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**FOR
BROWN
GIRLS
WITH
SHARP EDGES
AND TENDER
HEARTS**

A LOVE LETTER TO WOMEN OF COLOR



SEAL PRESS

New York

CHAPTER 2

COLORISM

Colorism is not unique to black Americans; people of color around the world—from Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Caribbean, etc.—are impacted by global colorism, or the widespread elevation of light skin tones over darker skin across all communities of color.

—JeffriAnne Wilder

Mi mami tells me to get out of the sun. Mi mami tells me to put on sunblock. Mi mami tells me to not go to the beach so much. But she is not protecting me from skin cancer; that is not really on our immigrant radar nor our primary worry, unfortunately. She is not telling me to stay out of the sun out of a deep concern for my health. Mi mami does not want me to be too brown.

You see, mi mami is from the mountains of Jinotega, Nicaragua. The mountains, where the temperature stays at a cool sixty degrees Fahrenheit. It is foggy, and people often wear sweaters. Mi mami, like many of her townspeople, is light skinned. She does not tan in the sun; she burns. Mi mami turns bright red, gets sunburned

in ways I have never experienced. But she is not as light skinned as my tias and her youngest brother, Tio Ivan. Mi mami has dark black hair and mi tias all have light-brown and ash-blonde hair. Since mi mami is one of the oldest among her siblings and cousins, and since each child born after her was fairer than the last, my family would joke, "la raza mejoró" with every child. And it should be noted that mi mami's skin tone at her darkest is my skin tone at its lightest.

Mi mami was born of a green-eyed, light-brown-haired, light-skinned man: mi abuelito Nicolas. Everyone hopes that my grandfather's light-eyes genes will be passed down and resurface someday, though it seems to've skipped two entire generations at this point. His mother was an Afro-Nicaragüense, but we do not talk about that. I learned about mi Black bisabuela in my late twenties, through a casual, happenstance conversation that left me surprised. Everyone else seemed content with this erasure.

I, however, have my papi's genes. My papi's side of the family is darker. They have Brown skin and very prominent traditional Indigenous features, like flat faces, wider noses, and straight black or brown hair. My papi is not ashamed of his Brownness. On the contrary, mi papi does not worry about his skin tone. He enjoys sitting in the sun unfettered, while mi mami wears a hat, sunglasses, and a long-sleeve shirt if she is able. But my papi is a man, and standards of admiration for men stem from their ability to perform some arbitrary definition of manhood. That is not to say that mi papi has not experienced discrimination due to his Brownness. I have vivid memories of the hyper policing mi papi experienced after 9/11 along with many other Black and Brown men in this country. These random body checks by the Transportation Security Administration were quite difficult to disregard as just coincidences. However, when I was growing up, how much money a man could provide for his household held more intracommunal value than his skin tone. On the other hand, women were valued

for our fragility, our purity, and our proximity to white standards of beauty.

I understood this growing up. The "prettiest" girls in my classes were always the ones who had light skin, light eyes, and light hair.

Mi mami tells me to get out of the sun. Mi mami tells me to put on sunblock. Mi mami tells me to not go to the beach so much. Because I have my papi's Brownness but mi mami's gender, a curse—I was born female and Brown, in a cultura that hates females and especially hates the darker ones.

But avoiding the sun feels unnatural and distasteful, when I know full well that the politics of pigmentation have been telling my people that being Black and Brown is bad and that getting darker is your own damn fault. Despite having grown up with meager means, we do not want to appear like we have worked in fields. It is shameful to own your poverty, and more shameful if your skin begins to tell the tale of your misfortunes. Our communities act like Brownness is optional, like we can dim our skin tone by avoiding the sun and hope that the yellow undertones eventually turn pink.

Mi mami tells me to get out of the sun. Mi mami tells me to put on sunblock. Mi mami tells me to not go to the beach so much. Mi mami tells me that I am becoming negra, with rechazo in her tone.

But I cannot undo the fact that my skin glows from all this sunlight. Like magic, my skin turns sunrays into nutrients, into vitamin D. You ask me what color my skin tone is, and I will tell you: It is a morning cafecito con leche with your abuelita. It is a caramelo tint that looks unreal, painted beautifully on my flesh. I do not burn with the sun; I evolve right before my very eyes. My Brown skin is beautiful. In the winter it becomes a lighter shade, the color of walnuts, and in the summer it darkens. I have to change my makeup with the seasons to match my beautiful, evolving skin tone, because my skin is supernatural.

I love my Brown skin, but it has taken me years to realize that and to undo the years of the sun-avoidance dance that many of us Brown girls are told to perform.

Mi mami tells me to get out of the sun. Mi mami tells me to put on sunblock. Mi mami tells me to not go to the beach so much. And I understand what she is doing, I understand what her life has taught her about Brownness, but I insist on living differently. I decline, because I refuse to let the color of my skin and my gender make me hide under ridiculous gorros. I refuse to incomodarme for a cultura that breeds colorism. Instead, I wear my tiniest bikini and I go to the beach, put on sunblock to protect this beautiful Brown skin I have been blessed with, and watch magic happen.



Colorism a byproduct of racism and shares many of the same qualities and characteristics. For example, colorism, like racism, is deeply embedded within societal structures (e.g., education, politics, the media) and can be institutionalized.

—JeffriAnne Wilder

My experiences with colorism are as a non-Black woman of color, and will not claim fluency in colorism within Black communities. I am an expert of my lived experiences. My experiences with colorism at home are hard to pinpoint and relate, because they never felt like discrete incidents; colorism was just always there.

After completing graduate school, I returned home. I was experiencing a lot of the trauma that comes with existing as a nonwhite person in predominantly white spaces. I had lived the majority of my life in Latinx neighborhoods, which meant that I had no real coping skills for the ways white people protected and abused their privilege. But my body took all that in, and when I graduated it felt tired and I needed rest. Fortunately, mi mami is traditional in

the way that she assumes her children are her responsibility until her last dying breath, so she invited me to move back home. She insisted.

Mindfully returning home meant acknowledging the ways I had changed. I finally knew how to speak up for myself. I had learned the language to name my experiences, which allowed me to heal from my childhood. Coming back home was terrifying, but I also had no real job prospects at that point. Nobody tells working-class students of color that our reality will not change much even after getting multiple fancy degrees. No one mentions in the “stay in school” propaganda that even when we have our education, the assumption of our inferiority persists. No one told me I had been fooled into believing in a system that was fundamentally designed to destroy me.

When I moved back home, I found myself crying a lot. I took many odd jobs, working at the private agency that handled Section 8 housing in Miami-Dade County, working on the floor at a Neiman Marcus outlet store. I even attempted to apprentice as a piercer at a tattoo parlor. I was mourning the loss of my first marriage, I was mourning my disillusionment with the American Dream, and I was mourning my loss of innocence. Adulthood as a woman of color required that I harden myself and keep my heart shielded. When I mourn, I seek solace in nature; I applied for jobs while sitting on a towel on Miami Beach, and it was there that I wrote often.

After a few months of being home, I remember one day coming back from the beach and mi mami saying that specific comment: “Te estás poniendo negra.” When mi mami said that, she was saying that I will darken to an unacceptable Brown, thus insinuating that darkness is inferior. She was expressing both anti-Indigeneity and also anti-Blackness. For non-Black POC, this is our colorism, seen and felt in the constant policing of our Brownness in its many tints and hues.

And while my experiences with colorism growing up had been hard to name and process, hearing this kind of “everyday colorism” at age thirty was different. I was now an adult with better tools to think critically about the things we casually say. That comment by mi mami hit me, hard. I also knew that her comment did not stand alone; it was part of a sea of normalized colorism that our communities enact toward one another. Somehow, among BI-POC, colorism is often disguised as genuine concern.

I did not know the term colorism until I got to graduate school. By learning in adulthood what colorism is, and what it does within my community, I grew to understand how those comments had shaped me growing up as a little Brown girl. I also have to accept how those comments still shape me today as a Brown woman. I refer to that comment mi mami made on that day when I came home from the beach as horizontal violence. This seemingly harmless gesture of concern is in fact an act of violence. We inflict this within our own communities; it is violence enacted by us and to us. We somehow have allowed ourselves not only to internalize racism, but to become Brown white supremacists. This is not an individual critique on mi mami; this is a larger conversation about the normalization of the supremacy of whiteness through colorism.

I grew up in a Latinx city, but more specifically in a non-Black Latinx neighborhood. The majority of the population of Miami-Dade County is Latinx and/or Caribbean. But like most major cities, Miami has neighborhoods that are siloed by race, nationality, or both. For example, back in the early nineties, Sweetwater was a primarily non-Black Nicaraguan neighborhood. So, my exposure to colorism came through a non-Black Latinx lens. The type of horizontal violence that is done in non-Black Latinx neighborhoods mirrors the type of violence that we enact toward one another back in our home countries, where proximity to whiteness is prized. Non-Black Latinx colorism is regularly carried out

by our families, friends, media, and sometimes even by ourselves as a survival tactic.

In Nicaragua, I was bought up to believe I was mestiza. I remember when my baby sister was getting her first bath at home, I saw her Mongolian spot and I asked my mom about it. She told me that it was a spot all mestizos have, and it fades as they get older. The Mongolian spot signified our Indigenous ancestors, and she told me that we had all had our own Mongolian spot. Yet, I have a Black great-grandmother on my maternal side and a Black uncle on my paternal side, and their Blackness is not part of the constructed mestiza racial identity I was taught to claim. To be mestiza is to be mixed specifically with Spanish and non-Black Indigenous ancestry—the Mongolian spot reference. However, technically I cannot be mestiza when I know I have Spanish, Indigenous, and Black ancestors. To identify as mestiza is to erase all my Black ancestors. My family, like many mestizos, has absorbed Blackness into our gene makeup, music, and customs but erased said Blackness entirely when identifying racially as mestizo. That is precisely why I do not identify as mestiza. Because in this way, we gatekeep mestizaje and erase the richness of our Black ancestry.

Black people can be Indigenous. There are also other racial categories that have been erased with time. An example in Nicaragua is that we have a history of multiple race categories dating back to the 1800s. The racial categories that existed were casta, ladino, zambo, mulato, mestizo, blanco, and negro. These racial categories include the mixing of Indigenous and Black, which is zambo. The categories also unveil the fact that white people have existed in Latin America. Furthermore, there were entire communities that did not mix and stayed racially Black. But today, mestizo and mulato are the two primary identifications that are commonly used, precisely to erase Indigeneity and Blackness except when in service to whiteness. Mestizo means someone who is European, Spanish

specifically, and Indigenous, while *mulato* means someone who is Spanish and Black. We have erased all other racial categories when we should not have.

For me, to identify as *mestiza* is to perpetuate the same colonial structures and eugenic thinking. I often self-identify as a non-Black Latina to highlight the issue of anti-Blackness—which shapes our identities vastly in Latin America and the Caribbean—by centering Blackness and my relationship to it. Additionally, this is not to say that there are not exclusively *mestizo* people, because there are; similarly, there are exclusively European folks living in Latin America and the Caribbean, like in Argentina, which has a substantial German and Italian population. However, since I write in first person, these are my lived experiences, with a very beautiful but complex family history that includes Indigenous, Spanish, and Black ancestry.

Colorism is often thought of as an issue exclusively affecting Black communities, where those who are lighter skinned obtain certain privileges due to their proximity to whiteness. Across the board, colorism means the privileging and prioritizing of lighter-skinned people of a specific racial or ethnic group. So, much to a lot of people's surprise, colorism is global. Other communities of color experience colorism because anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity is as expansive as colonialism.

Colorism in my particular non-Black Latina experience is anti-Indigenous. Back when the European conquests began in the Americas, rape, fornication, and marriages occurred between Indigenous women and Spanish men. The children that resulted from such unions meant the need for a new categorization, due to the revulsion that Spanish people had toward Indigenous people. Since these children were partially Spanish, the desire to acknowledge their elevated Spanish blood created the need for a new description. Yet, the children were still considered to be Indigenous, and they were not allowed to be fully acknowledged

as Spanish. This new racial category was meant to highlight proximity to whiteness, centering whiteness as superior. That is where *mestizaje* comes from, a desire to not be fully associated with an inferior race while acknowledging their elevated Spanish ancestry. *Mestizaje* is steeped in a history of hate and trauma, and through that hate and trauma comes the repulsive scale of colorism that I grew up intimately knowing. The children of this mixing have built nation-states whose entire identities revolve around the maintenance of anti-Indigeneity and anti-Blackness, which is why colorism needs to be undone.

Also, colorism is rooted in anti-Blackness. It is a system that places value on lightness and devalues darkness. Darkness, Blackness, is placed at the bottom rung of this fucked scale. So, while on the surface my non-Black Latina experiences with colorism were in a very directly anti-Indigenous context, this system is also automatically anti-Black in its agenda because the goal is whiteness and not the other way around. Colorism is a child of racism, and both are strategic constructions meant to give whiteness superiority over all other racial identities.

Colorism is about skin pigmentation, but it is also about facial features and hair types. Because the goal of colorism is to position whiteness as superior, white skin is placed at the top of these reprehensible hierarchies. Getting into the weeds, two people with similar skin tones can be differentiated and ranked based on facial features and hair color and texture. So, in addition to skin color, wider noses, bigger lips, and tighter curls are stereotypically associated with Blackness, and the goal is white skin, a small nose, small lips, and straight hair. Proximity to whiteness gives a person of color privilege over other BIPOC, and this inner hierarchy was created to delegitimize BIPOC experiences as a whole. All this is to say, it is self-destructive but prevalent.

Colorism took another form in school and socially. I learned that how I looked was a problem among *mestizos*. I am racialized

as Brown, my nose is wider, my hair is straight and dark brown, and I have a flat face with higher cheekbones. My features fit the stereotype of what Indigenous people are “supposed” to look like. So, I am acutely aware of how white I do not look. Even when I avoid the sun, I still have nonwhite facial features and straight, dark hair. But I learned the extent of my nonwhiteness through some very harsh life lessons.

In fifth grade, I attempted to grow out my hair for the first time. Mi mami, like many Latinas, had been forced to keep her hair long, and her way of emancipating herself was by cutting it into a pixie cut when she first got married. And mi mami never wanted me to feel that pressure, and so she kept my hair short for most of my life.

I never thought much about it; it was a decision made for me. So, in fifth grade, my desire to grow out my hair was not something I had invested a lot of time into. I just stopped getting haircuts. And as my hair began to grow longer, I began to get teased by my classmates. I attended a non-Black Latinx elementary school, so there were a few of us who were Brown; whiteness was understood as superior through the idolization of the popular girls, who were all white-passing. The microaggressions I experienced changed when I began to grow out my hair.

They started to call me what is often still used as an insult or a slur when referring to Indigenous people in Latin America and the Caribbean: “India,” they said. What they were teaching me was that I was ugly because I looked Indigenous.

I was only in fifth grade, and the lesson I learned on that day was that it was my job to manage how people would accept me. It was my job to manage my appearance. I have really straight, dark brown hair, and how I styled it and cut it meant a lot to me in terms of negotiating my identity. After that experience I kept my hair short, because growing my hair out still triggered some strong gut reaction that reminded me that I am not supposed to love myself.

Decades later, the act of growing out my hair took a lot of self-awareness and healing. Having long hair meant embracing those roots that are a part of me and embracing my ancestors. Everybody covets long, straight hair, but still the preference is with light-colored hair on white skin. White women can have long, dark, straight hair and still be considered desirable. If it is on the face and body of an undesirable other, a BIPOC—in those cases long, dark, straight hair becomes undesirable. Colorism dictates that some things are not inherently bad unless they are attached to darker bodies. Whiteness is queen, king, and army.

When you are prepubescent and suddenly become aware of the ways your own people think you are inferior because of the features on your face and the color of your skin, you will start to run away from yourself. You’ll want to look like someone else. You’ll want to hide your Indigenous ancestors.

In middle school, I started receiving the attention of a cute boy in my grade. His name was Juan, and to me he was so dreamy. He was Colombian and had this beautiful caramel skin color. His eyes were hazel, and this was one of the things everyone seemed to love about him, including myself—his claim to fame, his foothold in whiteness.

At first, I thought he was dating me as a joke. When you are made to feel like you are not beautiful, and society teaches you that the worth of girls and women lies in their beauty, then you start to feel unlovable. In tenth grade, a boy would date me as a dare, which further cemented this mentality for me. But much to my surprise, seventh-grade Prisca genuinely captured the attention of this boy, and after a few weeks I was ready for my first kiss. It was everything you could imagine: awkward. Thankfully, both our expectations were low so this did not seem to deter anything. Then he asked me to join him in the mornings before school started to hang with his friends, the cool kids. Cool by virtue of their light skin or ability to pass as white.

I remember walking up to his group of friends while holding his hand, and the girls started to laugh, loudly. They yelled, "She looks like an india," and continued to laugh. I remember him defending me, and I remember wanting to disappear. I did not speak up for myself because I believed what they said about me, that there was something wrong with me. He broke up with me a few days later, without any explanation.

These experiences taught me to hate myself. I learned that I deserved to be mocked for looking like my ancestors. I had my ancestral Brownness scripted on my face and on my body, and I was taught to hate it. I was taught to hide my features. I was taught how to begin to erase parts of myself. I was taught that I could erase myself entirely.

Mi mami tells me to get out of the sun. Mi mami tells me to put on sunblock. Mi mami tells me to not go to the beach so much.

I realize now those were the seeds of my own anti-Indigeneity. For a long time, I felt like I had to express the same disdain for Indigenous people in order to fit in with my fellow mestizos, because that is what mestizaje is built on. I was supposed to have more in common with mestizos due to the nation-state identities that were given to us by our colonizers. Embedded in my survival instincts was this desire to distance myself from my roots, from the real and vibrant communities that still exist today despite centuries of attempted genocide. Through ridicule, I became one of them, and I felt a need to cling onto that. It was not until I read Gloria Anzaldúa, who proudly claimed her Indigeneity, that things began to shift for me. Seeing someone call out our colonizers, and take pride in her Indigenous roots, is still vastly unheard of with so many of our gente.

I am visible—see this Indian face—yet I am invisible. I both blind them with my beak nose and am their blind spot. But I exist, we

exist. They'd like to think I have melted in the pot. But I haven't, we haven't.

—Gloria Anzaldúa

I needed to read Anzaldúa to discover ways to speak up against anti-Indigeneity. I realize today that while I was directly hurt because of this embedded prejudice, there are thousands of displaced peoples in my country and here in this country who continue to be hurt by these violent acts of erasure, nation-state policies, and occupation. I was participating in the continued subjugation of Indigenous communities by not owning that side of my ancestral line with the same respect and admiration the whiter parts of my ancestry received. I was also a person, socialized within a racist structural machine that specifically sought to devalue me and people like me. While in some regards my agency was taken from me through socialization, once I became aware of this, I could finally begin the work to actively undo those teachings and counter them.

Media does its fair share of harm by reinforcing negative stereotypes of people who are darker through colorism. Growing up, Telemundo and Univision had actresses, entertainers, and news anchors who all spoke my native tongue of Spanish—but they never looked like me. I grew up on Xuxa, Sofía Vergara, Lucero, Thalía, and Gloria Trevi, and they were all light-skinned, white-passing Latinas who were portrayed as the beauty queens of our countries. These were the women we were projected as our representation, but I did not look like them. Instead, I looked like the nameless maids who were occasionally cast in a telenovela or, worse, like la India María.

India María was an exaggerated and ridiculously racist stereotype of Indigenous people, and she was the only person I saw on our channels who looked anything like I did. She was kind, but

was presented as inferior. She stood in stark contrast to a Thalia and was always called fea and dumb by the other characters in whatever movie or show she was in. I became aware that I looked like pop culture's idea of a joke. As a young, Brown, third-world little girl, I understood too well the message behind *la India María*.

Colorism privileges white-passing and white-adjacent BIPOC. This deserves our attention, because when we eradicate colorism, when we divest from whiteness, we can hopefully find our way back to one another. Colorism divides all communities; not calling attention to it is a disservice to us all. Our darker members will resent those who do not share in such painful experiences. We are resentful of those with proximity to whiteness because we are all socialized to want that too. And Black people are justified in their anger toward non-Black POC for the violence we have been complicit in, knowingly or unknowingly, all in service of whiteness. That desire and longing for whiteness is a shared issue across communities of color; it is enforced through colorism, and our energies need to be focused on divesting from that hierarchy entirely.

Colorism can trick you into believing that you need to change yourself. I am embarrassed and still in disbelief at how much money I spent attempting to erase myself. I am embarrassed and still in disbelief at how much money so many Black and Brown folks spend to distance ourselves from our darker features. At the lengths that many of us will go to avoid the sun, to get that skin-bleaching cream, to contour with makeup to narrow our noses. So many of us became experts in how to erase ourselves, instead of healing from it all and eradicating colorism.

I was in high school the first time I attempted to really change my appearance to look white. In ninth grade, one of my friends, Jessica Otero, would bring to school a large plastic bag full of bootleg colored contacts. She was Cuban and white, and to me

that meant she was gorgeous. She would often wear hazel-colored contacts, and I thought she looked stunning. I realize now that I had been told to think that whiteness and lightness was stunning. But at that time, I wanted to look just as stunning, just as white.

I wanted to be like her, so I asked how much the colored contacts were, and she told me she was selling them for \$20. I didn't have an allowance, but I was able to save up money, little by little. In about a month and a half, I was victorious! There is very little that can stand in the way of someone who has been taught to hate herself, and so-called improvements become our fixation. I remember when I walked up to Jessica and asked her to show me her stash of colored contacts. She showed me every color and I picked the most natural-looking one I could see: turquoise. I realize now that was a terrible mistake, but in ninth grade you could not tell me a thing.

Of course, I looked like I was sick, with enlarged, ill-fitted, turquoise-colored eyes. The bootleg colored contacts lasted about two weeks before they started to deteriorate. They were probably not meant to be given without an eye exam. But because whiteness is a drug that BIPOC are told we want to be addicted to, I kept saving up more money to keep buying them throughout the school year.

Learning to love myself today meant learning to confess and denounce the alterations I had performed in the pursuit of whiteness. These alterations included wearing colored contacts, bleaching my hair, learning to contour my nose into a thinner shape—all in an attempt to pass as white despite the futility of it. My attempt at transformation was always rooted in colorism, which was basically a learned form of self-hatred. And as an adult, I needed to eradicate all of that from my life.

While colorism is a way for POC to enforce racism, it's also a way for some POC to survive racism. If you are white-passing or white-adjacent, you can survive and adapt to a racist society. If

you benefit from colorism, you are also rewarded for enforcing the codes within it.

Mestizos are seen as superior to Indigenous people, and we continue to be rewarded for our proximity to whiteness. The rewards were tangible back in the day, through treaties between our Indigenous and Spanish ancestors, and through the social embrace by the ruling class, the conquistadores. Though the embrace was conditional, it was a step in the direction of having our fractured humanity recognized.

Generation after generation, colorism results in confused, power-hungry mestizos who work tirelessly to become white at the expense of Black and Indigenous people. Colorism in my family meant that I was told that I was mestiza, when everyone knew that we have Black ancestry. Colorism meant that marriages were strategic to elevate one's racial status, where the aspiration was to marry up the colorism scale, not down it.

In this day and age, it is common to hear a liberal white person speak proudly about traces of diverse racial heritage, as discovered through commercial DNA tests. There is this fixation today with being more than just white. As if waves of European immigrants who were reviled as nonwhite—the Irish, the Italians, the Polish—hadn't yearned over generations to become just white. As if their ancestors did not work tirelessly to contribute to the national identity of whiteness by erasing their cultures and differences.

This stands in stark contrast to the genealogy searches that I am familiar with, where Latinx people attempt to find and claim their whitest European ancestors. In Miami, it was common to hear someone talk about being a mut, being mixed with Colombian, Spanish, and Italian, as if all that mixing had occurred consensually and was just a happy circumstance of their ancestors' lives. Mestizaje routinely seek to erase everyone in the family who is Indigenous or Black, by distancing us from them.

In fact, I had once done this myself, creating distance between myself and my Indigenous ancestors. When I was a teenager, mi abuelito, like many in his generation, became obsessed with genealogy. He retraced our paternal family line back to Spain, following our Spanish last names, selectively weeding out of the family tree any claim to Indigenous roots. He also traced us back to Egypt, looking for links to Egyptian royalty—despite the obvious fact that Egyptians are North African and racially Brown and Black. This did not seem to faze him. When he thought of Egyptian royalty, my abuelito thought of Elizabeth Taylor; somehow, to him, Egypt was a path to Europe.

His anti-Indigenous family search allowed him to proudly claim Spanish and Egyptian heritage, and thus I did too. I was not told about our Indigenous ancestors; they were deliberately erased and forgotten. I never questioned this, and so agreed to keep them erased and forgotten. I had already internalized the benefits of this willful ignorance.

In mestizo communities, proximity to whiteness affords people a possible reward of better jobs, better placements, and therefore better opportunities. Back in the 1800s, Nicaraguans were surveyed, and mestizos who promoted their whiteness got to keep lands; those who identified as Indigenous were removed. Claiming mestizaje is how we become whiter. It is tangibly beneficial to identify as white, even when your skin tells a different story.

Mi mami tells me to get out of the sun. Mi mami tells me to put on sunblock. Mi mami tells me to not go to the beach so much.

We don't just have to call out white people for their racism. We also have to dismantle internalized racism within communities of color. The politics of pigmentation cannot continue to be ignored, because denying our experiences perpetuates generations of harm. The next time your mami, tia, abuelo tells you to get out of the sun so that you do not get darker, tell them what they are actually

saying. The next time you try to erase your heritage, consider what it would mean to love your Brown skin. Those who have passed as white, you need to think about your privilege and the harms you may be perpetuating on your own communities of color. We all need to start this slow, sometimes painful process of communally unlearning what we have internalized.

And I implore you to wear your tiniest bikinis and enjoy the sun while watching your magic happen, juntxs!

explores neuroscience behind what happens to your brain during traumatic experiences and posits that trauma needs to be addressed directly to heal. Your body and your brain are made to keep you alive, and if you do not address the triggers your body has recognized through trauma, then you are destined to keep repeating patterns through trauma-fueled responses. Understanding how my parents' unresolved trauma has become my own trauma has been instrumental for me, hence I weave that sentence throughout the chapter: trauma is inherited. I am writing from knowledge gained and treating that knowledge as important by centering it as matter-of-fact.

Finally, I quote Donald Trump when he referred to certain countries as shithole countries. That quote came from an article titled "President Trump Called El Salvador, Haiti 'Shithole Countries': Report," *Time*, January 11, 2018, <https://time.com/5100058/donald-trump-shithole-countries/>. For me, highlighting the irony of this particular statement throughout the chapter takes power away from those words that hurt so many, without making this chapter about Trump. Rather, it is about what Trump's words represent about the ignorance of the American people and their relationship to the worldwide harm they have been complicit in.

NOTES FOR COLORISM CHAPTER

I introduce this chapter with the primary text I used for research in this particular chapter, which is JeffriAnne Wilder's *Color Stories: Black Women and Colorism in the 21st Century* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2015), p. 6. Wilder writes about colorism not being contained within the Black experience; rather, it is an insidious and prevalent part of the experiences of people of color. The second quote from Wilder is found on p. 47. The term "everyday colorism" is coined by her on p. 58. I've had extensive conversations and attended entire panels on colorism, as well as read about it as authors mention it, yet this is the only full-length book that I have

read about colorism that felt exhaustive. I am sure there are other texts, but this is still my primary text and I am informed by it the most.

In terms of understanding the construction of mestizaje, and how it is rooted in the erasure of Blackness specifically in my context, I read Lowell Gudmundson's chapter "What Difference Did Color Make?: Blacks in the 'White Towns' of Western Nicaragua in the 1880s," which is found in the anthology *Blacks and Blackness in Central America: Between Race and Place*, eds. Justin Wolfe and Lowell Gudmundson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 211. On p. 210 there is a snapshot of the racial categories that were included in a census and instructions given to census takers to misidentify people for the purposes of boosting mestizaje as the preferred national identity. Nicaragua is written about as an extreme case of erasure, so, whether I know it or not, I am shaped by that reality as a Nicaragua citizen by birth. When writing about any given topic, I seek to find solid footing in readings that talk about my specific context, which can be place of birth, gender, race, sexuality, class—the list goes on. But as a *light* postmodernist, I find value in contextualization. As a reader, finding your context-specific texts will unearth a series of explanations you did not know you needed for questions you were not even asking—which is a beautiful thing. So I implore you to find what is being written about your communities, by your communities.

In terms of understanding how race-based community formations came into existence, I read Justin Wolfe's "'The Cruel Whip': Race and Place in Nineteenth-Century Nicaragua," which is also found in *Blacks and Blackness in Central America*, pp. 177–207. An understanding that the construction of mestizaje was a concerted effort of centering whiteness demands that my reader engage with that entire book.

To understand how facial features and hair types resulted in skewed racial categorization, I recommend reading Mauricio

Meléndez Obando's chapter, titled "The Slow Ascent of the Marginalized: Afro-Descendants in Costa Rica and Nicaragua," found in that same anthology (pp. 334–354). Terms like *blanqueamiento* are further explained, and a look into how Spanish pure blood was guarded and honored is given.

Additionally, I utilize the term eugenics in this chapter. When people think of eugenics, they think of the early twentieth century. However, eugenic beliefs have existed since before they became popularized and socially accepted, and then rejected. This is not about the contemporary understanding of eugenics. Rather, it is about a system of beliefs around who is worthy of humanity and who is inferior, and the actions that followed based on those beliefs.

This chapter, much like the voluntourism chapter, uses a lot of the knowledge gained from Juan González, specifically when he talks about the conversion of Indigenous people in *Harvest of Empire* (p. 13).

Finally, I mention Gloria Anzaldúa in this chapter, briefly. Unfortunately, Anzaldúa perpetuates the "raza cósmica" stuff that feels equally problematic to *mestizaje*. In an attempt to reject *blanqueamiento*, Anzaldúa claims Indigeneity that simply is often inaccurate and blanketed. Claiming Indigeneity, as a mixed person, erases it from those communities in our countries that are still practicing Indigenous traditions and speaking their Indigenous languages. Unless we are willing to learn the languages of our Indigenous ancestors and relearn their traditions, we have to acknowledge that there are privileges in being *mestizo* within our particular borders. Understanding that we can revere our Indigenous ancestors without erasing and co-opting traditions that are not ours to co-opt is the work of liberation. Anzaldúa's work has unfortunately emboldened too many *mestizos* who are not willing to do the work of actually divesting from *mestizaje* but who only claim Indigeneity in passing, as if that has been optional for actual Indigenous people in our countries and here.

Nevertheless, Anzaldúa's work planted a seed for me, when otherwise I would have not fully understood the severity of the anti-Indigenous sentiments that I experienced. I use her quote from *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012).

NOTES FOR IMPOSTOR SYNDROME CHAPTER

The quote that opens this chapter, although not about impostor syndrome, points at the difficulties and self-silencing that students of color experience. This quote is found in Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic's book *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd. ed. (New York: NYU Press, 2017), pp. 50–51. Delgado, like Freire, is a primary voice that informed this entire book, so you will see this particular text in various chapters.

I am the founder and owner of Latina Rebels, and this chapter is the first time I mention this organization. For understanding the value of creating spaces for us, by us, through the Latina Rebels perspective, read Kaitlin E. Thomas, "Latina Rebels Turn to Memes, Humor to Rethink Media on Hot-Button Issues," *The World*, April 16, 2019, www.pri.org/stories/2019-04-16/Latina-rebels-turn-memes-humor-rethink-media-hot-button-issues. Finding our communities in white spaces can be the difference between dropping out and graduating. Sometimes our communities will not be physically present but rather exclusively online, and that is our new normal.

In terms of the pervasiveness of impostor syndrome, I read Jarawan Sakulku and James Alexander, "The Impostor Phenomenon," *International Journal of Behavioral Science* 6:1 (2011). P. 75 specifically gives statistical evidence.

A primary text I learned extensively from is Pauline Rose Clance's book, *The Impostor Phenomenon: Overcoming the Fear That Haunts Your Success* (Atlanta: Peachtree Publishers, 1985). Impostor syndrome was not understood to be an exclusively BIPOC