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Black-Latinas in the Workplace

Interviewer Vanessa Heredia speaks with Dr. Marta Cruz-Janzen, multicultural education professor at Florida Atlantic University, about discrimination she has experienced in the workplace because of her Black-Latina ethnicity.

This is Vanessa Heredia for Voices of Race and Change.

As my graduation date quickly approaches I am forced to take a closer look into real-world challenges I will face in the workplace. In doing so, I found that discrimination is still very prevalent, especially when it comes to ethnic women. Discovering that race is adding to the struggle women already face in the workplace when trying to be accepted and respected as they attempt to move into high positions led me to talk to Dr. Marta Cruz-Janzen, a multi-cultural education professor at Florida Atlantic University, to get her insight.

“I have written on this topic repeatedly over the years because this is something I have encountered almost my entire life. Being a black-Latina in Puerto Rico I started experiencing this since the moment I started going to elementary school. Ok so this is something I have encountered at every level”

Dr. Cruz-Janzen recalled a specific incident where she was blatantly being discriminated against in the workplace after she had left her position as a school principal.

“Everybody had to take a certification exam everybody was being trained to take the certification exam and the only one who didn’t get a book was me. And I had word from the other people that there were books, they had books and they were giving them out but they wanted to be sure I failed. I studied with another female. I took the exam- I passed the exam and they were really upset that I had actually passed the exam. Not to mention the expectation that there were very few women because as women you don’t belong here and on top of that as a black woman with an accent”

In the academic world, she also encountered challenges, she feels, as a woman, and a black Latina.

“I went up for promotions several times to be a full time professor and was denied three years in a row when other people were being promoted with much less qualification than I had. I mean here I am with books, publications, International recognition and people with 1/3 not even 1/3 because they were white males they were being promoted and when I finally decided enough was enough I decided to fight it the university at the time only had one black woman professor. One.”

I wondered if the shade of one’s skin also affected an ethnic woman’s acceptance in the workplace. If there were two women of the same racial background but one had more Caucasian features and one had more Africa American features would the woman who looked more African American have a more difficult time than the woman who looked more Caucasian?

“This is something I write about in the Latino culture. The lighter you are the better you are supposed to be. The lighter you are the less black you are, I have a sister who is lighter than I am and needless to say she is the pretty one”

Dr. Cruz-Janzen assured me that change is happening and that she does see an end to racial discrimination against women in the workplace, but this change is happening very slowly. Her greatest advice is to learn as much as you can because, as she says, everything else can be taken away from you but no one can ever take away your knowledge.

Voices of Race and Change: The Younger Generation is produced by students in Dr. Kitty Oliver’s Multimedia Practicum at Florida Atlantic University for the Race and Change Initiative Multimedia project. This is Vanessa Heredia.