



# Actress Gina Torres Speaks Out Against Being Trapped in African American Roles as a Latina



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Since the emergence of Black television and films in Hollywood, Latino actors of African descent such as Elvis Nolasco, [Miguel A. Nunez](#), Andre Royo, Jharrel Jerome, Tessa Thompson, [LaLa Anthony](#), and Gina Torres have been confined to African American on-screen roles. This has afforded them the opportunity to contribute to the renaissance of Black entertainment in America, but in the process, it has also drowned out remnants of their Hispanic heritage.



In the 60s, Afro-Latinos like Sammy Davis Jr. and John Carlos helped shape the consciousness of a Black presence on the national stage, but most people would never know that they were half-Cuban unless they looked up those tidbits online. The same impression rings true for celebrities such as Carmelo Anthony and Lloyd Banks, who many may not know are Black Puerto Ricans. As a result, the term Afro-Latino is still relatively unknown in the mainstream to this very day, and the masses still have not fully embraced the notion that someone with noticeable African features can also celebrate their own Hispanic heritage.

So, with very little representation in the public eye, a Dominican-American actress/singer named [Amara La Negra](#) practically made it her mission to put Afro-Latinos on the map during her first year on the reality television series *Love & Hip Hop Miami*. Her boldness might not have seemed like a big deal at the time, but in the years that followed, other Afro-Latino actors and actresses who work in the English-speaking market would step forward and speak out about their lack of representation on screen. In fact, *TIME* hosted a roundtable discussion for Afro-Latino actors in Hollywood back in 2021. Participants included Dascha Polanco (from *Orange is the New Black*), Laz Alonso (from *The Boys*), Sarunas Jackson (from *Insecure*), Amara La Negra, and Gina Torres (from *9-1-1: Lone Star*) to discuss that very topic.

Although the experience was therapeutic for the famous bunch, the inner and outward conflict that they face every day as Black Latinos is something that Gina Torres is still struggling to navigate. In a recent interview with Justina Machado on MSNBC, the 53-year-old actress talked about her journey as an Afro-Latina and the way that her Cuban upbringing at home often conflicted with colorism standards that developed in the United States of America, long before she arrived in the country. As the conversation moved along, she explained that being pigeonholed in roles that only represent her outward appearance as a Black woman has often left her feeling confused about her identity.

"I feel like I was living in three worlds," Torres said. "There was my world that I grew up in, also Spanish-speaking. Home, Cuban parents, and then you go out into the world, and I'm speaking English, and I'm in the Bronx. And then, going into this industry as an actress, then nobody recognizes you as either one...There was no place for me as a Latina and then as a Black woman—I didn't identify as a Black woman because, for me, it was cultural. Because, of course, I present Black, I am a Black woman. I am also Cuban. When you're here in the United States, and they ask you to be in a box, and you don't fit into the box...culturally, it was different. It was not one that I identified with. But to work, to survive, it was something that I had to learn."

Ultimately, Torres indicated that instead of fighting the label that Hollywood and society have bestowed upon her, just because of her outward appearance, she has learned to trick her mind into allowing herself to assimilate for the sake of her mental health and acting career -- even if she doesn't like it.

"[I've learned] to be whatever 'Black' was, and then feel like I was alienating that other part of myself, that Latina self, it just kind of became a Jedi mind trick, to keep myself from just being sad all the time about not being able to fully experience and express the entirety of myself," Torres said.

Gina Torres has come to the realization that she will likely have to make cultural compromises every time she steps onto a production lot for the remainder of her acting career. But that notion has not deterred the New York native from fighting for representation for the Afro-Latinos of this generation and the next. Last year, she was very vocal about Lin-Manuel Miranda's film "In the Heights" and the lack of Afro-Latinos that were cast in principal roles, even though Washington Heights is known for being a Dominican community and one of the most prominent Afro-Latino neighborhoods in America.