HUSTLING FOR EMPOWERMENT

How tactics of strategic ignorance can undermine systems of dominance

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To my Nana and my kindred spirit, Helen Lurie Moss, who was a mensch first, a feminist second, and an author a close third. No words can do her justice, so this is my attempt to do so through ideas.

ABSTRACT | There is no doubt that systems of ignorance facilitate oppression, but they also give the oppressed group space in which to resist the system. For instance, though many Americans are oblivious to the damage that U.S. colonial programs have had on Puerto Rican society, Puerto Ricans have used jaiba politics to play the system—instantaneously and deliberately taking advantage of ignorant American perceptions in order to attain tangible benefits. In this paper, I will first show how jaiba politics has been harmful to the Puerto Rican national identity and explain why this thoroughly studied usage of strategic ignorance fails to challenge the United States’ lopsided control over American-Puerto Rican discourse. Using Puerto Ricans as well as women as examples, I will explain why oppressed groups need a combination of hustling—an alternative form of strategic ignorance developed through the author’s feminist experiences—and the jaiba form in order to truly challenge oppressive systems.

1. INTRODUCTION

Strategic ignorance, widely recognized as the practice of using “dominant misconceptions as a basis for active creative responses to oppression,” has been a constant theme of Puerto Rico’s relationship with the United States since the very first political interaction between the two nations (Bailey 88). Looking at the fatal mis-
takes of the Filipinos as a guide for what not to do, the first Puerto Rican leaders concluded that the best way to handle U.S. domination was to go along with it. Instead of responding with force like the Filipinos, they fought from “within the regime, to hurt it from close up,” as statesman and nationalist Jose De Diego stated in 1907 (Sullivan 163). Ever since, Puerto Ricans have embraced a form of anticolonial politics called “jaiba politics”, named for the native jaiba mountain crab that must move sideways before it can move forward (Sullivan 164): it involves an ambiguous and shifty attitude towards US policies as a strategy to gain benefits from a system inherently stacked against the colonized. By applying strategic ignorance, Puerto Ricans have achieved incremental benefits, such as claiming illness to gain social security benefits and avoid military obligations.

Yet on the whole, this application of strategic ignorance has led people to suppress their true identities and confirm negative misconceptions, resulting in psychological harms and the perpetuation of a colonial system. Using Maria Lugones’ work on pure and “curdled” logics and Arlene Davila’s descriptions of Puerto Rican cultural politics to critique the development of the Puerto Rican national identity, I will raise concerns about this commonly discussed form of strategic ignorance. But before all hope is lost, I will introduce a different form of strategic ignorance called hustling, which can be used by members of marginalized groups without incurring the usual problems of strategic ignorance. By understanding the practice of hustling (which, I will describe, women have previously employed), Puerto Rican individuals could reap social and economic benefits from the system while simultaneously cultivating self-respect and pride in their nation’s character. Ultimately, I will argue that employing the two forms of strategic ignorance in combination would be most effective in resisting privileged ideologies. The two strategies operate on different levels of the same struggle: only by embracing both can marginalized groups, including Puerto Ricans, challenge privileged social supremacy and gain control over their own identities.

II. THE BACKDROP FOR STRATEGIC IGNORANCE: PURE AND CURDLED LOGICS

In a way, all acts of strategic ignorance are pranks played on the dominant group
in society. They involve the careful manipulation of a dominant group’s tendency to misjudge members of marginalized groups and see only the stereotypical identity they expect to see. In her paper “Strategic Ignorance,” Alison Bailey recounts how black laborers played up their perceived identities in order to “wage a kind of underground ‘guerilla’ battle” on the dominant system (88). When black workers in the 1950’s realized that their Southern white employers suspected them of writing civil rights literature, the claim that, as blacks, they didn’t know how to read was enough to ease their employers’ suspicions. As mentioned in Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man, blacks who sought to avoid trouble when driving around Southern towns in this era found protection by wearing chauffeur caps and pretending to be working for white men (211). Bailey’s analysis of American race relations demonstrates how an oppressed group can purposefully play into an oppressive social paradigm in order to resist it.

The access to strategic ignorance blacks and Puerto Ricans share stems from the fact that both implicitly recognize the coexistence of pure and curdled logics, two different understandings of personal identity defined by philosopher Maria Lugones. Lugones uses a culinary metaphor to illustrate how different aspects of one’s personal identity mix together to create an emulsified mixture that can no longer be split cleanly into its different components. The term “curdled” comes from the process of making mayonnaise: the egg yolk and the oil must fully emulsify for mayonnaise to successfully be produced (Lugones 145). Curdling is an irreversible process: once they’ve been mixed, any attempt to “split-separate” the two ingredients into their perfect forms will at best yield yolky oil and oily yolk (122). In terms of personal identity, curdled logic involves “categorical blurring and confusion” from an understanding of identity as an impure emulsion of multiple selves (145).

The logic of purity does not recognize this concept, and instead advocates for a systematic categorization of people based on a single aspect of their identities. It allows only “two kinds of subjects: unified subjects and fragmented subjects” (Bailey 83). By placing emphasis on one identity and considering any deviation an anomaly, dichotomies that follow the pattern of unified/fragmented (like white/black, American/Puerto Rican) are easily constructed. It is the perfect tool for organizing society since it allows for stratified social hierarchies. Thus, because they have an incentive to maintain control of the social world, people who are caught in
the dominant system tend to use the logic of purity (145). For a different example, imagine a female student in a majority-male business school, raising her hand in class to answer a question. The middle-aged male professor, who grew up within the paradigm of domineering men and obedient women, is conditioned to split the female student into a “fragmented subject” and focus exclusively on her marginalized identity (143).

Since the logic of purity acknowledges only a single identity, what happens to the female student’s other identities—including white, heterosexual, and Jewish? Identities which are essential to understanding a person’s self are overlooked and left for curdled logic, giving oppressed groups an advantage over those in the dominant system. Nobody is in a better position to understand curdled logic than members of oppressed groups, since a perspective according to which identities mix and blur together to reach a point where they cannot be cleanly separated provides an empowering alternative to treatment as fragmented beings in a world constructed by the “logic of control” (144).

Of course, these two perspectives do not exist in isolation. The interplay of these logics on identity is analogous to “bad radio reception. Sometimes the classical [signal] is clearer, and sometimes the country-western station dominates… other times the receiver pulls in an almost indecipherable mix” (Bailey 84). To extend Bailey’s metaphor, the precise mix that one hears at a particular moment is determined by one’s geographical standpoint in relation to the two radio towers. Someone standing at a better location than another is simply in a better position to understand what is truly happening on the radio. The female student can listen closely to her radio mix but still comprehend that the male professor is likely at a standpoint that split-separates her identity as a woman. By understanding the difference between pure and curdled logics and recognizing who tends to see the world in which way, the female student knows something that the professor does not. This creates a disparity of knowledge that gives the female student a measure of control over the male professor, opening up the possibility for strategic ignorance. As this example brings out, although a marginalized group cannot win by playing by the rules of the game, the option of resistance offered by strategic ignorance offers an alternate—and more effective—approach (Grosfoguel 30).
III. STRATEGIC IGNORANCE OF THE JAIBA TYPE

Strategic ignorance is a growing topic of discussion in philosophical circles, but much of the current analysis centers on a specific variety of strategic ignorance—one that can be referred to as the jaiba type. The name is a reference to a particular example, Puerto Rico’s jaiba politics, but this category also encompasses the strategy used by the black laborers in Bailey’s example and other instances in which a group confirms degrading stereotypes by ‘playing along’ to gain incremental benefits.

Puerto Rican Jaiba Politics

The practice of jaiba politics is a commonly mentioned application of strategic ignorance in Puerto Rico, likely because it fulfills general assumptions that strategic ignorance is both an active and surreptitious position. Just as the Puerto Rican jaiba mountain crab moves sideways in order to move forward, Puerto Rican politicians have historically complied with a colonial state of affairs in order to “use the tools, rhetoric, and goals of domination, including ignorance/knowledge” against the United States (Sullivan 167). For instance, instead of fighting on principle with the U.S. for its attempts to quell resistance movements—which it did by imposing American citizenship for all Puerto Ricans in 1917—jaiba practitioners slyly used their “insider” status to extort Social Security, unemployment, and civil benefits from the United States’ coffers (166). To achieve this, Puerto Ricans faked debilitating illnesses, intentionally misinterpreted vague U.S. policies to demand concrete benefits, and ultimately embraced an attitude of entitlement towards the United States (167).

The Puerto Rican Syndrome

A phenomenon called the Puerto Rican syndrome seems to be a subconscious manifestation of jaiba-type strategic ignorance. While not jaiba by name, this illness, coined by U.S. Army Medics in the 1950’s reporting that Puerto Rican soldiers were exhibiting strange psychiatric symptoms, is certainly an example of the jaiba type of strategic ignorance. The symptoms ranged from depression to rage, psychosis to hysteria, and patients often demonstrated “hyperkinetic manifestations”,

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such as foaming at the mouth, screaming, biting, and seizures (Gherovici 29-30). But because physical or mental reasons for the illness were never found, doctors came to no conclusions about its origins until subsequent studies characterized the syndrome as pseudo-epilepsy. Patricia Gherovici argues that the syndrome should be interpreted within the context of oppressed mentalities: it is no coincidence, she says, that the syndrome offered a way out of compulsive military service and was an “inventive way around... prohibitions [restricting] direct expressions of anger” (135). Despite the fact that it occurred on a subconscious level in a passive state of mind, the Puerto Rican Syndrome offered Puerto Ricans a measure of control over their situation. Guarnaccia and colleagues describe the syndrome as “an enraged voice of resistance: a voice of protest against the neo-colonial transformations of Puerto Rico which in many ways has undone the lives of [the people of] of Puerto Rico” (Guarnaccia 157-165). In this way, the Puerto Rican patients’ loss of self-control actually facilitates an exercise of control. Gherovici herself draws upon the concept of *jaiba* politics to explain how Puerto Ricans can play on U.S. expectations and desires as a form of resistance. She characterizes the interplay between Puerto Rico and the U.S. by expressing the message behind each country’s actions:

The [American] message would be: “I will turn you into an efficient soldier in the best army in the world on behalf of your belonging to a greater nation, the U.S.” In return, the [Puerto Rican] message traverses a “conversion” and becomes: “I’m incapable of being efficient, soldierly, ‘aggressive’ in my violence. The only violence you can release in me is uncontrollable. It ‘attacks’ others or myself without discrimination. Therefore I cannot be useful for your imperialist program. I’m disabled.” (138)

Gherovici’s analysis confirms an interpretation of the Puerto Rican syndrome as an application of the *jaiba* type of strategic ignorance. In a rather dramatic manner, Puerto Rican soldiers align their actions with American expectations in order to gain incremental benefits. Through their actions, they imply that they lack the discipline required to become good soldiers; in so doing, they set themselves up to avoid military service and gain economic benefits for disabled veterans.

The Harms of Identity-Masking

While *jaiba* politics and the Puerto Rican syndrome do grant the marginalized group some measure of agency over their situation, both cases involve masking
one’s true character in order to lead on the dominant group—whether it be de-
liberately or instinctively. Because all cases of the jaiba type of strategic ignorance 
require the confirmation of negative stereotypes, they come with harmful risks 
of dissemblance. Darlene Clark Hine describes the “culture of dissemblance” as 
“behavior and attitudes… that shield [the] truth of inner lives and selves” of an op-
pressed group from their oppressors (Harriford and Thompson, citing Hine 380).
Self-imposed silence about what one truly endures often involves psychological 
costs: for example, black women caught in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina 
were very reluctant to share their experiences of sexual assault for fear of being 
further stigmatized (ibid.). In the Puerto Rican case, in addition to provoking the 
psychological costs of dissemblance, jaiba practices cultivate characteristics such 
as shiftiness and indolence that contribute little towards national pride. Shannon 
Sullivan and Ramon Grosfoguel call attention to jaiba politics as a “nonheroic” 
ideology; both authors suggest that the strategy is rather undignified and is reason-
able only when a group is caught in an oppressive position with no other options 
(Sullivan 165, Grosfoguel 31).

Let’s use the specific example of jaiba politics to explore some of these harms. 
Recall that Puerto Ricans using jaiba politics must suppress their free-spirited, cur-
dled identities in order to act as flat ‘split-separated’ individuals. With any extensive 
charade, actors run the risk of ‘losing themselves’ in their characters, which is borne 
out by the example of the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, an ‘autonomous’ 
Puerto Rican governmental institution. Anthropologist Arlene Davila points out 
that the ICP was founded to foster a national identity by preserving the Indig-
enous, African, and Hispanic aspects of Puerto Rican culture, but ultimately failed 
to accomplish this mission (61). Despite its initial intentions to remain apolitical, 
the ICP was quickly dominated by party members and supporters—many of whom 
were also practitioners of jaiba politics (46). Instead of strengthening Puerto Rico’s 
vibrant and unique cultural identity as a rejection of the colonial social structure 
imposed by the United States, the ICP spread an “inclusive ideology of exclusion” 
that inherently championed “blanqueamiento” (whitening) and contributed to the 
fragmented Puerto Rican social order (69). The result was an incredibly restricted 
“premise of nationalist discourse” that went so far as to attempting to stop Puerto 
Rican folk musicians from using the tres, a guitar-like instrument of Afro-Cuban
origin which had been popular in Puerto Rico for decades but was not deemed to be an ‘authentic’ Puerto Rican instrument by the ICP (76). In an action reeking of the logic of purity, the Hispanophile politicians attempted to divert attention from an instrument reminiscent of the African components of Puerto Rican identity.

In using *jaiba* politics, Puerto Rican leaders succumbed to a worldview detrimental to their own history and missed the opportunity to create a Puerto Rican identity independent of U.S. colonialist influences. Regardless of whether or not there was another way out, the example of the ICP shows the consequences of the trade-off between incremental benefits and costs. When it comes to nation building, it is ultimately self-defeating to engage in resistance that minimizes one’s own national pride.

The Verdict on the *Jaiba* Type

We have seen that Puerto Rican application of the *jaiba* type of strategic ignorance results in individual harms from dissemblance and hinders the creation of a strong national identity. So how effective can the *jaiba* type of strategic ignorance truly be in working towards Puerto Rico’s interest to delegitimize U.S. hegemony? This leads to another issue: because successful usage of *jaiba* politics relies on American perceptions of Puerto Ricans as incompetent and obedient people, instances of *jaiba* politics prolong the stereotype by leaving the Americans with the same misconceptions they came in with. This does nothing to challenge the oppressive system—in fact, it legitimizes it. Linda Hutcheon admits that postmodern resistance, of which I consider strategic ignorance an instantiation, “is a strange kind of critique, one bound up, too, with its own complicity with power and domination, one that acknowledges that it cannot escape implication in that which it [wants to] undermine” (4); I add that, when used alone, it merely implies the victory of purist logic and will never undermine the system in a meaningful way.

Thus, if we consider strategic ignorance of the *jaiba* type as the sole way for marginalized groups to gain agency in their oppressive circumstances, what does this lack of control over their own group-perception say about their status as agents? We have reached the most troublesome aspect of the use of the *jaiba* type of strategic ignorance: it repeatedly reconfirms the dominant group’s misperceptions, ul-
timely contributing to the perpetuation of the oppressive system.

IV. STRATEGIC IGNORANCE OF THE “HUSTLING” FORM

So if the *jaiba* form of strategic ignorance is so detrimental, should groups give up on strategic ignorance completely? Not at all. Strategic ignorance comes in many forms, of which *jaiba* is just one. Recall that strategic ignorance is the term for any tactic that uses “dominant misconceptions as a basis for active creative responses to oppression”, not just for those that uphold dominant misconceptions (Bailey 88). Following this definition, strategic ignorance could very well be applied in a way that merely tolerates, ignores, or even debunks dominant misconceptions without actually perpetuating them. This is in fact the ultimate aim of another type of strategic ignorance, which I call “hustling”. As a female student in a business school that is two-thirds male and operates with a pervasive system of male-dominance, I have drawn upon my own experiences to define and explain this type of strategic ignorance.

Applying the Concept of Hustling to Strategic Ignorance

A key aspect of the practice of hustling is challenging the dominant group’s misconceptions by putting them in a position where they must change their beliefs. Aside from being the origin of the term’s name, a high-stakes game of pool is a useful metaphor for the strategy of hustling. Player 1 and Player 2 are equally skilled at pool, but Player 1 intentionally plays badly to lull Player 2 into a false sense of security about his seemingly assured win. At the right moment in the course of the game, Player 1 drops the charade; in doing so, Player 1 surprises Player 2, which has a detrimental impact on Player 2’s performance (an effect I will call the “power of surprise”). By depriving Player 2 of his full potential, Player 1 acquires an advantage she can use to win. This tactic is called hustling, and while it is frowned upon in the gambling world, it is a particularly valuable application of strategic ignorance. Through hustling, members of marginalized groups can selectively manipulate their identities, surprising the dominant group and exploiting their low expectations as a means to get ahead. I, for one, am a regular hustler. I take frequent advantage of the fact that people in my business school see me as ‘merely a woman’
and reflexively assign low expectations to my intellect and abilities on the basis of their unscrutinized impressions of stereotypical womanliness, just as Player 1 recognizes that Player 2 will be misled into thinking that Player 1 is a bad pool player. I do not need to actively deceive my male peers—they fall for the trap due to their own misconceptions—but I can use the power of surprise as a way to get ahead in classes and interviews.

Exploring Differences between *Jaiba* and Hustling

If marginalized individuals continue to accept the identity that the dominant group assigns to them, how does hustling avoid the pitfalls of the *jaiba* form of strategic ignorance? The distinguishing characteristic of the hustling type of strategic ignorance is that individuals maintain a *temporary farce*—not a permanent one. This is valuable in two ways: first, it naturally avoids dissemblance, the act of permanent identity-masking that Clark Hines admonishes against. Second, members of the oppressed group are not forced to take an active role in the perpetuation of their own oppression: quite the opposite, this form of strategic ignorance encourages members of oppressed groups to flaunt their identities. The distinction can be made clear through examples. Recall Bailey’s example of a *jaiba* type of strategic ignorance, in which black laborers’ actions corroborate white middle-class perceptions that “domestics are dishonest, workers are clumsy [and] black teachers cannot afford their own cars”: stuck in a vicious cycle, blacks had to promote the very system they were fighting against (89). On the other hand, as a woman in the business school, I understand myself through a curdled lens and resist to be “consumed by the logic of control” (Lugones 144). Instead, I draw strength from my multiplicity of identities to become an active subject; just like the pool hustler, I use the power of surprise as a way to get ahead in classes. By recognizing that my professor does not expect me to make compelling or substantial comments in class, but *does* expect the male student next to me to do so, I can utilize the advantage I have over my peers and still refuse to be consumed by the logic of purity.

When one “hustles”, acknowledging the ignorance and prejudicial perceptions of others and utilizing them towards one’s own benefit, it is a particularly effective means of strengthening one’s own identity, in contrast to the continued ignorance and lack of identity perpetuated by the *jaiba* strategy. Yet the broader appeal of
hustling is that it lets the member of the marginalized group contribute towards a change in the dominant perception. The individual’s understanding of ignorance is used to gain an advantage—one that is revealed for all to see. Returning to the example of the pool players: when Player 1 utilizes the power of surprise to win the pool game, Player 2 can either recognize that she is a skilled player and treat her differently in their next game, or remain ignorant and fall for the same trick again. Similarly, even though I earn high participation points for going ‘above and beyond’ expectations the first few times I speak in class, my male professor and peers will start to catch on. They can either recognize that I am a significant force to be reckoned with and change their expectations of my skills and abilities, or they can continue to give me the upper hand: either outcome is beneficial. It is unlikely that this specific encounter will dramatically alter my peers’ perceptions of women as a whole—even those who change their expectations of an individual tend to cling desperately to their prejudices of a group—but it is at the very least a step in the right direction.

Applying Hustling to the Puerto Rican Example

What makes hustling unique is that it allows the practitioner to maintain her curdled sense of personal identity while she takes advantage of the dominant misconception until it dissolves on its own. Like any form of strategic ignorance, hustling requires a simultaneous understanding of pure and curdled identities; in practice, however, it differs significantly from jaiba. Instead of requiring the member of the marginalized group to play up a “fragmented” split-separated identity, it encourages her to lay low while remaining steadfast in her curdled self. In the end, the inexplicable interplay of multiple identities provides the force behind the power of surprise.

Hustling broadens the scope of strategic ignorance by offering a strategy that works beyond the applicability of jaiba forms of strategic ignorance. First, let’s apply my university example in the context of the Puerto Rican-American relationship. Imagine a Puerto Rican student studying at a state university who realizes that his professors judge him to be less competent than his American peers. If he utilized jaiba, this student could slyly siphon benefits from the school by purposefully playing up stereotypical Puerto Rican traits such as indecision, passivity, and
distractedness—traits that resemble Attention Deficit Disorder—in order to gain longer testing hours. But by hustling, the student could draw strength from his multiplicity of identities, navigating the class as if he felt no difference between him and his American peers. Only when it benefits him (for example, when the professor asks a difficult question and he knows that he is the last student expected to answer) does he speak up and go ‘above and beyond’ expectations to gain an advantage over his flabbergasted peers.

Hustling has applications on a political level as well, demonstrating the additional possibilities for strategic ignorance. Extending the Puerto Rican example, consider the Puerto Rican Resident Commissioner to the United States taking advantage of the fact that his American colleagues in Congress likely view him through the logic of purity and see him as ‘merely a Puerto Rican’. Because his identity as a Puerto Rican is what defines him in their minds, they unconsciously assign low expectations to his strength of character and assertiveness on the basis of historical American impressions of stereotypical Puerto Rican character. The Resident Commissioner does not need to actively deceive the congressmen, yet just like the pool hustler and the female and Puerto Rican students, he can use the power of surprise as a way to get ahead in debates, internal politics, and perhaps even political gains for Puerto Rico.

At this juncture, dominant group members face two choices. In this example, the congressmen can either modify their expectations of the Puerto Rican’s skills and character or, if they let their assumptions continue to go unexamined, the Puerto Rican will retain the power of surprise. Generally, in a case where there is something at stake, members of the dominant group are pressured to change their expectations as it becomes more and more apparent that the member of the marginalized group is benefitting ‘unfairly’. But what if the first few times the Resident Commissioner employs hustling, the members of the dominant group attribute his success to chance, or take no notice of his actions? All the better for the Commissioner, since he can use the same advantage over and over again without getting caught. Eventually, however, his colleagues will start to catch on to the fact that this man is not as he seems and face the fact that this Puerto Rican is not just capable, but dangerously adept at politics. The dominant group will shift their expectations out of necessity and treat the Commissioner as a qualified equal.
The Limits of Hustling as an Individualistic Strategy

While it is possible to use hustling in situations that are explicitly political, as in the example of the Puerto Rican Resident Commissioner, the possibilities for the strategy are much more numerous when considering all the students, professionals, vendors, and travelers of marginalized groups that interact daily with members of the dominant system. It hinges on the ‘moment of clarity’ for a person in a dominant group, and perhaps even a sense of humiliation and embarrassment. In any case, it forces a person to reflect on his or her incorrect perceptions and, when combined with stakes that are high enough, provokes a change of opinion about a member of a marginalized group. Best of all, hustling preserves a curdled multiplicity of identities to grant individuals the power of surprise, allowing members of marginalized groups to embrace their own identities. It succeeds in challenging dominant assumptions while using them against those who hold them, empowering oppressed individuals to fight the system on a philosophical level as well as on a practical one. Little by little, it effectively disseminates a less oppressive mindset that works to undermine systems of domination, such as the U.S.-Puerto Rican colonial relationship or the social structure of male privilege. If enough individuals practice hustling, it may actually erode oppressive ignorance altogether. This is of course an extremely slow process that generally occurs on an individual-by-individual basis, which is why the use of hustling alone would take women, Puerto Ricans, and other marginalized individuals an eternity to accomplish their goals of resistance.

V. A COMBINATION

Consequently, we are led to return to the jaiba form of strategic ignorance, exemplified by the subversive politics that have worked within the framework of American policies for over one hundred years to bring widespread (albeit incremental) gains to Puerto Ricans. Even though I explained why the jaiba form likely harms as much as it helps, it would be foolish to do away with it entirely—for two reasons. (The Puerto Rican example can also be used to demonstrate this point.) First, due to jaiba’s intimate history with the construction of Puerto Rican national identity, the non-confrontational nature of jaiba politics is an extension of certain habits
of the Puerto Rican character (Grosfoguel 31). Thus, not only would it be foolish to advocate that Puerto Ricans ignore a critical part of their history and national identities, it would actually run counter to the idea that Puerto Rican identities are curdled and inseparable. Second, *jaiba* has the benefit of expediency, something that hustling lacks. Sociologist Ramon Grosfoguel emphasizes the importance of Puerto Rican resistance strategies that “privilege the improvement of oppressed subjects’ quality of life in the present rather than in a distant future ‘paradise’” (71). *Jaiba* politics affects people in real time: its usage averted Puerto Rican bloodshed in 1907, manipulated American interests in the service of its own benefit throughout the 20th century, and even today allows Puerto Rico to use the U.S. economy to support itself as its leaders contemplate which path of action to take next (90-91).

When it comes to the application of strategic ignorance, it seems that the best choice for marginalized groups is the strategy that maximizes steps forward and minimizes steps sideways. In combination, hustling can counteract the negative effects *jaiba* has on group identity, while *jaiba* can make up for what hustling cannot achieve in the short-term. Together, they constitute a bipartite arsenal of strategic ignorance, and on balance offer groups a powerful way to combat systemic oppression and create meaningful change. Yet even though the two approaches are used for different occasions and purposes, hustling is ideal for cultivating curdled identities that can change the system from the inside out. Indeed, ignorance stems from the failure of dominant group members to realize their own multiplicity of identities, perhaps because it is “epistemically cozy” to do so (Bailey 90). By making this logic of purity uncomfortable and unsustainable, strategic ignorance in its two forms works to eliminate oppression on both ideological and pragmatic fronts.

**WORKS CITED**


