“Raza: An Exploration of Race and Ethnicity in Dominican Literature” is a literary project designed to explore how Dominican authors like Junot Diaz and Julia Alvarez categorize race and ethnicity in their literature. For the purposes of this project, race has been defined as a social construct used to categorize people by different biological traits. The color of one's skin is most commonly used to differentiate people, thus, why one identifies as black or as white will be in question. Ethnicity is another social construct that groups people of similar cultural, social, religious, or ancestral experience. Therefore, I will examine how people who identify as Dominican, Dominican-American, Euro-Dominican, and Afro-Dominican, among other identifications, categorize their race as either black or white.

This project was inspired by a documentary by Henry Louis Gates titled, Black in Latin America, where a native Dominican said that he did not realize he was black until he visited New York City. This idea reflects how one must negotiate his or her own identity with external perceptions. Through the use of novels such as The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao by Junot Diaz and How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accents by Julia Alvarez, I will examine whether these two Dominican authors place the identity of their characters within the African Diaspora or not. Based on my findings, I will try to conclude why these authors’ characters identify with what they do and how this influences their characterization of the Dominican Republic in their literature.