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Synthesis Paragraph

West Side Story has been strongly criticized for several reasons, but the main one is race. Throughout the musical, it is claimed how Puerto Ricans were humiliated by the stereotypes that were given to the Puerto Rican actors. In the text “Feeling Pretty”, by Negron-Muntaner, Muntaner explains the several racial issues that were demonstrated in the musical. One point that she makes is how the Puerto Rican characters in the musical were played by American actors. She also mentions how a typical stereotype that was given to the Puerto Ricans was that they were more likely to be accused of being a criminal compared to white Americans. In the article “Trouble in New York City” by Warren Hoffman, Hoffman discusses the origin of West Side Story and how it was originally made. It was initially going to be called “East Side Story”, with a rivalry between Jews and Christians instead of “Americans” and Puerto Ricans. The article also refers to how the original writers of West Side Story had no knowledge, whatsoever, of the true culture of Puerto Ricans. The signs of racism that were obviously portrayed in West Side Story, as claimed in the Hoffman article, are the use of brown faces for the Puerto Ricans and the thick accent the American actors who played the Puerto Ricans used. Even though the articles “Feeling Pretty” by Muntaner and “Trouble in New York City” by Hoffman discuss the racism that was portrayed towards the Puerto Ricans, a contradicting point that was made in Hoffmans article was racism that was shown also throughout the American Character. Hoffman mentioned how the character of Tony was originally named Tonio, an Italian character, but then writers

changed his character into Tony, a Polish character, to make him seem “more white”. In addition, the characters who played the Americans had their hair unnaturally blonde to also make them more Americanized. In the article “This is our Turf: Puerto Rican youths in the 1961 film adaptation of West Side Story”, by Megan Woller, Woller claims that the representation of Puerto Ricans in the film West Side Story is a complicated issue. She mentions how the musical represents a broad generalization to demonstrate the ethnicity of the Sharks. Woller also discusses how in the song “America.” Bernardo seems to have a strong Mexican accent rather than a Puerto Rican one. Furthermore, during the mambo dance, that both the Sharks and Jets participated in, Woller claims that the Hispanic characterization of the Sharks is shown through the flamenco style dance. Lastly, in the book “Boricua Pop: Puerto Ricans and the Latinization of American Culture”, by Negron-Muntaner, Muntaner mentions how in America, especially New York in particular, is a place where women become more like Men, and Men become more like Women which can be seen through the song America. In America, the Puerto Rican women have more freedom and will not be judged compared to how they were back in Puerto Rico. They can go out and have fun instead of being housewives.