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AlterNative Archipelagos and the 1952 Caribbean Festival: Musical Mobilities Escaping ALCOA's Extractive Tourism

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Caribbean cultural tourism is deeply entwined with American empire and its trans-oceanic mobilities, yet transnational Caribbean cultural production constantly exceeds and escapes such limiting constructs. Music and dance are some of the greatest enticements of travel around the Caribbean region, both for the artists who produce that music and for the audiences who participate in it. In many ways, the Aluminum Corporation of America (hereafter ALCOA) was spreading mid-century American Empire through cultural promotion of Caribbean arts, music recordings, and cultural tourism—imagined as access to a kaleidoscopic archipelago of sounds, rhythms and inviting styles of dance. However, Caribbean music creators and consumers also had their own transnational cultural agendas and musical itineraries, suggesting their competing constructs of a transnational musical space. How did the archipelagic imaginary of Caribbean tourism intersect with, interfere with, or otherwise intensify the intra-regional and transnational artistic and musical mobilities that imagined the archipelago on different terms? In this essay, we combine the insights of a cultural sociologist (Sheller) and a musicologist (Martin) to interrogate the meanings of the first Caribbean Festival of the Arts (hereafter Caribbean Festival) in shaping divergent archipelagic spaces and competing musical itineraries and Black Atlantic soundscapes, both imperial and anti-imperial.

Following musical production, dance performance, and cultural tourism marketing around the Caribbean and into North America, we argue that beneath the currents of imperial transnational tourism and cultural consumption there were also countermobilities forming an “alterNative archipelagic” imaginary that connected the

Caribbean with Africa and Black America.¹ In a political sense these alterNative archipelagos involved Caribbean attempts at political federation, migrations of Caribbean workers across the region, and the travel of the musicians and performers themselves, all forging other kinds of mobilities and connections contra American imperialism, and connected to pan-Africanism. We trace the ways in which Caribbean music entered North American bodies, and Caribbean musicians brought surprising trends such as steelpan and Calypso into United States musical performance circuits beyond tourism. The music itself, too, changed culture and moved people, all over the world, which would soon become even more evident with the explosion of rock'n'roll in the United States in the 1950s, ska in the United Kingdom in the 1960s, reggae music soon to follow, and eventually the massive sound system culture of Jamaica and the Jamaican dancehall scene, as well as the highly transnational African music scene that Tsitsi Jaji calls "stereomodernism."²

Scholars in the field of mobilities research have occasionally considered musical mobilities and the mobility of dance forms, such as Tim Cresswell's work on the regulation of ballroom dancing that led to bans on The Shimmy as a "degenerate" and threatening bodily movement in the early twentieth century.³ Scholars of music have also studied the myriad transnational musical mobilities that connect the Caribbean, North America, and the wider African diaspora, including their deep political implications.⁴ Another current of music scholarship traces the political mobilizing power of recorded music and reverberating African diasporic "audiopolitics" as it spread around the world.⁵ Musicologist Ben Barson brings all of these strands together when he argues that the brass bands that emerged on sugar plantations in Louisiana allowed "working-class Black structures of affiliation, work, and community to take root in and against a society that had attempted to extinguish these spaces," thus forming a "commons" that fostered a creolization leading to jazz.⁶ We can see similar strands of cultural production and the emergence of geographies of Black life in the trajectories of Caribbean "folk" musical performance, especially in their escape from imperial structures of power and tourist commodification. Here we seek to bring studies of musical mobilities into conversation with the field of archipelagic studies to explore some of the tensions and excesses within the transnational cultural political economies of Caribbean folk music production, recording, and promotion within contexts of United States imperialism, tourism, and cultural consumption in the mid-twentieth century.

What are the relational connections between intra-Caribbean mobilities and the imperial production and musical consumption that spanned the plural archipelagic formations of the Caribbean? Are there multiple archipelagos that might come into view, or recede, depending on who is looking and who is moving? How do alterNative archipelagic formations emerge out of various kinds of mobilities, mixtures, and creolization (as well as efforts at folkloric differentiations)? And how do "folk" music and codified dance genres escape or exceed imperial power through their transnational proliferation? In other words, we seek to complicate the notion of the archipelago as

a fixed grouping of islands with separate “local” cultures, that is subject to imperial and touristic imaginaries, and think instead of a mobile assemblage of various kinds of generative spatial, temporal, and rhythmic formations at multiple scales, with the mobilities of performers, music, and dance itself being crucial elements in the creation of alterNative-archipelagos.

ALCOA Cruises as Archipelagic Formation

In the 1950s the Aluminum Corporation of America (ALCOA) was heavily promoting its extracting business via sixteen-day tourist cruises through the Caribbean region, an area integral to its bauxite mining operations. It promoted these cruises through an imagery of the Caribbean archipelago as a series of cultural and musical stepping stones, easily accessible to the North American tourist (see Fig. 1). Underlying the mobilities of tourists, though, were the mobilities of ALCOA’s freight ships, picking up bauxite from mines in the region or alumina from its refineries to be smelted into aluminum in United States smelters, which fed the metal into the massive military build-up and consumer markets that supported global United States imperialism in the mid-twentieth century.⁷ ALCOA was an empire-building company, promoting archipelagic travel through the Caribbean as an ancillary benefit of their vast aluminum empire, premised on the military network of US Navy war ships and bases throughout the region.



Fig. 1: ALCOA Cruise brochure depicting the Caribbean archipelago (1950s), Mimi Sheller’s personal collection.

ALCOA hired leading graphic artist James Bingham to depict the musical performances of each island in the archipelago for its advertising campaigns, while sending top sound recording producers to the Caribbean to capture the music of the region, probably during the Caribbean Festival. These records and images were then cross marketed with ALCOA's tourism advertising campaigns, just as Caribbean music was hitting the American mainstream. The company also sponsored the Caribbean Arts Festival—not to be confused with the Caribbean Festival of the Arts discussed later—in the 1950s, saving the prize-winning Caribbean paintings for its collection and advertisements.

“Cruise to the Isles where they began the Beguine” proclaimed an alluring early 1950s ALCOA Cruise Ship advertisement (see Fig. 2). Aimed at capturing the imagination and wallets of prospective travelers, the advertisement wove a lyric fantasy describing the region with the flowery prose, “The Lovely islands of the West Indies stretch like stepping-stones across the blue Caribbean” wrapped around colorfully vibrant artistic depictions of local dancers from Martinique and Guadeloupe.⁸ ALCOA's promotion invites tourists to join comfortable, leisurely, air-conditioned, and most importantly “modern” freighters or ALCOA passenger ships for a cruise through the region. The

*Cruise to the isles
where they began the Beguine*

The lovely islands of the West Indies stretch like stepping-stones across the blue Caribbean. You can visit them comfortably and leisurely on modern Alcoa 12-passenger freighters! Or, you may prefer to take a Caribbean cruise on one of Alcoa's air-conditioned passenger ships, calling at six ports in Venezuela, Trinidad, Jamaica, and Curacao or the Dominican Republic. These ships carry an average of only 65 passengers each, yet provide every convenience for your comfort—outdoor pool, lovely public rooms and bedrooms that are all outside with private baths. You travel in private-yacht luxury when you cruise with Alcoa. Freighter trips average 3-6 weeks, sail from New York, Montreal and New Orleans. Passenger ship cruises take 16 days, sail weekly from New Orleans. See your travel agent, or write to Dept. "H" for literature.

ALCOA
saves the Caribbean

WITH PASSENGER AND FREIGHT SERVICE TO 59 PORTS

ALCOA STEAMSHIP COMPANY, INC., 17 BATTERY PLACE, NEW YORK 4, N. Y. or ONE CANAL STREET, NEW ORLEANS 12, LOUISIANA

THIS IS THE BEGUINE a combination of African rhythm and French melody that is indigenous to Martinique and Guadeloupe. You can get an extended play 45 RPM high-quality recording of the beguine and other French West Indies folk dances, together with descriptive text, by sending \$1.00 to Dept. "H" at the New York address below. Ask for record No. 6 in our Series of Caribbean Recordings

To sales executives who want more business
If you're not sure domestic sales can keep your plant in full production, consider the billion dollar market in the friendly, nearby Caribbean. This Alcoa-served area is now Uncle Sam's second-best export customer. Send today on your company letterhead for our "Expert Market Opportunities" book that gives important facts and figures.

Fig. 2: ALCOA Advertisement (1950s), Mimi Sheller's personal collection.

American consumer modernity enabled by ALCOA's aluminum was thereby represented in sharp contrast to historical island-centered Caribbean folk cultures that were throwbacks to an earlier era of European colonization and island discovery.⁹

For ALCOA and their prospective target customers, the Caribbean was not just a place, but an idea, and the company sought to depict the region as a series of closely aligned steppingstones within earshot of the United States, and an archipelago of distinct islands, moving through which tourists would enjoy unique "folk" cultures inflected by French, Spanish, English, Indigenous, and African influences, amongst others. An example of this collective distinctiveness is the Beguine dance which was described in ALCOA's advertisement as "a combination of African rhythm and French melody that is indigenous to Martinique and Guadeloupe." ALCOA further invites their intrigued customers to order 45rpm recordings of this and other folk dances via a subscription to *Holiday* magazine which featured the Caribbean recordings in the first seven issues of 1954.

Yet Caribbean artistic and musical mobilities also speak to—and sound out—other kinds of archipelagic mobilities. First, there is the travel of musicians, dancers, artists, and other migrants who were producers of Caribbean musical cultures. Such artistic mobilities had deep roots/routes in musical cross-fertilization through circum-Caribbean travel, which spawned its many musical genres and reached "mainland" ports in South America, Central America, and the United States, especially New Orleans.¹⁰ These currents of creolization and circum-Caribbean travel also spawned anti-imperial politics and cultural formations that took shape through cross-regional meetings and movements, inspiring visions of an anti-imperial archipelago. Rippling through Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association in the 1930s,¹¹ pan-African movements in the first half of the twentieth century,¹² dreams of a West Indian Federation (1958–1962), and into the cross-regional cultural festivals known as CARIFESTA in the 1960s–70s, these "tidalectic" musical travels reverberated through the Black Atlantic.¹³

Garvey's vision of the Black Star Line as a route connecting the Caribbean and Africa that would triumphantly repatriate Africans stands in striking contrast to the ALCOA cruise lines' bevy of ships loaded with extracted alumina and white middle-class tourists casually gliding across the Caribbean Sea. The map of Garvey's travels and Garveyite strongholds across North America, Central America, and the Caribbean, as well as the emergence of other pan-African movements, hints at the alterNative-archipelago of African and Caribbean transnational political culture that would continue to inform waves of social movements and political mobilization throughout the twentieth century. And it was often musicians, dancers, and DJs who carried and remixed these musical "soundscapes" to create and propagate the "stereophonic" cultures of the Black Atlantic.¹⁴

The post-World War II period saw the Caribbean archipelago, much like the rest of the world, undergo dramatic postwar economic and cultural changes. As the American economy boomed, many Caribbean nations were in the process of shedding

their colonial tethers and, for those energized with newfound independence, sought to forge new economic opportunities out of the embers of the region's former plantation economies. Some Caribbean islands—such as Antigua and Barbuda, St. Thomas, and the Bahamas—had brokered in luxury tourism since the beginning of the twentieth century; however, by the early 1950s many newly elected government and economic leaders of individual Caribbean nations—realizing the limitations of their contemporary economic situations—aimed to leverage their biggest commodities—sun, sea, and sand—and fixated on developing tourism. The tourism and hospitality industry became a key pillar of economic development alongside extractive industries such as bauxite mining, gold mining, and the last remnants of the monocrop agricultural plantations of the colonial period.

In contrast to Black working-class movements such as Garveyism, in the postwar era the white business elite of the United States was promoting an imperialist archipelagic project in what it saw as its backyard of friendly neighbors. The promotion of mass tourism was a key cultural weapon in forging imperial bonds of cultural consumption. Cultural tourism through a music festival sought to naturalize an imperial archipelagic imaginary in a packaged form. This new brand of Caribbean tourism relied heavily on foreign impressions and interpretations of local culture and art and, following the austerity of World War II, was to be marketed to the burgeoning American and European middle class interested in traveling abroad to exotic vacation destinations. The resulting cultural tourism is thus deeply entwined with American and European racial projections and their imperialist transoceanic mobilities. ALCOA sat at the center of these development projects, suggesting a relation between the company's extractive mining and extractive tourism targeting racialized cultural products.¹⁵

As Caribbean tourism resumed following World War II moratoriums, many Caribbean countries faced rapid cultural changes with the influx of tourists and worked to remake and rebrand elements of their unique cultural identities and heritage festivals (music, dance, Carnival) attempting to create a single Caribbean-wide fictitious “island paradise” ambiguously located but easily marketable by the tourism industry. Later dubbed “Holiday Island” by ALCOA, this newly imagined pan-Caribbean identity resists modernization, and instead clings to a constantly reinvented colonial past while projecting an innocent present with a frisson of adventure.¹⁶ ALCOA's marketing campaigns thus sought to trumpet exclusivity and attempted to differentiate each of the island ports it called, and it did so by trying to claim a different style of dance and locally-rooted music associated with each new port—in contrast to the widely traveling soundscapes of the pan-Caribbean and pan-African music-makers and listeners.

While Bingham's images for ALCOA of the Francophone and Hispanophone islands of the Caribbean emphasized the admixture of European elements, melodies, and dance steps, several of the ads represented the “primitive” and “magical” elements of Indigenous and Afro-Caribbean cultures like the dances represented in Haiti and Venezuela. One of the appeals of Caribbean tourism was the idea of an

archipelago of cultural variety—it offered the steppingstones of islands through which cruising tourists would effortlessly glide while partaking of seemingly endless variety and cultural variations. But the imagery also played on racialized difference, and a racial capitalism that drew a line between the “backwards” island archipelagos and the “modern” United States, which came to permeate American representations of the region and is an attitude that continues on some level today.¹⁷

Such exoticizing depictions were simultaneously meant to encourage tourist mobilities through the islands, to experience each locality’s distinct music and dance, and combine them into the tourist’s own embodied mobile experience of place. Music became essential to the processes of tourism mobilities that leveraged “places to play” into “places in play” for investment, infrastructure and development.¹⁸ Consuming these representations of the region and embodied experiences of dances, as well as the labor of music producers and dancers, served to deepen and extend those very imperial formations of racialized coloniality that they glossed over. Crucial to this was the invention of the entire Caribbean archipelago as the United States’s backyard and tourist playground, heavily facilitated by music, dance, and cultural appropriation.

The Caribbean Festival as Imperial Project

The Caribbean Tourism Association’s sponsorship of a ten-day festival that brought together musicians and dance troupes from across the Caribbean in Puerto Rico in 1952 is a prime example of the imperial attempt (and success) at cultural remaking. The transnational program had a distinct arts focus, and its collection of music, dance, and *mas* (masquerade) offered a cultural tour through the archipelago, celebrating each country by highlighting their unique “folkloric” artistic heritage. The Caribbean Festival brought together musicians and dance troupes from Antigua, Trinidad, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Surinam, Curaçao, the Virgin Islands, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Grenada, and Haiti. The diverse roster of dancers, parades, and theater offered a tour through the archipelago, introducing each country via its folkloric music and dance. The Caribbean Festival program was also linked with the second annual Caribbean Exhibition of Painting held in San Juan, part of an emerging international market for Caribbean art, building on the success of the Centre d’Art in Haiti.

The Caribbean Festival held in the late summer of 1952 was, in hindsight, a collection of elements of archipelagic imperialism that constructed a fantasy version of the Caribbean region as an American playground. By selecting and subsequently promoting specific marketable cultural products the Caribbean Tourism Association succeeded in producing new modalities of imperial mobilities (premised on extractive racial capitalism) through its promotion of Caribbean tourism, dance, music recording and visual arts that let tourists bring “a little bit of the islands home” with them. Crucial to this process were academic and musicological research. By the 1950s, Caribbean music and dances were circulating through recordings and dance halls into the white

American cultural mainstream, enabled in part through tourism, but also supported by the newly emerging scholarly field of ethnomusicology.

One such scholar working in the field was anthropologist/ethnomusicologist Lisa Lekis (see Fig. 3), who at the time of the Caribbean Festival worked for the University of Puerto Rico, where she directed the dance program and established an initiative teaching and studying dance in rural schools of Puerto Rico.¹⁹ Lekis was named artistic director of the Caribbean Festival in early 1951 and tasked with vetting and selecting performers and cultural products. In her role as the Festival's artistic director she conducted extensive fieldwork throughout the Caribbean necessary to create a comprehensive survey of music and dance in the region deemed suitable for the Festival. Her field audio recordings from 1951 and 1952 became the basis for the Folkways recording *Caribbean Dances* (published in 1953) and greatly influenced audio engineer Emory Cook.²⁰



Fig. 3: Dancer and Anthropologist Lisa Lekis (1952).²¹

Lekis also studied dance choreographies, taught Caribbean folk dances across the United States, and published *Folk Dances of Latin America* (1958) and *Dancing Gods* (1960).²² In 1953, Lekis took a job as an advertising consultant for ALCOA Cruise Ship

Co., New York, where she employed many of the tools and techniques she had learned in Puerto Rico. ALCOA advertising created by Lekis ran constantly in major American newspapers during the 1950s and 1960s and was heavily influential in establishing the holiday island perception many Americans had, and still have, of the Caribbean as a tourist destination. Because of her work the Caribbean Festival serves as an important example of the impactful ways in which the mobilities of tourists and the influence of the foreign tourism industry shaped the local and regional cultural products of the Caribbean.

Throughout her preparatory fieldwork for the Caribbean Festival Lekis searched for cultural acts to document and promote that could balance the competing goals of broadness and individuality championed by the Caribbean Tourism Association for the Caribbean Festival. In Antigua, for example, she chose a clown dance troupe led by the Prince family (Roland and Sydney Prince) and the Brute Force Steel Orchestra to bring back to Puerto Rico for the Caribbean Festival (see Fig. 4).

Lekis’s field recording of the Brute Force Steel Orchestra performing “Mambo #5” was later issued in 1953 by Folkways Records—one of the earliest known commercially released steelband recordings. In this sequence of events, we can observe how a more complex set of musical genres and artistic mobilities across the archipelago was reduced and purified to one “typical” genre for each island, immobilizing “the folk” in time and space so they would be more easily consumed by mobile tourists. Touted as unique artistic heritage, the clown dance troupe and the Brute Force Steel Orchestra of Antigua were chosen over calypso and *benna*, a calypso

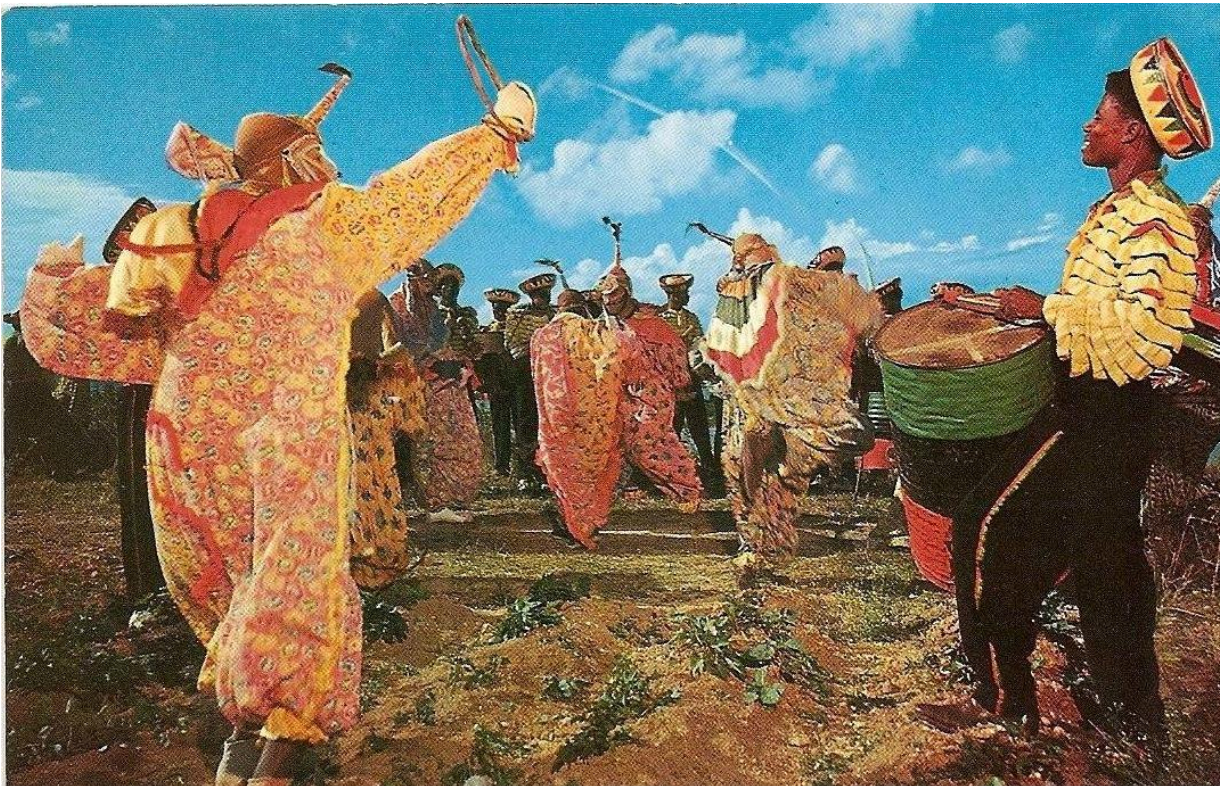


Fig. 4: Clown Mas Troupe and Brute Force Steel Orchestra postcard (1952).¹

song precursor, which in 1951 were arguably more culturally important to local Antiguan.

The selection of clown mas and steelband to represent Antigua was peculiar because of its oversimplification of interisland artistic and cultural development during the twentieth century. Since the nineteenth century, clown mas has served an important cultural role for people (not just Antiguan) throughout the Caribbean diaspora.²³ Yet, in Antigua and elsewhere in the Caribbean archipelago, clowns are one of several dozen Carnival mas characters whose popularity ebbs and flows every few years based on the public tastes. Similarly, by 1952, steelbands could be found in cities and villages across the Caribbean archipelago, but especially in Trinidad and Tobago—their place of origin. The Caribbean Festival organizers saw the potential of the steelpan's sound and image as a marketing tool separate from its cultural baggage, overlooking its reputation and connection across the Caribbean with gangs and street violence, and noting in festival literature that in Antigua the steelband “once disreputable and ostracized is now becoming more respectable and is recognized as one of the few new musical discoveries of the modern age.”²⁴

They further praised the Antiguan steelband movement, stating “In Antigua the steel band has been particularly well developed” and “The Brute Force Steel Band [*sic*] from Antigua is one of the finest of this new medium.”²⁵ Brute Force Steel Orchestra (see Fig. 5) was a superb steelband, but as of 1952 was only one of many accomplished steelbands in Antigua, not to mention the hundreds of steelbands in Trinidad and Tobago—some of which had already toured Europe. Thus, the archipelagic cultural imperialism sought to divide each island into a representative genre, when in actuality creolizing Caribbean cultural forms were dynamic, mobile, and diasporic, mutating



Fig. 5: Brute Force Steel Orchestra (1952). Andrew Martin's personal collection, photographer unknown.

across a variety of alterNative-archipelagic mobilities, many of which carried anti-imperialist and anti-American political messages.

In contrast to their counterparts in other Caribbean islands, Antiguan clown mas dancers often added old English and Scottish country dances (performed in “West Indian” fashion) to their repertoires of traditional African/Caribbean-based clown-type dances. This made them more accessible to practitioners of American folk dancing keen to try something a little more exotic. Caribbean Festival organizers called the Antiguan clown dance troupe “truly fascinating” and stated that “Antigua is developing its own folklore—a movement of the people themselves to establish their own tradition of dance and music.”²⁶ Yet the question remains of who was naming, identifying, promoting, and recording the folk traditions of each island, and for what purposes? What was being left out? And how were multiple traditions being remixed in ways that made them safe for white American consumption?

The Caribbean Festival simultaneously empowered Caribbean artists while also manipulating them to adapt and remake their cultural products to more closely align with the island fantasy promoted by the tourism industry. A subtle and unintended side effect of this type of festival cultural tourism was that the tourism industry, by encapsulating “representative” cultural products, essentially picked de facto winners and losers among local cultural products and performers. In singling out specific and purportedly “unique” local culture ensembles, festival organizers assembled an unofficial official list of exotic-sounding arts that in their estimation epitomized local heritage: “Curacao and Aruba have their bula waya; Trinidad its calypso; St. Croix its Jig player; Puerto Rico its bomba, seises and plena; Haiti, all its mysterious voodoo; Jamaica its strange rituals” etc.²⁷

In presenting a collection of the cultural heritages of the Caribbean curated mostly by outsiders for purposes beyond cultural preservation, pluralism, and celebration, the Caribbean Festival organizers made hard decisions when faced with aspects of cultural novelty and authenticity. This meant embracing the racy and at times mystical folklore of the Caribbean’s past history of piracy and exploration while also celebrating—and instigating investment in—its prosperous future of luxurious resorts and endless beaches. A supplementary result of these policies was that in the name of tourism—both present and future—Festival promoters glossed over key facets of the Caribbean’s narrative (American and European imperialist forces, slavery, colonialism, natural resource extraction) in favor of a transnational script that packaged the archipelagic imperial spaces of individual Caribbean islands as a collection of carefree playgrounds available for tourist consumption.²⁸ Moreover, they silenced the emerging political currents of transnational pan-Africanism and anti-imperialist independence movements that were swirling across the Black Atlantic cultural mediascape of arts, politics, and philosophy.

Media entities, too, played a role in developing the Caribbean Tourist Association’s vision of Caribbean cultural pluralism. The strategy of promoting the Caribbean region as a whole, while also celebrating unique and strategically identified facets of

individual island culture, was ubiquitous and newspaper coverage of the Caribbean Festival is littered with such examples of the Caribbean Tourist Association's collusion. This extended to *The New York Times*, for example, which promoted winter vacation packages to the region within the prose of the same article covering the cultural programming of the Caribbean Festival, or the *Chicago Tribune*, which ran a news story that meticulously chronicled the Caribe Hilton, Condado Beach Hotel, and other resorts at which the Caribbean Festival events were to be hosted and staged.²⁹ The Caribbean Tourism Association's vision of the archipelago dovetailed with the interests of imperial power, the nascent tourism industry, and the extractive industry of bauxite mining, all of which were in the hands of ALCOA.

AlterNative Archipelagos as Musical "Colonization in Reverse" and Imperial Escape

While it would be easy to read the collection of music and dance forms on display at the Caribbean Festival simply as contributing to extractive cultural industries, we also want to suggest that there is another dimension to musical mobilities. First, musical rhythms and dance steps also mobilize the individual who is moved by music to enter the dance themselves. Caribbean musical forms have played an especially important part in spreading new dance steps, rhythms and choreographies across the Americas (not to mention remixing musical cultures in Africa). If the modalities of tourism promotion and music recording encouraged tourists to bring a little bit of the islands home with them through their embodied mobilities, the archipelago of traditional music also got inside the dominant culture and moved it in unexpected ways.

Second, Caribbean musicians, meanwhile, were also traveling and absorbing traditions and styles from each place they encountered, not only blurring the cultural genres within the region but also blending into the musical mobilities of the United States. Caribbean musical genres are dynamic, creolizing, and constantly traveling. Thus, while the ALCOA advertising campaign and Caribbean Tourism Association sought to freeze each island's culture into a representative folk culture, Caribbean musicians played on the complex lines of musical lineages and mixtures, always pushing them forward toward the future rather than back to the past. This generates alternating ways to conceptualize the "kaleidoscopic archipelago," several of which escape the control and narrow framing of imperialist culture and the tourism industry.

One manifestation of this movement was the reception and participation in calypso as a dance craze throughout the heartland of the United States during the latter part of the decade. A song style by tradition, Calypso, unlike the Pachanga, Twist, Mambo, Rumba, or any other dance craze of the 1940s and 1950s, had no preexisting dance steps associated with the song form. By the mid-1950s, dance studios across the United States raced to create steps and routines for the genre. Small local studios and large national chains of dance studios such as Arthur Murray, Dale Dance, and Fred Astaire Dance each devised and taught steps for calypso at their studios across the country. Because the calypso craze was based on imperial archipelago constructions,

it comes as little surprise that dance steps for calypso were essentially fictions of the American cultural mainstream's imagination based on the exotic idealism of Caribbean culture and often dripping with stereotypes.

The music of the Caribbean (West Indies especially) increasingly moved into the American mainstream by the 1950s in the heavily exoticized and commodified narrative of the tourism and entertainment industries. As the Caribbean Festival program suggests, the “drums of Haiti are common knowledge” and “the primitive rhythms and art patterns have crept into our everyday life to a much greater extent than we realize.”³⁰ While consuming the region in a simulacrum of “discovery” of the diversity of Caribbean cultures (consciously echoing past imperial adventures) the festivalgoer's body is exposed to new rhythms, and those “enchanted” rhythms and patterns creep into American culture. How did the embodied mobilities of dance itself, through learning new rhythms and bodily choreographies, transform (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant) American “mainland” culture?

Embodied learning of Caribbean dance steps encouraged travel to the region, while certain influential musical travelers like Lisa Lekis, Maya Deren, and Katherine Dunham also traveled to the Caribbean and came under the sway of the music in complex and generative ways. While the American cultural mainstream first became conscious of Caribbean music via the tourism industry and calypso craze of the 1950s, several American anthropologists and ethnomusicologists had already been deployed to the Caribbean, many to collect music, and some found themselves swept up into the alterNative archipelagic formations of the Caribbean. In the 1930s anthropologist/writer Zora Neale Hurston, dancers/anthropologists Katherine Dunham and Maya Deren, and musicologist Alan Lomax, all visited Haiti and made recordings of the “folk” stories, speech, music and dances of various Caribbean islands. Hurston became deeply engaged in Haitian and Jamaican folk culture; Deren became a devotee and initiate of Vodou as she learned its dances; Dunham did as well, moving to Haiti to cultivate a forest and *hounfort* (Vodou temple) in Port-au-Prince.³¹

Beyond this, we might also argue that the archipelagic mobilities of Caribbean culture exceeded the control of American empire and escaped the total consumption of tourists. Musical and artistic performativity overspilled island boundaries, took “submarine” routes from island to island, to echo Brathwaite, and burrowed deep into the mainland itself as it travelled the creolizing trajectories and pathways of musical mobilities. Caribbean performers repackaged and repurposed the encapsulated notions of Caribbean Island culture promulgated by the tourism industry and cast new trajectories for these archipelagic mobilities in a transnational net reaching to the cities, towns, and backwaters of the United States. In what might appear as a colonization in reverse—as Jamaican poet Louise Bennett-Coverley astutely described emigration to England in her famous poem of 1966—white tourists from the United States and Europe travelled to the Caribbean and Caribbean cultural products (calypso, steelband, and mas) were sent back to American, Africa, and Europe.³² Perhaps the

most impactful of this newly imagined Caribbean artistic performativity were calypso and steelbands.

Of course, while the ALCOA/James Bingham advertisements and calypso craze supernova signaled America's primary introduction to Caribbean culture and music, the cultural mainstream of the United States was somewhat familiar with calypso, steelband, and Caribbean culture prior to the Caribbean Festival. In approximately 1934 the American Recording Corporation (later renamed Decca) was riding the success of blues artists such as Louis Jordan and decided to expand into the "race records" market, importing, amongst other ethnic styles of music, steady streams of calypso singers from the Caribbean to record and produce records in New York. These Decca calypso recordings, wildly popular in the Caribbean, were only a minor success within American markets; nonetheless, Decca continued calypso recording projects throughout the 1950s.³³ The colloquial lyrics of traditional Trinidadian-style calypso failed to resonate with the mainstream American audiences initially, and it was not until calypso had an image and lyric makeover courtesy of Harry Belafonte in 1955 that the disconnectedness between Trinidadian calypso lyrics and American audiences was overcome and the genre, gaining popularity in United States music markets, became a bona fide craze by early 1957.

Similar to calypso, steelband music was not entirely foreign to American audiences prior to the Caribbean Festival. Many calypso singers began employing single steelpan players as sidemen for club and recording dates in New York as early as 1939.³⁴ Precisely when the first steelband appeared in the United States is not entirely certain, though it was likely sometime around 1950 among the Caribbean diaspora in New York.³⁵ Despite the early activities of calypsonian and steelbands prior to the 1950s, the lasting identity of Caribbean culture in the United States is defined through the imperial archipelagic parameters established by the transnational tourism industry during and following the Caribbean Festival in 1952. This was further solidified by the calypso craze (1955–1958) when the visibility and accessibility of Caribbean culture and exotica peaked. The direct connection between Caribbean culture and its imperial archipelagic constructions resulted in a significant portion of steelpan music, calypso, and Caribbean culture from the 1950s being facilitated and mediated exclusively via the hegemonic, though largely unwritten, guidelines of these short-lived American cultural crazes. This tightly woven narrative of Caribbean culture in the United States created by agents of the Caribbean Festival is starkly different from the individual roots of Caribbean cultures hailing from the countries participating in the Caribbean Festival, as well as their diasporic specificity. The reduction of the diversity and individuality of Caribbean culture and music to a few select representatives served to further propel the imperial archipelagic fantasy of Caribbean cultural identity ready for consumption by the transnational tourism industry.

At the time, calypso, steelband, and Caribbean culture appeared on the surface as the latest example of the American commercial music industry appropriating foreign traditional music into something more palatable for American tastes. The

development of steelpan in the United States was, for better or worse, attached to the Americanized imperial archipelagic version of calypso, an attachment the instrument still battles to this day. For the better part of two years the airwaves became a battleground with the tuneful sounds of “Mary Ann,” “Day-O, the Banana Boat Song,” and many other calypso favorites competing as legitimate contenders with Elvis, Fats Domino, and Pat Boone for musical supremacy amongst the American cultural mainstream. This Belafonte style of fun-in-the-sun calypso is an exemplar of the cultural promotion undertaken by the Caribbean Festival some four years prior. The cultural disconnectedness led contemporary Caribbean and Trinidadian artists such as Geoffrey Holder to dismissively categorize the Belafonte style of calypso favored by the tourism industry as “Manhattan Calypsos.” Moreover, Holder and others like him such as Louis Farrakhan and Maya Angelou (both calypso singers) suggested that Caribbean artists and musicians involved in such exploits were complicit in cultural extraction, regardless of their diasporic connections.³⁶

Whether a complicit agent or innocent pawn in a large-scale transnational scheme, Caribbean artists and musicians gained a newfound agency as the 1950s wore on and the narrative of imperial archipelagic dabbling in the Caribbean was eventually underwritten, in part, by the local proponents themselves. That is, much of the content of the calypso craze, steelband movement, and subsequent transnational tourism marketing of the following decade was driven, if not dictated, by Caribbean artists, musicians, and actors. An example of this process was Caribbean steelbands of the 1960s which, rather than perform exclusively for tourists on cruise ships and the grounds of Caribbean resorts, were hired by Caribbean tourism boards to perform in the United States on promotional tours. Grenadian Norbert Augustine and the Merry Makers were one such steelband which, at the time, was formed in Jamaica by the Jamaican tourism board.³⁷ Augustine and the Merry Makers played throughout Jamaica promoting tourism on the island. However, the tourism board had larger plans and sent the band on a six-month tour throughout the Caribbean and the United States to play concerts promoting Jamaican tourism. According to Augustine, “we got special visas, so we could go back and forth anytime we wanted, it was great. We played all over the States for years, from New York City to Minnesota to San Antonio to Oklahoma. We played everywhere.”³⁸ In addition to Jamaica, tourism boards in the Caribbean and agents from the American tourism industry arranged many special visas during the 1960s to facilitate foreign steelband’s promotional work in the United States during this time period.

However, despite creating the imperial archipelagic ideal of what this music should sound like, the tourist industry had less control than one might think of the steelbands during these tours, as the individual steelbands dictated an eclectic mix of current Caribbean and tourist favorites; Augustine recalls “[w]e played the Belafonte stuff and whatever other songs we wanted.”³⁹



Fig. 6: National Steel Orchestra of Trinidad and Tobago, Mackinac, Michigan (1964). Andrew Martin's personal collection, photographer unknown.

Another example with perhaps a more lasting impact was a series of National Steelband Orchestra of Trinidad and Tobago (NSOTT) events organized by the government of Trinidad and Tobago in the 1960s (see Fig. 6).⁴⁰ Following Trinidad and Tobago's recent independence from Britain in 1962, the government led by newly minted Prime Minister Eric Williams sought to develop the country's nascent tourism industry, long neglected by colonial powers. Williams looked to the Caribbean Tourism Association for advice and saw an opportunity to celebrate Trinidadian culture while also leveraging its cultural product for tourism.⁴¹ While the many iterations of the NSOTT performed around Trinidad and Tobago for important government and cultural events, the primary objective of the NSOTT was to embark on several international tours of the United States and Canada to promote culture and tourism. Ranging in size from eighteen to twenty-two players, the NSOTT tours targeted different aspects of the tourism industry and took varying approaches to their advocacy—all leveraging the "exotic" soundtrack of the steelband. In 1964 the NSOTT performed at the Moral Re-Armament Conference in Mackinaw Island, Michigan. The conference was attended by a diverse mix of social activists, religious leaders, and entertainment and tourist industry executives. As NSOTT member Cliff Alexis recalls: "We had 1100 or 1500 people from all over the world at our concerts including Rajmohan Gandhi, Mahatma Gandhi's grandson."⁴² The NSOTT was a smash success and the band spent nearly three months touring the United States from Michigan to the East Coast to Santa Fe, New Mexico.⁴³

The NSOTT membership were leaders of the most famous steelbands in Trinidad and Tobago and their experiences touring the United States would drive elements of the steelband movement in the Caribbean for decades to come. By connecting with audiences beyond resorts and cruise ships they realized the visceral connection between steelbands and American audiences going through many of the same struggles of everyday life. In the United States the NSOTT was free to shape its message without the filter of the tourism industry shaping the narrative to a new audience captivated by its sound yet unaware of its social and cultural baggage.

Perhaps the most significant example of imperial archipelagic pathways forged by Caribbean artists is the Trinidad Tripoli Steelband (hereafter Tripoli), (see Fig. 7). Tripoli's leader Hugh Borde was a member of the NSOTT's 1967 summer residency in Montreal for the Expo 67 (World's Fair). Here, he caught the attention of famed pianist and entertainer Liberace who later hired Borde and the Tripoli steelband as his opening act. For the next few years, the Tripoli steelband crisscrossed America and appeared on a series of high-profile concerts and television shows with Liberace. The Tripoli steelband performed across the United States from coast to coast, noted band member Cliff Alexis: "He [Liberace] used to have us play in the lobby before concerts and during intermission. People loved us and thought we was real exotic. I thought we were nothing compared to the elephant he had on stage in Reno once."⁴⁴ Pachyderms aside, Liberace's promotion company was connected to resorts in Las Vegas and the Caribbean, thus bringing the archipelagic connections between the Caribbean Tourism Association full circle.



Fig. 7: Trinidad Tripoli Steelband, Los Angeles (1969), Andrew Martin's personal collection, photographer unknown.

The Tripoli steelband made its lasting mark in the backwaters, mountains, and prairies of the greater United States. The steelband was the point of first exposure to Caribbean music—steelband in particular—for many rural Americans in the margins, rural areas, and less-populated states such as North Dakota and South Dakota.⁴⁵ Following their stint touring with Liberace from 1968–1972, the Tripoli steelband continued onward for the next four decades, becoming fixtures at fairs, festivals, rodeos, and local celebrations across the United States. The steelband was especially popular at larger regional festivals in the Upper Midwest such as the North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, and Wisconsin state fairs.⁴⁶ Able to plot their own course beyond the imperial archipelagic narrative established by ALCOA and the Caribbean Festival of the 1950s, the Tripoli steelband presented their music and performativity as less of a celebration or even exploration of Caribbean culture. Rather, the steelband functioned as an act, just like any other, and the fact that twenty Afro-Caribbean musicians rolled into North Dakota to play their steelpans for a predominantly white audience unfamiliar with the instruments only served to bolster the curiosity. Breaking the semiotic stereotype of the time, the Tripoli steelband did not wear floral shirts, ruffles, or palm fronds, and likely further confused North Dakotans when they walked on stage dressed similarly to any American soul music band of the era. In doing so, the Tripoli steelband embraced a Caribbean music performativity outside the archipelagic fantasy narrative.

Conclusion

We have argued that on the one hand ALCOA's extractive model imposed an imperialistic archipelagic imaginary on the Caribbean in the form of both touristic appropriation of the islands as tourist playgrounds and the curating, recording, and consumption of its musical and dance forms through the Caribbean Festival of the 1950s. On the other hand, the power of the music also flowed in reverse, drawing tourists, musicologists, choreographers, and dancers into its sway. Caribbean dances and rhythms not only swirled around the region, but also moved north, and traveling musicians and performers imposed their own cultural understandings on the mobilities of this music and the benefits they could wrangle from it, such as travel across North America. Caribbean musical arts, in other words, could not be contained by imperial power. Archipelagic musical mobilities exceeded efforts to shape them as backwards folkways, seizing the stage and instigating the emergence of new "modern" musical genres, popular trends, and dance forms.

The notion of a Caribbean Festival of Arts and Culture took on its own mobilities as it morphed into a regional production. Caribbean cultural producers could not be positioned as peripheral or backward remnants of the colonial past, but instead catapulted themselves into the heart of modernity. CARIFESTA, as it came to be known in a new guise, generated a literary festival that in 1976 published a volume of writing

by influential Caribbean thinkers including John Hearne (Jamaica), C. L. R. James (Trinidad), Aimé Césaire (Martinique), Nicolas Guillén (Cuba), Octavio Paz (Mexico), René Dépestre (Haiti), Jan Carew (Guyana), George Lamming (Barbados), and many others, suggesting a very different archipelagic cultural vision of a transnational Caribbean.⁴⁷ Caribbean artistic and intellectual mobilities inspired a vision for radical Caribbean and pan-African unity against the imperial interests of the United States and extractive industries in the region. This tale of an imperial archipelago and its countervailing alterNative-archipelagos suggests that archipelagic formations are open to definition, difficult to stabilize, and always extending outwards beyond the horizon. Constituted by mobilities as much as by islands, archipelagos are a matrix of transnational cultures capable of remixing, expanding, and resisting imperial power.

Notes

- ¹ The concept of the “alterNative” draws on Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “The Otherwise Modern: Caribbean Lessons from the Savage Slot”, in *Critically Modern: Alternative, Alterities, Anthropologies*, ed. Bruce M. Knauft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 220–40.
- ² Tsitsi Ella Jaji, *Africa in Stereo: Modernism, Music, and Pan-African Solidarity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- ³ Tim Cresswell, “‘You Cannot Shake That Shimmie Here’: Producing Mobility on the Dance Floor,” *Cultural Geographies* 13, no. 1 (2006): 55–77, <https://doi.org/10.1191/1474474006eu3500a>.
- ⁴ See Peter Manuel, Kenneth Bilby and Michael Largey, eds., *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995); Laurent Dubois, *The Banjo: America’s Africa Instrument* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Ben Barson, “Brassroots Democracy and the Birth of Jazz: Hearing the Counter-Plantation in Black Atlantic Sonic Culture, 1791–1928,” (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2020).
- ⁵ See May Joseph, *Nomadic Identities: The Performance of Citizenship* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999); Paul Gilroy, *Darker than Blue: On the Moral Economies of Black Atlantic Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); and Michael Denning, *Noise Uprising: The Audiopolitics of a World Musical Revolution* (London: Verso, 2015).
- ⁶ Benjamin Barson, “‘You Can Blow Your Brains Out and You Ain’t Getting Nowhere’: Jazz, Collectivism, and the Struggle for Ecological Commons in Louisiana’s Sugar Parishes,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Ecosocialism*, ed. Leigh Brownhill, Salvatore

- Engel-Di Mauro, Terran Giacomini, Ana Isla, Michael Löwy, and Terisa E. Turner (London: Routledge, 2021), 209–10.
- ⁷ Mimi Sheller, *Aluminum Dreams: The Making of Light Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014).
- ⁸ See Mimi Sheller, “Cruising Cultures: Post-War Tourism and the Circulation of Caribbean Musical Performances, Recordings and Representations,” in *Sun, Sea and Sound: Music and Tourism in the Circum-Caribbean*, ed. Timothy Rommen and Daniel T. Neely (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 73–100.
- ⁹ Sheller, *Aluminum Dreams*, 147–73.
- ¹⁰ See Timothy Rommen and Daniel T. Neely, eds., *Sun, Sea and Sound: Music and Tourism in the Circum-Caribbean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Shalini Puri, *Marginal Migrations: The Circulation of Cultures within the Caribbean* (Oxford: Macmillan, 2003); Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Barson, “Brassroots Democracy and the Birth of Jazz.”
- ¹¹ John Henrik Clarke and Amy Jacques Garvey, *Marcus Garvey and the Vision of Africa* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).
- ¹² Jaji, *Africa in Stereo*, 59–60, 88.
- ¹³ Kamau Brathwaite, *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
- ¹⁴ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1996); Paul Gilroy, “Between the Blues and the Blues Dance: Some Soundscapes of the Black Atlantic,” in *The Auditory Culture Reader*, ed. Michael Bull and Les Back (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 381–95; and Jaji, *Africa in Stereo*.
- ¹⁵ On extractive tourism, see Matilde Córdoba Azcárate, *Stuck with Tourism: Space, Power, and Labor in Contemporary Yucatan* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020).
- ¹⁶ Sheller, “Cruising Cultures,” 93.
- ¹⁷ Sheller, *Aluminum Dreams*, 177.
- ¹⁸ Mimi Sheller and John Urry, eds., *Tourism Mobilities: Places to Play, Places in Play* (London: Routledge, 2004).
- ¹⁹ Lisa Lekis, “The Origin and Development of Ethnic Caribbean Dance and Music” (PhD diss., University of Florida, 1956).

- ²⁰ Walter Lekis and Lisa Lekis, *Caribbean Dances* (New York: Folkways Records FP 6840, 1953).
- ²¹ *Caribbean Festival of the Arts: Souvenir Program* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Imprenta Venezuela, 1952), 5.
- ²² Lisa Lekis, *Folk Dances of Latin America* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1958); and Lisa Lekis, *Dancing Gods* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1960).
- ²³ Daniel J. Crowley, "The Traditional Masques of Carnival," *Caribbean Quarterly* 4, no. 3–4 (1956): 218.
- ²⁴ *Caribbean Festival Souvenir Program*, 23–24.
- ²⁵ *Caribbean Festival Souvenir Program*, 23–24.
- ²⁶ *Caribbean Festival Souvenir Program*, 23.
- ²⁷ *Caribbean Festival Souvenir Program*, 2.
- ²⁸ Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (London: Routledge, 2003).
- ²⁹ Leslie Highly, "Caribbean Festival: Puerto Rico to Play Host to Inter-Island Exhibit," *New York Times*, April 15, 1951, 255; and "The Tribune Travelers' Guide: All Caribbean Isles to Join in Huge Fete," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 22, 1952, H5.
- ³⁰ *Caribbean Festival Souvenir Program*, 32.
- ³¹ Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1938; New York: HarperCollins, 1990); Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (New Paltz, NY: McPherson and Company, 1953); Katherine Dunham, *Island Possessed* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1969); and see Greg Beckett, *There is No More Haiti: Between Life and Death in Port-au-Prince* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019).
- ³² Louise Bennett Coverley, "Colonization in Reverse," in *Jamaican Labrish* (Kingston: Sangsters Limited, 1966), available at <https://www.poetrybyheart.org.uk/poems/colonization-in-reverse-2/>.
- ³³ Michael Eldridge, "There Goes the Transnational Neighborhood: Calypso Buys a Bungalow," in *Music, Power, and Politics*, ed. Annie J. Randall (New York: Routledge, 2005), 175.
- ³⁴ Ray Allen, "J'Ouvert in Brooklyn Carnival: Revitalizing Steel Pan and Ole Mas Traditions," *Western Folklore* 58, no. 3 (Summer–Autumn 1999): 255–77.

- ³⁵ See Joyce Wadler, "His Incessant Racket Coaxes Steel Drums to Sing," *New York Times*, November 1, 2002, B.2, and Jared McCallester, "Steelpan Tribute to Late Pioneer," *New York Daily News*, May 23, 2004, 5.
- ³⁶ Geoffrey Holder, "That Fad from Trinidad," *New York Times*, April 21, 1957, 192.
- ³⁷ "Merry Makers" is a common steelband name, and unrelated steelbands with this name appear in Trinidad, London, and New York in addition to Jamaica, dating as far back as the late 1940s.
- ³⁸ Interview with Norbert Augustine by Andrew Martin, Minneapolis, Minnesota, April 8, 2017.
- ³⁹ Interview with Norbert Augustine, April 8, 2017.
- ⁴⁰ George Goddard, *Forty Years in the Steelbands: 1939 to 1979* (London: Karia Press, 1991), 132.
- ⁴¹ Steelbands were some of Eric Williams's earliest and staunchest political supporters beginning in the 1950s. Many further saw Williams's efforts to employ panmen as payback for their support. See Steven Stuempfle, *The Steelband Movement: The Forging of a National Art in Trinidad and Tobago* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).
- ⁴² Cliff Alexis, interview with Ray Allen, August 31, 2014, New York.
- ⁴³ For more information on the tour, see Goddard, *Forty Years*, 130–140.
- ⁴⁴ Cliff Alexis, interview by Andrew Martin, April 6, 2013.
- ⁴⁵ Staff Writer, "NDSU Schedules Fine Arts Series for School Year," *The Bismarck Tribune* (Bismarck, North Dakota), August 30, 1979, 6.
- ⁴⁶ Andrew R. Martin and Ray Funk, "Hugh Borde and the Tripoli Steel Band," *Steel Times* 3, no. 1 (2020): 10–20.
- ⁴⁷ John Hearne, *Carifesta Forum: An Anthology of 20 Caribbean Voices* ([Kingston?]: Carifesta 76, [1976?]).

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