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2010

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Representations of Race, Entanglements of Power: Whiteness, Garveyism, and Redemptive Geographies in Costa Rica, 1921-1950

By

Asia Leeds

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

Requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

African Diaspora Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Ula Y. Taylor, Chair
Professor Robert L. Allen
Professor Nelson Maldonado-Torres

Fall 2010

Abstract

Representations of Race, Entanglements of Power: Whiteness, Garveyism, and Redemptive Geographies in Costa Rica, 1921-1950

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Professor Ula Y. Taylor, Chair

This dissertation explores the making of race and the politics of belonging in Costa Rica between 1921 and 1950, during a period of shifting racial borders and entangled terrains of power. While the idea of “racial democracy” and official discourses of *mestizaje* (racial mixing) predominate in Latin America, Costa Rica has been long held as a unique country in Central America with an exceptional social geography characterized by “whiteness” and homogeneity. Employed in the United Fruit Company enclave in the Atlantic region of Limón since the late nineteenth century but not formally granted citizenship until 1949, persons of British West Indian origin posed alternative claims to racial belonging, based heavily on the language and ideas of Garveyism—the Pan-African political philosophy of Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). The surge of anti-imperial protest against the United Fruit Company in the 1920s and the subsequent renegotiation of the Company’s contract in 1934 transferred the centers of banana production from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast, where “persons of color” were prohibited from employment. This process re-drew the borders of the nation and initiated the “Costa Ricanization” of Limón. Theorizing Limón as a borderland formed by the encounters of U.S., Central American, and Caribbean ideas of race, this dissertation maps the convergences and divergences of two distinct yet interwoven articulations of racial citizenship in Costa Rica; one West Indian, Garveyite, and black, and the other *criollo*-identified and white.

Utilizing interdisciplinary research methods and critical theories of race and diaspora, this project employs an analytical lens that engages the national and transnational politics of race, and the relationship between space, power, discourse, and visual culture in the making and contestation of racial belonging. This dissertation draws from the fields of African Diaspora Studies, Latin American Studies, Intellectual History, Cultural Geography, Women’s Studies, and Media Studies to analyze the languages, logics, signifiers, and imageries of racial belonging, reading newspapers and petitions as “counterarchives” and key sites where Costa Ricans and West Indians forged cultures of redemption and contours of citizenship, putting them on the record.

Introducing the concept of “redemptive geographies,” the discursive spaces and territorial claims in which Costa Ricans and West Indians negotiated modern subjectivity and “diasporic” identity,

this dissertation examines the re-mapping of the European and African diasporas alongside articulations of belonging to the Costa Rican nation. Costa Ricans re-formulated *criollo* whiteness and re-inscribed a mythology of homogeneity based on an identification with the Spanish settlers of the colonial past. The idea of national whiteness reinforced the outsider status of West Indians and was also an anti-imperial critique of the power of United Fruit in the country, which effectively reduced them to the status of colonized non-whites. Plagued with the problems of placelessness, lack of citizenship, and misrepresentation as savage threats to the Costa Rican nation, West Indians “invented” Africa in particular ways, highlighting legacies of greatness and civilization through the poetics and imageries of Garveyism to articulate black modernity and Afro-Costa Rican identity.

A key function of the dissertation is to highlight the internal hierarchies and exclusions that underpin the making of these redemptive geographies, complicating the notion of looking at history from below. I examine the ways Costa Rican and Garveyite ideologies of racial belonging invoked ideas and discourses of respectability, *upstanding* morality, and *honorable* behavior that drew interior borders along the lines of class, culture, gender, and sexuality. Defining and representing female honor was critical to producing and reproducing the *authentic* national body. I not only investigate the imageries of womanhood, motherhood, and femininity—including the frequent photographs of women featured in the newspapers—but I also analyze the ways that women theorized their own place within the projects of redemption.

For Polly and Pop Pop

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List of Abbreviations

- UNIA* Universal Negro Improvement Association
- ANCR* Archivos Nacionales de Costa Rica
- YWSC* Young Women's Social Club
- UFCO* United Fruit Company
- SEAP* Sociedad Economica de Amigos del País

List of Archives

- Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
 - Negro World*
- Archivos Nacional de Costa Rica
- Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica
 - La Tribuna*
 - La Gaceta*
 - Limón Searchlight*
 - La Prensa*
 - La Prensa Nueva*
 - La Prensa Libre*
 - Voz del Atlántico*
 - Trabajo*

Introduction



Map I.1 “Physical Map of Costa Rica.” Online image. 2008. *Costa Rica Traveler*. Downloaded 19 June 2009. <<http://www.costaricatraveler.com/english/maps.php>>. What is known as El Valle Central, or the *Central Valley* is located in the mountainous, high altitude, temperate central region of the nation, which includes the capital city, San José. The province of *Limón* runs along the Caribbean Sea and is largely made up of tropical lowlands.

In a letter he wrote for the *Limón Searchlight*, a West Indian¹ weekly newspaper, Charles McLeod accused his wife Louise of leaving “[his] home and protection to carry on with other men.”² Publicly declaring the “misconduct” of Louise, Charles’ letter reveals the centrality of the newspaper in setting the record straight, calling out others, and defending one’s own respectability. Louise, however, was not a passive victim of her husband’s defamation. She voiced a counter-narrative, submitting her own letter to the *Searchlight*, which the editor printed the following week.³ Contesting the statements of Charles, Louise claimed that she was forced

¹ I use the term “West Indians” to refer to those English-speaking immigrants of African descent from the British West Indies, primarily from Jamaica. Although by the period in question, a significant portion of West Indians were born in Costa Rica, they by and large, were not citizens of Costa Rica, and I therefore refer to both those born in Costa Rica and those who migrated to Costa Rica as West Indians.

² *Limón Searchlight*, 19 September 1931.

³ *Ibid.*, 26 September 1931.

out of their home by “the blows and illtreatment” she received and her position as a “Slave and the beating post” of the household. As the sole provider for their children, Louise describes herself as a “working woman [who buys] goods in Cartago and [takes] them on the [railroad] lines for sale.” Claiming that *she* was the rightful owner of the McLeod home since her money was used to purchase it, Louise has faith that the “laws of [Costa Rica] will not allow [for her and the children] to be turned on the Streets.”

The letters reveal a number of interrelated issues that this dissertation interrogates. First, the story of Louise and Charles McLeod illustrates the transnational or *diasporic* space to which West Indians in Limón belonged. In his letter, Charles details the couples’ movements in the circum-Caribbean area. Marrying in Costa Rica in 1910, Louise and Charles then moved to Jamaica to stay with Charles’ family. Leaving Louise in Jamaica, Charles traveled to Cuba, where he was likely a wage-worker on the plantations of U.S. sugar corporations. After Charles returned to Jamaica, Louise’s mother traveled to the island from Costa Rica. At the request of her mother, the couple returned to Costa Rica and bought property in Siquierres, Limón.

Secondly, the case of the McLeods provides insight on the complexities of place and belonging among West Indians in Costa Rica. While Charles referred to Jamaica as “home,” the couple was shaped by what Lara Putnam refers to as the “Western Caribbean migratory system,”⁴ and ultimately by their decision to settle in Costa Rica. With her savings and his earnings from plantation labor in Cuba, and perhaps in Panama and other sites of labor sparked by U.S. companies and the Canal building project, Charles and Louise moved from wage laborers to small landholders, as many West Indians in Limón had done by 1921. It was in Costa Rica, therefore, that the McLeods, like other West Indian migrant laborers who traveled in the region in the late nineteenth century and turn of the twentieth century, were able to become landowners. The dynamics of banana production and the United Fruit Company (UFCO) in Limón informed this process of West Indian land tenure.

Finally, gender and sexuality also play a central role in the stand-off between Louise and Charles. Leaving the “protection” of the home, Charles characterizes Louise as no better than a “public woman,”⁵ or commercial a sex worker, charging her with carrying on illicit sexual relationships with men (in plural). Charles challenges her respectability, a highly treasured status among West Indians, especially women, in Limón. Louise at once maintains her own respectability and redefines it for herself. While she was no longer a domesticated wife, she was, in her words, a “working woman” who found dignity in being able to support herself and their children. Women were both the objects of West Indian anxiety around respectable womanhood and female sexuality, and the authors of their own respectable subjectivities.

The experiences and conflict between Louise and Charles is telling of the dynamics of the West Indian population in Limón during this time. Situated somewhere between British Caribbean and Costa Rican identification, West Indians increasingly articulated Afro-Costa Rican identities as power and governance shifted in Limón. As the UFCO withdrew and the Costa Rican government began to nationalize the region, the West Indian community voiced their desires for permanence and citizenship in Costa Rica.⁶ While forging places of belonging

⁴ Lara Putnam, *The Company They Kept: Migrants and the Politics of Gender in Caribbean Costa Rica, 1870-1960* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 4.

⁵ Ibid. Putnam notes that sex workers were referred to as *mujeres publicas*, or public women, in governmental and colloquial discourses of health and sanitation.

⁶ Benedict R. O. G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (London: Verso, 1991); David T. Goldberg, *The Racial State*. (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2002); Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage in association with the

in Limón, West Indians navigated transnational mediascapes and communities, shaped in large part by Marcus Garvey's pan-African organization, the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA). As *the* central organizing factor in the West Indian community, with twenty-three branches spread over the province of Limón, the McLeods, as upwardly mobile, landowning, and educated West Indians, may have participated in the UNIA. The discourses of Garveyism could have informed the ways that both Louise and Charles defined female respectability, even though their ideas are seemingly divergent.

Costa Rica: Race, Exceptionalism, and Limón

In the 1920s, migrants from the Costa Rican Central Valley and immigrants from the British West Indies converged in the banana-producing region of Limón. For both the Costa Ricans and the West Indians, Limón, the region that lies on the Atlantic coast of Costa Rica, represented an unknown space. Seventeenth and eighteenth century Limón, like the rest of the Atlantic coast of Central America—from Guatemala to Panama—was an “untamed” space, a site of marronage and self-governance where runaway slaves, indigenous groups, the multiracial Miskitu (notorious for raiding settlements), and English buccaneers, all operated outside of the reach of colonial governments. Traveling to the “Miskitu Coast” as a missionary in the 18th century, Olaudah Equiano, the “enlightened African,” and author of one of the most widely read autobiographies of an ex-slave,⁷ referred to the Miskitu as “unenlightened Indians.”⁸ “I often wished to leave this place, and sail for Europe,” he wrote, appalled by what he viewed as the “heathenish” ways present in the region.⁹ Indeed, the Caribbean basin of Central America, has not only been a part of a persisting imagining of an “other” Central America, but also a part of the Black Atlantic¹⁰ for centuries.

Conceptualized as a space of lawlessness, foreign influence, savage blackness, and indigeneity, Atlantic Central America was both peripheral and central to consolidation efforts in the post-independence climate of the nineteenth century. Efforts to modernize¹¹ and nationalize the region were enacted and then often abandoned. But by the late nineteenth century, the expansion of export-based economies demanded the use of the Atlantic region. In Costa Rica,

Open University, 1997). Benedict Anderson, David Theo Goldberg, Stuart Hall, and others engage the making of nation, identity, and citizenship. I will explore the complexities of identity-making in relation to racial formation in this dissertation.

⁷ Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1995 [1789]). Born in West Africa, Equiano became active in the British abolitionist movement and authored this widely read autobiography of his life as a former slave.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹⁰ Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1983); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993). Thompson, Gilroy, and others refer to a “black Atlantic world” that is shaped by movement, exchange, and creolization of African-derived aesthetics, world-views, and practices in the Americas.

¹¹ See Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2000); Mabel Moraña, Enrique D. Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui, eds. *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Ramon Grosfoguel, “World-systems Analysis in the Context of Transmodernity, Border Thinking, and Global Coloniality” *Review - Fernand Braudel Center for the Study of Economies, Historical Systems, and Civilizations* 29.2 (2006): 167. Following the lead of Quijano, Mignolo, Grosfoguel, et al, I will engage the *modern* and *modernity* as a set of ideas that emerge out of a Europe-centered world-view based upon the enslavement, colonization, and *coloniality* of European dominance of the non-European world.

North American and European demand for coffee led to monocultural production of the crop. By the early twentieth century, however, with the development of the UFCO, the dominance of the banana industry out-paced coffee. Contracting North American Minor Keith to build an Atlantic port and a railroad that would stretch from the coffee-growing lands of the Central Valley to the Port of Limón, the Costa Rican government enabled the development of a “state within a state,” the United Fruit-run banana-producing enclave in Limón.¹²

Twenty-three year-old Marcus Garvey, himself, who would go on to create the UNIA—the world’s largest pan-African organization in modern history¹³—left his natal Jamaica for the first time in 1910 (the same year that Louise and Charles were married) on a ship headed for Limón.¹⁴ As a timekeeper for the UFCO in its segregated Limón enclave, situated within a Central American nation-state that identified as white,¹⁵ Garvey interacted with new ideas and complexities of race, power, and citizenship that would inevitably shape the platform, purpose, and urgency of the UNIA and its strong resonance among West Indians who would remain in Costa Rica and form an Afro-Costa Rican identity. Within a field of overlapping and contested relations of power, this dissertation maps the convergences and divergences of two distinct yet interwoven articulations of racial belonging in Costa Rica—one West Indian, Garveyite, and black, and the other Costa Rican, *criollo*¹⁶-identified, and white—and the entanglements of citizenship and cultural representation.

Although Latin American society is generally understood in terms of *mestizaje* (mixing), *racial democracy*, or *racelessness*,¹⁷ Costa Rican national identity is based upon the idea of European heritage and whiteness. The following passage is excerpted from the official report written to supplement the 1927 census and represents the dominant narrative of Costa Rican national identity:

[A]s can be judged by these figures the population of Costa Rica includes a high percentage of [the] white race...With good reason the conditions of social and political order which have prevailed in our country, and which have endowed us with those habits of peace and work so traditional among our people, have been attributed to the racial homogeneity of the Costa Ricans.¹⁸

¹² Aviva Chomsky, *West Indian Workers and the United Fruit Company in Costa Rica, 1870-1940* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 30.

¹³ Colin Grant, *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 164. Founded in Jamaica in 1914, Garvey incorporated the organization in New York in 1917. A year and a half later, the organization grew from 13 members to 5,500 members in 25 U.S. states, in the Caribbean, Central America, and West Africa. In Garvey’s estimation, by June of 1919, the organization had two million followers!

¹⁴ Garvey would move onto the Canal Zone of neighboring Panama in 1911 after several months in Costa Rica, taking detours in Jamaica and the United Kingdom before settling in Harlem, New York in 1916.

¹⁵ Employing an idea of national history, in which colonial Costa Rica was peopled with persons of Spanish descent, official national discourse claims that the nation is a white one, and most Costa Ricans (especially those with light skin) refer to themselves as *blancos*.

¹⁶ *Criollo* was a term used in colonial Latin America to identify persons of Spanish lineage born in the Americas, which we can think of as a creolized white identity.

¹⁷ George R. Andrews, *Afro-latin America, 1800-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Mark Q. Sawyer, “‘Race’ to the Future: Racial Politics in Latin America 2015,” *Perspectives on Politics* 3.3 (2005): 561-564. In contrast to the racial segregation and “one drop rule” of the United States, Latin America is often understood to be a space of racial mixing between Spaniards, Africans, and Indigenous people, where racial categories are not concrete. In fact a great deal of scholarship on Latin America examines “ethnicity,” ethnic minorities, or ethnic difference, rather than race. Scholars like George Reid Andrews and Mark Sawyer critique this trend and highlight the central role of race in power, identity, and belonging in Latin America.

¹⁸ Putnam, 72.

Obscuring the existence of the Bribris, Guaymies, and other indigenous groups, enslaved Africans and their descendents, and the Afro-Indigenous Miskitu, all of whom existed primarily in the peripheralized region of Limón, the notion that colonial Costa Rica was a sparsely populated territory of smallholding farmers with a weak elite and an equal distribution of wealth comprised solely of persons of Spanish ancestry is the founding discourse of national history.¹⁹ Costa Rican whiteness was produced by both official national rhetoric like this and by the ways that Costa Rica was juxtaposed to the rest of the region. In the follow-up to his influential *Cosmic Race*²⁰ José Vasconcelos, a leading intellectual and proponent of *mestizo* nationalism in Mexico in the 1920s and 30s, reveals the ideal of racial purity and the privileging of the European bloodline in his own thinking, noting that Costa Rica, with its “pure race of Gallic origin,” and therefore, exceptional social geography, has avoided the crises of governance and modernization found in the rest of Central America.²¹ The 1927 census description of “racial homogeneity” based on the predominance of the “white race” establishes that Costa Rican *exceptionalism*²² in Central America is fundamentally racial in nature, and governed by the following logic: the nation’s democratic tradition, prosperity, and peacefulness, hence, *modernity*, are the result of the absence of Indians and blacks.

As concepts of race are produced in the interactions of discourse, space, and power, this project seeks to highlight the ways that representation and knowledge, color-lines and diaspora, and the complications of imperialism and nationalism inform the making and contestation of what it means to be Costa Rican at a critical juncture in the nation’s territorial consolidation. The abandoned hot and humid Caribbean lowlands of Limón, long held as an “uninhabitable” area where “no whites could survive,”²³ and thus set apart from the rest of Costa Rica, became a key site of struggle in the making of Costa Rican nationalism. As the UFCO dominated industries, politics, and policing in the region, and West Indians formed a “middle-level local elite” between U.S. bosses and Costa Rican plantation workers, Central Valley migrants in Limón were out of place and rendered non-white by the hierarchies of race and power in the region. The idea of black advantage and foreign control in Limón stimulated national debate and protest by both Costa Rican workers in Limón and Costa Ricans in the Central Valley in the 1920s and 1930s. Ultimately, UFCO contract re-negotiations in the 1930s and the subsequent relocation of its operations to the Pacific coast in 1934, where “persons of color”²⁴ were prohibited from employment, encouraged and enabled the nationalization of Limón. Furthermore, the post-emancipation black population of West Indians, present in Limón after 1871 and formally

¹⁹ See Lowell Gundmonson, *Costa Rica Before Coffee: Society and Economy on the Eve of the Export Boom* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986).

²⁰ José Vasconcelos and Didier Tisdell Jaén, *The Cosmic Race: A Bilingual Edition* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997[1925]). In this 1925 text, Vasconcelos heralds the mixing of races as producing a unique cultural history and “chosen” path for Mexicans.

²¹ Marilyn Grace Miller, *The Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race: The Cult of Mestizaje in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 40.

²² Mitchell A. Seligson, “Costa Rican Exceptionalism: Why the Ticos Are Different,” in *Citizen Views of Democracy in Latin America*, ed. Roderic Ai Camp (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), 90-106.

²³ Michael Olien, *The Negro in Costa Rica: The Role of an Ethnic Minority in a Developing Society* (Winston-Salem, N.C: Overseas Research Center, Wake Forest University, 1970), 10.

²⁴ What was known as the “companion law” to the new banana contract of 1934 between UFCO and the Costa Rican government, gave preference to “native” workers and prohibited the employment of “personas de color” in the new banana enclave. While many West Indian residents of Costa Rica had been born in the country, few were naturalized citizens and West Indians, whether born in Costa Rica or not, were considered foreigners and not natives of Costa Rica.

granted citizenship in 1949, posed alternative claims to racial belonging, based heavily on the language and imagery of Garveyism, complicating the very notion of Costa Rican homogeneity.

What was at stake in the making of race in early- to mid-twentieth century Costa Rica? While experiencing entangled colonialities²⁵ in varying ways, both Costa Ricans and West Indians sought to overturn representations of race and belonging that did the ideological and discursive work of subordinating and misrepresenting them. Reformulating their racial identities and spaces of citizenship by claiming access to modern subjectivity and diasporic identity, both construct, disseminate, and reproduce redemptive imageries of race.

Redemptive geographies are spaces within which history is remembered and contested and where racial identities are contingent on redeeming representations of diaspora. Referencing the past and re-writing history was, then, crucial to redemptive narratives. For Costa Ricans, this entailed inserting themselves into the white world based on the idea of European heritage. Costa Ricans re-inscribed the mythology of “rural democracy,”²⁶ based on identification with the Spanish settlers of the colonial past. Homogeneity and white ancestry was therefore *traditional* in Costa Rica.

For West Indians, a redeemed Africa enabled the articulation of black civilization. “Inventing”²⁷ Africa in particular ways and highlighting legacies of greatness and civilization, the poetics of Garveyism claimed that it was the destiny of the black race to ascend to and surpass past achievements. The UNIA was the central organizing structure of West Indian Limon and Garveyite West Indians contributed to the *Negro World* newspaper and its local organ, the *Searchlight*, and petitioned the Costa Rican government on behalf of the West Indian community, invoking the imagery, philosophy, and prophecy of Garveyism. West Indians were not only engaged in a discursive struggle to become redemptively black, but were doing so within the context of becoming Costa Rican.

The articulation of racial identities and national belonging in Costa Rica is a discursive struggle over narration, representation, and ideas of territory, origin, and history. My dissertation explores the crafting of redemptive geographies, or counter-spaces of citizenship and identity, by both Costa Ricans and West Indian immigrants as they navigated entangled racial borders and shifting terrains of power. Examining the forging of national and transnational cultures of redemption and respectability, this dissertation engages newspapers and petitions as key sites where Costa Ricans and West Indians critiqued ideas of racial inferiority and global hierarchies of power that displaced them. Of concern to this dissertation are the tensions and complexities of the two coinciding efforts toward racial nationhood that in the end share a similar logic and acceptance of modernity’s foundational premises; that race determines the contours of belonging and a people’s suitability for independence and self-governance. Analyzing the philosophical, historiographical, and cultural aspects of racial redemption

²⁵ I will examine the varying experiences of empire and colonization that shape the making of race in Costa Rica in more detail in chapter 3.

²⁶ Gudmundson, 1. Gudmundson refers to “rural democratic or rural egalitarian model” of conceptualizing pre-coffee Costa Rica. His seminal work refutes the idea that riches from coffee exportation formed for the first time a ruling elite and class stratification in the nation.

²⁷ V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 133-165. Mudimbe examines the epistemological complexities of “African gnosis,” scientific and ideological discourse on Africa, in relation to the idea of “African philosophy,” the “African personality,” and the unity of African culture theorized by black scholars. Entangled with the very concepts of modernity and a “Western methodological grid,” Mudimbe argues that African philosophy participates in the “invention of Africa” as much European ethnography.

articulated in the “counterarchives” that circulated within the Costa Rican and West Indian communities and the larger diasporic spaces in which both claimed membership, this project interrogates narratives of *exceptionalism*, representations of *blackness* and *whiteness*, and the relationship between race, modernity, and citizenship in Costa Rica.

Coloniality, Culture, and Color-Lines

Modernity is marked by the universalization of its epistemological and ontological claims,²⁸ the making of empire, and the re-ordering of the globe. From the perspective of the Caribbean, modernity was

an insurrectionary rupture with the established cosmic order of things that inaugurated a new era in the relations between the European ego and the world. It globalized the European project of existence, weakened the power of the gods, relocated Europeans at the center of this new world, and refigured the Caribbean into one of its subordinate peripheries.²⁹

Legitimized by the sovereignty of the European ego, the power of modernity to “set aside by setting apart”³⁰ is fundamentally spatial and ideological. For Edward Said, *Orientalism* was crafted through “a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” formed in the cultural, political, and economic contours of imperialism. The representations and illustrations of the “Orient” configure an “imaginative geography” which draws “dramatic boundaries” between two distinct, yet contingent worlds; the West and the rest.³¹ Drawing the borders of nation, citizenship, and belonging through the articulation of an epistemological order, modernity establishes Europe as the prototype for human civilization and progress and the location of knowledge, philosophy, art, and beauty.

As “bourgeois liberty, equality, and fraternity was not for colonial subjects,”³² modernity is a paradox, whereby the *modern* and the *colonial* are dialectical, representing two sides of a unitary process. Enacted by the idea of what Walter D. Mignolo calls “colonial difference,” *coloniality*, which we can think of as modernity’s “darker side” or “underside,” enables the classification of the globe in a way that “transform[s] differences into values” legitimizing the “subalternization of knowledges and the subjugation of people” deemed incapable of, or having not yet achieved, modern subjectivity.³³ For Sylvia Wynter, the *discursive* violence of European conquest and colonization has produced conditions in which the “entire world has now come to see and know reality through the mediation of the master-categories and conceptual frameworks generated from the varying ‘images of the human’ put in place by Western European thinkers from the Renaissance onward.”³⁴ As Anne McClintock refers to the “postcolonial” as a “prematurely celebratory” term that hides the “continuities” of colonialism,³⁵ the idea of

²⁸ I use “epistemology” to denote a framework of knowing and ideas about the nature of knowledge and truth and “ontology” to refer to theories and reflections on the nature of human existence.

²⁹ Paget Henry, *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 4.

³⁰ Goldberg, 9.

³¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 73.

³² Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington, D.C: Howard University Press, 1981), 223.

³³ Mignolo, 16.

³⁴ Sylvia Wynter, “1492: A new World View” in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, eds. Hyatt, Vera L, and Rex M. Nettleford (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995).

³⁵ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 12-13.

coloniality accounts for the persistent power of modernity's "master categories" and "conceptual frameworks," and its hold on our imaginings of race, identity, and nation.

My use of coloniality draws from the conceptual inroads of W. E. B. Du Bois, who theorized the division of space through colonial relations and representations of difference at the turn of the century. While most noted in its application to the case of the United States, DuBois defines the "color-line" as the demarcation of the "relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea."³⁶ The color-line, then, is a concept that encompasses reflections on both local and global manifestations of a hierarchy that privileges the white and European, of which U.S. Jim Crow segregation was but one example. The "imaginative geographies" of Western imperialism and ideas of citizenship and belonging, therefore, formed *racial* borders.

As Stuart Hall notes, race is not genetically or biologically determined; it is, rather, a "discursive regime."³⁷ Legitimizing the Atlantic slave trade and subsequent direct colonialism in Africa, "dark continent discourses" materialized, depicting Africa as a space of savagery, barbarism, witchcraft, sexual immorality, degeneracy, and located in pre-history. In the Costa Rican census report, fears of blackness and hybridity as a chaotic and backwards threat to modernity are silently echoed in the association of "social and political order" and "habits of peace and work" with European ancestry and "racial homogeneity" at a time when Costa Ricans were acutely aware of the presence of West Indians of African descent within the nation.³⁸ For Garveyites, therefore, "a free and a redeemed Africa,"³⁹ the depiction of a past of glory and civilization, and the invocation of racial destiny, were central to the political philosophy of black redemption.

This dissertation functions "contrapuntally,"⁴⁰ examining a field of manifold and competing legacies and experiences that I think of as *entangled colonialities*. As "landscapes are entangled in power relations,"⁴¹ Limón, while territorially part of Costa Rica, represents a space of competing nations and sovereignties, overlapping allegiances, compounded citizenships, varying migratory paths, and multiple empires and colonial legacies. I use the idea of "entanglement" to map the messy inter-workings of Spanish, British, and U.S. colonialities within Costa Rica, as well as the coloniality of Costa Rican and Garveyite ideologies of racial belonging, which drew internal borders and hierarchies along the lines of class, culture, gender, and sexuality.

Redemption and Representation at the Crossroads: "Problem-Spaces" and the Politics of Becoming

In his seminal work, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, Robert Farris Thompson posits that "visual and philosophical streams of creativity and

³⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover, 1994 [1903]), 9.

³⁷ Stuart Hall, "The After-life of Frantz Fanon: Why Fanon? Why Now? Why *Black Skin, White Masks*?" in *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*, ed. Alan Read (Seattle: Bay Press, 1996), 20.

³⁸ Putnam, 72.

³⁹ Amy J. Garvey and Marcus Garvey, *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey, Or, Africa for the Africans* (Dover, Mass., U.S.A: Majority Press, 1986), 81.

⁴⁰ Said, 15-18. Said maps out the discursive space of 'Orientalism' "contrapuntally," that is, within the "intertwined and overlapping histories" of "British, French, and American empires."

⁴¹ Donald S. Moore, *Suffering for Territory: Race, Place, and Power in Zimbabwe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 23.

imagination” map the cultural landscape of the African Diaspora.⁴² In an examination of Afro-Caribbean calligraphic art, Thompson identifies “the ‘turn in the path,’ i.e., the crossroads” as “an indelible concept in the Kongo-Atlantic world,” showing how “the cosmogram of Kongo emerged in the Americas precisely as *singing and drawing points of contact between worlds*.”⁴³ I conceptualize Limón as a “point of contact” and a space of movement—migration, immigration, exportation, shift, and incorporation—representing a new and changing terrain within the Costa Rican nation-state. Conceptualizing Limón as an entangled space highlights the role of diaspora, circulation, and consciousness in the ways Costa Ricans and West Indians engaged national belonging, their place in the world, and imaginings of sovereign futures. The “crossroads” accounts for the fact that the making of counter-spaces⁴⁴ in Costa Rica takes place “between worlds,” specifically the intertwined worlds of the United Fruit plantation economy, Costa Rican nationhood, and the transnational Garveyite community, and in the realm of culture and imagination.

My reading of Costa Rica treats the nation-state as produced in the interplay of local histories and global systems, rather than a unit of analysis in and of itself.⁴⁵ As “discourses and representations have materiality,”⁴⁶ the political economy of monoculture, or single-crop production—the legacy of colonialism in both Costa Rica and the British Caribbean—established the conditions that enabled the development of the United Fruit enclave and informed the immigration of West Indians and migration of Costa Ricans to Limón. Although postcolonial in relation to Spain, Costa Rica’s location in the Western Hemisphere, a space that the United States had declared dominion over by the turn of the century, placed the nation within the sphere of U.S. imperial power wherein Limón functioned as a colony of United Fruit. While export economies, legacies of slavery, and color-lines established certain parameters of movement, I am interested in the production of racial identities, not as they are *imposed* upon those on the underside of the global color-line, but the ways that they are developed and articulated in critique of and in negotiation with dominant conceptions of modernity.

Although deemed non-white by the North American racial characterization of Latin America, Costa Ricans drew from a *criollo* heritage to re-formulate national whiteness, conceptualized as the key to the nation’s past and future democracy, prosperity, and peacefulness. Garveyism resonated with many West Indians, who although inhabiting the post-emancipation twentieth century were informed by the “phenomenology of slavery”⁴⁷ and the crisis of black citizenship. From the perspective of both the neo-*criollo* and the “ex-slave,” reflections on the questions “Who am I?” and “Who are we?” are at the heart of the counter-discourses that form redemptive geographies. For those enslaved, colonized, and peripheralized by modernity and its constituent “psychology of colonialism,”⁴⁸ a crisis of not only sovereignty but existence informed their conceptualization of political problems. As Paget Henry

⁴² Thompson, xiv.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 109-110. Original Emphasis.

⁴⁴ See Neil Brenner, Stuart Elden, and Henri Lefebvre, eds., *State, Space, World: Selected Essays* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002). Scholars like Warner and Lefebvre theorize the crafting of counter spaces or “counterpublics” as oppositional spaces of existence.

⁴⁵ See Ramón Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Mignolo.

⁴⁶ J.-A. Mbembé, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 5.

⁴⁷ Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed, 1983), 177.

⁴⁸ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 11.

conceptualizes Afro-Caribbean philosophy as an “intertextually embedded discursive practice...shaped by the colonial problematics and contours of [Caribbean] cultural history,” I engage the discourses of redemption produced in Costa Rica as philosophical reflections informed by conditions of coloniality and embedded in modernity’s structures of knowledge.

The entangled colonialities present in Limón created the *problem-space* from which Costa Ricans and West Indians crafted alternative spaces of belonging and definitions of race. David Scott understands “problem-spaces” as “an ensemble of questions and answers around which a horizon of identifiable stakes (conceptual as well as ideological-political stakes) hangs.”⁴⁹ The racial and ethnic organization of the UFCO enclave created a crisis of identity and citizenship for Costa Rican workers who found themselves on the bottom of the division of labor. Cultural and linguistic factors as well as UFCO methods of production⁵⁰ informed the movement of West Indians into a middle space between North American bosses and unskilled plantation labor, comprised largely of Costa Ricans by the 1920s. The perceived dominance of blacks in Limón via their position as small-scale contractors and plantation foremen evoked racist and nationalist protest that echoed beyond Limón, prompting a re-assertion of a national identity based on homogeneity and whiteness. In the climate of shifting authority in Limón after the renegotiation of the United Fruit contract in 1934, West Indians found themselves placeless; they were no longer British subjects, no longer able to appeal to the Company, and on the outside of Costa Rican spaces of belonging.

For both Costa Ricans and West Indians, therefore, the problem-space of this historical juncture was characterized by displacement. In an atmosphere of rampant anti-colonial rhetoric against “El Pulpo,” or the Octopus, a common nickname for the UFCO, alluding to its multiple strangle-holds in the region, Costa Ricans protested the dominance of the foreign power that placed them in a disadvantaged position within their own territory. Costa Ricans were becoming white in a new context, in relation to West Indians, whose presence was not only evidence of the coloniality of United Fruit but a disruption of the trajectory of national whiteness rooted in narratives of the colonial past. Garveyism’s central notion was that the black race was at a turning point, moving towards maturity and the development of a black nation. Redemption, an issue at the heart of Garveyism, was fundamentally a discourse of becoming, and a reflection on the vulnerability of blacks in the Americas, who were on the outside of national belonging and the rights of citizenship. The idea of *becoming* within the context of a problem-space makes visible the dynamics of race and what Michael Omi and Howard Winant call “racial formation,” the unstable, incomplete, and contested “complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle.”⁵¹ With citizenship, nationhood, and sovereignty so tied up into ideas of modernity, the politics of racial identity in Costa Rica rested on the production of counter-claims to modern belonging.

In addition to its theoretical value, the concept of the “crossroads” offers insight into the central methodological concern of this dissertation, which functions at the intersection of political philosophy, history, and cultural studies. As a critique of global and local orders and their constitutive ideologies, racial redemption is a project of identity-making and discursive

⁴⁹ David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 4.

⁵⁰ Chomsky, 7. Chomsky argues that in Costa Rica “the company found it more advantageous to keep much of the production of bananas in the hands of other farmers, while retaining control of transportation and marketing, than to monopolize production itself.”

⁵¹ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 55.

contestation. The production of a “counterarchive” is needed to make this project materialize, because without it “others will dictate the terms by which one will be represented and remembered; one will exist, for the future, in someone else’s archive.”⁵² Redemption, like Scott’s notion of “vindicationism” is a “response to a sense...of being wronged, or worse, slandered.”⁵³

Both West Indians and Costa Ricans, therefore, petitioned the Costa Rican government, putting varying claims for peoplehood and belonging on the record. Newspapers were also a key site of contestation. Daily national newspapers published in San José also circulated in Limón alongside the newspapers produced by West Indians and Costa Ricans of that Atlantic province. In addition to *The Searchlight*, Garvey’s New York-based *Negro World* newspaper, was a major source of information for West Indians in Limón. Each of these newspapers also drew from transnational “mediascapes,”⁵⁴ reproducing articles and images from various newspapers in the world. My aim is to read these counterarchives and routes of media circulation as forming the philosophical, historiographical, and cultural contours of race and redemption.

Employing discourse analysis, this dissertation engages the language of race noting where and how racial identifiers are used. Racial discourse includes not only the use of the explicit terms black or white, (*negro* or *blanco* in Spanish), or the indirect signifiers *Antillano*, or Antillean, and *Jamaquino*, or Jamaican, but also the ways that behavior and culture were characterized racially. With ideas of race so central in determining capability for modern citizenship, the question of *who* represents the race was fundamental. Redemptive geographies were exclusionary, internally governing and organizing bodies and deeming some on the outside; therefore not all Costa Ricans and West Indians fit into these spaces of belonging. Racial identities were only redemptive insofar as they highlighted the respectability of the race. Within “environments in which one’s allegiance to ‘race’ is critical to one’s in-group status, one’s performance of the appropriate ‘essential’ signifiers of one’s race is crucial,”⁵⁵ and I analyze discursive acts of *racial performativity* in the counterarchives. As discourses of sexual immorality and gender deviance among those deemed non-modern and uncivilized underpin the formation and rationalization of color-lines, racial performativity and respectability is necessarily gendered and concerned with sexuality. The characterization of the “Negro Problem” or the *problema racial* as a sexual threat to Costa Rican purity was both explicit (the idea of the preponderance of sexual diseases, promiscuity, and prostitution among West Indians) and more covert (news articles of allegedly deformed bi-racial children, for example).

The body is a site of contestation, upon which critiques of modernity’s racial and colonial borders are enacted through behavior and appearance. Acts of redemptive representation-making involved putting the best face forward. For West Indians, this meant the peripheralization of certain segments of the West Indian community as deviant, insane, and non-representative of the black population at large. In order to counter conceptions of the inherent savagery of blacks, Garveyites rejected displays of *African-ness* that did not fit into the redemptive imaginary, and

⁵² Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 9.

⁵³ Scott, 83.

⁵⁴ Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Economy” in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

⁵⁵ E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), 6.

the leadership campaigned for the eradication of “witchcraft,” “sexual immorality among our girls,” and other “uncivilized” practices.⁵⁶

Within this logic, the manhood and power of a race depended on the redemption of its women, therefore, defining and representing female honor was critical to producing and reproducing the authentic national body. I not only investigate the imageries of womanhood, motherhood, and femininity—including the frequent photographs of women featured in the newspapers that I refer to as *newspaper portraits*— but I also analyze the ways that women theorized their own place within the projects of redemption, taking note of the deployments of “community feminism,” which functions at the intersection of feminism and nationalism, critiquing male dominance while functioning within patriarchy.⁵⁷ A key aspect of my dissertation is to highlight the internal hierarchies and exclusions that exist in the very making of these identities, complicating the notion of looking at history from below.

At times affirming the historicist claim that “all non-Europeans could be considered as pre-European,”⁵⁸ other times breaking with dominant narratives, both discourses of redemption are embedded and entangled in the concepts of Enlightenment thought. As “conscripts of modernity,” West Indian and Costa Rican identity and nation-making was both enabled and limited by the “epistemological conditions” and the very concepts of modernity, progress, and social change.⁵⁹ While countering relations of coloniality and hegemonic notions of race that excluded both communities from the privileges of sovereignty, dominant notions of blackness and whiteness both haunt and frame the formation of West Indian and Costa Rican redemption. Both articulations of racial belonging are formulated in interaction with modernity’s anti-blackness which held Africa and all things African at the bottom of the global hierarchy, as the “heart of darkness,” and in essence, as the antithesis of civilization. Inevitably, the following analytical questions emerge: To what extent are redemptive geographies “counter” spaces? In what ways do the racial articulations of West Indians and Costa Ricans reveal the “tragedy of enlightenment?”⁶⁰

Structure of the Dissertation

In Chapter 1, *Color-Lines, Entangled Colonialities, and Racial Landscapes in Costa Rica*, I explore the history of race and power in Central America, the British West Indies, and the U.S. circum-Caribbean empire, and their convergence in the space of Limón. I use the concept of *redemptive geographies* to formulate the theoretical framework through which I read archival material and intervene in the standard narratives of Costa Rican history. From the perspective of the neo-criollo and the ex-slave in interaction with Spanish, British, and U.S. colonialities, I will engage the problem-spaces and shifting terrains of power that set the stage for the contestation of race and territory and the production of counterarchives among Costa Ricans and West Indians.

⁵⁶ These terms were featured in the articles of the *Limón Searchlight*, and will be analyzed in greater detail in the second and third chapters of the dissertation.

⁵⁷ Ula Y. Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey: The Life & Times of Amy Jacques Garvey* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 2.

⁵⁸ Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America,” *International Sociology* 15 (2000): 229.

⁵⁹ Scott, 7.

⁶⁰ Scott sees both Toussaint L’Ourverture’s leadership in the Haitian Revolution and C. L. R. James’ narration of this history in *The Black Jacobins* as both enabled and limited by the concepts of Enlightenment thought.

In Chapter 2, *Damas de honor: Newspaper Portraits and the Female Image in Black and White*, I look at the centrality of gender, sexuality, and respectability in the racial representations formed and circulated in Costa Rican and West Indian mediascapes. Focusing on the newspaper and its key role in shaping contours and narratives of belonging, I analyze photographs, advertisements, articles, and other invocations and imageries of redemptive womanhood. Employing “historical imagining,” I read the newspapers that circulated in Limón from the perspective of a young West Indian woman who participates in the UNIA. I imagine the ways that this young woman would have interpreted the images, especially the photographs, that appeared in the newspapers. Noting the showcasing of Costa Rican women from *families of note* in photographic albums, I examine the relationship between honor and white womanhood. As racial ideals are formed in a field much larger than the nation-state and both sets of newspapers drew from global and local sources, this chapter will include a discussion of circulation, transnationalism, and the visual and written discourses of race, gender, and nation.

In Chapter 3, *Race, Place, and Diasporic Identity: Entanglements of Power and Belonging*, I grapple with articulations and meanings of diaspora in Costa Rica. With a focus on the making of diaspora and the complications of place, space, and citizenship, this chapter elaborates upon the idea of entanglement. By looking at the relationship between diasporic citizenship, redemptive motherhood, and the idea of racial purity, I reveal the interdependence of black and white redemption in Costa Rica. Confronting *dark continent discourses*, the *invention* of Africa by West Indians highlight the stakes of black citizenship and African sovereignty. This chapter also engages the relationship between U.S. imperialism and fears of ‘Africanization’ in the development of what I will call a white “double-consciousness” among Costa Ricans. Although negative tropes of Haiti and Africa were used to characterize the unsuitability of blacks for self-governance and participation in a democratic nation, I will show that Costa Ricans expressed solidarity with Haitians struggling against U.S. occupation, Ethiopians fighting Italian colonialism, and African Americans who faced lynch mobs. However, through racialized notions of history, civilization, and modernity, I argue that Costa Rican news media, nationalist organizations, and citizen petitioners carved out a discursive space in which Costa Rican identity could be both white and colonized.

Chapter 4, *Mapping Afro-Costa Rica: Nationalism, Citizenship, and the Practice of Garveyism*, looks at the strategies and discourses that West Indians used to claim belonging in Limón and the larger nation. Analyzing petitions sent to the Costa Rican government from West Indians, as well as the articles and op-eds that West Indians wrote in the English-language newspapers, I examine the politics of place, the significance of the Garveyite discourse, and the making of black citizenship in a period in which West Indians could no longer appeal to the UFCO or the British consul for support or protection. I pay particular attention to young people’s critiques and appropriations of Garveyism in the development of black Costa Rican identities. Looking to assert their place in Limón in the face of UFCO withdrawal from the Atlantic coast and the encroachment of the Costa Rican government, questions of belonging *within* the Costa Rican nation become entangled in the articulation of respectable blackness. Ultimately, I argue, Garveyites in Costa Rica were not preparing to go *Back to Africa* but, rather, were making inroads toward Costa Rican citizenship through the making of Afro-Costa Rican spaces.

My arguments in these four chapters will reveal that the making of redemptive geographies in Costa Rica was an anti-colonial effort toward sovereignty and self-determination, but did not have de-colonizing results. Costa Rica continues to be upheld as a showcase nation,

and the idea that the true Costa Rican is white persists. Because of this I conclude with remarks on the significance of this time period to the politics of race and belonging in Costa Rican today, as well as the importance of this study for the fields of African Diaspora Studies, Latin American Studies, and History.

Acknowledgements

This project has been many years in the making. As a history major at Fordham University, I was drawn to Latin America, specifically the experiences of people of African descent. With the encouragement of Drs. Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, Irma Watkins-Owens, and Chris Schmidt-Nowara, I embarked upon a senior thesis project that would turn into a Fulbright scholarship proposal, “West Indian Migration to Costa Rica and Panama, 1900-1930.” My undergraduate experience at Fordham, therefore, established the foundations of this project.

Living in Costa Rica for the 2003/2004 academic year as a Fulbright IIE grantee opened my eyes to new life experiences as well as new research questions. My friendships with Afro-Costa Ricans in San José and in Puerto Viejo and Cahuita, Limón expanded and challenged what I thought I knew about their heritage and history. I benefited greatly from reflecting on blackness outside of the United States and its transnational significance. Diaspora was not just a theoretical concept. It was a strategy of survival that I, along with some of my Afro-Costa Rican peers, employed as a different type of citizenship to ease the double-consciousness that comes with the stares, with the exoticism, with the *gaze of differentiation* imparted upon us by Costa Ricans who identify as white and *criollo*.

Entering the University of California, Berkeley fresh out of Central America, I approached the topic of West Indians in Costa Rica as a citizen of the *Americas*. The doctoral program in African Diaspora Studies allowed me to craft an interdisciplinary historical project that engaged all the complications and entanglements of black identities. Taking seminar courses with Dr. Percy Hintzen shaped my conceptualization of power and the role of discourse and knowledge in ways that power is yielded, resisted, or reformulated. Drs. Ramón Grosfoguel and Nelson Maldonado-Torres also pushed my understanding of power as well questions of epistemology and the logics that govern knowledge. Introducing me to the idea of *coloniality of power*, their courses highlighted the relationship between race, power, and knowledge.

The Department of African American Studies at Berkeley was not only my source of intellectual development and training; it was my home away from home. Lindsey Herbert, Toni Whittle-Ciprazo, and Stephanie Jackson helped me to navigate through the bureaucracy, made sure I met deadlines, and did whatever they could to help me succeed. Dr. Robert Allen was always an enthusiastic and supportive advisor and dissertation committee member who made time for me, and who was willing to read a draft or write a letter of recommendation, sometimes on short notice. The chair of the committee, Dr. Ula Taylor shaped this project in so many ways. Her insight about archival research, her calm nature, tireless re-reading of chapters, and overall enduring support were invaluable to the completion of this dissertation and the maintenance of my sanity. She has provided a model for me on how to navigate academia gracefully, and I hope to someday be as rigorous a scholar and as dedicated a mentor as she is.

My family, friends, and colleagues also helped to shape this project and nurture me through its completion. My grandparents, Mrs. Martha W. Leeds and the Honorable Jacques E. Leeds, Sr., supported me financially, emotionally, and in just being listening ears on the other end of the telephone during my rants about graduate school. Their constant love, affection, and interest in my academic pursuits and personal well-being anchored me, as I experienced the challenges of

graduate school and research abroad. Without their support, I would not be where I am today. Fithawee Tzeggai has influenced this dissertation more than he knows. Always willing to give me a ride, pick me up, bring me food, listen to my complaints about postdoctoral fellowship applications, and give words of encouragement, Fithawee was my partner throughout this writing process. These chapters took shape in the long hours we spent in cafes and libraries together. The women of my cohort, Kelley Deetz, Petra Rivera, and Erinn Ransom, and I were a supportive unit and we took heed to what our beloved Dr. VÉVÉ Clark told us: “Make Normative Time!” Going through coursework, the Master’s Exam, the Qualifying Exams, and finally the dissertation-writing and job market process together, these women challenged me to work hard and progress through the program in a timely manner. My colleagues in the African Diaspora Studies program, Ronald C. Williams, II and Shawn Ossei-Owusu became good friends, and our conversations about academia and life in general always kept me laughing. My friends on the east coast kept me grounded with non-academic discussions and activities during my visits to Baltimore and Washington, D.C., and during my two years of fieldwork and writing in New York. I could always count on Melanie Collier, Korey Phillips, Kwaisi France, and my other close friends in New York for fun times after long hours of writing. My Columbia University crew Matthew Morrison, Alvan Ikoku, Courtney Bryan, and Imani Owens are some of the most humble, down to earth scholars and artists that I have ever met and inspired the ‘Harlem years’ of this project.

I am very grateful for the financial support of various institutions. The Andrew W. Mellon Predoctoral Fellowship in the Humanistic Studies, Graduate Opportunity Program and Dean’s Normative Time Fellowships at the University of California, Berkeley, the American Association of University Women Dissertation Fellowship, and grants from Berkeley’s Center for Race and Gender, Center for Latin American Studies, and Graduate Diversity office all made the research and writing of this project happen.

West Baltimore in the house!

Curriculum Vitae

Education

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Graduate Student Instructor, "Africa: History and Culture," Department of African American Studies, University of California-Berkeley, August 2005-December 2005

Research Experience

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York, New York, April 2009-July 2009

I located and searched through the *Negro World* newspaper, the main organ of Marcus Garvey's transnational United Negro Improvement Association (U.N.I.A.), paying particular attention to news about the Costa Rican branches and the photographs of U.N.I.A. women that appeared in the weekly paper.

National Library and National Archives, San José, Costa Rica, January 2008-September 2008

I compiled newspaper articles, advertisements, photographs from Limón and San José in the National Library and searched through governmental legislation, United Fruit contracts, and petitions in the National Archives.

National Library, San José, Costa Rica, Center for Latin American Studies Tinker Grantee and Center for Race and Gender Grantee, project entitled "Black Immigration and the Racialized Body in the Making of the Costa Rican Nation," June-July 2006

I searched through news articles, opinion columns, editorials, announcements, and advertisements in newspapers from the 1920s and 1930s. I located various examples of both written discourses and visual images that Costa Ricans employed in their characterization of Afro-Caribbean immigrants as unfit and undesirable as citizens based on racial difference and a threat to virtuous "white" womanhood.

Research in Argentina, project entitled "Blackness in Buenos Aires: *Afroargentinos*, Black Immigrants, and *Porteño* Identity," June-August 2005

I conducted fieldwork in Buenos Aires, Argentina for three months to investigate the formation of Afro-Argentine identity and notions of "blackness" within the capital city. I analyzed racial discourse on television and in films, and conducted interviews with Afro-Argentines, as well as Afro-Latino and African immigrants.

Fulbright/IEE U.S. Student Grantee in Costa Rica, project entitled "Afro-Caribbean Migrants in Costa Rica: A Study of Race and Rights," September 2003-July 2004

My fieldwork was comprised of three types of research methods; archival work and analysis, interviews, and secondary source and historiographic analysis. I searched through early-twentieth century periodicals and government legislation dealing with the "Negro Question," Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association, and immigration. In an effort to gauge regional difference and the persistence of anti-black racism and xenophobia within the country, I interviewed close to forty Afro-Costa Ricans in both San José and the Caribbean coast.

Presentations

"'The Higher Type of Womanhood': Newspaper Portraits, Diasporic Citizenship, and Garveyism in Costa Rica, 1921-1938," Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora Biennial Conference, Accra, Ghana, August 2009

"Redeeming Black Womanhood: Newspaper Portraits and Notions of Femininity in Marcus Garvey's *Negro World*," Theorizing Blackness Conference, CUNY Graduate Center, 2008

“‘Dark Continent Discourse’ and the African-Caribbean in the Making of the Costa Rican Nation,” Caribbean Studies Association, Salvador da Bahia, Brazil May-June 2007

“Gender, Sexuality, and ‘Dark Continent Discourse’ in the Making of the Costa Rican Nation, 1920-1940,” Center for Race and Gender Afternoon Forum Series, University of California-Berkeley, April 2007

“Africa in Latin America: The Political Economy of Garveyism in Costa Rica and Rastafari in Argentina,” National Association of Ethnic Studies Conference, San Francisco, March 2006

“Blackness and Nation-Making: Coloniality, State Policies, and Garveyism in Early-Twentieth Century Costa Rica,” Marlon M. Bailey Colloquium Series, University of California-Berkeley, March 2006

“Afro-Caribbean Migrants: A Study of Race and Rights,” Fulbright Central America Enhancement Seminar, Panama, June 2004

Academic Affiliations

Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora

Caribbean Studies Association

Center for Latin American Studies Afro-Latino Working Group, University of California-Berkeley

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Chapter One: Color-Lines, Entangled Colonialities, and Racial Landscapes in Costa Rica

Travelers in this hemisphere will know that this can only be Costa Rica, a land of great beauty with a commitment to democracy and reasonableness that has guided its history and its public life for 50 years and longer.⁶¹

I. The Terrains of Nation and the Racial Politics of Belonging

The “showcase” nation vis-à-vis Nicaragua and its other neighbors in Central America, an ally of the United States during the contra wars of the 1980s, a long-standing democracy and bastion of peace in Latin America, and a tourist destination known as “safe” and “friendly,” Costa Rica is many things to many people, but is almost always characterized in terms of its “exceptionalism.”⁶² While academics, journalists, and others theorize Costa Rica’s putatively peace-loving, highly literate, middle-class identity to be the result of social initiatives and government actions, including the abolition of the army and the development of a welfare state, descriptions of the inimitable nature of the nation implicitly or explicitly refer to the social geography of Costa Rica and the “unique” nature of the Ticos.⁶³

The *New York Times* travel writer, who wrote the epigraph above, notes the “patience,” “kindliness” and “reasonableness” of the “gently inclined” and “egalitarian ticos” in their “highly civilized country.” The article identifies the “classic sabanero[s],” the central figures of the Tico national narrative—who are sometimes cowboys and other times depicted as small farmers—as “tough mounted herdsmen of [the plains].” “Known in the old cowboy way as independent, chivalrous and capable of iron endurance,” the Tico is not only “egalitarian” and democratic, but here is also depicted as well-mannered and industrious.⁶⁴ These descriptions of Costa Rica and the Ticos differ greatly from the characterizations of instability, violence, laziness, stagnation, poverty, tragedy, and unrest typically used to refer to other nations of Central America.

National narratives trace *lo Tico*—or the essence of what it means to be Costa Rican—to a particular representation of the colonial era. As the narrative goes, Spain ignored the sparsely populated province of Costa Rica in preference for areas with mineral wealth (gold and silver) and concentrated indigenous populations like Mexico and Guatemala or regions with the capacity for large-scale plantation slavery like the Spanish Caribbean and the Atlantic mainland. Because of this, Costa Rica developed into a different kind of colony, one inhabited by small-scale farmers of Spanish descent, who resided in the temperate Central Valley region of the territory. Credited for the “rural egalitarianism” understood to be traditional in Costa Rica, these *criollo* farmers are identified as the first Ticos. *Lo Tico*, therefore, is a decidedly European-descended, Central American-born phenomenon of creolized⁶⁵ whiteness. Whereas other Central American provinces developed systems of pigmentocracy and rigid methods of forced labor to control indigenous peoples and persons of African descent that would persist in the post-independence societies,⁶⁶ the idea of Tico homogeneity negates not only the existence of

⁶¹ Robert Stone, “A Quick Swing Through Little Costa Rica,” *The New York Times Magazine* 25 September 2009.

⁶² See Seligson.

⁶³ The national term for “Costa Rican.”

⁶⁴ Stone.

⁶⁵ In the case of Latin America, *criollo*, or creole, refers to persons of European lineage born in the Americas.

⁶⁶ See Andrew B. Fisher and Matthew D. O’Hara, eds, *Imperial Subjects: Race and Identity in Colonial Latin America* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2009); Jorge Canizares-Esguerra, “Racial, Religious, and Civic Creole Identity in Colonial Spanish America,” *American Literary History* 17.3 (2005): 420-437; Nancy P.

indigenous and Afro-descended groups but renders class and color hierarchy a non-issue in Costa Rican society.

The first European contact with what would be named Costa Rica occurred when Columbus landed on the Atlantic coast in 1502. Indigenous peoples, including the Bribris, Guaymies, Cabécares, and Maleku, were fewer in number in comparison to other parts of Central America, since Costa Rica was a small and sparsely populated territory. Those who survived the imposition of the Spaniards found a safe haven in places like the dense, tropical terrains of the Atlantic lowlands. Also situated in the Atlantic region of the country, along the Caribbean coast, a small number of enslaved Africans labored in an absentee cacao plantation system beginning in the seventeenth century. Scholar of Afro-Costa Rican history Trevor Purcell notes:

There were never more than about two hundred slaves at any one time, and these were located...on the Atlantic coast and with minimal supervision. Evidently, their numbers were far too small to darken the complexion of the country. The absence of a large slave population (and a large freed population) as well as the isolation of Blacks from white settlers/Owners, meant that whites had no reason to feel threatened physically or economically. There was no intermediate colored population for Blacks to join as allies. Therefore, there was no real continuum.⁶⁷

The cacao plantations were vulnerable to looting and escapes, as most of the enslaved fled with British pirates or Afro-Indigenous Miskitu raiders from the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, causing absentee owners to fully abandon them in the early nineteenth century. Since there was a general belief that “no whites could survive”⁶⁸ in the humid, undeveloped, jungle-like Atlantic coast, the region would remain abandoned until a second wave of black workers, those from the British West Indies,⁶⁹ migrated from their islands of birth to fulfill the labor demand of a railroad and port construction project in the 1870s and then the harvesting and exportation of bananas for the UFCO at the turn on the twentieth century.

By the mid-nineteenth century, coffee exports boomed, and became the dominant economic enterprise in Costa Rica. A railway and an Atlantic port, connecting the coffee-growing Central Valley highlands to the Caribbean coast, was vital to meet the demand for coffee from European and North American markets. In 1869 the Costa Rican government established a national railroad project, which was financed by British bankers and to be constructed by North American Henry Meiggs. As a result, foreigners controlled the entire enterprise and massive amounts of Costa Rican land were offered as collateral.⁷⁰ When Meiggs’ nephew Minor Keith took over the building endeavor, signing the Soto-Keith contract in 1883, he was “granted a ninety-nine-year lease to 800,000 acres of land, exemption from taxation, and given ownership of the railway that he was to complete.”⁷¹ With ownership of large tracts of land and control over the railroad, Keith was able to develop a profitable banana exporting company, which was consolidated in 1899 as the multinational United Fruit Company. Whereas the monoculture of coffee in Costa Rica established the conditions for the development of the

Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson, and Karin A. Roseblatt, eds, *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

⁶⁷ Trevor Purcell, *Banana Fallout: Class, Color, and Culture Among West Indians in Costa Rica* (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies Publications, 1993), 10.

⁶⁸ Olien, 10.

⁶⁹ I use the term “West Indians” to refer to those English-speaking immigrants of African descent from the British West Indies, primarily from Jamaica, but also Barbados, St. Kitts, and other islands.

⁷⁰ Ronald Harpelle, *The West Indians of Costa Rica: Race, Class, and the Integration of an Ethnic Minority* (Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 11.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

UFCO and labor demand, the monoculture of sugar in the West Indies and its political and social effects pushed thousands of British West Indians outward to fill this demand. By 1910, the number of West Indians in Costa Rica had risen to around 20,000.⁷² These laborers constructed the Atlantic port and railroad at the end of the nineteenth century, and in the beginning of the twentieth century worked as banana cutters and in a variety of other positions tied to the plantation economy.

The stranglehold of the UFCO in Latin America and the Caribbean and its exploitative practices, control of the marketing and transportation of bananas and the enclaves of production, partnerships with and endorsement of corrupt governments, and disrespect for worker rights stimulated nationalist and anti-imperial protest across the region and from varying social classes. Following the height of the banana boom in the 1910s, the 1920s was a period of decline and depression. In Costa Rica, the 1920s was also a critical decade in shaping a new inter-class Costa Rican nationalism underpinned by anger against the Company, in which the elite planter class, day laborers and the working class, a growing middle class, intellectuals, and civic groups participated in re-thinking the significance of peoplehood and the meaning of national sovereignty.

Aviva Chomsky's work on United Fruit in Limón highlights the dynamics of the banana industry, which informs the shifting terrains of power in Costa Rican during the time period in question.

From the first incidence of the Panama disease that attacked the banana plants in the 1910s, the Atlantic Coast industry was characterized by a continual abandonment of diseased plantations and the search for new areas to plant. Until 1927 exports remained fairly high, but the disease spread ever more rapidly and, combined with the effects of the world depression in 1929, seemed to spell the death of the Atlantic Coast as a banana-producing area.⁷³

The nature of banana production, the propensity of disease, and the exhaustion of land therefore fueled the expansionary tendencies and the negotiation of a new contract between United Fruit and the Costa Rican government. Set to expire in 1930, the 1910 contract between the Company and the Costa Rican government was a topic of widespread debate in Costa Rica in the 1920s, as Costa Ricans saw the pending expiration as an opportunity to harness the power of United Fruit. While the drop in banana exports led the government to concede to many compromising terms in the new contract, the agreement to move the UFCO centers of production from the Atlantic to the Pacific side shifted the role of the United Fruit Company and the place of Limón within the country. There were three major benefits to the new contract of 1934 for the Costa Rican government. The nation could regain its sovereignty in incorporating Limón into federal governance, jobs and development would be created on the Pacific side of the country, and of critical importance, the government would be able to control and contain the West Indian population.⁷⁴ Seen as part and parcel of United Fruit imperialism, West Indians were a black stain on the discourse of Costa Rican whiteness and exceptionalism and reminders of the nation's compromised sovereignty.

By the twentieth century, the narrative of national Costa Rican whiteness persisted and crystallized, reinvigorated by the Central Valley's awareness of the residence and employment of West Indians in the United Fruit enclave in Limón. As noted in the 1927 census report, Costa

⁷² Chomsky, 174.

⁷³ Ibid., 11-12.

⁷⁴ Ronald N. Harpelle, "Bananas and Business: West Indians and United Fruit in Costa Rica," *Race and Class* 42 (2000): 57-9.

Ricans believed their exceptionalism, “social and political order,” and “habits of work and peace” to be “attributed to the racial homogeneity” and the predominance of the “white race” within the nation.⁷⁵ This Central Valley-based understanding of the nation and national history excluded the histories of indigenous groups and plantation slavery, and West Indians, whose numbers declined by the 1920s but still represented a sizeable percentage of Limón’s inhabitants. Even West Indians born in Costa Rica did not possess Costa Rican citizenship, and the West Indian community at large existed in a complicated space of non-citizenship and placelessness; living within a United Fruit-run enclave certainly did not make them U.S. citizens, and by the 1920s the British consul increasingly questioned its role in protecting this group of persons who may or may not have been born in the British Caribbean. Indeed, the very idea of an Afro-Costa Rican had yet to exist in political and popular imagination in the Central Valley and blacks of West Indian descent born in Costa Rica still represented a foreign element within the nation. For this reason, following the lead of the small but growing scholarship on this topic, I refer to both persons of West Indians descent born in the West Indies and those born in Costa Rica as “West Indians.”⁷⁶

A color-line, therefore, not only peripheralized non-whites in national memory, but also in determining citizenship and belonging. Geography and location helped to enforce racial borders. The Bribri indigenous group of the Caribbean coastal region constituted a state within a state and “since the 1870s the Bribri king had been officially recognized by the government of Costa Rica as the leader of the Bribri people.”⁷⁷ But because the Bribri were non-white, outside the nation, and consequently did not hold Costa Rican citizenship, the population had insubstantial rights to the land that they occupied and were easily ousted by the Costa Rican government who gave massive land concessions to the UFCO. Indigenous people would not gain citizenship in Costa Rica until 1993.⁷⁸

Before the building of the national railroad in the late nineteenth century, the rugged terrain hindered and discouraged movement between the Central Valley and the Atlantic side of the country, enabling the formation of nationhood and national identity as confined to the limits of the Central Valley. As legend has it, West Indians laid the railroad tracks, starting at the Port of Limón and ending at the inland town of Siquierres, not far from the border of the province of Cartago in the Central Valley, after which Costa Ricans took over the building toward the capital city of San José, as to not disrupt the nation’s racial borders.⁷⁹ The dialectic relationship between Costa Rican whiteness and the racialization of threatening outsiders persists today in the depictions of Nicaraguan immigrants, whose Indigeneity and dark skin is often cited as the primary marker of their outsider status.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Putnam, 72.

⁷⁶ See Putnam; Chomsky; Harpelle, *The West Indians of Costa Rica*

⁷⁷ Philippe I. Bourgois, *Ethnicity at Work: Divided Labor on a Central American Banana Plantation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 30.

⁷⁸ Deborah J. Yashar, “Democracy, Indigenous Movements, and the Postliberal Challenge in Latin America” *World Politics* 52.1 (1999): 76-104.

⁷⁹ Personal communication with West Indian residents in Cahuita, Limón in 2004.

⁸⁰ See Carlos Sandoval García, *Threatening Others: Nicaraguans and the Formation of National Identities in Costa Rica* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004).



fig. 1.1 “Emblem of Costa Rican flag.” Online Image. 2009. *Costa Rican Workshops*. Downloaded 17 December 2009. <<http://costaricaworkshops.com>>

The emblem that appears on the Costa Rican flag reflects these national discourses, highlighting the relationship between the physical terrain of the nation and its exceptional social geography. The Spanish galleons on either side of the nation, highlight not only Tico identification with Spain, but also imagine a scene whereby Spanish conquistadors descend on an otherwise unpopulated territory. The depiction portrays the nation as situated in an altitudinous valley, flanked by Pacific and Atlantic coasts. If we assume that the sun in the image is rising, it is doing so from the eastern side of the country, from the Caribbean coast. It is significant that the Atlantic coast is unseen, and although we can infer its existence, it seems far off and hidden by the peaks of the Central Valley. I think of this as a metaphor for the peripheralization, isolation, and distance (not just in location, but distance from the representations of the Central Valley) that characterizes the placement of the Atlantic province of Limón within Costa Rican historiography and narratives of peoplehood.

Race in Latin America is generally understood in terms of *mestizaje*, or mixing. *Mestizaje* as nationalist ideology departs from the premise that the authentic citizen derives her heritage from Spain and from Indigenous Americans (and Africans, when they are not totally erased from national narratives). Both official and unofficial whitening policies were widespread in Latin America, including subsidized European immigration and land colonization, the purported science of eugenics among the elite, and the encouragement of *marrying up*, also know as *mejorar la raza*, or improving the race or people. While appearing to herald the lack of distinct races, the asserted racelessness of the region, and therefore its racial democracy, *mestizaje* masks the racialized terrains of belonging and a racial hierarchy that holds whiteness at a premium, as ideal, and as a marker of progress.

My project takes as a point of departure what Marilyn Grace Miller calls the “darker side” of *mestizaje*.⁸¹ The rhetoric of *racial democracy*, the idea that *mestizaje* has created social equality due to the blurring of distinct racial categories, claims that unlike the rigid color-lines of

⁸¹ Miller, 4.

the United States,⁸² neither race nor the problem of racism plague the region. The idea of racial democracy in Latin America, effectively hides the bias toward whiteness and the goal of whitening, or *blanqueamiento*,⁸³ that underpins the project of mestizaje. In 1919, a Venezuelan intellectual explained the racial anxiety of the Latin American *criollo* elite and national governments, and the correlation between modernization and *blanqueamiento*:

Venezuela has no salvation unless it resolves how it will become a Caucasian country. This is the key to the future...We are two steps from the jungle because of our blacks and Indians;...a great part of our country is mulatto, mestizo and zambo, with all the defects...recognized in hybridism; we must transfer regenerating [Caucasian] blood into their veins.⁸⁴

Blackness and indigeneity, even in its mixed forms, “mulatto, mestizo, and zambo,”⁸⁵ represented a biological and cultural problem that threatened the development and progress of the nation. As *Caucasian* civilization and Indian and African savagery were diametrically opposed in this line of thinking, the only way to allegedly modernize Latin America was to whiten it. Deviant black culture and its savage, sexual manifestations in black music, dance, and religious practices, presented a cultural and biological threat to Latin American modernity, and whites, especially white women, were vulnerable to succumb to the purported dark passions of “the jungle,” and therefore lose their whiteness.

Tico national identity conceptualized modernity in the same racialized ways, carving racial landscapes that placed Limón outside of Costa Rica. While Costa Ricans made the presence of West Indians invisible in the 1927 census and strengthened its own white national identity, re-articulating narratives of exceptionalism and a twentieth century *criollo* identity, nations like Venezuela, Cuba, Panama, Colombia, and Guatemala were also dealing with the problem of perceived *blackening* via West Indian immigration. As United Fruit systems of production dictated the type of labor that would work its plantations in these countries, West Indian immigration exacerbated not only anti-black feeling but also anti-colonial rage against United Fruit.

In establishing that Costa Rican exceptionalism is based upon the country’s racial make-up, the 1927 census report and Tico national narratives offer insight on the relationship between race, power, and belonging in Latin America. Since the onset of Spanish colonization, racialized conceptions of modernity and modern behavior determined the social distance between who governs and who is governed in Latin America, and between those who are inside and outside of the nation and spaces of citizenship. We can infer from this that the existence of various forms of coerced labor and social conflict elsewhere in Latin America—the norm against which the

⁸² The Latin American concept of becoming white through racial improvement counters U.S. “one-drop” notions of external pollution. Thus the *casta* system and the racial system of the U.S. constitute disparate ideologies within the common belief in white supremacy.

⁸³ See Andrews. Both official and unofficial methods of whitening and attempts to improve the race/*mejorar la raza* were practiced throughout Latin America. Governments subsidized European immigration and wrote laws to prohibit the immigration of non-whites, and in the 1930s, eugenics gained popularity in some intellectual circles and amongst others who believed that in order to “modernize” the nations of Latin America would have to “whiten” themselves.

⁸⁴ Andrews, 118-119.

⁸⁵ See Magali M. Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003); Ilona Katzew, *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). In the Spanish colonial *casta* regime, *mulatos* were persons of mixed African and European ancestry, *mestizos* had indigenous and European heritage, and *zambos* were the product of African and indigenous unions.

exception of Costa Rican “social and political order”⁸⁶ is established—is due to the heterogeneity within other nations in the region, specifically the existence of the non-white and racially mixed masses and their non-modern behavior that consigns them to positions of subordination.⁸⁷

While Costa Rica presents a unique case in that official national discourse articulates the whiteness and not *mestizaje* of the nation, my investigation has implications for the largely unspoken centrality of race in the making of national identity in the larger region, where the relationship between whiteness and ideas of modernity and modernization go hand in hand. Noting “the links between the cult of *mestizaje* and earlier forms of colonial domination,” Miller argues that “*mestizaje*’s positive retooling had not solved problems of race and class in Latin America, but instead had compounded them by employing a rhetoric of inclusion that operated concurrently with the practice of exclusion.”⁸⁸ While the rhetoric of *mestizaje* seeks to deflect from the practices of pigmentocracy that have organized Latin American societies since the colonial era, my dissertation will highlight the central relationship between race and belonging in Latin America.

II. Peoplehood, “Problem-Spaces,” and Ideologies of Race

W. E. B. Du Bois’ idea of the “color-line” is often quoted, but rarely in its full context, leading scholars to limit the application of the concept to discussions of U.S. segregation and other U.S.-specific examples of racial borders. In fact, in Du Bois’ conception,

The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line, --*the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.*⁸⁹

For Du Bois, therefore, the problem of the color-line was a global one that not only defined the age in which he lived, but enabled a theoretical framework that highlights the relationship between discourse, representation, space and place. The color-line did not begin or end in the United States, but rather, emerged out of “the contact of European civilization” with the rest of the world.⁹⁰ It is precisely this idea of European civilization as the yardstick of modernity that formulated and universalized the discourses of difference and inferiority used to characterize other peoples and regions of the world. From his perspective as a person of African descent, an identity that extended beyond the borders of the nation-state, Du Bois’ studies of the “Negro problem” were engagements with and critiques of what James Tyner calls “geographical knowledge.” Serving a “disciplinary function,” the geo-cultural formulation that European man is the only being capable of producing thought, the lone inhabitant of modern citizenship, and the sole beacon of progress in a backward and stagnant world, was “employed to keep people in ‘place’ both physically (e.g., segregated spaces) and psychologically (e.g., knowing one’s

⁸⁶ Putnam, 72.

⁸⁷ It was precisely because of their racial and cultural difference—or alleged inferiority, to be precise—that Indians and Africans were suitable as forced labor. The very organization of Latin American societies, from the colonial period through the independence era and beyond, is based on the concentration of wealth, power, and resources in the hands of a tiny white-identified elite by means of the control and the exploitation of the labor of the non-white masses.

⁸⁸ Miller, 4.

⁸⁹ Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 9. My emphasis.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 99.

place).”⁹¹ Disrupting narratives of history that emplaced Africans and their descendents at the bottom of a global hierarchy, Du Bois’ critique of white power was necessarily a philosophical and historiographical endeavor.

Revealing the paradoxes of modernity, the “Negro problem” is a problem for thought⁹² and a place from which to problematize the very idea of knowledge. Foucault reminds us that “relations of power...can neither be established nor function unless a true discourse is produced, accumulated, put into circulation, and set to work.”⁹³ Du Bois’ re-writing of history reveals that assumptions of black inferiority are wound up into the production of history and philosophy as discourses of truth. If the existence of *History*, believed to be based on writing and archives—as opposed to *legend*, *superstition*, or *myth*—was the hallmark of modernity, then the central struggle of those deemed without history was to re-narrate the past and formulate representations that reflect their own subjectivity. Historicizing the denial of black humanity as a project and product of slavery and capitalism rather than a fact that exists in nature, and illuminating the racial and spatial limits of democracy, liberty, and citizenship as systemic and fabricated rather than the result of inherent hierarchy among races relies on challenges to, in the words of Shawn Michelle Smith, “authorized claims to truth” and the production of “counterarchives” and counter-images, both written and visual. Without these, “others will dictate the terms by which one will be represented and remembered; [and] one will exist, for the future, in someone else’s archive.”⁹⁴

David Scott defines a “problem-space” as “an ensemble of questions and answers around which a horizon of identifiable stakes (conceptual as well as ideological-political stakes) hangs.”⁹⁵ I analyze the ways that West Indians and Costa Ricans formulate redemptive articulations of blackness and whiteness, respectively, from the problem-spaces of their particular socio-political locations. Plagued with the problems of placelessness, lack of citizenship, and misrepresentation as savage threats to the Costa Rican nation, West Indians appropriated the discourses and imageries of Garveyism, which enabled articulations of black modernity. Costa Ricans re-formulated *criollo* whiteness as a way of articulating the nation’s exceptionalism, the outsider status of West Indians, and as an anti-imperial critique of United Fruit power in the country, which effectively reduced them to the status of colonized non-whites. Utilizing the counterarchives produced within the “problem-spaces” of compromised sovereignty and struggles over representation and belonging in an atmosphere of United Fruit dominance and the imperialism of U.S. geopolitics, I envision my dissertation as an intervention in the standard narratives of Costa Rican history and national identity. Highlighting the role of race, power, and belonging in the making of Costa Rican identities and the history of West Indian incorporation within the nation, the following questions guide my analysis: What is the relationship between Costa Rican narratives of exceptionalism and representations of whiteness and homogeneity? How do West Indians make diasporic citizenship claims and at the same time begin to formulate an Afro-Costa Rican identity in a context of shift and nationalization in Limón? How do entanglements of empire and complications of power shape the racial contours of identity and

⁹¹ James A. Tyner, *The Geography of Malcolm X: Black Radicalism and the Remaking of American Space* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 54.

⁹² Nahum Chandler. Course lecture. Department of African American Studies. Columbia University, 24 October 2006.

⁹³ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-1976* (New York: Picador, 1997), 24.

⁹⁴ Smith, 9.

⁹⁵ Scott, 4.

belonging, and their internalization and circulation? How are race, gender, and sexuality interdependent in the making of racial redemption? As “conscripts of modernity,”⁹⁶ critiquing modernity through its own logic, language, and epistemology, how do Costa Ricans and West Indians both resist *and* reinforce dominant frames of knowledge? I employ the idea of *redemptive geographies* as a theoretical foil that puts the competing and overlapping discourses of race in Costa Rica in conversation with each other.

As “the modern state has always conceived itself as racially configured,” the modern state is a “racial state.”⁹⁷ David Theo Goldberg’s conceptualization of the racial state reveals that

central to the sorts of racial constitution that have centrally defined modernity is the power to exclude and by exclusion include in racially ordered terms, to dominate through the power to categorize differentially and hierarchically, to set aside by setting apart.⁹⁸

A homogenizing project, the modern nation conceptualizes heterogeneity and the unknown as a racial threat. Fashioning power and belonging through the formation of color-lines, modernity’s racial logic not only characterizes the external and the outsider as racially other, but “the internal in the form of the self becomes...racially defined also.”⁹⁹ So race and racial difference is not simply the relationship between *whites* of Europe and *blacks* of Africa, but ideologies of peopledom and national identity are racial concepts. *Outsiders* are characterized as racial others, and varying types of difference and representations of inferiority have been characterized in terms of *blackness* and therefore, threats to the nation.¹⁰⁰

While varying conceptions of race and racial difference inform the making of the modern state, imaginings of Africa have played a particular role in characterizing the unsuitability of persons of African descent for modern citizenship. The discourses of “blackness” and “whiteness” set into motion through unequal relations of power between Africa and Europe that developed in the 15th century, established the discursive conditions that rationalized the enslavement and colonization of Africans.¹⁰¹ If Africa represents the “heart of darkness” and a central antithesis to modernity, then “a free Negro was a contradiction, a threat and a menace”¹⁰² to the modern nation-state. While, according to Du Bois, the “relation of the darker to the lighter races” framed the contours of global geo-politics and created colonized spaces, the nation-state played an equally important role in managing this system. The idea of modern citizenship and nationhood determines who is within the sovereign people and who lies on the outside, and those set apart are done so through conceptions of racial difference. Discussing intra-European conceptions of racial difference and belonging in the making of the modern European state, Foucault suggests “the social body is basically articulated around two races.”¹⁰³ What Matthew Frye Jacobson calls the “alchemy” of whiteness in the U.S., whereby Italians, Irish, Jews, and

⁹⁶ See Scott.

⁹⁷ See Goldberg.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2-34.

¹⁰⁰ See Anderson; Sara Castro-Klarén and John C. Chasteen, eds, *Beyond Imagined Communities: Reading and Writing the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (Washington, D.C: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2003); Kathryn A. Manzo, *Creating Boundaries: The Politics of Race and Nation* (Boulder, Colo: L. Rienner, 1996).

¹⁰¹ See Rodney; Fanon.

¹⁰² W. E. B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1935), 7.

¹⁰³ Michel Foucault cited in *Michel Foucault, Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, eds. Hubert L. Dreyfus, Paul Rabinow, and Michel Foucault (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 60.

others *became white*,¹⁰⁴ is another example of how racial formations emerge out of specific political contexts, conceptions of knowledge, and in the making of national borders. There are no black or white identities without conditions of power and ideologies of belonging and otherness.

In his analysis of West Indians in Costa Rica, Philippe Bourgois analyzes their position as a black minority within the nation, yet is hesitant to analyze how Costa Rican whiteness functions or inhibits the incorporation of this minority. Referring to Costa Ricans as “whites” (in quotations), Bourgois, from his perspective as a North American, characterizes the whiteness of Costa Ricans as not real or worth interrogating, while treating the blackness of West Indians as a given. My work adds to the scholarship on West Indians in Costa Rica and whiteness in Latin America by engaging the making of racial identity among both West Indians and Costa Ricans, and to borrow from Anne McClintock, “I do not see race and ethnicity as synonymous with black or colonized...[;t]he invention of whiteness, here, is not the invisible norm but the problem to be investigated.”¹⁰⁵

To help define what I mean by “race” and its significance to the modern state, I borrow again from David Theo Goldberg:

Race may be thought of as the social or cultural significance assigned to or assumed in physical or biological markers of human beings, including the presumed physical or physiognomic markers of *cultural attributes, habits, or behavior*.¹⁰⁶

Racial hierarchy is then justified as culturally inscribed, and the non-modern, backward culture and behavior of racial others places them on the outside of modern nationhood. The deployments of race and racial difference, like other political ideologies, are historically specific, contested, unstable, and multiple, revealing the tensions between the fluidity of racial articulation and the Manicheanism¹⁰⁷ of modernity. I investigate the interaction between long-standing anti-black discourses in Latin America and the politics of racial identification and belonging during this particular historical juncture of nationalization and territorial consolidation in Costa Rica.

A 1933 letter to Congress written by Costa Rican workers in Limón reveals that West Indians were conceived of as a threat to the nation based on the interarticulation of race, gender, and sexuality. This petition against the continued residence and employment of West Indians within the country was rationalized on the basis that:

it is not possible to get along with [the blacks], because their bad morals don't permit it: for them the family does not exist, nor does female honor, and for this reason they live in an overcrowding and promiscuity that is dangerous for our homes, founded in accordance with the precepts of religion and the good morals of the Costa Ricans.¹⁰⁸

This logic characterizes black women in particular ways. For the petitioners, black women were the primary cause of black degeneracy, since the purported preponderance of promiscuity among West Indians was the result of the lack of normal home and familial relationships (conceived as a woman's sphere of influence) and female honor. Defining blackness as devoid of morality, specifically sexual morality, the five hundred workers that signed the petition, employed the

¹⁰⁴ See Matthew F. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998).

¹⁰⁵ McClintock, 7-8.

¹⁰⁶ Goldberg, 118. My emphasis.

¹⁰⁷ See Fanon.

¹⁰⁸ Putnam, 166.

same logic as whites in the U.S. who used lynching to govern racial borders¹⁰⁹; integration was perceived as a sexual threat. If West Indians could not be totally removed from the nation, then their existence and the “biological danger” and “moral dirtiness”¹¹⁰ that it represented had to be confined to Limón and the conditions of black savagery quarantined as a particular regional anomaly. This conception of the “Negro Problem” had implications on the ways that womanhood was represented amongst Costa Ricans, who circulated imageries of “honorable” white womanhood, and amongst West Indians, who sought to counter the representation of the black Jezebel by presenting UNIA women as a redeeming ideal within Limón’s black community.

III. Imaginative Geographies, Imperial Legacies, and Racial Redemption

For Edward Said, *Orientalism*, or the illustrations and definitions of the *Oriental* from the perspective of European imperial power, mapped “imaginative geographies.” The West endowed itself with the power of identification whereby:

The imaginative examination of things Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections.¹¹¹

A frame of knowledge, Orientalism named and represented the Orient for the project of imperial governance and extraction. The mapping of “imaginative geographies,” therefore, emerged out of the relationship between power and knowledge and were formed as much by the “empirical reality” of colonizing modes of production and governance as in the less visible realm of discursive power. If European modernity enabled a “sovereign Western consciousness,” then Orientalism was one of modernity’s many undersides.

An imaginative geography shaped by the politics and economics of banana production as well as a racialized space onto which both the UFCO and the Costa Rican government projected ideas of racial belonging and hierarchy, Limón functioned as a site of entangled and contradictory ideas about and functions of *blackness* and *whiteness*. The mid-level¹¹² position of most West Indians, who existed in a sort of buffer position between the white North American bosses and the Spanish-speaking plantation labor¹¹³ by the 1920s, functioned to the benefit of the Company. The UFCO kept its overhead costs low in the face of the persistent threat of banana-disease, as well as the ebbs and flows of the banana market due to world wars and other geopolitical factors, by adopting a system that favored the production of bananas by small-holding West Indians. At the mercy of the Company were not only those West Indian farmers who produced export crops to sell to the Company but also the West Indians employed in middle level positions on Company-owned plantations. Able to pay them much less than they could a white North American for the same job, the Company hired West Indians as timekeepers, foremen, etc., and this group was equally dependent on the Company for their livelihood and middle class lifestyles in Limón.

¹⁰⁹ See Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women, and the Mob* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

¹¹⁰ Fanon, 165-189.

¹¹¹ Said, 8.

¹¹² Bourgeois, 78.

¹¹³ Comprised mostly of Costa Ricans but also including significant numbers of Nicaraguans.

This was the stratum of West Indians who were attracted to Garveyism and the UNIA and considered themselves as the leadership of the West Indian community in Limón. It was this group of West Indians who wrote articles for Garvey's *Negro World* newspaper, who created their own newspaper, *The Limón Searchlight*, and who petitioned local and national officials on behalf of the West Indian community. By the 1920s, the poorest and most able-bodied West Indians left Limón for better wage labor opportunities elsewhere (on U.S. sugar plantations in Cuba, for instance). As a result, West Indians by and large occupied a middle social and economic position in Limón and was older and more sedentary with stronger ties to Costa Rica than earlier immigrant waves.

The resulting hierarchy of race and ethnicity in Limón was unique in the "Plantation Americas," where blacks occupied the lowest social level. To Costa Ricans, Limón was out of sorts, dislocated from the national way of life, and a reversal of what most believed to be the natural order of things. White-identified, working class Costa Ricans who left the Central Valley to work in Limón's banana enclave were displaced by the United Fruit hierarchy and racialized in new ways, in which U.S. whiteness subordinated Costa Rican whiteness, and West Indians enjoyed a relatively advantaged position. Anti-imperial uproar over the practices of the United Fruit Company was nationwide, thanks to national daily and weekly newspapers that circulated and helped shape a reaffirmed inter-class white national identity in Costa Rica. This re-articulation of Costa Rican whiteness formed a neo-*criollo* identity produced in the in-between space of *criollo* double-consciousness, now informed by U.S., rather than Spanish, coloniality.

While the stakes of racial redemption, the forming of redeeming racial identities and spaces of citizenship, were different for West Indians and Costa Ricans, both critiqued their exclusion, subordination, misrepresentation, and the existence of color-lines and racial borders with modernity's own logic and language of racial belonging. Subscribing to ideologies of race, albeit ones with distinct narratives, both Garveyite and the dominant national narratives of belonging in Costa Rica are tied up in the assumptions and premises of modernity in the crafting of redemptive geographies.

Walter Mignolo defines "border thinking" as an "other thinking" located in the "borderlands" of modernity, a location not rooted in one territory but "based on the spatial confrontations between different concepts of history."¹¹⁴ Reading Costa Rica as a borderland, and Limón as the site upon which divergent histories and narratives collide, I seek to interrogate the convergence of Central America, the British West Indies, and the multinational United Fruit Company, with a focus on the ways hierarchies of race and power led to the problem-spaces from which Costa Ricans and West Indians formed and articulated redemptive geographies.

In contrast to Costa Rica, the plantation-slave system in Jamaica and the British West Indies, was profitable and hegemonic. The seventeenth century dominance of sugar as an export commodity drove the English to cement a plantation system, in which masses of enslaved Africans harvested and produced the crop for a small and omnipotent white planter class. Throughout the British Caribbean, where African slaves had quickly outnumbered the European population on the islands, a repressive and inflexible socio-political system was essential in keeping blacks in a servile position. This profit-driven structuring of the Caribbean islands ensured that the coerced labor of the masses persisted after slavery was outlawed. The Emancipation Act of 1833 established a system of "apprenticeship," which pushed the West Indian laboring class into the realm of debt peonage and wage slavery.

¹¹⁴ Mignolo, 67.

Economic crisis was a central factor in the movement of West Indians away from the British islands. By the 1890s, the sugar system was bankrupt in the British West Indies. Between 1887 and 1896, Jamaica produced an average of 20,801 tons of sugar per year, less than a third of what the island had produced per year between 1824 and 1833.¹¹⁵ Sugar prices dropped dramatically. In addition, cane disease ravaged the islands, resulting in worker layoffs and plantation bankruptcies.¹¹⁶ Land was virtually unattainable for peasants and small farmers in overpopulated Barbados, and in Jamaica, especially after the Boston Fruit Company began banana cultivation on the island. For those who labored in the sugar industry, wages remained stagnant (aided by Asian indentured labor) and deteriorating conditions kept workers in perpetual servitude. In addition to the burdens of taxation, voter eligibility was based on one's ability to pay thirty pounds a year to the government or earn twenty pounds a year from owned land. This law "effectively disenfranchised 99½ [sic] percent of the population."¹¹⁷ Colonial policy on both islands dictated that blacks would not only be landless, but also that they would be barred from civil service positions. Those with talent, ingenuity, creativity, or the simple desire to feed themselves and their families found a scarcity of alternatives to employment in sugar cane fields. Many West Indians were attracted to Limón because of the opportunities to make money in the United Fruit enclave, whether through company jobs (limited to men) or in other industries auxiliary to the production of bananas and the male workforce. For example, women often explored entrepreneurial options in food preparation, laundry, sex work, etc.

The legacy of Atlantic slavery and the colonization of the Americas was therefore central in the movement of black bodies across the Caribbean Sea in the beginning of the twentieth century. In *Black Marxism*, Cedric Robison calls twentieth-century black theorists, "the children of the slaves." Following this lead, I will read West Indians in migratory diaspora in the early twentieth century as "ex-slaves" in a post-emancipation context. For West Indians in diaspora, "the twentieth century was for the most part their biographical station, but merely one site in the zone of their interrogation,"¹¹⁸ whereby the legacies of centuries past weighed down upon their physical, political, and intellectual movements. The post-emancipation climate in the West Indies is not only a factor pushing blacks away from the islands, but more significantly helps us to map a West Indian diaspora within which export economies, plantation labor, and wartime industry utilized black labor.

Life within the United Fruit enclave in the white-identified nation of Costa Rica not only made West Indians conscious of their blackness, but also resulted in the development of their consciousness as *colonized* people, in ways that were not evident in the West Indies. In the anti-colonial longings of the ex-slave in diaspora, new understanding of his/her belonging and relation to the Caribbean, to the mother country England, and to the motherland Africa developed. Although the first West Indians immigrated to Costa Rica beginning in the late 19th century, West Indians, as noted above, were not Costa Rican citizens. West Indians were technically still British subjects, since their islands of origin were the colonial possessions of the United Kingdom (and would remain so until the 1960s). But by the 1930s, it became increasingly difficult for people of British Caribbean descent in Costa Rica to make grievances

¹¹⁵ Noel Deerr, *The History of Sugar* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1949), 377; also see Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York, N.Y: Viking, 1985).

¹¹⁶ Dawn Marshall, "A History of West Indian Migrations: Overseas Opportunities and 'Safety-Valve' Policies," in *The Caribbean Exodus*, ed. Barry B. Levine (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987), 20.

¹¹⁷ Elizabeth McLean Petras, *Jamaican Labor Migration: White Capital and Black Labor, 1850-1930* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), 95.

¹¹⁸ Robinson, 177.

with the British consul. At the same time, the politics of UFCO power in Limon allowed for the retention of certain British customs. West Indians continued to speak English (which was the language of power in the UFCO enclave), and because the Company cared little about the development of things unrelated to the production of bananas, West Indian institutions flourished, including West Indian private schools, where West Indian children born in Costa Rica were educated in the language and customs of the British West Indies. West Indians retained some levels of pride in British culture, feelings of cultural superiority, and identification with the British empire intensified during WWI (West Indian participation and support), but it became increasingly necessary to forge a space of belonging within Costa Rica.

Varying experiences of slavery, colonization, and monoculture converged in Limón. Spanish colonial governance functioned through a racial division of labor in a *casta* regime¹¹⁹ informed by gender, class, and sexual accessibility in the making of categories of racial mixture. In the taxonomy of race, organized by the naming and organizing of Spaniards, Indians, and Africans, their mixed offspring, Mestizos, Mulatos, Zambos, and their offspring, and so on. *Peninsulares*, or Spaniards from the Iberian peninsula were situated at the top of the hierarchy. *Criollos*, or American-born persons of Spanish descent, were considered *blancos*, or whites, but a distinct and inferior type of New World whiteness. The duality of being both white and Latin American created a particular type of “double-consciousness” for the *criollo* that heightened during and after the struggle for independence.¹²⁰

Race, power, and identity in the region were also shaped, or rather shaken, by the Haitian Revolution. In the aftermath of the Haitian Revolution, the governing elite of the region feared the development of what Simón Bolívar called *pardocracia*, or pardocracy—rule by blacks, or persons of mixed African ancestry (*pardos*). After 1804, the fear of *Africanization* or blackening became a fear of *Haitianization*, as it was often explicitly written. As the first black state and the second republic in the Americas, Haiti “realized a complete reversal of imperial hierarchies and social goals: the territory’s European name had been obliterated; slaves had become masters; and the process of capitalist development through the industrialization of agriculture had been severely disrupted.”¹²¹ The Haitian Revolution, and the subsequent making of a black nation-state, terrified the *criollo* elite of European descent, who thought that Haiti would export its revolution throughout the region, and disrupt the racial status quo and systems of production in which blacks were subordinate. Ironically, the help of Haiti was crucial in 1815 when Simón Bolívar, stationed in Jamaica, was only able to land in Venezuela with the help of Haitian leader Alexandre Pétiou. The independence movements, led by Bolívar, liberated the nations that would become Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela, and Panama. In preparing for the Pan-American conference in 1826, to which Haitian representatives were not invited, Bolívar, however, characterized Haiti as a threat rather than a model for revolution. He argued that in the development of independent states in the Americas, the region “would have nothing more to fear from that tremendous monster who has devoured the island of Santo Domingo.”¹²² The

¹¹⁹ A regime of caste and racial hierarchy in colonial Latin America. See Katzew.

¹²⁰ On the making of Criollo identity, see Anthony Higgins, *Constructing the Criollo Archive: Subjects of Knowledge in the Bibliotheca Mexicana and the Rusticatio Mexicana* (West Lafayette, Ind: Purdue University Press, 2000); Severo, Martínez Peláez, W. George Lovell, and Christopher Lutz, eds, *La Patria Del Criollo: An Interpretation of Colonial Guatemala* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.)

¹²¹ Sybille Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 1.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 4.

existence of Haiti, an example of black sovereignty, haunted the *criollo* elite like Bolivar, who sought to break ties with Spain only to replace the Spanish as the keepers of racial order.

In Costa Rica, anti-black nationalism was produced at the intersections of the local history of Limón and the particular structures of the UFCO plantation system, and the longer history of anti-black racism and fears of pardocracy embedded *criollo* technologies of power.¹²³ Anti-black rhetoric and legislation did not begin with the contestation and dismantling of the UFCO enclave, but was produced in the intersections of Spanish colonial legacies, U.S. imperial encroachment, and the quest for modernization. The mid-level position of West Indians in the racial and ethnic hierarchy of Limon produced a renewed fear of pardocracy amongst Costa Ricans.

As Walter Mignolo argues, notions of “purity of blood” and “rights of the people” are the foundation of the racial imaginary.¹²⁴ In the racial imaginary of highland Costa Ricans the nation was comprised of whites, and therefore, exceptional in the region. The various Costa Rican laws that prohibited the migration of “non-whites” into the country, like 1862 Ley de Bases y Colonización that prohibited black and Chinese immigration, highlight the effort of the government to control the race, and in this line of thinking, the modernity, of the nation.¹²⁵ As tens of thousands of West Indians and other undesirables inhabited the country, the Costa Rican government renewed its commitment to preserving the racial state.

La Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País, a nationalist and xenophobic Costa Rican organization based on eugenic principles was founded in 1927.¹²⁶ Through the rhetoric of health and morality, the Sociedad took an anti-black political stance, petitioning the government for restriction of the entry of blacks into the country and the sterilization of those already in Costa Rica.¹²⁷ West Indians were characterized as criminal with a “higher predisposition to diseases like tuberculosis, leprosy, syphilis, and madness.”¹²⁸ Their diseased and insane blackness threatened the integrity of the white Costa Rican race. Member of the Sociedad and prominent Costa Rican intellectual José Guerrero penned an article in 1930 entitled “Como quiere que sea Costa Rica, blanca o negra? (How do we want Costa Rica to be, black or white?)”¹²⁹ in which he aroused public fears of a black invasion and the “Africanization” (in his words) of the country.

Since Costa Ricans employed a racial logic in articulating a national identity, whereby democracy and prosperity were the result of the predominance of European blood among the population, the immigration of black West Indians was a dangerous threat to the ideal of homogeneity. Black immigration, enabled by U.S. neocolonial power, disrupted the trajectory of whiteness rooted in the colonial narratives of national history. The struggle for whiteness among Costa Ricans was not only a struggle for modernity, but was an anti-colonial struggle against the nation’s compromised sovereignty. As neo-*criollos*, Costa Ricans were forced to legitimize their whiteness in the face of a racialized global division that marked Latin America non-white.

¹²³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

¹²⁴ Mignolo, 27.

¹²⁵ Harpelle, *The West Indians of Costa Rica*, 7.

¹²⁶ See Allan Chase, *The Legacy of Malthus: The Social Costs of the New Scientific Racism* (New York: Knopf, 1977). Around the same time, the U.S. approved a eugenic commission. These eugenicist discourses of racial health (moral and physical) in the Western hemisphere were generated largely in the U.S., but were widely adopted in Latin America.

¹²⁷ Harpelle, *The West Indians of Costa Rica*, 69.

¹²⁸ Putnam, 166.

¹²⁹ I offer a close reading of this article in Chapter 3.

Grosfoguel warns that “there are neither autonomous logics nor a single logic, but rather multiple, heterogenous, entangled complex processes within a single historical reality.”¹³⁰ Similarly, Said theorizes Orientalism as a “complex hegemony.”¹³¹ Central to a conceptualization of power in Costa Rica are the interplay, overlapping, and entanglement of Spanish and British colonialities, and the ultimate hegemony of United States coloniality. The varying colonial legacies at play in Costa Rica are therefore key in the production of white national identity and contesting black nationalism in Costa Rica. The time period in question, from 1921 through 1950, was one in which the language of race was viable in the making of new states, the rise of fascism and eugenics, the bubbling of anti-colonial and independence movements, and the violence of genocide, race riots, and lynchings. I will examine the currency and uses of languages, logics, and representations of race and racial difference in Costa Rica during an era marked both locally and globally by the weakening of old colonial powers and borders and the formation of new nations and empires. Reading Costa Rica within the global interstate system,¹³² the interplay and circulation of politics, ideas, and imageries inside and outside the national borders is critical to this project.

The post-World War I atmosphere of destruction and chaos in a weakened Europe—supposedly *the* example of modern progress—stimulated reflections on subjectivity and sovereignty from the underside of the color-line. Critiquing the parameters of modernity in the making of new nations and transnational communities, the colored and colonized engaged questions of citizenship and self-determination through the re-formulation of identity and belonging. In the years between World War I and World War II anti-colonial consciousness and activity stirred in various parts of the globe. Anti-colonial and independence movements erupted in Morocco, Egypt, China, Saudi Arabia, and other nations, old empires dissolved (i.e. the Ottoman empire) and new ones were forged (i.e. the Soviet Union and the U.S. empire). Increasing pan-Africanism in protest of the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935, and other transnational political issues, as well as the meeting of African Americans, West Indians, and Africans in Paris, New York, and London also informed this era of increased internationalism.

British and Spanish colonial structures left both West Indian migrants and the Costa Rican government vulnerable to the political and economic dominance of the United States in the Caribbean basin. The British colonial legacy that pushed West Indians outward from their natal islands and the Spanish coloniality that persisted in the economic and socio-political framework of Costa Rica gave way to the emergence and hegemony of the coloniality of power of the United States via the United Fruit Company. As a result, the process of territorial consolidation, state formation, and nation-making in Costa Rica, took place in a sphere of U.S. coloniality.

The flourishing of the *American century* had particular ramifications in Latin America. As the ideology of Manifest Destiny rationalized the growth of the United States beyond its mainland borders and the building and control of the Panama Canal cemented its presence, intervention and investment fomented U.S. hegemony in the circum-Caribbean region and Central America by the beginning of the twentieth century. As Aimé Césaire wrote, it was the “American hour.”¹³³ In the aftermath of the Spanish-American War ending in 1898 and President Roosevelt’s corollary to the Monroe Doctrine in 1904 that established the United

¹³⁰ Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects*, 15.

¹³¹ Said, 5.

¹³² See Immanuel M. Wallerstein, M. *World-systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

¹³³ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: MR, 1972), 76.

States as an “international police power”¹³⁴ in the Western Hemisphere, U.S. geopolitical and economic interests and power in the region culminated in multiple annexations (Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands), occupations (Cuba, Nicaragua, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and the Panama Canal Zone), military interventions (Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador), and multinational corporations that exported fruit, sugar, and other crops.¹³⁵ The role of the United States and U.S. multinational businesses like the United Fruit Company in Latin American and Caribbean state formation gives credence to the fact that “states are not given...[but] are created institutions, and are constantly changing—in form, in strength, in boundaries—through the interplay of the interstate system.”¹³⁶ An analysis of the consolidation of the Costa Rican state and the narratives and counter-narratives of belonging in Costa Rica in the first half of the twentieth century must, therefore, take into account U.S. domination in the broader region.

¹³⁴ 1904 Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine.

¹³⁵ See Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).

¹³⁶ Immanuel Wallerstein, “World Networks and the Politics of the World-Economy” in *The Politics of the World-Economy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 4.

Chapter Two: *Damas de honor*: Newspaper Portraits and the Female Image in Black and White

I. Bananas, Garveyism, and United Fruit: The Gendered Contours of (Im)migration to Limón

In *Lose Your Mother*, Saidiya Hartman imagines the last moments of a young West African woman on her deathbed aboard a slave ship heading toward the New World from the Gold Coast. Telling the story from multiple angles, including that of the ship's captain, crew, doctor, and from the perspective of the girl, herself, Hartman excavates and imagines a narrative from "a few lines from a musty trial transcript."¹³⁷ Black women are unfortunately on the "periphery of most historical documents." In fact, their representations in the archives, as Ula Taylor notes, is "limited, heavily tainted, or virtually non-existent" which explains the need for scholarship that engages the "inner lives" of black women.¹³⁸

Largely appearing as "textual snapshots" in official archives, reading these small nuggets of information about black women against the grain can offer new perspectives on archives that have already been examined by scholars. Taylor argues that "we should...think and theorize from these same documents not only to recover voices but also to disrupt those canonical discourses that have too often rendered African American women invisible."¹³⁹ My intervention in the study of West Indians in Costa Rica lies in reading the archive differently. By including an analysis of the portraits and photographic albums of women that were published with great frequency alongside articles and advertisements, I read newspapers as a *counterarchive* with both visual and written representations of racial redemption.

Newspaper portraits were central in shaping the contours of the redemptive geographies being crafted in Costa Rica. Analyzing the photographic albums that W. E. B. Du Bois showcased at the American Negro Exhibit at the 1900 Paris Exposition, Shawn Michelle Smith conceptualizes a "counterarchive" as offering "competing visual evidence" in the struggle over black representation. Highlighting middle class blacks and the educated elite and making a record of their modernity, the redeeming albums of Du Bois "suggest that photographic meaning, and even identity itself, is situated somewhere between the institutional and the vernacular, between determination and agency, between the archive and the album."¹⁴⁰

Drawing from the "historical imagination" of Hartman and Taylor, I analyze Limón, Costa Rica in the 1920s and 1930s from the perspective of a young woman, Sarah Cummings, the secretary of the Port Limón division of the UNIA.¹⁴¹ Port Limón was the central town in the

¹³⁷ Saidiya V. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

¹³⁸ Ula Y. Taylor, "Women in the Documents: Thoughts on Uncovering the Personal, Political, and Professional." *Journal of Women's History* 20.1 (2008): 188.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 189-195.

¹⁴⁰ Smith, 2-12.

¹⁴¹ The *Searchlight* kept readers abreast of the happenings in the UNIA divisions, listing information and announcements about meetings, events, and elections. Sarah Cummings was listed as Secretary of the Port Limón

province of Limón where numerous businesses thrived and where people from varying parts of the province would come into town to do their banking, mailing, etc. In addition, Port Limón was also the site of the most discussed and controversial branch of the UNIA, and the debate that emerge from the practices of this branch reveal many particularities about the ways that Garveyism operated in Limón.¹⁴²

The *Limón Searchlight*, a West Indian newspaper produced in Limón and owned and edited by former Port Limón Division president Samuel C. Nation, was a key source of information for the black community in Costa Rica. Major accusations against the leadership of the Port Limón Division were made public via the *Searchlight*, where Garveyites published opinion editorials criticizing the Limón Division. The Garveyite community itself was a contested space and there were competing ideas about who represented authentic Garveyism, and the West Indian community at large. The newspaper was also a site of contestation among Garveyites in Limón, and a space in which West Indians imagined Africa, defined respectability, and participated in both Costa Rican and transnational social and political debates.

With only a snapshot of Sarah's life in *The Searchlight*, I can only imagine what her life might have been like. The nature of banana production, the desire for permanence amongst the West Indians who remained in Costa Rica after the decline of the banana industry, and the increasing national anxieties around the Negro Problem¹⁴³ in Limón, give me some insight on the atmosphere in which Sarah came of age and the ways that she might have conceptualized her surroundings and her place in Costa Rica. By drawing upon what I know about the dynamics of Limón and the politics of race and place during this time period, I intend to "fill in a historical picture, even when the primary materials are scant."¹⁴⁴ Finding Sarah's name as a part of the executive board list that was reprinted in the local West Indian newspaper, I think about how she might have read and engaged the various news sources and imageries that circulated in Limón. As a UNIA officer, a literate young woman, and likely well educated, Sarah would have had access to and an interest in the variety of newspapers that appeared in Port Limón. Weaving local and transnational media into an analysis of the complex dynamics of Limón, I draw from regional newspapers in Limón, national newspapers produced in San José, and the *Negro World* newspaper that served the transnational UNIA community. Reading these "mediascapes"¹⁴⁵ from the perspective of a young woman of West Indian origin, I will engage with the representations of black and white womanhood that converged in Limón.

20-year-old Sarah, the daughter of a small-holding banana farmer¹⁴⁶ and businessman, enjoyed what could be considered a middle class lifestyle in Port Limón. Her family was not necessarily wealthy, but was more financially stable than many residents in Port Limón during

Division in the 4 January 1930 edition. Given the difficulty of locating a full biography of a young West Indian woman in Costa Rica during this time period, I use Sarah Cummings' life, along with archival snapshots of her peer group to imagine their experiences in Limón.

¹⁴² I explore this in more detail in Chapter 4.

¹⁴³ In Costa Rica, the Negro Problem, *el problema del negro*, or *el problema racial*, as it was often called, was the result of the residence of West Indian blacks in the Limón, their perceived dominance vis-à-vis Costa Rican workers in the region, and the threat that they would migrate into the Central Valley and produce a nation of racially mixed, non-white progeny.

¹⁴⁴ Taylor, "Women in the Documents," 189.

¹⁴⁵ See Appadurai. His work investigates the flows of global culture in various landscapes. One of these he refers to as "mediascapes," which highlights the dissemination of information in global circuits and the world and image-making that takes place within these spaces.

¹⁴⁶ The majority of West Indian men of this generation were farmers on rented, squatted, or owned land. See Bourgois.

this period of decline in the banana industry. Her mother did not work outside of the home after she married Sarah's father, but had worked as a domestic, like many other West Indian women, when she first arrived in Costa Rica. Along with thousands of other women from the island, Sarah's mother boarded a ship on the Great White Fleet—the ships of the United Fruit Company that moved people as well as bananas—and headed for Limón, meeting up with a family member who had migrated there earlier. As a brown¹⁴⁷ woman, Sarah's mother would have never considered working as a domestic in Jamaica. But Costa Rica was not Jamaica. While there were fruits, plants, and other things that reminded Sarah's parents of home, in many ways, Costa Rica was a different world.

Sarah's father found it necessary early on to start a business that was not directly impacted by the sale of bananas to United Fruit, as there were many seasons in which the Company refused to buy his bananas. Sometimes they rejected perfectly good bananas, saying that they were bruised or otherwise inferior, other times the price offered per banana was so low that he would lose money if he went along with the sale.¹⁴⁸ So like a number of other West Indians with the means to do so, he established his own business, a notary in the center of town. Sarah's parents were members of the Port Limón UNIA since 1920 and prided themselves on *race work* and the *uplift* of blacks. As a central organ of West Indian life and her parent's social networks, Sarah grew up regarding the UNIA as the organization of respectable and well-regarded West Indians in Port Limón.

Sarah had been educated in a West Indian private school in Port Limón. Since public schools did not exist, West Indians paid for their children's education, and as a result, West Indian children born in Costa Rica spoke English, played cricket, and were culturally British Caribbean in a number of ways.¹⁴⁹ Although born in Costa Rica, Sarah did not refer to herself as a Costa Rican. For her, that title conjured an image in her head of a white-skinned woman with long, flowing hair, informed by the photographs of Costa Rican women that appeared in *La Prensa* and *El Voz del Atlantico*. Nor did she identify with the Costa Rican banana cutters who migrated to Limón from Cartago and other provinces. They looked rough and dirty and she believed the rumors that they did not eat with utensils and were prone to violence.

Her father seemed more interested in being Costa Rican than she was. He was always talking about how important it was to learn Spanish and for West Indians to become naturalized. But only wealthy people could afford the legal know-how required to apply for and secure citizenship. Very few West Indians completed this process.¹⁵⁰ In the meanwhile, proving

¹⁴⁷ The brown, mulatto, or racially mixed class in the British Caribbean that occupied a middle space in the racial hierarchy between whites owners and black slaves. For the significance of skin color in the West Indies in the past and present See Mervyn C. Alleyne, *Construction and Representation of Race and Ethnicity in the Caribbean and the World* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2002); Sarah England, "Mixed and Multiracial in Trinidad and Honduras: Rethinking Mixed-Race Identities in Latin America and the Caribbean" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33.2 (2010): 195-213; Christopher A. D. Charles, "Skin Bleachers' Representations of Skin Color in Jamaica." *Journal of Black Studies* 40.2 (2009): 153-170.

¹⁴⁸ See Chomsky, 7-12. Since the UFCO had a monopoly on transportation, exportation, and marketing of bananas, they controlled the banana industry in Limón and would reject bananas and buy as few or as many of a farmer's bananas as it pleased according to its own interests in the global market. In the climate of global economic disaster after the collapse of the stock market in 1929, the UFCO decreased the amount of bananas that it purchased from West Indian farmers. Since West Indians were dependent on the UFCO and the banana industry, many struggled during this time.

¹⁴⁹ See Deyanira Castillo-Serrano, *Afro-Caribbean Schools in Costa Rica, 1934-1948* (PhD diss., UT Austin, 1998).

¹⁵⁰ See Harpelle, *The West Indians of Costa Rica*. A small minority of West Indians became naturalized citizens of Costa Rica before the 1940s. I discuss this in more detail in Chapter 4.

oneself fit for Costa Rican citizenship required putting your best face forward and highlighting the very best of the race. While often feeling like she held the weight of the race on her shoulders, Sarah felt empowered by the possibility of travel. Living in a port city, movement and migration seemed as natural to her as the wind. Sarah dreamed of leaving Port Limón to attend a university in Jamaica or New York or London and thought of herself more as a citizen of the world than a citizen of Costa Rica. This was informed by her participation in the UNIA, her diligent reading of the *Negro World*, and by the American movies that she watched on Saturdays in the Cine Moderno movie theater.¹⁵¹

Limón, though, was her home and place of birth, and she recognized that she was neither fully Jamaican nor fully Costa Rican. She was, however, acutely aware that she *was* black. The world seemed huge and it seemed that black people were everywhere, although struggle and hardships seemed to follow them. Where was her place in the world? Where did she belong? Participating in the UNIA gave her a sense of purpose and belonging to a community much larger than the geographical limits of Limón.

Limón and the Boundaries of Whiteness

Limón has played an “outsider-within” role in Costa Rica beginning with Spanish colonization. Since the colonial era, Central Valley governing officials have treated the Atlantic region as an anomaly, at times formulating land colonization schemes to “Europeanize” and develop the region, other times, ignoring the region all together. Expeditions to Limón increased in the second half of the nineteenth century, and Limón was viewed as the last frontier in the making of a solidified Costa Rican nation-state. After independence from Spain in 1821, and participation in the Central American Federation through 1838, Costa Rica became a republic in 1848. Not even ten years into statehood, Costa Rica found its sovereignty threatened by 1855 with the invasion of William Walker in neighboring Nicaragua.¹⁵² Proclaiming himself President of the Republic of Nicaragua in 1856, Tennessee-born Walker had concrete plans to invade and colonize the rest of Central America, including Costa Rica. Although he was defeated in that same year, the case of Walker in Nicaragua and the larger threat of U.S. coloniality shaped the nation in its formative years. One can argue that this threat of U.S. dominance and imperialism came to fruition in the building of the Panama Canal, and the military, economic, and political might it afforded the U.S., and also in the birth of the United Fruit Company.

While Limón has historically been characterized by its racial difference and the existence of Indians and blacks, Limón has also been imagined as a sort of empty space, upon which new hopes for the nation could be built. The birth of the United Fruit Company in 1899 was not the first time that businessmen or government officials sought to make Limón “productive.” Cacao plantations worked by enslaved Africans existed in the region during the colonial period, and the cacao industry saw a period of boom from the mid-1600s to the mid-1700s. But the few numbers of enslaved blacks and their propensity for marronage in the absentee system (in which plantation owners resided in the Central Valley) made for an unstable industry that was abandoned by the early 1800s. Aside from disparate attempts at colonization, the region

¹⁵¹ The Cine Moderno movie theater in Port Limón posted advertisements in the *Searchlight*, and featured movies like *Tarzan the Great*. One such advertisement was featured in the 30 November 1929 edition of the newspaper.

¹⁵² Gudmundson, 3.

remained abandoned until the mid-nineteenth century. Limón did not become a municipality until 1892.

Limón represented a frontier, both racial and geographical, in the Costa Rican national imaginary. Limón had no infrastructure and no roads connecting it to the rest of the country (which worked to the advantage of the indigenous groups and persons of African descent who sought self-governance and independence). The consolidation of power, plans for modernization, and capitalist enterprise went hand-in-hand for the ruling elite in Costa Rica, and indeed Latin American governments all over the region were bringing peripheral lands and persons into the space of the nation-state as a means of what they constructed as progress and economic growth. At the turn of the twentieth century the role of Limón as the site of a new plantation-based enterprise was renewed, again relying on black labor.

Ironically then, representations of blackness and persons of African descent as threats to the nation have played a central role in the language of immigration laws and land tenure projects, as well as discourses of national whiteness. Before and after the birth of the United Fruit Company in 1899, efforts to nationalize and colonize Limón were explicit attempts to whiten the region, one of many examples of governmental attempts at *blanqueamiento*, or whitening, in Latin America at large. Since becoming a part of the nation required that Limón become white, colonization plans sought explicitly to people the region with white families. Ventures into Talamanca (in southern Limón near the Panama border) further displaced Bribri, Cabecar, and Boruca indigenous groups, pushing them into the more mountainous parts of the region. While scholars of the West Indian presence in Costa Rica similarly highlight the time period in question as a turning point in Costa Rican history, most, including scholars like Lara Putnam and Aviva Chomsky, argue that anti-black nationalism and economic decline were mutually constituted phenomena.¹⁵³ To locate Costa Rican white identity and anti-blackness as rooted in economic competition in the midst of depression in the late 1920s and 1930s ignores the way that race has shaped national identity in Latin America since the colonial times and how the logic of this anti-black bias is part of a larger epistemological framework and ideas about modernity. I argue that older narratives of Costa Rican exceptionalism and whiteness were reaffirmed and re-made in the midst of a national Negro Problem and economic uncertainty, not articulated for the first time.

The promotion of *colonias agrícolas* by the Costa Rican government intensified in the late nineteenth century. An 1882 decree offered plots of land given to any whites who would colonize Limón. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, individuals and companies negotiated to bring families from a number of different European countries and from the United States to settle lands in Limón. Even in the context of recent attempts, both failed and successful, to annex Central America—including the 1848 annexation of Mexican land after the Mexican-American War, the efforts of William Walker to rule Nicaragua, and confederate plans to expand their plantation-slave system into the region—the Costa Rican government signed a contract with the U.S.-based Talamanca Colonization Company in 1891 to settle 100 North American families in southern Limón, granting them land in the town of Cahuita. The following year, another contract was signed to bring 100 Swedish families to the region, and in 1908, 100

¹⁵³ See Chomsky; Putnam. Both Chomsky and Putnam argue that anti-black racism developed in Costa Rica as a response to the climate of economic uncertainty and social change in the 1920s and 1930s. I seek to reveal the relationship between the racist nationalism of this time period with older narratives of anti-black racism and Costa Rican whiteness and racial purity.

Spanish families.¹⁵⁴ A contract for Italian families was approved “with the precise condition that said immigrants are not of the black race or the yellow race [*con la précis condición de que los mencionados inmigrantes no sean de la raza negra ni de la raza amarilla*].”¹⁵⁵

From the 1862 law restricting the immigrations of blacks, Chinese and other non-Europeans to the 1904 prohibition of “Arabes, Turcos, Sirios, Armenios, Gitanos” and the 1912 prohibition of “individuos de la clase cooli,”¹⁵⁶ racism against non-whites and the fear of blackening and mongrelization was embedded in legal, as well as popular conceptions of Costa Rican identity. Plans to populate, or rather re-populate, Limón were explicit in their goal of racial improvement. Limón was, after all, a racial frontier. In order to protect the boundaries of whiteness, efforts to bring Limón into the fold of the nation required not only the policing of *who* could become Costa Rican through land tenure and citizenship, but was also a decided attempt to people Limón with persons identified as white. The promise of revenue from coffee and bananas, however, was motivation enough for the Costa Rican government to bend its own rules and permit the labor immigration of non-white groups, including those most feared to threaten the purity of the nation: blacks. Setting aside their immigration laws prohibiting blacks, Asians, and Middle Easterners from entering the country, the centrality of the export economy led the Costa Rican government to concede to United Fruit’s desire to hire workers from nearby Jamaica.¹⁵⁷ Blackening the nation rather than whitening it, the making of the banana industry in Costa Rica re-constituted Limón as a racially distinct space under the control of foreigners.

The state of the banana industry and the routes of migration and immigration to Limón informed the contexts in which West Indians and Costa Ricans negotiated their racial identities. In the 1920s, the number of Costa Rican workers on the plantations in Limón increased. Being displaced and marginalized in their own country, Costa Rican workers in Limón became increasingly nationalistic, employing anti-colonial rhetoric to complain about the United Fruit Company. Despite its peripheralization in Costa Rican historiography, Limón was a central space of contestation in the national struggle between United Fruit and the “coalition of oppositional forces”¹⁵⁸ that opposed the Company’s dominance. The nature of UFCO production and the hierarchies it shaped created fears of *pardocracia*¹⁵⁹ (rule by blacks), and the presence of West Indians created a “Negro Problem” characterized by the tropes of disorder, lawlessness, disease, and sexual immorality in Limón. I will highlight the central role of respectable womanhood and motherhood in both characterizing West Indians as unfit for Costa Rican citizenship and in the contestation of black deviant sexuality by West Indians. Focusing on the politics of gender and sexuality in the making of racial redemption, I look at the ways both West Indians and Costa Ricans employed particular representations of women’s bodies and sexuality to craft redemptive geographies.

Limón was a topic of serious debate and discussion, as evidenced in the newspapers and petitions of the time. The anti-imperial protest of Costa Ricans against United Fruit were two-

¹⁵⁴ Chomsky, 21.

¹⁵⁵ Ronald Harpelle, “Electronic Guide to the West Indian Diaspora in Middle America,” Lakehead University Department of History, <<http://bolt.lakeheadu.ca/~sojourners/diaspora/diaspora.html>> (accessed 22 February 2008). My translation.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ While not directly recruited by United Fruit, persons from Barbados and other islands made their way to Limón while migrating within the Western Caribbean.

¹⁵⁸ Harpelle, “Bananas and Business,” 60.

¹⁵⁹ I discuss Simon Bolívar’s use of the term *pardocracia* in chapter 3, as it relates to the white *criollo* elite’s fear of black and non-white dominance in the Independence period.

fold. First, the production of bananas enriched United Fruit at the expense of the nation and its workers and the Company seemed to yield more power than the governments of the countries in which it operated. Secondly, United Fruit had disrupted the racial order within the country, placing West Indians in an advantaged position, from the perspective of Costa Rican workers. An ethnic hierarchy existed that worked in the favor of the United Fruit Company, the dominant force in the region of Limón. Costa Rican and other Spanish-speaking Central Americans worked primarily as plantation labor and were at the bottom of the workforce. West Indians occupied a middle position in the United Fruit hierarchy of labor, some were small holders of land who produced bananas that they sold to United Fruit. These farmers were tied to the Company and their economic success was dependent on United Fruit. By the 1920s, West Indians also filled the positions of timekeepers, foreman, and other mid-level position in the plantation hierarchy. Atop the hierarchy was United Fruit bosses and plantation heads, and United Fruit controlled most facets of everyday life in the banana enclave including water, electricity, hospitals, and policing.¹⁶⁰

While the Company was not omnipotent in the region and was never able to harness complete control of bananas nor the people who planted and cut them, it wielded a disproportional amount of power and dominance in the region. Disease, a persistent problem in the banana industry, however, shaped the way that the United Fruit Company operated in Limón. As noted in the previous chapter, Panama disease affected the planting practices of the UFCO beginning in the 1910s. The spread of disease, the perpetual abandonment of plantations, and the constant need for new land led the UFCO, very early on, to keep a sizeable portion of the growth of bananas in the hands of small-holding planters. In 1905, 54 percent of bananas exported by the company were grown on UFCO plantations, but by 1926 only 25 percent were.¹⁶¹ The proliferation of plant diseases, along with West Indian resistance to proletarianization and the migrations of jobless Costa Ricans from the Central Valley, encouraged a dual system of production in which both large plantations and small farms flourished. Maintaining a system of overproduction based largely on Costa Rican plantation labor and small West Indian farms kept banana prices low for the company. Since the UFCO controlled transportation (it owned the railroad) and most other central facets of production and discouraged the development of subsistence farming (the Company owned much of the land that West Indian farmers occupied in tenant-lease agreements), the system functioned by keeping “both workers and private planters” dependent on the banana industry.¹⁶²

In a context of shifting landscapes of power, the nationalization of Limón and the transfer of UFCO production from the Atlantic to the Pacific side of the country made the potential movement of West Indians outward from Limón a national Negro Problem, where previously foreign blackness was simply a regional nuisance. For Costa Rican workers as well as elite nationalists, the threat of racial integration was a sexual and biological threat wherein miscegenation would rob Costa Rica of its status as an exceptional case of homogeneity and peacefulness in Central America.

Race, Gender, and Migration: Women in Limón

¹⁶⁰ Harpelle, *The West Indians of Costa Rica*, 69.

¹⁶¹ Chomsky, 60.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 83.

Robert Farris Thompson conceptualizes the visual and philosophical creativity of the Black Atlantic in terms of movement and conjunction. Showing how blacks in the Americas performed and illustrated the Kongolese concept of the *crossroads* to deal with and transcend conditions of slavery and dehumanization, Thompson reveals that productions of culture and the making of identity are crafted in movement, in interstices, and in contact “between worlds.”¹⁶³ As a point of contact, Limón of the 1920s and the 1930s was a crossroads between the worlds of West Indians who sought permanence and citizenship, Costa Rican workers from the Central Valley who migrated to the region for banana plantation jobs, and the negotiations between the governance of the United Fruit Company and that of the Costa Rican government. *Redemptive geographies* is a concept that engages the contact, overlap, and entanglement of UFCO coloniality, contestations of belonging in Costa Rica, and the cultural politics of race and nation. Both West Indians and Costa Ricans in Limón articulated racial identities in an atmosphere of instability and change, and both did so employing representations of womanhood and motherhood that redeemed their respective identities.

The United Fruit Company and the banana industry therefore shaped the composition of Limón, the conditions in which West Indians and Costa Ricans interacted with and understood each other, as well as the dynamics within these groups. The primacy of banana exportation also shaped the gendered contours of Limón and the roles that women played in the midst of a demand for male labor. (Neither West Indian nor Costa Rican women were employed to work on UFCO plantation.) Women did create employment opportunities for themselves that took advantage of the UFCO’s system of production. West Indian and Costa Rican women of varying classes and backgrounds resided in Limón. Some had migrated with husbands, brothers, or other family members, or met them in Limón after roots had been established. The wives of local officials and United Fruit bosses would undoubtedly have experienced life in Limón in a different way than the women who accompanied jobless men, or who came to Limón alone.

In the realm of the unknown, mysterious, dark, and dangerous, Limón was characterized as a wild frontier, where the morality and civility of the Central Valley and the “authentic” nation, were cast aside. As a place of blackness, Limón represented a space where Central Valley Costa Ricans could lose their whiteness. Being in such close proximity to blacks, in other cases working alongside them, in some cases working *for* them, Costa Rican workers experienced racialization in particular ways. Unable to control their positions of subordination in the UFCO enclave, Costa Rican workers were increasingly drawn to nationalist rhetoric that reclaimed the narrative of Costa Rican whiteness. Life in Limón encouraged poor Central Valley workers to become nationalist, and to assert a white racial identity. Putnam’s data on Costa Ricans from the Northern province of Guanacaste reveals the process of whitening via migration to Limón: “Apparantly *guanacastecos* looked whiter in Limón that they did back home; census takers in Guanacaste described 67 percent of residents as mestizos in 1927, but less than 6 percent of *guanacasteco* immigrants were labeled mestizo by census takers in Limón that same year.”¹⁶⁴

The immigration of West Indians to Limón peaked in 1910 with the boom in bananas, but by the 1920s, the population declined as the banana business suffered in the midst of plant disease and economic depression. The young and able, and others who had few economically viable opportunities in Limón, left Costa Rica to try their luck in other places, including Cuba, where the sugar industry was booming. The West Indians who did remain in Limón, therefore,

¹⁶³ Thompson, 110.

¹⁶⁴ Putnam, 65.

occupied a middle position in the banana enclave, comprising what Bourgois calls a “middle-level local elite” who operated “small- or medium-sized farms”¹⁶⁵ or worked in mid-level positions on UFCO-run plantations. The West Indians who remained in Limón in the 1920s and 1930s often had families, houses, and businesses, and sought permanence in Costa Rica.

The Central Valley Costa Ricans who migrated to Limón from the Central Valley and other areas of Costa Rica in increasing numbers in the 1920s were in a very different social and economic position. These Costa Rican migrants, many of whom were former laborers in the coffee industry, were poor and occupied the lowest rungs on the socio-economic ladder in the places that they migrated from. In 1920 the Company reported that ninety percent of new hires were Costa Rican,¹⁶⁶ and these workers made up the majority of the plantation labor in Limón. For the first time, Costa Ricans made up a sizeable part of the province of Limón. According to 1927 census data, the province was comprised of 18,003 “Blacks” and 9,970 “Costa Ricans.” By 1950, the year after blacks were legally able to apply for citizenship, the population of Limón included 13,749 “Blacks” and 30,260 “Costa Ricans.”¹⁶⁷ That the “biggest wave of internal migration to Limón occurred in the 1930s” during a time when the Company cut back its operations on the Atlantic coast and “turned over to the government large tracts of land” reveals that, like West Indian immigrants before them, Costa Rican “peasants were much more eager to acquire land than to enter a labor market.”¹⁶⁸

In a space where both Central Valley Costa Ricans and West Indians of Limón experienced displacement, the family and the role of women were a central site of control and contestation in the crafting of redemptive geographies. Life on banana plantations shaped ideas and practices of gender, sexuality, and family for both West Indians and Costa Ricans in Limón, and ultimately both groups found “family life and plantation labor incompatible in the long haul.”¹⁶⁹ Since UFCO used its dominance to discourage subsistence farming and the production of food for local consumption, Limón was a very expensive place to live and it was often “cheaper for a Costa Rican worker to leave his family in the interior and maintain two homes than to keep them in Limón with him.”¹⁷⁰ Because of this most Costa Rican banana workers traveled to Limón alone. In fact, “more than three-quarters of Hispanic *peones bananeros* in the 1927 census resided in all-male households.”¹⁷¹ As the numbers of Costa Rican migrants grew in the 1930s and 1940s, the number of Costa Rican women in the province expanded.

For Irma Watkins-Owens, theories of Caribbean migration tend to overlook the issue of gender. Her efforts to “identify issues specific to women’s migration experiences and to reengage the often gender-neutral narrative of early Caribbean upward mobility”¹⁷² reveal that West Indian migration and the political identities that emerged hence were gendered in specific ways. Largely because of male-specific labor demand “a women’s departure for New York [for example] required more careful orchestration than a man’s.”¹⁷³ This was also the case in Central

¹⁶⁵ Bourgois, 78.

¹⁶⁶ Putnam, 64-65.

¹⁶⁷ Chomsky, 47.

¹⁶⁸ Chomsky, 47.

¹⁶⁹ Putnam, 132.

¹⁷⁰ Chomsky, 84.

¹⁷¹ Putnam, 79.

¹⁷² Irma Watkins-Owens, “Early-Twentieth-Century Caribbean Women: Migration and Social Networks in New York City” in *Islands in the City: West Indian Migration to New York*, ed. Nancy Foner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 25.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 29.

America, as women were not contracted as United Fruit Company plantation workers or diggers of the Canal. Excluded from most jobs tied into industry booms and multinational projects, West Indian women, as black women, found their employment options limited to service jobs and domestic work. Educated and middle class women who were sheltered from this type of work in the West Indies found that these were among the only types of jobs available to them in the host nations. This situation lent itself to the development of new types of consciousness of race and gender.¹⁷⁴

Since the labor demands created by United Fruit were filled by men, employment opportunities for women were precarious, but West Indian women managed to create a niche in certain industries tied to the banana export industry. From the beginning of the UFCO in Limón, single West Indian men lived in Company bunkhouses and were limited to what was available at the Company commissary. Over the course of West Indian labor in Limón, from the bunkhouses to boarding houses to home ownership, West Indian women provided a variety of services for the UFCO workforce. These included the preparation and vending of food and laundry services. West Indian women also worked as “traders, shopkeepers, midwives, or confectioners.”¹⁷⁵

There were fewer Costa Rican women than West Indian women. In addition to the high cost of living in Limón, fears of the province as a place of immorality and danger prevented married workers from bringing their wives or families or permit their daughters to travel there alone. These attitudes began to change as Limón became more Costa Ricanized. Of the women born in the Central Valley who came to Limón in more significant numbers in the 1930s and 1940s, Putnam’s research offers an interesting snapshot into their lives:

Most worked as domestics or in the fields during their early adolescence and bore their first child in their late teens. Sometimes marriage or co-residence preceded their first pregnancy, but often it did not. Those who lived with male partners while their children were young did not work outside the home at the time. But for most of the women, these marriages or first consensual unions ended within a few years due to their partner’s drinking, infidelity, physical abuse, or abandonment.¹⁷⁶

This picture of an average *tica* lifestyle in Limón is very different from the image of redemptive womanhood that Costa Ricans put forth during this time. Notions of the sanctity of marriage and moral goodness and purity embedded in discourses of Costa Rican identity is further revealed as more national myth than reality by the fact that highland women also participated in the commercial sex industry in Limón.

While a doctor in Port Limón remarked in 1910 that the majority of prostitutes were black and that the population was predisposed to sexual disease and immorality, officials also remarked on the degeneracy of working class Costa Ricans. The governor of Limón complained in 1911 about the “public women from the interior...who come here [to Limón] for their entertainments on paydays, leaving as is natural venereal diseases spread among the workers of the canton.”¹⁷⁷ In 1907, paraphrasing the city doctor in Limón, the Spanish language *Correo del Atlantico* newspaper of Limón negatively described the Costa Ricans who migrated to Limón in the following way:

The Costa Rican peon does not come to Limón to fulfill any sacred family obligation, nor to save money...but rather the opposite, what this addition to their wages develops is

¹⁷⁴ See Irma Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900-1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

¹⁷⁵ Putnam, 54.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

their vices, and thus we see workers who stay one or two months with the same clothing that they arrive with in the train, without having spent a single cent in washing...they return to the bosom of their families [with]...a chronic case of malaria to tend to, or a total alteration of their organism damaged by the abuse of alcohol.¹⁷⁸

The following year, the same paper described these Costa Rican labor migrants as lacking the intelligence and adaptability to survive in Limón, and as a result, they will “soon return to their homes, which they never should have left, annihilated by malaria and anemia, the only and miserable relics of their unfulfilled dreams of riches.”¹⁷⁹ Costa Rican workers were therefore characterized as dirty, sickly, and physically degenerate, which was just as much the result of their own cultural shortcomings as it was the result of Limón’s “dark” influence.

It was through the period of anti-imperial nationalism that grew in the 1920s that this class of Costa Ricans became absorbed into the category of homogenous white identity. The political climate of the 1920s and 1930s, in which Costa Ricans outnumbered West Indians in Limón, a region that the government made strides toward nationalizing, it became necessary to absorb the working class into the space of national whiteness. Ironically, this migrant working class became the white *colonos* of Limón, ushering in the nationalization of the region. The incorporation of Costa Ricans who were in earlier years or other provinces identified as mestizo or not quite white reveals both the multi-ethnic “alchemy of whiteness” and the idea that race in Latin America is based more on culture than biology.¹⁸⁰

Manhood, Sexuality, and the U.N.I.A.

In ‘*Colón Man a Come: Mythographies of Panamá Canal Migration*, Rhonda D. Frederick shows how the trope of the West Indian Panama canal migrant in literature and songs produced “the fictive Colón Man...identified by his migration-forged masculinity, cocky attitude, [and] material possessions.”¹⁸¹ Taking issue with gender-neutral analyses of Caribbean migration in a way similar to Watkins-Owens, Frederick argues that “mainstream historical approaches have...failed to address the Colón Man’s desire to migrate in order ‘to become a man’ or so that he might partake of the ‘freedom’ legislated but denied in the Anglophone Caribbean after Emancipation.”¹⁸² The legend of the Panama returnee, identified by jewelry and new ways of speaking and dressing, produced new images and ideals of manhood: “The failure to return with Panamá Money to purchase material goods, land, and/or court a woman would put a migrant’s identity as ‘man’ in question.” That “returning with money...marked returnees as especially manly,”¹⁸³ illustrates the relationship between money, power, and manhood that was the foundational to Garveyism, an ideology that circulated in the West Indian diaspora.

Garvey’s UNIA was the central social and political organization of the West Indian community in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1919 the first branch of the organization was chartered in

¹⁷⁸ Chomsky, 52.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Jacobson explores the trans-ethnic making of whiteness in the US as an example of what he calls the “alchemy of race.” For the relationship between race and culture in Latin America, see Alastair Bonnett, *White Identities: Historical and International Perspectives* (Harlow, England: Prentice Hall, 2000); Marisol Cadena, *Indigenous Mestizos: The Politics of Race and Culture in Cuzco, Peru, 1919-1991* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

¹⁸¹ Rhonda D. Frederick, ‘*Colón Man a Come: Mythographies of Panamá Canal Migration* (New York: Lexington Books, 2005), 5.

¹⁸² Ibid., 7.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 129-130.

Costa Rica. The cover of the UNIA membership card in Limon in the early 1920s outlined the efforts of the organization as “...striving for the FREEDOM, MANHOOD, and NATIONALISM of the Negro...to hand down to posterity a FLAG OF EMPIRE...to bequeath to our children and our Grand Old Race the heritage of an Ancestry worthy of their time and thoughtful of the future.”¹⁸⁴ For Garvey the fact that “a race without authority and power is a race without respect”¹⁸⁵ leads him to advocate a fundamental tenant of the movement, the creation of an “African Empire.”¹⁸⁶ The implicit imperialism of Garvey lay in his belief that the ‘black race’ can only be affirmed by its ability to make a nation-state and empire; only when blacks “strike out to build industries, governments, and ultimately empires...will [the] race prove to [its] Creator and to man in general that [it is] fit to survive and capable of shaping [its] destiny.”¹⁸⁷ The economic foundation of nation and empire is based on the European model of capital enterprise in the exploitation of Africa’s resources. As the “richest spot in the world,” Africa, Garvey argues, must be “exploited by those who are keen enough and appreciative enough to invest their money and their interests in the development of that continent.”¹⁸⁸ Capitalism, in his view, was essential to “human advancement” and the “progress of the world.”¹⁸⁹

Although his “race first” approach to transnational black unity troubled the United Fruit Company, the British consulate, and the Costa Rican government in the first appearances of the UNIA in Costa Rica in 1919, Garvey did not seek to disrupt work, was anti-union, and admired enterprises like the United Fruit Company. Garvey’s Black Star Line of black-owned and operated sea vessels was undoubtedly informed by the Company’s Great White Fleet of ships.¹⁹⁰ As a result of his anti-unionism, the UFCO became an official Garvey supporter and the “Limon manager placed the company’s services at Garvey’s disposal, shuttling him around the Limon and Bocas divisions on United Fruit Company launches and trains.”¹⁹¹ The UFCO also saw beneficial to its production the fact that the UNIA required dues and actively sold shares of the Black Star Line company, helping to keep workers in debt and subsequently tied to their jobs.¹⁹² During Garvey’s day-long visit to Limon in 1921, the company showed their support of his ideology and practices by making it a holiday and special pay day.¹⁹³ Garvey was so well regarded in Costa Rica that he met with the British consul in San José and even the president of the nation, Julio Acosta.¹⁹⁴ Garveyism, then, did not operate as an oppositional ideology in Limón, but rather reinforced relations of power under the dominance of UFCO.

Garveyism also greatly impacted the relationship between redemption, respectability, and gender in the West Indian community in Limón. The black nation and empire was an affirmation of black manhood, and one of the tenants of Garvey’s association declares black men

¹⁸⁴ Bourgois, 85. Original Emphasis.

¹⁸⁵ Garvey, 2.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 14.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 9.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 64.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 72.

¹⁹⁰ The Company’s ships were omnipresent in the region, transporting bananas as well as persons to ports in the circum-Caribbean. See Peter Chapman, *Bananas: How the United Fruit Company Shaped the World* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2007)

¹⁹¹ Bourgois, 101.

¹⁹² Harpelle, 56.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 57.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 59.

“the sworn protectors of the honor and virtue of [black] women and children.”¹⁹⁵ While branches of the organization were required to have both a male and a female president, Garvey usually addressed his followers as “fellow men of the Negro Race.”¹⁹⁶ Even the notion of liberation was gendered, and settlements in Liberia were characterized as a place where blacks could “enjoy the pure atmosphere of manly freedom.”¹⁹⁷

The sexuality of women was the central focus of both Costa Rican and West Indian discourses of redemption. Workplace and occupation choices affected the way a woman was viewed in Limón. Judging from self-identified occupations upon entry to the Port of Limón, a sizeable percentage of West Indian women worked as domestics, and this made them particularly subject to rape and sexual harassment.¹⁹⁸ Both West Indian women and highland Costa Rican women participated in the sex industry, and had the ability to earn much more than men who toiled on the banana plantations for 10 cents an hour.¹⁹⁹

Sex labor was the occupation that spawned the most anxiety in the West Indian community. The “Night Hawk,” a frequent contributor to the *Searchlight* via letters to the editor, discussed the negative impact that “society dames” (alluding to sex workers) had on society. The language of health and morality was used to critique these “public” women. “Deformities” and “juvenile mortalities” occurred because the illegitimate children of sex workers “have no resistance to fight the infections that they inherit from those who disgrace the sacred name of ‘Mother.’” The “contagious” and “unclean” nature of these women shamed the race, “making the ‘better man’ think that negroes are so debased that they encourage this sort of living amongst their people.”²⁰⁰

Another article, entitled “Immorality in Limón,” accuses gentlemen of “high positions” of soliciting and publicly frolicking with sex workers. That “some of these men are employed to [the] leading commercial and industrial Companies”²⁰¹ suggests that white men of United Fruit, the Northern Railway Company, and other U.S.-owned corporations, carried on public affairs with black women. Whether or not these women were actually selling sex on all such occasions, we cannot know, but this representation does give insight into the ways that interracial sex between white men and black women was a concern of West Indian men.

The stakes of governing racially segregated, compulsory heterosexuality were clearly evident in the *Searchlight*. An article from a Boston newspaper reprinted in the *Searchlight* described “a rather amusing [black] woman,” a “masculine female,” who applied for a marriage certificate to wed “a young white woman.” It is only because the couple was interracial that the clerk “scrutinized them so closely” and realized that the black “groom” was a crossdressing woman. Both were arrested, and the black woman was charged with “impersonating a man.”²⁰²

¹⁹⁵ Garvey, 139.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 377.

¹⁹⁸ Based on my research in the National Archives of Costa Rica, the majority of West Indian women who entered Costa Rica identified their occupations as *domestica*. For instance in a 1936 list of passengers who arrived in Port Limón from Kingston, Jamaica, four out of the five women were domestics. ANCR Relaciones Exteriores Caja 424 no. 4 (1936).

¹⁹⁹ Putnam, 52-53. She notes, “in the years when male laborers were earning 1.50 to 2.15 *colones* a day (\$.70 to \$1.00) and skilled male artisans five *colones* at most, a washerwoman or cook earned up to two *colones* a day in Port Limón. Women who worked as prostitutes earned a good deal more, between one and five *colones* for a single sexual encounter at the turn of the century.”

²⁰⁰ *Limón Searchlight*, 7 March 1931

²⁰¹ *La Voz del Atlántico*, 29 May 1937 (English language article)

²⁰² *Limón Searchlight*, 26 December 1929

The politics of redemption governed the borders of both race and gender by policing the boundaries of sexuality. Although mainly characterized as the perpetrators of sexual “indecent,” young West Indian women were also portrayed the key to black success and integration within Costa Rican society.

II. The (Trans)national Newspaper and the Politics of the Portrait

For women like Sarah, newspapers said a lot about a people, their beliefs, and desires. It identified *who* the people were, and what mattered to them. The newspaper also allowed people to interact with the world outside of their community or nation. The aftermath of the Great War in Europe, lynchings in the United States, the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, and other events shaped by aggression and violence made Sarah feel as though the world around her was in disarray. At home in Limón, the Great Depression left everyone unsure of the future, and left many families in desperate situations. Her own family felt the pinch, but not like many West Indians who left Costa Rica during these lean years. While the collapse of bananas drove some away, others became religious zealots or put all their faith in obeahmen.²⁰³ Sarah no doubt noted an urgency about everything. Everyday life was no longer as simple. Sometimes reading the newspaper made her and others anxious. But other times it gave them hope.

The *Searchlight* and the *Negro World* inspired her race pride. Not only did these newspapers keep her abreast of what was happening in the black world, they offered images of black women that revealed Mammy and Jezebel as nothing more than caricature. Those kinds of degrading images were no match for the photograph, which offered real life examples of black womanhood. To have one’s portrait reproduced in the newspaper was a symbol of prestige. Women of Sarah’s status looked forward to the day when they would have their own portrait taken. Perhaps it would be printed in the West Indian newspaper like her friend Monica Clunie,²⁰⁴ or even in the *Negro World* next to an article about her achievements or travels abroad.



fig. 2.1 Miss Monica Clunie. 8 February 1930. Personal photograph by Asia Leeds. Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica. *Limón Searchlight*. 12 October 2008.

²⁰³ Similar to Santería and Vodun, Obeah is a Caribbean spiritual practice with African roots, and Obeahman are a type of shaman who mediate the relationship between believers and the gods. See Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert and Olmos M. Fernández. *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santería to Obeah and Espiritismo* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

²⁰⁴ While there is no evidence that Sarah Cummings and Monica Clunie knew each other, given their social standing, it is not unlikely that they would be friends.

While Sarah learned to read in Spanish at her father's request and could read Costa Rican newspapers, she was much more interested in the visual imagery, in particular, the photographs of "Women of Honor" that appeared with much frequency at this time.²⁰⁵ After the *Limón Searchlight* went out of business in 1932, Sarah relied on the *Voz del Atlántico* for news on Limón. She was acutely aware that these photographic albums never featured West Indian women. In fact, the "Beauties of Limón," as the newspaper called them were always very fair skinned women, many with blond hair and light eyes. Aside from the occasional wife or daughter of a Company boss, Sarah rarely encountered women such as the ones whose portraits were featured in the *Searchlight*. She saw a variety of Costa Rican women from the highlands and the other parts of the country. Many worked the fields on their family's small plot of land. Others participated in what Sarah considered less than lady-like activities. West Indians would often gossip about the young women who traveled all the way from the highlands on the workers' payday and would leave the next day, having charged plantation workers a day's salary for a few minutes of pleasure. But of course, these were not the women whose photographs were featured in the newspapers.

Fig. 2.2 Damas de honor. 2 January 1932. Personal photograph by Asia Leeds. Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica. *La Prensa Libre*. 6 June 2006.

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

²⁰⁵ Both the Central Valley newspapers like *La Tribuna* and *La Prensa* featured portraits of women of distinction who were showcased as the ideal of white womanhood.



fig. 2.3 Homage to Limón Beauties. 13 Feb 1937.

Personal photograph by Asia Leeds. Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica. *Voz del Atlántico*. 9 November 2008.

Sarah and her peers would therefore view the newspaper as a means through which specific representations of Costa Rican women were portrayed. Garvey himself participated in this visual propaganda of racial imagery in the *Negro World* in the 1920s and then in the 1930s with the *Blackman* newspaper. It was clear that photography allowed people to show themselves as they want to be seen. But not everyone in Limón had access to portrait studios nor the “look” that would get them featured in the newspaper album. For photography and the portrait was the way that women of a certain class and standing, and racial aesthetic, came to be represented as not only the important members of society, but authentic Costa Ricans. This drew a color-line making it clearer than any law that West Indian women were not Costa Rican and could never represent Costa Rican beauty or womanhood.

bell hooks describes black photography as a “critical intervention” and “disruption of white control of black images.”²⁰⁶ As dominant images characterized black women as Mammy, Jezebel, or exotic native, photography and visual culture was a key medium through which black womanhood and sexuality could be re-represented. For blacks, as hooks argues, the camera became a “means by which [they could] participate fully in the production of images.” As “issues of representation were linked with the issue of documentation,”²⁰⁷ the counterarchive involved both visual and narrative that heralded the “best” of the race. The newspaper, as counterarchive, allowed Costa Ricans and West Indians to produce their own self-

²⁰⁶ bell hooks, “In our Glory: Photography and Black Life” in *Picturing US: African American Identity in Photography*, ed. Deborah Willis (New York: The New Press, 1994), 47.

²⁰⁷ hooks, 45-48.

representations. Smith's conceptualization of the color line as "a nexus of competing gazes,"²⁰⁸ reveals the multiple imageries at play in the entangled mediascapes in Limón and in Costa Rica in general. West Indian, Costa Rican, and U.S. representations of race and gender all shaped the contours of the redemptive geographies being formed in the nation. The stakes of representation in an atmosphere of shift and depression highlight the fact that "the field of representation...is a site of ongoing struggle."²⁰⁹

As the migratory wave from Jamaica slowed as early as 1913,²¹⁰ those West Indian remaining in Costa Rica desired permanence and citizenship. In the midst of increasing immigration from the Central Valley and other regions, and after the passing of the 1934 banana contract, it became clear that Limón was changing at a rapid pace. Barred from employment in the new banana enclave on the Pacific side of the country created by the new contract, West Indian movement throughout the nation was being severely curtailed. With the province of Limón undergoing a process of Costa Ricanization, West Indians, especially community and UNIA leaders sought to prove West Indian fitness for Costa Rican citizenship. This was done largely in the terrain of "respectability." Redemption therefore included performances and embodiments of respectable behavior, including sexual morality, sanctioned familial relations, and public restraint. Garveyites thought of themselves as examples for the community at large and a vanguard in which "well thinking ladies and gentlemen of [Limón] will stretch out the helping hand to those struggling women and help to elevate the morals of our girlhood and womanhood." Redeeming behavior, they believed, allowed for the community to "attain a standard of respect and esteem in the [Costa Rican] Community."²¹¹

Redemption required 'putting the best face forward' and heralding the images and representations that showcased the best of the race. The sheer frequency with which portraits and albums of women appeared in newspapers reveals that redemptive womanhood was the trope through which both Costa Ricans and West Indians crafted racial identities and formed the boundaries of citizenship and diaspora. Drawing the borders of the nation through literacy²¹²—a literacy that functioned through imageries of race—West Indians and Costa Ricans drew from multiple spaces of belonging (local, national, and transnational) to make identity claims.

In this section, I draw from articles, advertisements, and the portraits that appeared in the newspapers that the residents of Limón, like Sarah, would have read. I look at five newspapers, in particular: *La Prensa*, *La Tribuna*, *Voz del Atlántico*, *The Limón Searchlight*, and *The Negro World*. *La Prensa* and *La Tribuna*, popular daily newspapers in Costa Rica produced in San José, circulated nationally, including in the region of Limón. There were two Limón-based newspapers during this time; *The Limón Searchlight*, a West Indian weekly in Limón with a Garveyite editor, and *Voz del Atlántico* (Atlantic Voice), a Limón weekly written by Costa Ricans, but with appearances by West Indian writers and community leaders and the frequent appearance of an English language section. In addition to the *Searchlight*, West Indians also read the *Negro World* newspaper, the main organ of the UNIA. The circulation of the *Negro World* was international, featuring news on UNIA branches in various locations in the transnational Garveyite community. Central American branches, especially those in Costa Rica

²⁰⁸ Smith, 2.

²⁰⁹ hooks, 46.

²¹⁰ Chomsky, 35.

²¹¹ *Limón Searchlight*, 13 December 1930.

²¹² See Anderson.

and Panama were well represented in the newspaper. In each of these newspapers, representations of womanhood were central in their visual discourse.

Body Politics: Dominant Images of Black Woman

“A person or people without a state is considered as good as *faceless*, having no identity, and so a threat to those who do.”²¹³

Situating the local politics of representation and redemption in Limón within national and transnational fields can be done by investigating the circulation of dominant images, like Mammy and Jezebel figures, in newspapers, onscreen, and in the theater. “Overdetermined from without”²¹⁴ by their bodies and sexuality, black women were “faceless” in the post-emancipation Americas. Since “in relation to the Negro, everything takes place on a genital level,”²¹⁵ black deviance, in this logic, was rooted in particular representations of black sexuality and black womanhood. The residents of Limón encountered images of lynchings, characters in blackface, and North American movies as they navigated entangled ideas of race and belonging. The images above of Mammy, Josephine Baker, and the “Hottentot Venus,” would have circulated in the province via newspapers and access to U.S. visual and popular culture.²¹⁶ For West Indians, these images, along with local anti-black discourses, informed the making of counter-discourses of black female sexuality.

Films like *Gone With the Wind* would likely have played at the American movie theater in Port Limón. Mammy, the trusty slave, was a mothering, asexual (and therefore non-threatening) figure, whose undying loyalty to Scarlet O’Hara made her faceless. She was but a dark shadow, and hers was an interchangeable face, a generic objectification of the Old South’s desires to contain black womanhood. With her white skin, flowing, straight hair, slender figure, and feminine clothing, O’Hara is the epitome of white beauty, the kind of beauty that newspaper portraits in *La Voz del Atlántico* and *La Prensa* hoped to uphold as a Costa Rican ideal. Mammy’s placement in the movies frames behind O’Hara denotes that her existence is contingent to that of her mistress. She is desexualized, protective, supplementary, and non-feminine. Physically, Mammy is the opposite of O’Hara; she is overweight, dark-skinned, and presumably has short, kinky hair under her turban. In the book version of *Gone With the Wind*, Mammy is described as “pure African.”²¹⁷ Hale’s *Making Whiteness* reveals Mammy’s central role in the making of white womanhood, wherein “the black mammy supported...the southern lady—an image of white purity and gendered passivity.”²¹⁸ The film resonated with whites for whom Mammy represented the “continuity”²¹⁹ of the Old South. The popularity of the film both within the United States and abroad meant that the significance of Mammy was not simply limited to a U.S. context, but through circulation, became part of an imagery that the greater Black Atlantic had to contend with.

²¹³ Goldberg, 40. My emphasis.

²¹⁴ Fanon, 116.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 157.

²¹⁶ While the image of neither Josephine Baker, nor Mammy, nor the Hottentot Venus were featured in the newspapers, there were frequent examples of minstrelsy and blackface, using in movie advertisements.

²¹⁷ Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 111.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 105.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 111.

The *Searchlight* and the *Negro World* offered West Indian women alternative images of black womanhood and femininity. These newspapers instructed West Indian women on how to be *New Negro* women, the kind of women who do *race work*, rather than pandering to whites and playing subservient roles. The Mammy character would have been a relevant one to the many West Indian women who worked as domestics for company bosses and other, probably white and foreign, families in Limón. The newspapers presented alternatives to the image of Mammy, showcasing photographs of slender, light-skinned women and advertising skin bleaching crèmes and hair straighteners for those who were not naturally endowed. At stake in this counter-image was the enlistment of an alternative black female body in the service of black uplift.

A central part of this aesthetic critique to dominant representations of black womanhood was the redemption of black women's sexuality. The nakedness of both Josephine Baker and the "Hottentot Venus" renders them, like Mammy, faceless. They are constituted by their bodies, specifically the exoticized sexuality of their bodies. Baker's pose signals sexual availability. Her seductive, Jezebel role, revealing outfit, and tropes of colonial exoticism and tropicalized²²⁰ blackness is the type of representation that Garveyite West Indians would have discouraged in a atmosphere in which there was a campaign against "sexuality immorality" among women. The body of Sarah Baartman, the Khoisan woman exhibited like a caged animal in Britain and France in the early 19th century, was also on display. Even after her death the "abnormalities" of her body and genitalia were exhibited, and renderings of her, like the one above, continued to circulate in the 20th century. The case of Baartman also highlights the role of power and control in the realm of representation. As Baartman had no control over how her body was used and displayed in life and death, issues of power and ownership shape the struggle over black self-representation.²²¹

The images above were the type that the project of black redemption sought to counter and de-legitimize. As the juxtaposition of Mammy and Scarlet O'Hara reveal, renderings of black womanhood were intertwined with the stakes of representing white womanhood. The politics of the portrait was central to the making of redemption for both West Indian and Costa Rican women. For Costa Rican nationalists who believed in the superiority of whiteness and the goal of white purity in the nation, black female sexual immorality was thought to be the basis of the degeneracy of blacks in general. Costa Rican mediascapes, then, affirmed the dominant representations of savage black sexuality in presenting white women and white female chastity as the national ideal. Notions of gender, sexuality, and racial purity were therefore embedded in the making of redemptive geographies.

Counterarchives, Racial Representation, and the Garveyite Politics of Respectability

Writing during this time, Ida B. Wells recognized the relationship between journalism and counterrepresentation. Her anti-lynching campaign highlights the relationship between gender, sexuality, and representation and the prevalence and significance of lynching imagery in the Americas. As "Nothing...is to be gained by a further sacrifice of manhood and self-respect" among blacks, Wells' writings also reveals the interdependence of ideas of manhood and

²²⁰ See Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *Josephine Baker in Art and Life: The Icon and the Image* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007.)

²²¹ See Pamela Scully and Clifton C. Crais, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.)

womanhood in the fight for equality and humanization. In Wells' analysis, lynching not only cast black men as savages motivated by a sexual lust for white women, but also cast black women as outside of the parameters of womanhood and incapable of being raped due to their alleged inherent sexual deviance: "At the very moment when these civilized whites were announcing their determination 'to protect their wives and daughters,' by murdering [a black male inmate], a white man was in the same jail for raping eight year-old Maggie Reese, a colored girl. He was not harmed."²²²

In proving that "the Afro-American is not a bestial race," Wells felt that she had "done [her] race a service."²²³ This is similar to DuBois' central aim to "scientifically" study the Negro,²²⁴ and as a result, reveal that the characterizations of blacks used to justify their imputed inferiority does not represent truth. The struggle over representation was the central site of black protest, and culture and politics were therefore inextricable. hooks sums this up explaining the relationship between the white gaze and the black desire for documentation:

The degrading images of blackness that emerged from racist white imaginations and circulated widely in the dominant culture (on salt shakers, cookie jars, pancake boxes) could be countered by 'true-to-life' images. When the psychohistory of a people is marked by ongoing loss, when entire histories are denied, hidden, erased, documentation may become an obsession.²²⁵

Documenting "true-to-life" representations, Wells, Du Bois, and Garvey, as well as unknown West Indians in Limón made claims to modernity, humanity, and recognition on their own terms. That the struggle over representation was central in the fight for black equality and humanity in the Americas is evident in the writings of black scholars in the 1920s and 1930s. Warning against white control of black art, DuBois asked the following: "Suppose the only Negro who survived some centuries hence was the Negro painted by white Americans in the novels and essays they have written. What would people in a hundred years say of black Americans?"²²⁶ According to Alain Locke, New Negro expressions broke with those of the Old Negro, who "had long become more of a myth than a man," and "more of a formula than a human being." Where blacks were "wholly caricatured" by white representations, they were "seriously portrayed and painted" by black artists and writers.²²⁷ The interdependence of "writing and racism" and "white supremacy and the text," both visual and written, renders cultural politics the key cite of both the making and contestation of race. For blacks, written out of history and caricatured as non-human, "textual power becomes a route to freedom and bodily autonomy."²²⁸

While there was a shortage of detailed information on how Jim Crow segregation functioned in Limón and how it inevitably shifted to accommodate the increasing numbers of Costa Rican workers in the 1920s and 1930s, we can surmise that U.S. whiteness subordinated both Costa Ricans and West Indians in Limón. A 1929 account of the company describes the division manager as "not only the business head but in a fashion...the head of the municipality,

²²² Trudier Harris and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Selected Works of Ida B. Wells-Barnett* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 213.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 15.

²²⁴ See W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Study of the Negro Problem," *Annals- American Academy of Political and Social Science* (2000): 13-27.

²²⁵ hooks, 48.

²²⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Criterion of Negro Art" in *Writings*, eds. Nathan I. Huggins and W. E. B. Du Bois (New York, N.Y: Literary Classics of the United States, 1986), 999.

²²⁷ Alain L. R. Locke, *The New Negro* (New York, N.Y: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 3-9.

²²⁸ Mason B. Stokes, *The Color of Sex: Whiteness, Heterosexuality, and the Fictions of White Supremacy* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001), 1-2.

for although the various stations are under the normal control of the local authorities, [managers] commonly do their own policing and have their own regulations.” The manager was in essence “the viceroy of the company.” In addition, the status of the manager’s wife was “about the same as the First Lady in a small republic.”²²⁹ In Limón, therefore, the presence of U.S. bosses and managers fostered an internal colony within the nation in which the interests of the United Fruit Company was dominant. In neighboring Panama, a system of Jim Crow segregation emerged in the canal zone that masked an explicit reference to race, as white North Americans were paid in gold and everyone else was paid in silver.²³⁰ The “silver roll” in Panama, comprised of West Indians as well Panamanians of all colors, was not only paid in a lesser currency, but housing, restaurants, and other businesses were divided along the gold-silver line. In Costa Rica, the UFCO “held a particular fascination for whites from the US South” in its recruitment of lower level managers and overseers who had direct control over the workforce.²³¹ An English Bishop described how the color-line functioned in Limón. White North Americans, he wrote, “will not come into the same church with black or coloured people...nor allow them as guests in their hotels.”²³² North American whiteness and white privilege therefore subordinated both West Indians and Costa Ricans as non-whites. As the Company divested from Limón and the Atlantic coast, however, the Costa Rican government sought to bring Limón under the fold of national governance, culture, and identity.

But even as UFCO power gave way to Costa Rican governance, U.S. politics of race were still embedded in the social landscape of Limón. While United Fruit bosses came to Central America with ideas of white supremacy nurtured in specific black-white relations that emerge out of social and political cues of a specifically North American plantation-slave system, these ideas were never wholly imported into Limón. Instead, North Americans, West Indians, and Costa Ricans each came to Limón with their own ideas about race and the meanings of whiteness and blackness. The dominance of U.S. cultural imperialism, however, shaped the context in which images were produced and circulated in the Western Hemisphere. U.S. representations of the degeneracy of blacks, for example, matured in the U.S. in particular ways and were further nuanced in U.S.-occupied spaces abroad. The circulation of images of lynching, Ku Klux Klan (KKK) terrorism, and blackface cinema complicated symbols and meanings of race in Latin America, especially in enclaves like Limón. *Tarzan the Great* and similar films played at the Cine Moderno movie house²³³ in Port Limón, and news of the 1936 Scottsboro case, and other such stories circulated in Limón newspapers. The case of Adrian Smith, a West Indian who was lynched in (date) by white North Americans in a banana enclave in Livingston, Guatemala is one example of how U.S. ideas of race, power, and justice played out in Central America.²³⁴ Stories of Klan violence were featured with frequency in Spanish-language newspapers in Costa Rica, and Costa Rican mediascapes made links between the white power of the KKK and the imperialism of United Fruit. I explore the double consciousness that this produced for Costa Ricans (as white in one context and colonized in another) in the

²²⁹ Samuel Crowther, *The Romance and Rise of the American Tropics* (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, Doran & Co, 1929), 230-31 cited in Chomsky, 40.

²³⁰ See Irma Ritter and Velma Newton, *Los Hombres Del “silver Roll”: Migración Antillana a Panamá, 1850-1914* (Panamá, República de Panamá: Sociedad de Amigos del Museo Afroantillano de Panamá, 1995).

²³¹ Chapman, 78.

²³² Chomsky, 53.

²³³ *Limón Searchlight*, 1 February 1930

²³⁴ Harpelle, “Electronic Guide to the West Indian Diaspora in Middle America,” <<http://bolt.lakeheadu.ca/~sojourners/diaspora/diaspora.html>>. My translation.

following chapter, but here it is important to note that U.S. dominance in the region, and UFCO dominance in Limón, Costa Rican politics, and the export economy at large, complicated the meanings of whiteness for Costa Ricans at this time.

For West Indians, negative representations of blackness enabled the ideological framework for denying black people sovereignty and participation in the modern nation-state. Garveyism gave blacks in the Americas a means to counter these representations, both in the *Negro World* newspaper, and in the realm of self-governance. Where the lines of national citizenship were murky for West Indians in Costa Rica, the UNIA provided an organizational structure that not only gave blacks a sense of belonging, but that also endowed its leadership with the power to speak on behalf of the West Indian community at large. It was no coincidence that the *Searchlight's* editor was a former UNIA branch president or that UNIA leaders contributed to the *Voz del Atlántico* and sent letters to UFCO, local, national, and international officials on behalf of West Indians. Garveyites in Limón adopted a governing role in the West Indian community, and so the politics of respectability and race consciousness of the Garvey movement informed both the intra-community struggles and the politics through which Limón Garveyites engaged with the Costa Rican government and society at large on behalf of the West Indian community. The UNIA allowed for internal governance in the West Indian community, largely in the realm of behavior and culture. The politics of respectability was a strategic maneuver on the part of West Indians who desired citizenship and a place within the Costa Rican nation. In her study of black Baptist women, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham describes how respectability was entangled in the struggle for equal rights. These women, she argues, “adhered to a politics of respectability that equated public behavior with individual self-respect and with the advancement of African Americans as a group.” The belief that “certain ‘respectable’ behavior would earn their people a measure of esteem from white America,”²³⁵ was one that resonated with West Indians in Limón.

The Garveyite discourse of respectability was laden with notions of gender and sexuality for the purpose of controlling and re-formulating the images of black womanhood. Affirming the superiority of the bourgeois family, West Indian Garveyites viewed the behavior and sexual practices of women as redeeming only if they promoted the social and biological reproduction of the Garveyite home and community. “Race work” was the only acceptable public work that redeemed black women. As “*mujeres públicas*,” black prostitutes were the antithesis of the respectable black woman. Both the use of their bodies and sexuality as an entrepreneurial enterprise and their penchant for using the court system in Limón to fight slander against them, placed “*mujeres de la vida*” inside the public realm and, therefore, outside the “upright” black community.²³⁶

West Indian mediscapes offered examples of redemptive womanhood as well as examples of women that Garveyites felt hampered the progress of blacks. The Garveyite politics of respectability was most concerned with the behavior of young women, and how it reflected upon the West Indian community. The Night Hawk wrote a message of farewell to one of the “good little girls,” who was set to depart Costa Rica with her family for Trinidad, where she was to attend school. Traveling abroad for her education, she is presented as being very different from most young women in Limón, who the West Indian community “so seldom find[s]

²³⁵ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 14.

²³⁶ Putnam discusses *mujeres de la vida* in the chapter two of her book, entitled, “Las Princesas del Dollar: Prostitutes and the Banana Boom, 1890s-1920s.”

deserving of praise.” She was a rare example of redemptive womanhood in the midst of a “Social Depression that abounds in this [Valley] of Tears.”²³⁷ While the decline of the banana industry was out of their hands, Garveyites believed that respectability and redemptive culture could alleviate “social depression” in Limón.

An article entitled “Obscene language on our streets” highlighted an issue that received much attention in West Indians newspapers; the behavior of young West Indians in public. The articles and the many others like it characterized the streets of Limón as a site of moral degeneracy and embarrassment. Young women spoke with words that prompted the “utter disgust of respectable adults and the danger of innocent children.” A call for officers who speak English, indicating the need for West Indian officers, to police such young women.²³⁸ Those called for “improper” behavior in public also included young men, in a manner that is telling of the interdependence of the manhood and the womanhood of the race. The central problem of the “vulgar mannerism” of young men who use the “filthiest expressions imaginable” was its threat to the protection of women in public spaces: “Gentlemen are timid to invite their wives, sisters or daughter for a pleasant walk...for fear of being confronted with such a menace which is an insult to our manhood and a disgust to our finer sex.”²³⁹ Public spaces were therefore central to the contestation of black identity and culture, and presented both an opportunity to showcase redemptive black behavior *and* the site of the erosion of respectability.

Another type of story that appeared with frequency in the newspapers chronicled public fights between women. In one example, two presumably West Indian women (due to their English surnames), both 18 years of age, were engaged in a “dual.” That the article²⁴⁰ was written in Spanish affirmed the preoccupation of West Indian leaders, that the larger Costa Rican public noted this behavior and used it as evidence of West Indian savagery. This particular example shows how race was sometimes coded. The English surnames and the behavior of the women marked these young women as West Indian, without being explicitly racial or offending the West Indian community, many of whom subscribed to the *Voz*.

Characterized as a “band of loose, common young girls” who loiter along the railroad lines “throwing out the vilest expressions in the presence of the police as well as the respectable women in the vicinity.” Not worthy of the title of girl or young woman, these “things in human form” should be apprehended by “Hygiene officers.”²⁴¹ Keeping the wrong company, or spending time in certain areas could mark young women as prostitutes worthy of imprisonment, in the opinion of UNIA members.

The UNIA informed the making of other clubs that specifically targeted young women. These clubs usually held meetings and activities in the UNIA’s Liberty Hall. The clubs sought to highlight the role of “intellectual encouragement” as the solution to the eradication of uncivilized practices among young women. Activities like “elocution contests,” debates, and weekly lectures²⁴² were aimed at stimulating the minds of West Indian women, and therefore re-routing the seemingly innate bodily desires toward transgressive behavior. A Literary and Sporting Club for women aimed to raise “the moral, social, and educational status of the women in [the town of] Waldeck and to provide them with useful and healthful exercises to wear away

²³⁷ *Limón Searchlight*, 31 January 1931

²³⁸ *La Voz del Atlántico*, 27 February 1937

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 26 January 1935

²⁴⁰ *Limón Searchlight*, 17 January 1931

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1 February 1930

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 1 November 1930

the monotony of dull cares.”²⁴³ Since the candidates had to apply for membership those who participated in these types of clubs were likely the daughters of UNIA women. The Young Women’s Standard Club (YWSC) was a key club amongst the young women “of note” in the community and the daughters of UNIA members. The YWSC hosted a number of different programs and activities for young women in Limón, including a basketball team that met every Tuesday and Friday. The hope was that the female youth of Limón would “put [their] hearts and souls” into athletics like basketball, which was a “pure game, both good for the Body and well as the soul.”²⁴⁴ That the body is capitalized reflects the centrality of young women’s bodies in the making of redemptive geographies. Clubs and activities aimed to keep the children of Garveyites and West Indian community leaders, especially the young women, occupied by physical and mental activities in hopes that this would deter their becoming public women, whether participants in sexual labor, interracial relationships, or loud-talking, vulgar fixtures on the streets. These organizations essentially functioned as auxiliaries to UNIA branches in Limón. The political philosophy of Garveyism and racial uplift, therefore, shaped the language and logic of West Indian racial contestation.

The YWSC sought to “promote a higher standard of social life among the young women of Limón,” to stimulate “the highest achievements possible in moral life” with the goal of “commanding the respect of the Community in which [they lived].” The UNIA and its affiliate organizations like the YWSC sought to “[subdue] the darker passions” and reclaim “those who might have erred,”²⁴⁵ but it seemed to be less successful in converting the bad girls into good ones. Instead these clubs reaffirmed the divisions and hierarchies between UNIA West Indians and those on the outside of the redemptive community.

Garveyite West Indians were a self appointed vanguard of the West Indian community that sought to train young women to perform respectability through the disciplining of their bodies. The demography of Limón’s West Indian community, wherein young women outnumbered their male counterparts, and where an older generation, a majority of whom were male, predominated in leadership positions in the community and informed the stakes of respectability and redemption. While women participated in the Limón branches of the UNIA, as members and in leadership positions, the head of most branches were male, as were the newspaper editors and the majority of journalists and op-ed contributors. In other words, a system of patriarchy shaped the cultural politics of regulating young women’s bodies. The domination of UNIA members in the crafting of a local counterarchive, namely newspapers like the *Searchlight* and in petitions to various officials, begs reflection on with *whose* counter-discourses are documented in the archives.

Who is the face of the community/nation? Who is left out, hidden, or ascribed to the background? That counterarchives are exclusive complicates our look at history from below. Garveyite West Indians defined redemption through control of women’s bodies, sexuality, and behavior, believing that race, nation, and citizenship were constituted by redemptive gender roles and sexual behavior. The idea that “the civilization of every country is...gauged by the deportment and mannerism of its populace”²⁴⁶ underpinned the West Indian campaign for respectability. West Indian leaders detested West Indians who did not adhere to the politics of respectability, including those who troubled and challenged bourgeois gender and family roles,

²⁴³ Ibid., 31 August 1931

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 13 December 1930

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 4 October 1930

²⁴⁶ *La Voz del Atlántico*, 26 January 1935

heterosexuality, and monotheistic Christianity. In making redemptive spaces of belonging, Garveyite West Indians followed the logic of social Darwinism; those who survive and prosper are the ones most culturally fit.

In an effort to de-stabilize Mammy and Jezebel, and the representations of prostitution and moral deviance that had come to represent West Indian women in both Costa Rican and West Indian mediascapes, UNIA members instructed young women to practice redeeming “racial performativity.” Highlighting the ways that race is enacted and embodied, E. Patrick Johnson understands race as made and brought to life in the realm of the performative. The making and “appropriation of blackness” is therefore a “performance,”²⁴⁷ reminiscent of Said’s conception of representation as “theatrical.”²⁴⁸ The idea of performativity, then, offers insight into more than the arts, but into everyday actions and behaviors; in the clothes that one wears, in how one speaks, in how one acts in public.

For E. Francis White “representation has two meanings: the act of symbolically standing up for a group and the act of revealing the nature of a group.”²⁴⁹ As “racial performativity informs the process by which we invest bodies with social meaning,”²⁵⁰ the making of redemptive blackness through the re-presentation of black womanhood sought to showcase respectable young women as examples of the true nature of black women at large. Women who deviated from this model had also deviated from what it meant to be authentically black. The exclusion of certain parts of the West Indian community and the heralding of specific types of women was part and parcel of the project of redemption. To begin with, only certain West Indians participated in the culture of newspaper literacy and subscription. Garveyite West Indians had the means and possessed the political desire to appropriate blackness in Limón in their interests and image. Blackness does not belong to any one group, “rather, individuals or groups *appropriate* this complex and nuanced racial signifier in order to circumscribe its boundaries or to exclude other individuals or groups.”²⁵¹ The authentic black subject in discourses of black modernity formed and circulated in Limón were, as a result, exclusive.



Fig. 2.4. Album of UNIA women. 6 January 1923. Personal scan by Asia Leeds. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. *Negro World*. 30 June 2008.

²⁴⁷ Johnson, 6.

²⁴⁸ Said, 63.

²⁴⁹ White, E. Francis. *Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism and the Politics of Respectability* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 51.

²⁵⁰ Johnson, 9

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 3. Original Emphasis.

In January 1923, a series of photos of UNIA women were featured in the *Negro World*. This album was a holiday special, in celebration of a Christmas season and new year. The album reveals just how important the visual realm was in the UNIA's political philosophy. Among the photographs of women from all over the black Atlantic, including West Africa, the U.S., Central America and the Caribbean, was this trio that included "A Chicago Belle," "A Jamaican Beauty," and "Miss Amy Jacques," future wife of Garvey, listed as his "personal secretary." While there were a few women with dark complexions in the multi-page album, the image of these three fair and light brown women, clustered together portrayed a counter-image of black femininity and gentility. In contrast to the image of Mammy, these black *ladies* were evidence of black modernity. They are slender, have light skin, straightened hair, and unlike the Jezebel figure, the Garveyite ladies were dressed in respectable clothing, highlighting their faces instead of their bodies.

In Smith's analysis, Du Bois' photographic albums "reproduce the sentimental and commodified forms of the middle-class portrait to contest the conflation of African Americans under the visual signs of criminality or biological inferiority."²⁵² Putting certain types of black women on display, women who looked like the trio in the *Negro World*, and heralding then as the archetype of redemptive womanhood, Du Bois not only "poses a vision of an African American patriarchy," but reveals the way that blacks, especially the black middle class, made "claims to both economic advancement and cultural privilege through the performance of gendered respectability and sexual control." Like Du Bois, Garveyites in Limón and elsewhere in the Americas made the case for equality and citizenship "through class stratification...figured through gender hierarchy."²⁵³ For Costa Ricans, the politics of white womanhood was also informed by the politics of culture and class.

Ladies of Honor and the politics of white womanhood



Fig. 2.5 *Sociales de Cartago*. 26 July 1941. Personal photograph by Asia Leeds. Biblioteca Nacional. *Voz del Atlántico*. 17 November 2008.

For Malcolm X, the white man signifies "complexion only secondarily; primarily it described attitudes and actions."²⁵⁴ That matters of biology and complexion were only secondary to the primary realm of behavior and thinking, highlights the fact that whiteness, like blackness, was an enterprise crafted through cultural politics. It was in the act and spectacle of lynching in the United States, for example, that persons of varying classes and social standing claimed and performed whiteness. In Costa Rica, newspapers were the primary means by which

²⁵² Smith, 9-10.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁵⁴ Alex Haley and Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Random House, 1975), 7 cited in *Diploma of Whiteness: Race and Social Policy in Brazil, 1917-1945*, Jerry Dávila (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 340.

the ideal of white womanhood circulated as the norm in the nation, instructing Costa Rican women on how to act white, even if they were not quite white physically. A specific aesthetic ideal of pale skin, long straight hair, with women typically dressed in white, or decorated with flowers, was heralded as a national ideal, and there was little deviation from this image in the newspaper. Newspapers from both the Central Valley and Limón featured photographs of women, usually album-style. Through circulation to various parts of the country, Costa Rican newspapers nationalized the ideal of white womanhood and its cultural attributes.

In an atmosphere in which Limón was represented as a dark stain on the national fabric, Limón newspapers like the *Voz del Atlántico* presented a visual campaign providing evidence that Limón was a civilized place where white families could thrive. The *Voz del Atlántico* normalized whiteness in Limón and masqueraded in *whiteface*, concealing the blackness of the province's population. In her look at cinema, Gwendolyn Audrey Foster refers to "whiteface" as a "space where representation demands class-passing, class othering, giving up ethnic identity to become white."²⁵⁵ The wives of the poor banana plantation workers who migrated from the highlands or Guanacaste participated in "class-passing," giving up a particular social class or regional identity to *become white*. While Julian B. Carter argues that in the late nineteenth to mid twentieth century United States discourses of normality informed "white deracialization,"²⁵⁶ rendering whiteness an invisible norm, in Costa Rica, this process informed white *re*-racialization. Where they had been rendered deviant and uncivilized in earlier years, the politics of nation-making and black exclusion made it necessary to racialize Costa Rican working class as whites.



Fig. 2.6 Album La Prensa: Señorita Aída Charpentier Rucavado. 13 August 1921. Personal photograph by Asia Leeds. Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica. *La Prensa*. 7 July 2006.

²⁵⁵ Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Performing Whiteness: Postmodern Re/Constructions in the Cinema* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 51.

²⁵⁶ Julian B. Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 21.



Fig. 2.7 Album La Prensa: Carmen Serrano. 16 July 1921. Personal photograph by Asia Leeds. Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica. *La Prensa*. 7 July 2006.

In the early 1920s, Central Valley newspapers set the standard for predominance of the newspaper portrait in Costa Rica. These albums appeared at least weekly in the popular daily San José newspapers, and were institutionalized as a part of national news and identity. The “Album la Prensa” typically featured a portrait of one or more women accompanied by a sentence or poem that heralded the whiteness of the women, usually in very explicit, albeit poetic, terms. The 1921 portrait of Carmen Serrano (fig. 12), a “young woman (*damita*) of the Costa Rican Society” was accompanied by an inscription that lauded her “beautiful virtue.” The *Para Las Damas* section appeared in *La Prensa* every Thursday in the early 1920s. Written by “one of the most...distinguished young women of the San José upper class,”²⁵⁷ women of varying classes were believed to be able to access the cultural tools of virtuous womanhood. While the women showcased as *damas de honor* represented an ideal of racial purity that most Costa Rican women undoubtedly could not attain biologically, they were instructed on how to discipline their bodies and *behave* like whites.

As whiteness is, in the analysis of Malcolm X, primarily a matter of “attitudes and actions,” these *virtuous, pure* women of honor, were only white and honorable insofar as their behavior, especially in sexual matters, was respectable and redemptive. In this logic, white womanhood was fragile and potentially transient, as the beneath the surface of virtue lurked dark sexual desires. If in the analysis of Signe Arnfred, “the white woman conceals the black (sexual) woman,” an “aggressive, devastating black sexuality may break through at any moment.”²⁵⁸ White women, then, could *become* black. A 1932 article in *La Prensa Libre* entitled “The Marvelous Case of Witchcraft in Panamá” described just an incident. As the story went, “a white woman converted to black” after a practitioner of “voodoo” gave her a cup of coffee.²⁵⁹ While not explicitly about sex, the article did highlight fears that racial integration, particularly

²⁵⁷ *La Prensa*, 5 January 1922.

²⁵⁸ Signe Arnfred, “‘African Sexuality’/Sexuality in Africa: Tales and Silences” in *Re-thinking Sexualities in Africa*, ed. Signe Arnfred (Uppsala, Sweden: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2004), 64.

²⁵⁹ *La Prensa Libre*, 17 March 1932.

the movement of black people in the interior of the country, would corrupt the already delicate shell of white womanhood.

Visually, West Indian women were absent in the *Voz del Atlántico*, placing them outside of the realm of beauty, family, morality, and what it means to be Costa Rican. West Indians were therefore welcome to contribute to the paper by writing articles and op-eds, but West Indian women were not suited for portraiture. In the newspaper, white women were the “silent markers in the systems of exchange that make both whiteness and heterosexuality cultural givens.” It was in the protection of womanhood that the boundaries of nation were policed. “Simultaneously imagined as the key to whiteness’s future and its weakest defense,”²⁶⁰ maintaining the purity of white womanhood was a central anxiety for Costa Ricans, especially in Limón. Following the lead of *La Prensa* and other San José newspapers, the *Voz del Atlántico* published albums of women’s portraits with great frequency. In the first years of the *Voz*, the *Semana Social* section—which focused on news about social gatherings and balls, as well as news of *distinguished* women—focused solely on women and events in Cartago, the old capital of the nation and a province of the Central Valley that shared a border with the province of Limón. But soon, the *Voz* shifted its focus to Limón entirely, featuring *Limón Beauties (Bellezas Limonenses)* and highlighting the whiteness of the province at a time when the nation was preoccupied with and fearful of the province’s black population. The newspaper aimed to show that Limón also had its own white women deserving of an homage.



Fig. 2.8 Del Concurso de Belleza. 23 Nov 1935. Personal photograph by Asia Leeds. Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica. *Voz del Atlántico*. 19 November 2008.

²⁶⁰ Mason Stokes, *The Color of Sex: Whiteness, Heterosexuality, and the Fictions of White Supremacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 17.



fig. 2.9 Aida Heilbron Young. 21 July 1934. Personal photograph by Asia Leeds. Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica. *Voz del Atlántico*. 19 November 2008.



fig. 2.10 Nuestras Amiguitas. 14 July 1934. Personal photograph by Asia Leeds. Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica. *Voz del Atlántico*. 19 November 2008.

One album called “Homenaje a la Mujer Limonense” (Homage to Women of Limón) raved about the “elegance and refinement of *Limonense* women.” Noting that these women “rival the ladies of the capital” and declaring that “Limón has its queens,”²⁶¹ the *Voz* critiqued the monopoly on white womanhood that the Central Valley claimed. Señorita Isabel Muñoz was described as “white, refined, delicate and pure like a fragil alabaster vase.”²⁶² Anita Royo was

²⁶¹ *Voz del Atlántico*, 29 May 1937

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 8 sept 1934

praised for her “golden colored hair.”²⁶³ Señorita Gladys Pontón de Arce was a “crystalline ideal of the north” with the “whiteness of snow.” “White, tall, [and] blonde” with “light eyes,” Gladys’ beauty was “like an expensive ideal.”²⁶⁴ In addition to portraits lauding whiteness and purity, pageantry was yet another method that photographs of white women were showcased in the *Voz*. Pageantry was another method of showcasing the national ideal of white womanhood. *Señorita Limón* (Miss Limón) and the *Concurso de Belleza Nacional* (the National Beauty Competition) featured the same young women who appeared in the albums of the *Semana Social* section.

Most telling about the racial politics of Costa Rican nationalism in Limón was the ease with which foreign white women were absorbed into the category of national ideal. The “gentle and beautiful” Señora Doña Hortenia de Marroquín, originally from Guatemala, was one of many foreign women featured in the albums of the *Voz*.²⁶⁵ Doña Magda Shumacher de Antillón, “wife of a doctor” was also lauded as a “distinguished lady,” having migrated from Germany to Costa Rica, where she was “justly held in high esteem.”²⁶⁶ Even the daughters and wives of American bosses at United Fruit and Northern Railway were praised in the *Voz* for their whiteness, like the “small and refined” Margarita Sheehy.²⁶⁷ Since the face of national womanhood was white, white foreign women were able to become Costa Rican while West Indians could not. Costa Rican newspapers participated in a system of representation prevalent at the time, in which “white women were fashioned in racial terms as the media of national reproduction.”²⁶⁸ An examination of the racial politics of motherhood reveals the stakes of redemptive reproduction for Costa Ricans and West Indians.

²⁶³ Ibid., 4 aug 1934

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 11 August 1934.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 1 September 1934.

²⁶⁸ Goldberg, 89.

Chapter Three: Race, Place, and Diasporic Identity: Entanglements of Power and Belonging

This chapter is divided into three parts to engage issues of race, diaspora, and entanglement in Costa Rica. The webbed relationship between white Costa Ricans, West Indians, the UFCO, and the State, generated a troubling spectrum of mediascapes ranging between racist paranoia to a romantic imaginary of Africa. Sectioning this chapter into three parts is an effort to unravel the complexity of living in Costa Rica during the 1920s and 1930s. Whether one worked for the UFCO or as an independent farmer; embraced gendered notions of respectability or lingered on the periphery of unacceptable womanhood; found a home in Garveyism or the nationalist SEAP; class, color, and capitalist power impacted citizenship and belonging. In part I, I highlight the making of diasporic citizenship, with a focus on the role of womanhood in the reproduction of racial redemption. Part II looks at the discourses of African redemption employed in Garveyism. Moreover, *invention* of Africa and the making of new representations of the continent alongside counter-narratives of African history, informed the ideas of West Indians' ideas of belonging. Lastly, part III reveals that Costa Rican whiteness, based upon an identification with the white world, was also a colonized identity, forming a white double-consciousness in the nation.

I. Diasporic Citizenship and the Reproduction of Race

Referring to the UFCO as a colonizer and equating the Company's practices with that of William Walker, the North American who appointed himself president of Nicaragua and attempted to rule over Central America in 1855, nationalist organizations like the Liga Civica and the Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País (SEAP) helped to shape the discourses of anti-imperialism in the 1920s. Drawing from an atmosphere of anti-UFCO protest from the working class as well as the planter and land owning class of Costa Ricans, the SEAP articulated a national platform of anti-imperialism, one in which race was of central importance. The nation's loss of sovereignty over its terrains via the dominance of the UFCO was most visibly apparent in the labor immigration, residence, and purported *dominance* of tens of thousands of West Indians in Limón. In 1927, the president of the SEAP Joaquín García Monge critiqued the power of the UFCO by stating, "we must not omit to mention...the issues relative to the merely racial question of the immigration that this company principally stimulates: the black, who, it is known, has a greater predisposition to sickness such as tuberculosis, leprosy, syphilis and insanity, creating a higher mortality quotient among these elements than among white."²⁶⁹ While crafting diasporic citizenship by identifying as being a part of the white world, nationalist Costa Ricans viewed the West Indian population as a threat to this redemptive geography of whiteness. Seeking to overturn the alleged U.S. monopoly on whiteness and drawing from a mytho-history of homogenous Spanish ancestry, the making of Costa Rican national whiteness in the 1920s through the 1940s was formed in the ideology and imagery of racial purity.

For those who advocated white national citizenship, "black immigration [was] not appetizing," as the SEAP secretary Marco Aurelio Zumbado declared. It was "illogical," he argued that black immigration and integration be institutionalized in Costa Rica as "the black is only good for the Company as a beast of burden...[but] is deadly for the social order [since he is]

²⁶⁹ Chomsky, 213.

vicious [and] criminal in general (witness the delinquency in the Atlantic).”²⁷⁰ Pointing to Limón as proof of the inherent inferiority of blacks, Zumbado cited high rates of illness, prostitution, and violence. Claiming that “he mesticizes our race, which is already darkening” Zumbado and others claimed that West Indian men had a sexual appetite for white women.²⁷¹ The *Negro problem* was a national problem primarily because of the threat of interracial sex, which compromised Costa Rica’s white identity and citizenship in the white world. Costa Rica’s whiteness was already an unsettled and dynamic identity informed by various ideas of race and terrains of power.

Donald Moore’s analysis of what he calls “entanglement” in Kaerezi, a region of Zimbabwe, has implications for the spatial and temporal complexities of power within which identities and spaces of belonging are formed. He describes an entangled landscape in which

Kaerezians found themselves subject to both state legal and administrative dictates, as well as to Rekayi Tangwena, a nationalist chief who defied Ian Smith’s racial land and labor laws. State officials, a postcolonial chief, his headman, and a rainmaker all sought to influence resettlement. These competing practices of spatial discipline, sovereignty, and subjection all coexisted at the same time in a postcolonial place.²⁷²

Like Kaerezi, Limón was a site of entanglement. Spanish colonial legacies that peripheralized Limón and facilitated its underdevelopment and isolation interacted with British imperial structures that produced widespread outward migration in reaction to unemployment and disenfranchisement in the West Indies. Out of this entanglement, the UFCO, an enclave of black workers, and a monoculture of bananas emerged. The power of United Fruit as a multinational corporation in a circum-Caribbean region dominated by the geopolitical interests of the United States produced certain material conditions and informed patterns of development in Limón that benefited the Company and the exportation of bananas. But yet, the very nature of banana production, the vast exhaustion of soil, and the prevalence of disease among the crop, along with the actions and negotiations of workers and the Costa Rican government, meant that the company was never a fully omnipotent force. Central America and the circum-Caribbean region was, therefore, a space shaped by complexities of power and belonging. The various forces at play in Costa Rica’s entangled terrains of power, however, were not on equal footing. The transnational power of the United Fruit Company, along with U.S. geopolitics, often superceded the power of national governments.

For both Costa Rican citizens and West Indian residents, past and present empires, including U.S. coloniality, shaped the stakes of redemption. For Anne McClintock, the term “postcolonial” is an illusory concept that is

haunted by the very figure of linear development that it sets out to dismantle. Metaphorically, the term postcolonialism marks history as a series of stages along an epochal road from ‘the precolonial,’ to ‘the colonial,’ to ‘the postcolonial’—an unbidden, if disavowed, commitment to linear time and the idea of development...[produces] a recentering of global history around the single rubric of European time.²⁷³

In response to this linear conception, the idea of *coloniality* enables analyses of multiple and entangled locations of power, past and present. The concept of coloniality accounts for the economic, political, cultural, linguistic, existential, and religious matrices of empire. Encompassing various temporalities, coloniality highlights the dynamics between the *longue*

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 222.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Moore, 3.

²⁷³ McClintock, 10-11.

duree, or long history of modern imperialism, and contemporary manifestations and permutations of empire. Since military intervention and occupation, the economic colonialism of multinational corporations and global banks, and the rhetoric of democracy have formed new imperial relations, the post-colonial era has, arguably, never existed.

Aníbal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, Walter Dignolo, and others conceptualize the *coloniality of power* whereby capital and labor, sex and family, the nation-state, and knowledge production are all articulated through and continue to be reproduced by the construction of race and the characterization of racial difference.²⁷⁴ While two sides of the same coin, as colonization enabled the modernization and development of Europe, coloniality is the hidden side of modernity. “Occidentalism,” Mignolo posits, is the “visible face in the building of the modern world, whereas subaltern knowledges are its darker side, the colonial side of modernity.”²⁷⁵ Modernity/coloniality, as a mutually constitutive process, functions through a hierarchy wherein *white* and European cultural, political, economic, and epistemological frameworks and practices were dominant over the non-white and non-European. Claiming the power to name, assign, and classify, the ego-politics of European ontology negated both the sovereignty and humanity of non-Europeans. Coloniality governs its borders by marking what Mignolo calls the “colonial difference,” which “transform[s] differences into values,”²⁷⁶ classifying the world according to a hierarchy based on a European norm.

“European imperialism was, from the outset,” McClintock argues, “a violent encounter with preexisting hierarchies of power that took shape not as the unfolding of its own inner destiny but as untidy, opportunistic interference with other regimes of power.”²⁷⁷ The *entangled colonialities* present in Limón were formed in the interplay of power relations both internal and external to the Costa Rican nation-state. While Costa Rican whiteness internally peripheralized Limón as geographically and racially outside of the nation, Costa Rican workers were at the bottom of the division of labor in the UFCO enclave, disadvantaged by the dominance of the English language, amongst other Anglo-based cultural traits shared by West Indians and the American bosses. West Indians brought with them experiences of empire and a history of exclusion and exploitation in a post-emancipation society, and Garveyism offered an apparatus and philosophy to internally govern the West Indian community. The Costa Rican workers who migrated to Limón for jobs had their own historical memory, rooted in experiences of poverty and a coffee industry that enriched large landowners. Multiple regimes of power and varying colonial histories, then, collided in Limón.

As a “social product,” space is “political and ideological” and “the interrelationships forged within space are, accordingly, politically or ideologically laden.”²⁷⁸ In *The Hood Comes First*, Murray Forman sees participants in hip hop culture as “[demonstrating] unique capacities to construct different spaces and, simultaneously, to construct spaces differently.”²⁷⁹ Costa Rican citizens and West Indians residents participated in shaping their own worlds, and the making of redemptive geographies was an attempt to form counter spaces. Subordinated by systems of governance and exploitation that racialized Central America and the Caribbean as

²⁷⁴ See Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity;” Enrique Dussel, *Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of “the other” and the Myth of Modernity* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

²⁷⁵ Mignolo, 20.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁷⁸ Murray Forman, *The ‘Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place and Hip-Hop* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 4.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

non-white spaces, both crafted racial counter-identities. These racial identities drew from diasporic spaces, as Costa Ricans claimed belonging to a white world and West Indians to a black one. Enlisting particular imaginings of the European and African diasporas, respectively, Costa Ricans and West Indians sought to redeem their identities from dominant ideas of race and power that hindered their sovereignty. The making of redemptive geographies of race, therefore, was shaped in a transnational field in which counter-representations of whiteness and blackness were articulated through diaspora. According to Henri Lefebvre, representational spaces “are sites of resistance, and of counter-discourses which have not been grasped by apparatuses of power.”²⁸⁰

In Costa Rica in the first half of the twentieth century, racial identity was defined at the intersections of nation and diaspora. For both Costa Rican citizens and the persons of West Indian origin who were claiming spaces of belonging within Costa Rica, redemptive racial identities were formed within larger diasporic spaces. Diasporic citizenship can be thought of as a racial passport that marks belonging to a redemptive geography. The cultures of redemption and respectability formed in Costa Rica were shaped in circulation and interaction with racial representations from other sites within the diasporas. Drawing from Garveyite mediascapes, West Indians crafted black redemptive identities in conversation with blacks in other parts of the African diaspora. Denied the rights of citizenship in Costa Rica, diasporic citizenship within redemptive geographies gave West Indians a sense of belonging as well as a means through which to prove their modernity and suitability for participation in modern citizenship.

West Indians experienced race and crafted racial identities within multiple diasporas. The West Indian diaspora formed an outward migration from the West Indies that was shaped by the larger African Diaspora in the Americas. Legacies of slavery and disenfranchisement informed the ways West Indians conceptualized issues of discrimination, inequality, and marginalization in Costa Rica. Without the rights of citizenship, blacks were nationless there. As black British colonial subjects in the segregated UFCO enclave, confronting Costa Rican claims of black inferiority, West Indians developed new relations to Africa and the African Diaspora. The UNIA’s push for the development of black capitalism, industry, and ultimately nation and empire appealed to the desires of West Indians in diaspora, who longed for the privileges and protection of modern citizenship. Redemptive blackness, crafted through re-defining and re-imagining Africa in the articulation of black modernity, was deployed by West Indians to counter the anti-black racism which underscored Costa Rican nationalism at this time.

For Costa Rican citizens who identified as white, diasporic citizenship was a means through which to claim belonging to the white world. While whiteness was understood to be the key to progress and modernization in narratives of Costa Rican exceptionalism, dominant notions of whiteness did not recognize Costa Rica as the white nation that it fashioned itself to be. Costa Ricans measured their own whiteness by claiming Spanish heritage, the very thing that they believed set the nation apart from the mixed and non-white masses of Central America. Completely obscuring the existence of indigenous people, Costa Rican whiteness was depicted as racially pure and of European descent. Costa Ricans, therefore, saw themselves as a part of a European diaspora in Latin America. Furthermore, Costa Ricans drew from the identity of the colonial *criollo*, the Latin American-born, Spanish-descended caste, who after independence appointed themselves the holders of power and true citizenship in the new nations.

By charting the terrains of diaspora and regulating the borders of diasporic citizenship, both West Indians and Costa Ricans attempted to craft redemptive racial identities. Black and

²⁸⁰ Tyner, 64.

white redemption in Costa Rica was entangled not only in terms of space and power, but in epistemology and practice as well, and both employed a similar logic that sought to discipline, purify, and improve the respective race. Investing in the ideology of race, if only to turn it on its head, both articulations of race placed a premium on redemptive motherhood. Since redemptive geographies depended on the reproduction of redemptive children, women's bodies and sexuality were key sites in the making of contesting racial identities. The value of women in projects of redemption depended on their suitability for motherhood and raising future citizens. Motherhood defined the borders of belonging to both the Costa Rican nation and the transnational spaces of racial belonging.

The Meanings of Diaspora in Costa Rica

It is important to read the making of race and identity in Costa Rica within a transnational frame of analysis. As stated above, U.S. coloniality as well as the colonial legacies in Central America and the British West Indies shaped the meanings and contestation of race and belonging. I analyze Costa Rica within a field of multiple diasporas in order to highlight the complexity of space, power, and history, as well as the cultural politics of circulation and movement. The imagery of lynching, the brutal murder, maiming, burning, and hanging of blacks, most often black males, marked the racial "relationship of power to helplessness, citizen to outsider, privilege to oppression, subjecthood to objecthood, and community to outcast" in the United States.²⁸¹ As U.S. power formed a transnational sphere of influence, these images of U.S. brutality circulated globally. West Indians and Costa Ricans were acutely aware of the prevalence of lynching, which Costa Rican Spanish language newspapers referred to as "linchamiento."²⁸² U.S. whiteness subordinated other white identities in the Americas. In fact, Latin Americans in the U.S. were as vulnerable to violence as black Americans, according to one news story about the lynching of a Latin American man.²⁸³ In the Western Hemisphere, the dominance of the United States, therefore, informed the stakes of racial representation and the meanings of sovereignty and the rights of citizenship.

In *The Geography of Malcolm X*, James Tyner argues that the idea of belonging is a spatial matter; "To belong is to be *some place*."²⁸⁴ For West Indians in Limón, the issue of placelessness was the foremost problem that shaped the politics of representation and redemption. Indeed, the conditions of placelessness shaped black identity as "alienation by and from states is constitutive of the shared history of black citizenship, [and] of blackness as a sociopolitical category in the New World."²⁸⁵ As an alternative space of belonging where blacks could claim citizenship, the African Diaspora was a location within which blacks could construct new relations to power and new representations of themselves.

Theorizing what she calls "diasporic whiteness" in South Africa, Melissa Steyn understands diaspora as consisting of "those who are dislocated from their own centers of identification." Costa Ricans located the origins of their whiteness and modern culture in Europe, specifically Spain. In Steyn's analysis, diaspora is peopled by those who have identities

²⁸¹ Apel, 7.

²⁸² *Trabajo*, 3 December 1932.

²⁸³ *La Prensa*, 11 January 1922.

²⁸⁴ Tyner, 5.

²⁸⁵ Robert Carr, *Black Nationalism in the New World: Reading the African-American and West Indian Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 14.

“grounded in founding narratives that originate away from the context in which their lives are lived out, but who have enduring ethnic identities, real or ascribed, that link them to those contexts.”²⁸⁶ The founding narratives of Costa Rican exceptionalism were rooted in Spain, and although Spain was a previous colonizing power of the region, Costa Rican national heritage was understood to be derived from an enduring white, racially and culturally homogenous Spanish ancestry. But being part of a white diaspora in the Global South, Costa Ricans were both privileged and marginalized. As Steyn notes, “those who have a leg in two different continents can be privileged in one context, and marginalized in another.”²⁸⁷ While Costa Ricans who were recognized as white enjoyed the privileges of citizenship and participation in the nation, they were marginalized in their interactions with and employment by the UFCO, which made Costa Rican workers not only subordinate to white U.S. bosses, but also to black West Indian supervisors.

DuBois’ concept of “double-consciousness” can therefore be applied to the case of both diasporas in Costa Rica. As Percy Hintzen suggests, “there is another side to DuBois’ double consciousness.” It is for Hintzen, “a striving to attain ‘self-consciousness’ in a world that is not of one’s own creation and that is produced out of the racialized imagination of whites.”²⁸⁸ For Costa Rica of the early to mid twentieth century, the hegemonic white imaginary was produced by U.S. coloniality. Costa Rica’s position in the western hemisphere was subordinated by the power and interests of the U.S., which racialized Latin America as a non-white space, and therefore a region to be conquered, controlled, and exploited. Both Costa Ricans and West Indians were racialized in new ways by UFCO’s power, and experienced a crisis of identity as the way they saw themselves and the way they were viewed by the white world produced discrepancies that had lived and material consequences.

For both these efforts to critique dominant ideas of whiteness and blackness, the newspaper was a platform for the contestation and making of race within Costa Rica and also a transnational force in forming the contours of racial citizenship. Reprinting news, and engaging with other parts of the black and white diasporas, Costa Ricans and West Indians both claimed belonging in a space that was larger than the small nation of Costa Rica and beyond the limits of Central America and the Caribbean. The newspaper was a space of contestation where West Indians and Costa Ricans appropriated, adapted, and translated racial identities. Brent Hayes Edwards’ conceptualization of the “practice of diaspora” offers a useful frame through which to analyze this exchange. Citing the proliferation of what he calls internationalism in the years between WWI and WWII, Edwards conceptualizes diaspora as “a term that marks the ways that internationalism is pursued by translation.” Linking a dispersed people across various histories, experiences, languages, and places, translation happens in the gaps and discrepancies, in the *practice* of diaspora, through the exchange and circulation of ideas, images, identities, and philosophies.²⁸⁹ Edwards reveals that the Harlem Renaissance was shaped as much by black American experiences in Paris and exchanges with Africans and West Indians there as it was by

²⁸⁶ Melissa Steyn, “‘White Talk’: White South Africans and the Management of Diasporic Whiteness” in *Postcolonial Whiteness: A Critical Reader on Race and Empire*, ed. Alfred J. López (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 124-125.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Percy Hintzen, “Whiteness, Desire, Sexuality, and the Production of Black Subjectivities in British Guiana, Barbados, and the United States” in *Problematizing Blackness: Self Ethnographies by Black Immigrants to the United States*, eds. Percy Claude Hintzen and Jean Muteba Rahier (New York: Routledge, 2003), 146.

²⁸⁹ Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003), 11-15.

the political and cultural climate of New York and the United States at large. Edwards surmises, “it is as though certain moves, certain arguments and epiphanies, can only be staged beyond the confines of the United States, and even sometimes in languages other than English.”²⁹⁰ Similarly for Alastair Bonnett, who investigates white identities in the Global South, “whiteness was actively interpreted and translated” to the cultural and political atmosphere of Latin America. The limitations of Latin American whiteness were informed by “power relations within the newly independent countries of Latin America as well as between Latin America and Europe (and North America).”²⁹¹

The *truth* of race as an organizing unit in the classification of peoples and nations, however, was not lost in translation. Diasporic citizenship was a critique of dominant ideas of blackness and whiteness, but left in tact the overarching logic of race. While making racial identities, both West Indians and Costa Ricans subscribed to an ideal of racial purity. Diasporic citizenship was then defined by racial belonging within a logic wherein the strength, development, and the future of a people were based upon the people’s capability to reproduce it purist and most redemptive elements.

Redemptive Motherhood and Racial Purity

The UNIA perceived its struggle against marginalization and powerlessness as the struggle against the feminization of the race and the making of a black nation and empire as an affirmation of black manhood. The vulnerability of both black men and women to the whim—sexual or otherwise—of whites produced a crisis of gender roles that black redemption attempted to eradicate. Black men had little control over their families during slavery and post-emancipation rendered them unable to protect their wives from sexual violation or other forms of exploitation. As control and protection over wife and family defines manhood in heteropatriarchies, black men were denied the rights of manhood, and the masculinist desire to reclaim it was reflected in Garveyism. Garveyism offered a competing narrative that satisfied longings for manhood, womanhood, and *normative* black families in the face of discourses of black deviance. For black men, “mytho-history” of the Americas “are portrayed as eternally dependent children: little Black Sambos, Black studs...or as castrated Uncle Toms,”²⁹² the struggle for black independence was the struggle for manhood. For Paulette Pierce and Brackette Williams “the capture, rape, and degradation of Black women [during slavery] constitute the central metaphors for the enslavement and for the continued exploitation of the Black race by the White man.”²⁹³ That “subordinated races were...subject to racial death brought on by a suicidal venture in improper agency—effeminate men and mannish women,”²⁹⁴ made gender division and hierarchy intrinsic to black redemption.

As Kopano Ratele argues in his study of South Africa, “the struggle for [the country] was...masculinized [as] [t]he national struggle was cast primarily as a race struggle between

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 5.

²⁹¹ Alastair Bonnett, “A White World? Whiteness and the Meaning of Modernity in Latin America and Japan” in *Working Through Whiteness: International Perspectives*, ed. Cynthia Levine-Rasky (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 72.

²⁹² Paulette Pierce and Brackette F. Williams, “‘And You Prayers Shall Be Answered Through the Womb of a Woman’: Insurgent Masculine Redemption and the Nation of Islam” in *Women Out of Place: The Gender of Agency and the Race of Nationality*, ed. Brackette F. Williams (New York: Routledge, 1996), 194.

²⁹³ Ibid, 199.

²⁹⁴ Brackette F. Williams, “Introduction: Mannish Women and Gender After the Act” in Ibid.,19.

black and white *men*...[and] apartheid and antiapartheid became phallocratic contests with women being the stakes.”²⁹⁵ Women were the central stakes in the making of redemptive geographies and motherhood was understood to be the aim of women’s bodies and sexuality. Feldstein interrogates the relationship between motherhood and citizenship, revealing that “representations of women as mothers developed in conjunction with debates about who was a healthy citizen and what was a healthy democracy.” She identifies “maternal ideologies” as governed by the logic that “women who failed as mothers were objects of concern because they raised *men* who...failed to meet the criteria of healthy citizenship.” As maternal ideologies helped to define the contours of normality, they can serve as a “lens through which to view gendered and racial conceptions of citizenship.”²⁹⁶ The sexuality of women was both at stake in and the vehicle of racial redemption, and the home was the site racial reproduction. *Searchlight* contributor Cyrilo referred to the home as “the nucleus, not only of civilized society but also of all well-ordered governments,”²⁹⁷ and the home was conceptualized as the woman’s sphere of influence. Since redemptive motherhood produced redemptive citizens and nations, women as mothers shouldered the burden of birthing a diasporic race.

Ideas of citizenship, modernity, civilization, and normality were mediated and defined through notions of race and culture. The fear of black sexuality and anxiety about sexual relations between white women and black men shaped the discourses of anti-black racism in Costa Rica. The reproduction of a British article “There are in reality 11 million more women than men of the white race”²⁹⁸ in a Costa Rican newspaper, reveals not only that Costa Ricans were preoccupied with maintaining white womanhood and discouraging miscegenation, but that Costa Ricans identified with being part of the white world. Global trends confirmed what Costa Ricans feared locally, that white women were especially vulnerable to the lure of miscegenation. The threat of black male sexuality shaped the ideological contours of the white world in the Americas, from the U.S. practice of lynching to Costa Rica’s attempts to legally restrict black integration and movement into the nation from Limón.

In the 1930s, two representations of black motherhood were hegemonic. The “desexualized hypermaternalism” of Delilah in *Imitation of Life* (1934) and Mammy in *Gone With the Wind* (1939) and the “hypersexualized” promiscuous black mother were reified by policy and academic research on black families during this time. Sociologist E. Franklin Frazier’s 1939 study *The Negro Family in the United States* drew links between migration (from the South to Northern cities) and the problems of black motherhood. In Frazier’s estimation, bad black mothering was the root of blacks’ societal problems, as “it was the black women who perpetuated female dominance and promiscuity, masculine weakness and, through the production of disorganized families, ongoing racial inequalities.”²⁹⁹ Garveyites echoed this belief that “black women’s bodies and behavior required regulation for race relations to improve.”³⁰⁰

In her “Message for the Negro Women of the World,” the Lady President of the Philadelphia Division of the UNIA declared that “the redemption of Africa depends on the

²⁹⁵ Kopano Retele, “Kinky Politics” in *Re-thinking Sexualities in Africa*, ed. Signe Arnfred (Uppsala, Sweden: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2004), 149.

²⁹⁶ Ruth Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White: Race and Sex in American Liberalism, 1930-1965* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 1-5.

²⁹⁷ *Limón Searchlight*, 7 February 1931.

²⁹⁸ *La Prensa*, 20 January 1922.

²⁹⁹ Feldstein, 18-27.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

motherhood of black women.”³⁰¹ Seeking to replace an affinity and longing for whiteness with a heralding of blackness, Garveyism relied on the redemptive motherhood of black women. Redemptive black mothers were role models for redemptive culture, taught children to value and love their race and history, replaced white images with black ones in the home, and will therefore produced the redemptive children of the race who lead their people toward racial progress. *Recovering* a black self required teaching children race pride, and mothers were understood to be the teachers of redemptive diasporic culture.



Fig. 3.1 Negro Dolls. 21 October 1922. Personal Photograph by Asia Leeds. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. *Negro World*. 7 September 2008.

A *Negro World* article reproduced from the *Florida Sentinel* claimed that the central problem of the black race was that the Negro “thinks white.” “He reads from a white book, [and] worships a God who is pictured to him as white,” the article explained. Since “he puts his money in a white bank [and] his employers are white... [the black man] thinks that to escape [oppression], he, too, must be white.”³⁰² For Fanon, the oppression of white ontology made only one path available to those who invested in its truth: “for the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white.”³⁰³

For Garveyites, redemptive black womanhood had positive effects on both female and male children. An article in the *Our Women and What They Think* section of the *Negro World* chided the fact that black women “talk race purity, and yet, by the white pictures on [their] walls, by the many calendars in [their] home with white faces on them, [they] are teaching [their] children to honor and idolize the other race.” Idolizing the white race, in their estimation, will lead to miscegenation. For the article’s author, allowing black girls to play with white dolls teaches them to “love and honor white babies.” “When these girls grow into womanhood naturally they will believe it more honorable to be the mothers of white babies than black babies,” she claimed.³⁰⁴ Since the making of counter-spaces required the making of new images of the self, Garveyites gave much focus to the making of black images where white ones served as the norm. Toys were not simply diversions for children, they were centrally important in image-making. The emancipation of the black race was reliant on the children’s cognition of race since “by the white tin soldiers in the hands of your little boys you are teaching them to be serfs and slaves for the other race.”³⁰⁵

³⁰¹ *Negro World*, 4 February 1922.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 6 December 1924.

³⁰³ Fanon, 10.

³⁰⁴ *Negro World* 4 February 1922.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

Noting that “the hand that rocks the cradle still rules the world,”³⁰⁶ Garveyite women in New York, Kingston, and Port Limón believed that motherhood was the single most important factor in shaping the destiny and redemption of the race. Since childhood is the time when “all habits are formed” and “instincts are made,”³⁰⁷ according to one writer, redemptive black motherhood was responsible for producing the diasporic citizen. Proclaiming that “it is the babies in the cradle who will be the true Garveyites of tomorrow,”³⁰⁸ Garveyite women appointed themselves as the guarantors of the future of black redemption.

Garveyite mothers who wrote articles for the *Negro World* instructed the female readership on their role as teachers of redemptive diasporic culture. One article listed a number of instructions for black mothers, urging them to “teach practical and constructive race doctrine to the children” and to teach children to “love their race first.” An article entitled, “The Obligations of Motherhood” encouraged black mothers to spend the “evenings reading to [their] child about Frederick Douglas, Toussaint L’Overture, or Phyllis Wheatley,” affirming black achievement and diasporic citizenship.³⁰⁹ “To [the Negro woman] has come the privilege of carving the destiny of a race handicapped and persecuted for generations,” the author wrote, and “it is for her to bless or curse the future generations by her conduct.”³¹⁰

For the members of the Young Women’s Standard Club (YWSC) in Limón, a UNIA spinoff organization, young *race women* who participated in the uplift movement were to be trained for redemptive motherhood. The “aim for lofty ideas,” “clean lives, [and]...noble thoughts” was preparation for one ultimate goal, that they will become “credible mothers of an ambitious generation.”³¹¹ “Baby imitates Mother” women should therefore practice “gentleness and refinement.”³¹² If black women are “mean and dirty” so to will be their children, posited Matilda Ingleton of Tela, Honduras in agreement. In her list of the “essential qualities” of black women, she notes that Negro mothers should “give an equal amount of education to our girls as well as our boys, because the women make the nation.”

Redemptive black motherhood produced black modernity “Modernize yourself along with your children,” the *Negro World* urged black mothers.³¹³ The relationship between modernity and motherhood was a crucial one. “If we wish to compete with other races, physically, economically, and intellectually,” another instructive article explained, “we must stop, look, listen, and see to it that we no longer bring forth children who are physically, mentally, and morally defective and unfit for life’s struggle.”³¹⁴ Through regeneration, reproduction, and the raising of new generations of Garveyites, blacks would attain a modernity that would put them “on par with the other races of the world.” Attaining *normality* in home and family life would, therefore, “produce...a progressive race which will be able to demand that respect due to all races and peoples.”³¹⁵

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 23 May 1925.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 4 February 1922.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 19 April 1924

³¹⁰ Ibid., 29 April 1924.

³¹¹ *Limón Searchlight*, 6 June 1931.

³¹² *Negro World*, 29 April 1924.

³¹³ Ibid., 18 April 1925.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 29 April 1924.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 2 August 1924.



Fig. 3.2 Distinguida amiga ausente. 8 May 1937. Personal photograph by Asia Leeds. Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica. *Voz del Atlántico*. 22 November 2008.

Fig. 3.3 Regreso De Una Dama. 11 June 1938. Personal photograph by Asia Leeds. Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica. *Voz del Atlántico*. 3 December 2008.



The relationship between motherhood and racial improvement was key for Costa Rican redemption as well. Imagining the nation white and a part of the European diaspora in so much as Costa Rican women reproduced whiteness, redemptive whiteness held motherhood and family as redemptive insofar as they produced racially pure white offspring. The vulnerability of white women to succumb to *Africanization* via sexual or cultural integration required a visual and discursive campaign that heralded white mothers and babies. An article entitled, “A black and white baby,” underscored the possibilities. A woman gave birth to a “baby of two colors” the bottom half of the child was black and “the rest of the body white.” The baby’s mother was a “native of Escazú,” in the Central Valley and the father was “of Jamaican origin.”³¹⁶ The report was unconfirmed, as noted in the short article, but the implications of the news story were clear.

Pure white babies represented vitality and health for those Costa Ricans who equated racial purity with progress. The description of a Costa Rican baby who photograph appeared in *La Prensa* lauded his “pure blue” eyes, the same color as “the heavens,” and his skin, like the “whiteness of marble.” He was an example of “immaculate purity.” This obsession with purity and hygiene was reflected in the advertising culture of the white world, and white babies played a prominent role in this mediascape. “The babies of today are the foundation of the race or people,”³¹⁷ one ad for baby formula read. Another, advertising Glaxo milk formula proclaimed itself “the most pure and rich, [and] free of infection.” Glaxo promised to “Grow Beautiful Robust babies,”³¹⁸ the type that Costa Ricans hoped would produce a redemptive, pure future. White babies, therefore, were the symbol of strength, growth, and progress of the nation.

³¹⁶ *La Prensa*, 27 October 1921.

³¹⁷ *La Nueva Prensa*, 20 January 1931

³¹⁸ *La Prensa*, 2 May 1924.



Fig. 3.4 Glaxo Cria Niños Robustos Hermosos. 2 May 1924.

Personal photograph by Asia Leeds. Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica. *La Prensa*. 7 November 2008.

Fieldstein notes that in white mediascapes “images of bad white mothers mushroomed in advice manual, scholarly treatises, films, and cartoons in part because they could explain virtually all that was wrong with the country—and white men.”³¹⁹ Similarly in Costa Rican newspapers in the Central Valley and Limón, articles instructed Costa Rican women on how to be redemptive white mothers. Since Limón was under foreign occupation, by both the UFCO and West Indians, the importation of white national culture via white families would bring Limón into the nation. Costa Rican workers who migrated from other provinces to the UFCO banana enclave penetrated a frontier within the nation. The idea that “modern civilization developed through the cultivation of marriage,” served as the cornerstone of white modernity and normality. Normal citizens were defined as “whites who used their respectably reproductive sexuality for the betterment of race and nation.” Carter examines the role of the “frontier couple” in expanding the borders of the racial state. The white family would bring “wilderness under cultivation” in the “extension of white racial dominance.” As “the frontier represented the geographical limit of white rule,”³²⁰ Limón represented the limits of white nationhood.

An article entitled “The Education of the Rural Woman” advised women of agricultural working class families on balancing the duties of agriculture and of domestic order. Like the Garveyite news media, the article argued that the role of the mother was to raise children in the proper way and to honor the “purity and light” of children. Since children model their behavior after their mothers, in this logic, the article puts a spotlight on the purported ignorance of rural women.

What does [the rural woman] know about the nourishment and care of children, of dressing, bathing, of the cradle, of [a child’s] teeth? What does she know about hygiene in general? She ignores it all!

The article proposed the development of a national program or lesson to teach rural women how to raise healthy children, in addition to the opening of “agricultural schools for women.” The culturally backwards, not quite white, agricultural workers of the nation must be trained—via its women—to be white citizens. Since agriculture was the “base and sustenance” of nations, and so the education of the rural agricultural women was critical to the stability of the nation. With the proper education, this rural woman could lead the nation towards prosperity. Training the rural woman meant training the frontier family for the civilizing mission of whitening and nationalizing Limón.

Both ideologies of redemptive motherhood held racial purity as the key to crafting diasporic identities that critique dominant ideas of blackness and whiteness. Garveyite women

³¹⁹ Feldstein, 42.

³²⁰ Carter, 82.

wrote of interracial sex with disgust. “Miscegenation a Disgrace,” read one title. “Miscegenation destroys race pride” and “produces weak offsprings [sic],” the author reasoned. Equating racial strength with purity, the article posited that “if we allow these conditions to exist, a weak-kneed progeny shall arise, who shall care nothing for their ancestors.” “If we correct the abuses of the race,” alluding to interracial sex, it continued, “we shall see within a short while what a pure, healthy, unified race can accomplish.” Claiming that the “evolution” was the result of racial purity, the author urged blacks to “be proud of those characteristics which make [them] a separate and distinct type” since “pride of race...alone is the safeguard to race purity.”³²¹ Racial purity via redemptive black motherhood regulated the sexuality of black women, deeming their sexuality respectable and redemptive only through the mediation of black male sexuality. In this formulation, the black woman was in a “double-bind; she can remain free as the White man’s whore or she can become the Black man’s property.”³²²

Through the language of Garveyism, West Indians believed that race pride was a way to ease the concerns of Costa Ricans who feared the mongrelization of the nation via sexual relations between West Indian men and white Costa Rican women. With a direct response to the issue of miscegenation that racist nationalist proposals like black sterilization sought to control, Pettigrave, who would become the President of the Limón Moín Junction UNIA division, proclaimed that “the Negro as a race in Costa Rica has no intention to interpose in the other race groups” as the “cultures do not blend.” “As a fact,” he added, “the Negro is at his best when yoked up with one of his own.”³²³ Another writer spoke directly to the persistent fear of miscegenation, arguing ten years later that Central Valley Costa Ricans should not fear the making of a “hybrid race” since West Indians keep to their own race.³²⁴ White and black redemptive geographies were not only entangled, but were complimentary. Garveyite West Indians highlighted redemptive black modern identity as complimentary to, rather than a threat to, white Costa Rican nationalism. The logic of redemption, however, would motivate West Indians to fight for equal citizenship rights in Costa Rica. This *was* a challenge to dominant narratives and terrains of Costa Rican nationhood.

II. The Invention of Africa and the Discourses of African Redemption

“In these Latin countries,” a member of the West Indian community wrote in an op-ed for the *Searchlight*, “there is a tendency...to feel that because one is a Jamaican he is inferior.”³²⁵ West Indian residents were represented in the Costa Rican media as dangerous, savage, and inherently inferior. Congress enacted laws that sought to restrict black movement within the nation, black naturalization, and the overall integration of black residents into the national body.³²⁶ Through English language newspapers, West Indians contested negative images of blackness. The first step in the forging of diasporic and black counter-identities was to redefine Africa for the project of redemption, in attempts to rescue the continent from characterizations of premodernity and the primitiveness that fixed people of African descent at the bottom of local and global hierarchies of power.

³²¹ *Negro World*, 23 May 1925.

³²² Pierce and Williams, 201.

³²³ *Limón Searchlight*, 23 August 1930.

³²⁴ *Voz del Atlántico*, 9 March 1940.

³²⁵ *Limón Searchlight*, 4 January 1930.

³²⁶ I discuss these laws in more detail in the following section of this chapter.

A West Indian named Adrian Wynter sent letters to the *Searchlight* from his new home in the Gold Coast, present-day Ghana. Wynter, a former employee of the UFCO, had moved to West African to work for a West Indian family of merchants. He described “the natives” as “highly learned [as] some are Doctors, Lawyers and expert accountants possessing wealth.”³²⁷ This image was certainly different from dominant representations of African *backwardness*. Referring to Africa as a country rather than a continent and taking his experiences in the Gold Coast as representative of Africa at large, Wynter described Africans as a “people decidedly Eastern in outlook, [for] whom decades of Christianity cannot persuade from reverting, at times, to fetichism [sic].” Africa, then, was a site of both primitiveness and redemption. While some Africans wore European styles of dress, and other chose what he called “native costume,” Wynter pointed out that some “prefer [a] continual sun-bath.” The naked African, the African doctor, the “highly learned” African, and the African who practiced “fetishism” were all apart of the social landscape, offering a complex image of what constituted the African. The contestation of what it meant to be African and of African descent was at the center of black redemption.

Wynter posited, like Garvey, that “if the African would only be sensible to discard all tribal differences, and adopt one common policy, the future of the Negro would be more assuring.”³²⁸ For the Garvey movement Africa represented a space of liberation, most significantly through repatriation to the continent, although, unlike Wynter, neither he nor the vast majority of Garveyites would make this move. Garveyism defined black peoplehood as rooted in Africa. Remembering a glorious past, Garvey hoped to lead the movement that would take Africa back to “that ancient place, that ancient position that [blacks] once occupied, when Ethiopia was in her glory.”³²⁹ This is an example of what Ali Mazrui calls “romantic gloriana,” a “tribute to Africa’s empires and kingdoms, Africa’s inventors and discoverers, [and] great Shaka Zulu rather than the unknown peasant.”³³⁰ Examining the “invention of Africa” by scholars of African descent, Mudimbe highlights the “mobilizing myths” that shape the idea of a black personality and the “hypothesis of African unity.” Focusing on the epistemological entanglement of this scholarship, Mudimbe argues that

the affirmation and promotion of African philosophy meant a claim to an original alterity.

Their argument, in its demonstration, runs parallel to primitivist theories on African backwardness and savagery.³³¹

For Africanist scholars hoping to overturn colonization’s foundational premises, “the classical theme ‘all that is European is civilized; all that is African is barbarous’ was substituted ‘all that is African is civilized and beautiful,’” affirming a “Western methodological grid.”³³² The politics of placelessness and powerlessness made blacks seek recognition in a world that sought to deny their humanity.

Anthony Bogue refers to Garveyism as a part of the prophetic stream within black thought, in that it broke with “monochronic time frames and developed conceptions and historical narratives that collapse past and present.”³³³ Re-narrating the history of Africa was a

³²⁷ *Voz del Atlántico*, 2 October 1937.

³²⁸ *Voz del Atlántico*, 8 January 1938.

³²⁹ Garvey, 82.

³³⁰ Ali A. Mazrui, “Pan-Africanism: From Poetry to Power” in *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, Vol. 23, No. 1, African Studies (Winter - Spring, 1995), 35.

³³¹ Mudimbe, 151.

³³² *Ibid.*, 79.

³³³ Anthony Bogue, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 179.

means to counter its representation as the antithesis of civilization, a depiction that disadvantaged members of the African diaspora. As a dispersed people marginalized in the countries in which they found themselves, a homeland and a sense of belonging, represented a critique of white supremacy and a strategy of survival. While a number of enslaved and post-emancipation blacks in diaspora viewed the kingdom of heaven as their homeland in the next life, Garvey conceptualized liberation from subordination and the making of a black kingdom as necessarily attainable in the here and now. Garveyism sought to address the displacement and dehumanization of *ex-slaves* by discrediting dominant images of Africa. As “a ‘problem-space’...is meant first of all to demarcate a discursive context, a context of language,” it produces a “context of argument and, therefore, one of *intervention*.” Defining blackness as modern and civilized, and crafting redemptive geographies based on a black diaspora required intervention in narratives of black inferiority.

The central significance of African representation and redemption inspired West Indians in Limón to write a great deal about the continent. A number of poems published in the *Searchlight* romanticized the continent in ways that reveal West Indians’ preoccupation with their lack of citizenship in Costa Rica. One poet described “Afric’s sunny fount of old[.]...where rolls the precious nuggs of gold.”³³⁴ In an atmosphere of economic instability and a declining of the banana industry, the idea of a fertile, abundant, and wealthy African homeland captured the dreams of West Indians struggling in Limón. Another poet wrote of the Africa of “centuries past,” when the continent was “famed for her grand civilization, when black race power was formidable at home, when oneness of purpose was the goal of Africans.”³³⁵ The power, purpose, and civilization of Africa past made blacks respected and revered in a previous era. The contemporaneous reality of colonization and exploitation on the African continent, however, left Africa and its diaspora in a position of subordination and vulnerability.

The Making of Black Solidarity

As *ex-slaves*, West Indians in Limón deployed the tropes of slavery and emancipation in conceptualizing their subordinate position within the Costa Rican nation and the privileges of modern citizenship at large. Freedom continued to be outside of the grasp of blacks as they lived, in the words of a *Searchlight* article, “under the tutelage and dictatorship of the different races dominating [them].”³³⁶ In the *Negro World*, Garvey spelled out the stakes of emancipation for the descendents of slaves in the Americas:

We are organizing because we no longer desire to be the political and commercial slaves of other races. We do not want tolerance and protection. We desire racial liberty and freedom.³³⁷

Conceptualizing liberty from the perspective of the slave, Garvey remarked, “for hundreds of years we have depended on others to do for us, and they have made us but their slaves, and slaves we shall ever be until we start out to build upon our own foundation economically and politically.”³³⁸ Transnational racial solidarity, Garvey proposed, was the only means through which blacks would harness the strength to redeem Africa through industrial development and nation-making.

³³⁴ Limón *Searchlight*, 28 February 1931.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 7 February 1931.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

³³⁷ *Negro World*, 15 August 1925

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 3 June 1922

“The U.N.I.A. is endeavoring to draw into one united whole the four hundred million Negroes of the world,” Garvey proclaimed.³³⁹ The UNIA “takes in all Negroes everywhere. You cannot be too rich or too poor to belong to the UNIA.”³⁴⁰ In fact, migration to Costa Rica and its color line politics racialized West Indians in new ways, unifying a variety of persons within the category of black. This included *brown* Jamaicans and persons *of color* who may not have been considered black in the West Indies. “It is a fact that some men do not like to consider themselves coloured, but the fact remains that they are,” charged one *Searchlight* contributor.³⁴¹ Frequent contributor Philomela, who advised young West Indian women on racial uplift warned, “Young ladies of the clearer dye, do not think that you are exempt from these articles.” Garveyites in Limón appealed to West Indians of all color, warning the lighter among them that in Costa Rica, the distinctions of class and skin tone were obsolete.

In an interview in the *Limón Searchlight*, the interviewer asked “do you think Limón very prejudiced as regards color?” The response of the interviewer is telling of the ways that culture and language informed the making of race in Limón. “Yes,” he answered, color prejudice operated in such a way that “a white West Indian is black and a black Columbian is white.”³⁴² The making of race in Costa Rica was informed by cultural and linguistic borders that placed West Indians of varying skin colors within the category of black and foreign. Caribbean blackness was unable to be assimilated, and the terms *Jamaican*, *West Indian*, and *black* operated as synonyms within dominant nationalist discourse. English language, British culture, and most significantly, ideas of black deviance marked West Indians as foreign in a time period of increasing nationalistic sentiment based upon white Spanish culture. Conditions in Costa Rica and the world at large made unification, in the eyes of Garveyites, critical.

Urging every West Indian to “forget his individuality...and think and act collectively,”³⁴³ West Indians who contributed to the *Searchlight* and the *Voz* were particularly fixated on the theme of racial unification, solidarity, and cooperation. “Unity produces strength, respect and admiration,” they reasoned.³⁴⁴ Warning West Indians against being “sectionized,” since in the perspective of Garveyites, “this age demand[s] a bringing together, a unification, a concerted effort, exemplified in oneness of aim and destiny.”³⁴⁵ Following this logic, “the truly great is great because he had entered into a oneness” with his people.³⁴⁶ Pointing to the example of whites, they argued that white racial solidarity had produced white achievement and progress. Those blacks who distanced themselves from the cause of uplift hurt the progress of the race and were not “sympathetic...[nor] mindful of the fact that every waif of his race on the street that incriminates himself by indecent conduct, tells heavily in the adjudications by public sentiment of the class to which he belongs.” The politics of respectability, in other words, left blacks with the burden of representation, the idea that one was always representative of her/his race.

Identifying racial solidarity as the basis for black progress, West Indians critiqued dominant definitions of race and blackness. Destabilizing the myth of black inferiority was necessary in the demand for equal rights. “What constitutes a race?” one article in the *Voz*’s English page asked, offering a competing conceptualization of racial difference. The idea of

³³⁹ Ibid., 15 August 1925

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ *Limón Searchlight*, 4 January 1930

³⁴² Ibid., 24 January 1931

³⁴³ Ibid., 4 January 1930

³⁴⁴ *Voz del Atlántico*, 26 February 1938

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 10 June 1939

³⁴⁶ *Limón Searchlight*, 31 January 1931

black inferiority was “blasphemous and directly audacious to the Creator,” the writer charged. Arguing that the physical differences between the races was simply the result of differences in environment, he claimed that all people were “created of one blood and endowed with the same rights.” West Indians’ critique of race, however, did not break with a belief in the existence of distinct races and what the writer called a “standard of pureness.”³⁴⁷ West Indians in Limón sought to define blackness for themselves, both critiquing and reaffirming dominant ideologies.

“Be not disheartened by the propaganda of the enemy,”³⁴⁸ Garvey warned the membership of the UNIA. To counter this, he put forth his own propaganda in the service of black redemption. Garvey identified the *New Negro* as a counter-image to hegemonic representations of blackness. “The New Negro is tired of being abused and ill-treated,” he wrote. Reclaiming the manhood of the race would foster black power and self-determination. “The time has come for us to stand up like men,” Garvey remarked, “for after all, it is only a question of manhood.” Equating power with manhood, the strength of a redeeming diaspora would enable blacks to “measure up in this world of men.”³⁴⁹ As one West Indian in Limón put it, the New Negro divorced himself from the Old Negro who shuffled and begged “at the footsteps of the other races, jimcrowed [sic], segregated, ostracized, lynched and disadvantaged in the most disgraceful manner.”³⁵⁰ Instead, black “consciousness of self” would mend the psychological damage of slavery, colonization, and disenfranchisement. Arguing that “the world is what it is today because of the confidence of the white man in himself,”³⁵¹ Garveyites affirmed the ego-politics of European ontology, claiming access to this for the black race.

In fact, as Garveyism posited, the *true* African heritage of blacks was a modern one. Despite depictions of black premodernity and primitiveness, West Indians in Limón countered with representations of black sovereignty in Africa of eras past. “Freedom is not alien to his nature,” one article explained of the black man in relation to an African past, rather, “it is natural to him, for he is a MAN, a child of nature, whose ancestors were ever free men.” Drawing from naturalist and historicist argumentation, the construction of a free African past was based on the idea of what the writer called blacks’ “ancestral heritage” of freedom. Decoding the prophetic destiny of African history, this Garveyite line of thinking claimed that the “Negro’s potential greatness is manifest.” Affirming the stagism of modern development, the author of this article, entitled “Nationalism and the black race,” argued that “the negro is just getting into his stride.”³⁵²

“The unorganized...group without direct representation” was “helpless” and “more likely to be victimized,” a Limón resident wrote, reflecting on local and global conditions faced by blacks. The “scattered negro groups,” in his opinion, would remain vulnerable to injustice and inequality as long as they remained without a sovereign and peaceful homeland.³⁵³ Making a black nation in Africa would give placeless blacks throughout the globe the protection of citizenship. Measured by a “compass of suffering,”³⁵⁴ the contours of the African Diaspora were shaped by powerlessness, therefore efforts to overturn this position of subordination required black solidarity across national borders.

³⁴⁷ *Voz del Atlántico*, 12 August 1939

³⁴⁸ *Negro World*, 15 August 1925

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁰ *Limón Searchlight*, 7 February 1931

³⁵¹ *Negro World* 15, August 1925

³⁵² *Voz del Atlántico*, 28 July 1934

³⁵³ *Limón Searchlight*, 20 September 1930

³⁵⁴ Cesaire, 43.

West Indians with the means and desire had the option to subscribe to Garvey's *Negro World* in the 1920s and then his *Blackman* newspaper in the 1930s, as well as a host of black American newspapers, in addition to the local *Searchlight* and the *Voz*. This transnational mediascape informed the local politics of racial uplift. An advertisement in the *Voz* read: "Attention! Race Lovers! Are you following the Progress of the Race? Read 'THE PITTSBURGH COURIER' The Negro Weekly that tells you all you want to know about Joe Louis, John Henry Lewis, [and] the Italo-Ethiopian situation."³⁵⁵ The Italian invasion of Ethiopia, in fact, was a central issue that shaped transnational black politics, identities, and the desire for sovereignty for those in diaspora, including West Indians in Limón in the mid-1930s.

Abyssinia and Black Sovereignty

A poem entitled "Awake to Duty," written by resident poet of the *Searchlight*, J. C. Francis of the town of Bananito in the province of Limón, declared there will be "no peace till the battle is ended[/]And afric's redemption is won." The redemption of Africa, through the development of sovereign nation-states and ultimately a unified African empire, was Garveyism's central goal. As reflected in the poem, the redemption of the black race would be a battle. "We'll conquer or die in the field," Francis wrote. Revealing the desire for a nation and a flag, he proclaimed, "let's show to the world that our colours[/]Are the red, the Black and the Green,"³⁵⁶ alluding to the pan-African flag popularized by the Garvey movement as a symbol of black nationalism.

In the desire for self-government and self-determination, the three black sovereign nations—Haiti, Liberia, and Ethiopia—were important in the forging of black anti-colonial political landscapes. The invasion of Ethiopia by Italy in 1935, became a key issue that united persons of African descent in the interwar period.³⁵⁷ As an independent African country in a continent overrun by European colonization, Ethiopia played an important role in Garveyite discourses. The land of biblical legend, whose name was often a catch-all term for the continent at large, inspired poems, images, and the hopes of black self-governance. The threat of Italian colonization of independent Ethiopia was also a threat to black citizenship rights in other locations in the African Diaspora. A politically and economically independent and sovereign Africa was the root of black redemption in the Americas, according to pan-African philosophies.

West Indians in diaspora organized in support of Ethiopia, informing the development of new identities and political philosophies. The existence of organizations like the International Friends of Abyssinia,³⁵⁸ chaired by Trinidadian C. L. R. James—illustrates that the struggle for African independence was inseparable from the development of anti-colonial politics and equal rights struggles among blacks in the diaspora. George Padmore's participation in the organization and support of the threatened black nation also fostered larger political implications; "After Abyssinia fascism acquired a broader meaning for him, indicating not only the type of political regime evolving in Germany and Italy, but a racial politics linked to colonialism

³⁵⁵ *Voz del Atlántico*, 1 February 1936

³⁵⁶ *Limón Searchlight*, 21 December 1929

³⁵⁷ In London and Paris, for instance, West Indian and West African migrants in diaspora organized politically with each other around this issue, as both groups developed increased consciousness of their shared condition of colonization and lack of self-determination.

³⁵⁸ The International Friends of Abyssinia soon became the International African Service Bureau, and was chaired by James' fellow Trinidadian and colleague George Padmore.

itself.”³⁵⁹ Just as Aime Cesaire’s reflections in *Discourse on Colonialism* posit that the origins of fascism lie in colonialism,³⁶⁰ Padmore “stretched the concept of fascism such that it would illuminate the historical realities of the super-exploited of the underdeveloped world.”³⁶¹ Re-thinking their relationship to Europe at the peak of the fascist regimes of Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco, therefore, resulted in new conceptualizations of colonialism for West Indians.

While Garvey advocated the building of a black empire, Garveyism lent itself to an anti-colonial critique of power in the world. “If you look at the map today you see all Africa controlled by the alien races of the world with the exception of Liberia and Abyssinia,” wrote a West Indian contributor to the English section of the *Voz*. For West Indians in Limón, as with blacks elsewhere in the diaspora, fascism was a “new barbarism” that threatened black sovereignty.³⁶² The struggles in Ethiopia led James, Padmore, and of course, Garvey, to turn “their attention to the entire stage of Africa, believing that they had it within their grasp to organise [sic] the emancipation of a continent.”³⁶³ Mr. W. A. Lindo, a West Indian resident of Limón, announced in the English section of *Voz* that he was “preparing to make an early departure for [Abyssinia] to enlist in the Red Cross.” He asked for the support of those “who profess their sympathy in the cause Afric.”³⁶⁴ Race work among blacks therefore, was necessarily a diasporic, transnational endeavor as well as a local one, that confronted local and global manifestations of coloniality.

According to an article in the *Voz*, the “salvation” of the race can only be found “under the free skies of Ethiopia.” As a result, the article called for West Indians to join the Limón branch of the Ethiopian World Federation, which held weekly meetings.³⁶⁵ The local Committee on Abyssinian matters sent a cablegram of support to Haile Selassie.³⁶⁶ Sam Nation was chair of the Committee, and other Garveyites participated in the organization. Along with a call to boycott Italian goods,³⁶⁷ there was also a call to “patriotic West Indians” to enlist in the Ethiopian army.³⁶⁸ An “Ethiopia enlistment movement” had formed amongst blacks in the U.S., Limón, as well as other locations in the diaspora.³⁶⁹ “In attempting to perform our racial duties, Ethiopia represents the most urgent need,” another *Voz* article pointed out, the Abyssinian cause was “an opportunity for securing the rights of our people.”³⁷⁰ The human rights of all blacks were threatened by Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia.

³⁵⁹ Bill Schwarz, ed., *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2003)139-140.

³⁶⁰ Cesaire, 37.

³⁶¹ Schwarz, 138.

³⁶² *Voz del Atlántico*, 29 June 1940

³⁶³ Schwarz, 140.

³⁶⁴ *La Voz del Atlántico*, 11 January 1936

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 15 January 1938

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 28 September 1935

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 12 October 1935

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 31 August 1935

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 18 January 1936

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 26 February 1938



Fig. 3.5 Abisinia Paso a la Historia. 14 May 1938. Personal photograph by Asia Leeds. Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica. *Voz del Atlántico*. 20 November 2008.

After WWI and on the brink of WWII, it seemed to some West Indians that Great Britain was facing its downfall. Matters in Ethiopia prompted West Indians in Limón to re-think their place within the British empire. West Indians resented the fact that the British crown did not offer Selassie asylum. “Briton [sic] has undoubtedly lost her prestige as the greatest diplomatic nation on earth,”³⁷¹ one writer in Limón remarked. Another charged England, along with other countries of Europe, with giving Italy a “free hand against the ancient and independent Kingdom in return for certain Italian favours in European politics.”³⁷² Moving away from an identity of British imperial subjectivity, West Indians in Limón looked toward Africa for their liberation and citizenship.

Both Malcolm X and W.E.B. Du Bois conceptualized the janus face of democracy, which placed blacks on the outside of modern citizenship. For Du Bois, the color line “excuses the suppression of democracy”³⁷³ outside of non-white and non-European spaces. For Malcolm X, the modern nation is simply an expression of “white nationalism, which [whites] call democracy.”³⁷⁴ White representations of Africa informed depictions of black cultural deviance in the Americas, leading Malcolm X to posit “you can’t understand what is going on in Mississippi...if you don’t understand what is going on in the Congo.”³⁷⁵ In *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois argued that “the whole history of Reconstruction has with few exceptions been written by passionate believers in the inferiority of the Negro.”³⁷⁶ President Andrew Johnson summed up the ideology that rationalized black subordination and disenfranchisement. “It must be acknowledged that in the progress of nations,” he wrote, “Negroes have shown less capacity for government than any other race of people.” “No independent government of any form has ever been successful in their hands,” he declared,

³⁷¹ Ibid., 28 August 1937

³⁷² Ibid., 16 February 1935

³⁷³ W.E.B. DuBois, *Color and Democracy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1945), 85.

³⁷⁴ Malcolm X., *February 1965: The Final Speeches* (New York: Pathfinder, 1992), 46.

³⁷⁵ Tyner, 34.

³⁷⁶ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 381.

alluding to representations of African backwardsness, “on the contrary, wherever they have been left to their own devices they have shown a constant tendency to relapse into barbarism.”³⁷⁷

West Indians in Limón faced the same ideology, imposed upon them by the logic of Costa Rican anti-black nationalism. Garveyism offered West Indians in Costa Rica an ideology that granted them citizenship, (trans)national identity, and a historical legacy centered around blackness and Africa. A redemptive conceptualization of Africa, however, depended on the insertion of the continent into a European-led path to modernity, which was a model for what the continent could become with capitalist investments and the elimination of *uncivilized*, non-Christian practices. In the early 1920s, Garvey hoped to establish a “commercial enterprise” in Liberia that would eventually support a colony of blacks from the Americas.³⁷⁸ “What do we desire in Africa?,” he posed,

We desire a mighty government built by Negroes in Africa so strong that Negroes, whether they be in America or the West Indies, can be citizens of such a government, and when you touch one such Negro—whether he be in New York, Illinois, Georgia or Alabama—you touch the entire African empire.³⁷⁹

“We realize that this is the age when all races are striking out for their national, racial independence,” Garvey wrote in a *Negro World* editorial, and “we have found out that we are the only race of people deprived of liberty, deprived of democracy.”³⁸⁰

In Limón, West Indians conceptualized black nationalism within both local and global political context. Denied the rights of Costa Rican citizenship, the discourse of black nationalism represented a critique to the idea that blacks could not participate in the modern nation. Black nationalism was a belief system, a striving toward racial unity, with the idea that the development of racial strength among blacks would protect them from discrimination and exclusion wherever they found themselves in the world. This belief is based on the premise that a strong Motherland would protect its diaspora. “Nationalism,” therefore, was a matter of “paramount importance,” as one *Searchlight* journalist outlined. “Any race or people who do not nationalize themselves are doomed to extinction,”³⁸¹ he continued, warning that “if [blacks] do not ‘Nationalize’ [themselves] as quick as possible [their] position will be as the aborigines of America, Australia and New Zealand, yea [sic] even worst [sic] than the lost inhabitants of Atlantis.” The survival and future of the race was at stake as “those legislations against the negro is [sic] with a view to exterminate him.”³⁸² Black redemption via the redemption of Africa was therefore an attempt to “save prosterity and the Mother Land Africa from Annihilation.”³⁸³

In a poem called “Patrotism,” David Luke, another *Searchlight* poet, penned a couplet that summed up this logic: “Africa must be redeemed[/]Where all the ‘Blacks’ will be esteemed.”³⁸⁴ Black survival in Costa Rica was linked to black progress in Africa and elsewhere. While many believed that there was “no other place...more suitable than the Homeland Africa” for blacks to build a nation, redemption had critical importance for black citizenship in the Americas. Africa would serve as the “nucleus for Nationalism,” and a symbol of black power that the powerful governments in the world would regard with respect and treat

³⁷⁷ Ibid, 341.

³⁷⁸ *Negro World*, 12 April 1921

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 15 August 1925

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ *Limón Searchlight*, 7 February 1931

³⁸² Ibid., 20 Sept 1930

³⁸³ Ibid., 7 February 1931

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 22 August 1931

with equality.³⁸⁵ “A government by and for Negroes in a Free and Redeemed Africa” was therefore the remedy for “manhood repressed” in the black world at large.³⁸⁶ Black nationalism enabled certain critiques of power *within* nations in the Americas, and *going back to Africa* was a figurative and ideological move rather than a physical one for West Indians in Limón. The cultural stakes of black identity and the contestation of blackness reveal that the invention of a redemptive African identity was a critical strategy for Garveyites in Limón.

The Politics of Culture and the Campaign Against Pocomia

While Africa was central to the articulation of black modernity, the meanings and representations of Africa were complex within the ideology of Garveyism. Garvey’s conceptualization of Africa characterized the continent as both primitive and advanced. He noted the “tribal primitiveness”³⁸⁷ of enslaved Africans who “suffered, bled and died to make us what we are today—Civilized, Christian free men.”³⁸⁸ But on the other hand, Africa “gave civilization, gave art, gave science; gave literature to the world.” Garvey saw the role of the UNIA as initiating the advancement of Africa to a future without primitiveness by returning the continent to its past ascendancy of empire and wealth.³⁸⁹ Recovering an *authentic* Africa, Garveyites rejected uncivilized *Africanness* as a false representation of African culture and a hindrance to redemption. Highlighting depictions of black civilization Garveyites contested dominant representations of African culture.

In an attempt to garner the respect of the Costa Rican government and nation at large, Garveyite West Indians attempted to govern the cultural practices of the West Indian community. The resultant hierarchy subalternized the purported *savage, uncivilized* practices of the so-called uneducated West Indians that promoted non-redemptive *Africanness* and immorality. Within discourses of health and sanity, West Indian community leaders “pathologized,” in the words of Putnam, the behavior of the blacks who did not fit the mold in order to rationalize the existence of such culture and practices in Limón as the “result of social sickness rather than ‘Negro nature.’”³⁹⁰ Like Garvey, who affirmed the spiritual/religious hierarchy headed by Christianity, his followers in Limón used the same standard to attack Pocomia and Obeah. Obeah, or medicinal and spiritual healing based on West African knowledges and customs, and Pocomia, a hybrid Christianity with strong African-derived influences, including dance, speaking in tongues, and possession, were characterized by West Indian community leaders as “witchcraft” and “voodoo.”³⁹¹ Chomsky notes the rise of Pocomania and its revival in the 1920s and 1930s during a time of economic instability.³⁹²

Newspapers in both the Central Valley and Limón featured articles about Pocomia. Spanish-language Costa Rican newspapers sometimes referred to the practices as “Cocomia” and

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 28 February 1931

³⁸⁶ *Voz del Atlantico*, 29 June 1940

³⁸⁷ Garvey, 303.

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 46.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 80.

³⁹⁰ Putnam, 171.

³⁹¹ Ibid, 106; 180. Chomsky notes that Obeah, and the related practice of myalism, developed in eighteenth century Jamaica. Chomsky identified Pocomia as “based on dance, drumming, singing, and spirit possession.” Both practices were “based on access to the supernatural, but myalism was a group worship, while obeah was usually a power invested in an individual obeah man.”

³⁹² Ibid., 183.

played on popular fears of black savagery in depicting accounts of child sacrifice, and the use of human skeletons and blood.³⁹³ As Mbembe argues, “discourse on Africa is almost always deployed in the framework...of a meta-text about the *animal*—to be exact, about the *beast*,” characterized by the “strange” and the “monstrous.”³⁹⁴ After consulting a “Pocamanian Priest,” a young man attacked his siblings, stabbing his brother, and even attacked his infant sister, “chopping her to pieces,” according to a *Voz* article.³⁹⁵ The youth was told by the priest to “get a sacrifice and eat its brain and heart,” the newspaper claimed in a second article about the incident.³⁹⁶ Implying that the young man practiced cannibalism, the article described how he severed the head of the baby from her body, “the crown of the skull was entirely cut off.”³⁹⁷ The caricature of the cannibal, savage African posed the same threat to the Costa Rican nation as it did to the West Indian Garveyites, whose respectability rested on their distance from notions of uncivilized Africanness. Community and UNIA leaders in Limón even wrote the Costa Rican president, encouraging the eradication of Pocomia, allying themselves with the anti-black national government.³⁹⁸

Similar to the xenophobic Sociedad Económica,³⁹⁹ Garveyites in Limón employed the rhetoric of health and morality in their campaign against behavior that threatened black respectability. In this view, mental health and moral values were indicative of culture. Community and UNIA leaders blamed African-derived religions and spiritual beliefs for mental illness and insanity among blacks rather than the conditions fostered by the racist Costa Rican government and the withdrawal of UFCO from the region. In tandem with the national government, the West Indian leadership supported proposals for the sterilization of *insane* blacks. Former UNIA president and owning editor of the *Searchlight* Samuel Nation, advocated the sterilization of “the offspring of germ infested, diseased parents, who...constitute a dangerous menace” to the making of a redemptive black nation.⁴⁰⁰ Nation and other UNIA leaders were also in support of a “police round-up” of practitioners.⁴⁰¹ The politics of respectability functioned in such a way that cultural practices that were not redemptive “[reflected] badly on the behaviourism [sic] of [the West Indian] community.”⁴⁰² Calling for West Indians to practice “Garveyism instead of Voodooism,”⁴⁰³ as one article urged, Garveyites in Costa Rica were the local vanguard of black redemption.

Along with a lack of national sovereignty, black survival was threatened by the purported cultural deficiencies and backwardness of segments of the black community. Instead of seeking medical treatment, community leaders charged, uneducated ailing West Indians took their troubles to an Obeahman, and were never healed. According to a news story, a West Indian woman thought she was “bewitched” but instead had an illness that required medical attention.⁴⁰⁴ The belief in *witchcraft*, Garveyites argued, clouded the rational mind and encouraged

³⁹³ Ibid, 104;112.

³⁹⁴ Mbembe, 1.

³⁹⁵ *Voz del Atlántico*, 3 April 1937

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 17 April 1937

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 3 April 1937

³⁹⁸ Harpelle, *The West Indians of Costa Rica*, 115.

³⁹⁹ I examine this nationalist group in more detail in the following section of this chapter.

⁴⁰⁰ Harpelle, *The West Indians of Costa Rica*, 116.

⁴⁰¹ *Limón Searchlight*, 17 May 1930

⁴⁰² Ibid., 25 January 1930

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 26 July 1930

⁴⁰⁴ *Voz del Atlántico*, 24 April 1937

“immorality, insanity, and nefarious practices among the younger generation.” Since practitioners catch a “spirit” and lay “half naked; some in a state of coma,...others like raving maniacs,” speaking in “tongues,”⁴⁰⁵ pocomia represented unenlightened culture, the opposite of the black modernity that Garveyites held as key to counter discourses of blackness. The leadership of the West Indian community sought the prosecution and deportation of persons who practiced pocomia.⁴⁰⁶ Those who “believe not in the doctrine of progress” but ascribe to the “Ancient Superstitions, [and] think that Charms and Obeah can lift them out of their Social Mire”⁴⁰⁷ retarded black ascension.

Culture was a central site of contestation of black inferiority and had implications for ideas about health and sanity. “What of our insane[?]” one article asked rhetorically, speaking of those who are “afflicted...by the loss of their reasoning powers.” Since the national asylum was limited to white citizens, Port Limón, according to an article, was a city with “many [West Indian] persons who are of unsound minds.” One such West Indian man “divest[ed] himself entirely of his clothing, entered...[a] place of business and smash[ed] [the] show cases” while wielding a “butcher’s knife.” Although community leaders supported a “movement on foot to round up all these mentally deranged and deport them to their countries of origin,” the fact remained that “several of these people are born Costa Ricans, [and] others traveled prior to the institutions of passports” and have unknown origins.⁴⁰⁸ Wanting to articulate black rights in Costa Rica, yet placing the insane outside of black redemptive geographies, the writer revealed the complicated borders of respectability and belonging.

Reflecting on the place of West Indians within the nation, a contributor to the *Searchlight* differentiated between types of Costa Ricans and their opinions of blacks. On the one hand, he argued, the illiterate and unsophisticated Costa Ricans who worked on banana plantations in Limón, believed in the inferiority of blacks. Meanwhile, the West Indian’s “intellectual abilities and moral standing in the Community [were] ever so much appreciated by the best blood of the country.”⁴⁰⁹ While West Indians believed that the community had redeemed themselves in the eyes of the upper class, Costa Ricans of various classes and social positions, however, were unifying around the ideology of black inferiority and the restriction of West Indian integration and participation in the nation, and legal efforts at separating the black and white races flourished in the 1930s.

III. Criollo Double-Consciousness and the Interclass Production of Whiteness

Costa Ricans who were invested in a white national identity regarded black cultural deviance as a central marker of the racial inferiority of West Indians. White identity and the articulation of a European diaspora in Costa Rica, however, was complicated by the power of the U.S. in the region as well as legacies of Spanish colonialism. A *lesser* white category, the criollo identity asserted during the struggles of Independence from Spain was one that was both white and colonized. While European ontology identifies the European as a thinking, and therefore, sovereign subject, the Latin American who identified as being a part of the European diaspora had what I will refer to as *white double-consciousness*, as they were white in the context of their

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 27 August 1938; 15 October 1938

⁴⁰⁷ *Limón Searchlight*, 10 May 1930

⁴⁰⁸ *Voz del Atlántico*, 25 January 1936

⁴⁰⁹ *Limón Searchlight*, 4 January 1930

location but were colonized, rather than sovereign. The coloniality of U.S. power in Latin America and the Caribbean set the stage for the development of a neo-criollo identity in the twentieth century. Although U.S. ideologies of race did not recognize Latin Americans as whites, Costa Ricans rearticulated a white criollo identity, affirming the nation's modernity and exceptionalism in the region.

As notions of race and power were entangled in the anti-imperial discourse of Costa Ricans, critiques of U.S. power included reflections on the *blackening* of Costa Rica's Atlantic coast via UFCO's employment of West Indians. The residence of blacks within a nation that saw itself as white stimulated a new type of nationalism in Costa Rica that functioned at the intersection of racism and anti-imperialism. Costa Ricans sought to reclaim the nation both from a black *invasion* and from further colonization by the UFCO, and assert the borders of the racial state that only recognized the rights and citizenship of whites. While pushing for a new contract between the UFCO and the Costa Rican government in the 1920s, and then protesting its outcome and the continued privilege of the Company in the 1930s, Costa Rican civic groups, workers, and other citizens also pressed the government to pass laws of racial segregation. Seeking to restrict the movement of West Indians, their use of public facilities, and their employment by the UFCO, Costa Ricans viewed racial segregation as a way to keep the nation pure and ensure the future of Costa Rican whiteness and therefore progress. Claiming belonging to a white world, the diasporic identity of Costa Ricans was a critique to the idea that white purity, and therefore, civilization, peace, and progress, were only located in the Global North.

U.S. Coloniality and the Fear of Africanization in Latin America

U.S. coloniality via U.S. foreign policy and multinational corporations like the UFCO informed the politics of race and entanglements of power in the Western Hemisphere. The ideology of Manifest Destiny rationalized the growth of the United States beyond its mainland borders. The appropriation of Mexican land after the Mexican-American War in 1848 initiated expansion into Latin America. As the U.S. developed into a hegemonic power in the region, Manifest Destiny informed the making of the Monroe Doctrine as U.S. foreign policy, declaring that the U.S. had a duty to protect the western hemisphere from outside interference (particularly from Europe). This doctrine fomented the Spanish-American War of 1898, which gave the United States a crucial foothold in the Caribbean region in the annexation of Puerto Rico and the claiming of Cuba as a protectorate. The purchasing of the Danish Virgin Islands and the occupation of Haiti from 1914 to 1935 further increased U.S. power and presence in the region. In his corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, President Theodore Roosevelt in 1904 added that "in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States...to the exercise of an international police power." The building of the Panama Canal, allowing for easy passage between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, gave the United States a geopolitical, military, and economic advantage, and the means to govern the hemisphere.

Central America and the Caribbean, therefore, served as a base for U.S. coloniality in the Western Hemisphere at large. The development of US agri-businesses and monopolies in the circum-Caribbean produced a labor demand that privileged West Indian labor. The West Indies were viewed as a reservoir of labor, and United Fruit Company and Isthmian Canal Commission representatives recruited West Indians. During Canal construction, "the Isthmus served as a kind of labor mart from which American government officials and private companies could choose

laborers,”⁴¹⁰ creating a type of auction block. After the completion of the Canal in 1914, as Watkins-Owens notes, “the United Fruit Company virtually controlled the Caribbean labor market.”⁴¹¹ Legends of *Panama money* and the prospect of earning a small fortune ensured that West Indians poured into Cuba, Central America, Colombia, and Venezuela. In Cuba 300,000 British West Indians and Haitians worked on US-owned sugar plantations; between 200,000 and 300,000 migrated to Venezuela to work in the new US-dominated oil industry; between 150,000 and 200,000 went to Panama to dig the Canal, and smaller but significant number of West Indians labored on railroad projects and banana plantations in Central America.⁴¹² For the nations of Central America this migration of West Indians was counter to national whitening efforts. U.S. coloniality, in the view of Central Americans who held power, not only compromised the sovereignty of the nations but threatened their racial progress, which was understood to be the key to modernization and development.

In Panama, Jim Crow racial apartheid was managed by a system of “bi-metalism.”⁴¹³ ‘Gold’ and ‘silver’ demarcations regulated space and compensation for labor:

In all official documents, the post office, and other public places, white and black, or ‘gold’ and ‘silver,’ designations were in place. Black employees, regardless of their actual skill, were designated ‘unskilled’ and paid in Panamanian silver balboas, while white American skilled workers were paid in gold.⁴¹⁴

While UFCO officials did not enjoy the level of direct control over the entire region of Limón like U.S. official did in the Panama Canal Zone (which was legally U.S. territory), residential spaces, public accommodations, and the like were segregated by race. Costa Ricans and West Indians would have both been subordinated by the systems of U.S. coloniality, and Costa Ricans were rendered non-white by these practices.

In the 1920s and 1930s xenophobic nationalism in Central America was produced at the intersection of a systematic rejection of blackness and a consciousness of intervention and occupation by the United States. Despite immigration legislation that denied blacks entry into the country, UFCO power ultimately overruled Costa Rica law. The fear of Africanization existed throughout the region, where whiteness was equated with power and modernity, and national projects of *mestizaje* sought to whiten and improve the national race.

In Latin America the white landowning elite partnered with multinational corporations to control the labor of the non-white masses. Colonial hierarchies therefore persisted (and took on new meanings) in partnership between the Latin American elite and foreign capitalists. While the criollo elite would come to join forces with U.S. geopolitical and economic endeavors, becoming “enriched and empowered by...export trade,”⁴¹⁵ in Costa Rica, the landowning class and national elite saw the banana industry as an foreign initiative, rather than a creole, or native, agricultural industry like coffee.

In Cuba, where more than 300,000 British West Indians and Haitians worked as migrant labor on sugar plantations in the 1920s, the increase in black rebellion and political parties frightened the white and European-identified Cubans. As “the spectacle of an armed black political movement triggered deep-seated fears in Cuban society of *Haitianization* and

⁴¹⁰ Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations*, 16.

⁴¹¹ Ibid, 17.

⁴¹² Andrews, 137.

⁴¹³ Trevor O’Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship: The Evolution of Black West Indian Society in Panama 1914-1964* (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 2006), 4.

⁴¹⁴ Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations*, 14.

⁴¹⁵ Andrews, 117.

Africanization, the possibility that rebel forces might take over the island and turn it into a black republic” produced paranoia.⁴¹⁶ These fears were echoed throughout the region. For the Dominican Republic, anti-blackness was especially anti-Haitian, as it shared a border with the black nation. Dictator Rafael Trujillo contrasted Dominicans and Haitians as “two antagonist races, one of Spanish origin, and the other Ethiopian.”⁴¹⁷ This ideology of racial difference justified the 1937 massacre of 15,000 Haitian immigrants and Dominicans of Haitian descent. Reporting on United Fruit Company plans to bring more West Indians to Honduras in 1923, a Costa Rican journalist postulated, “Honduras will be buried beneath a Haitian republic.”⁴¹⁸ Ideas of nation and citizenship were, therefore, explicitly racial in nature in Latin America, and informed by entangled colonialities and ideas of race. British West Indians, rather than Haitians, as in eras past, became the black ‘other’ that threatened the purity, prosperity, and social order of the nations of Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean.

The inferiority of blacks was cemented in a social hierarchy in which blackness was equated with poverty, labor, and backwardness and whiteness with wealth, control of labor, and progress. On the one hand, black labor was central to the success of US and multinational projects and businesses, and subsequently to the increase in tax revenues paid to Latin American nations, which funded national consolidation and modernization. On the other hand, the very existence of blackness threatened the survival of whiteness, European culture, and the future of the nation, in the view of the governing white elite.

Racism, Nationalism, and Anti-Imperialism

For Costa Ricans who believed that West Indians represented a threat to Costa Rican exceptionalism, racial purity, and modernity, black culture was inferior. Just as pocomia threatened the redemption of Garveyite West Indians, Costa Ricans depicted the practice as an example of black deviance and unsuitability for national citizenship. In fact, the “semi-savage acts” of pocomia, as one article referred to it, threatened the whiteness of the nation by corrupting the “ignorant and simple” class of Costa Ricans. The reproduction of whiteness in Costa Rica relied on bringing the working class into the space of national whiteness, as rural people (“gentes del campo”) had a greater propensity for believing in pocomia, and being attracted to other *black arts*. “Nude fanatics,” who solicited children, robbed graves, and made potions from “dried human bones” were especially interested in targeting white women. A call for the authorities to create an “energetic campaign” against these practices with a “rapid expulsion of those *foreigners* who dedicate themselves to these practices.” “This is not something [we] should allow to cross the frontier,” the article argued, hoping to contain such practices in Limón and initiate of campaign of expelling all known practitioners. “The [capture] of witches in the region of Guapiles,” a town in the province of Limón that is inland and in the area closest to the Central Valley, highlighted the fact that black cultural deviance was already making its way into the heart of the nation.⁴¹⁹ White homogeneity and purity were juxtaposed to black deviance and degeneracy in the depictions of West Indians that circulated in the nation.

Marijuana use, which was also understood to be a black cultural threat, was depicted in the Costa Rican news media as a heinous habit introduced to the nation by West Indians. News

⁴¹⁶ Ibid, 131.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid, 142.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, 139.

⁴¹⁹ *Voz del Atlántico*, 1 April 1939

stories about West Indians being arrested for transporting or selling marijuana frequented the newspapers.⁴²⁰ One article pointed out the “growing number of...consumers” of the plant while discussing the details of a West Indians dealer who was caught in San José.⁴²¹ Black deviance was penetrating the frontiers of the authentic nation. The idea that blacks targeted young people, especially young women, would culturally and biologically mongrelize the nation.

The inherent criminality of blacks was also represented in Costa Rican newspapers. One such story chronicled the brutality of a black culprit, Thomas James Crawford, who was depicted as nothing more than an animal. For three years he “lived in the woods” leaving only by night in order to “prowl and assault couples and trusting women.” Again, the vulnerability of women and young girls was the key preoccupation of anti-black nationalism. He was accused among other things, of the “violation of a little girl in Siquierres,” made an attempt on the life of the school Director, and threatened others with firearms. The criminality of Crawford was linked to black cultural deviance, as the article charged him with practicing voodoo, evidence of which was his decapitation a pig. The article describes James as a “colored subject,” who was nineteen years old, “of extraordinary stature, strong and...aggressive.”⁴²² Weather or not Thomas Crawford was indeed a criminal or falsely accused, the depictions of him were that of the black buck rapist of the white imaginary. Young black males were almost always the culprit in these types of news stories, and the *Notes From Limón* sections of Central Valley newspapers became preoccupied with the *Negro Problem*.

As seen in the Crawford case, black criminality was linked to representations of black insanity. The madness of blacks led to violence and murder, in this logic. One West Indian accused of murder was described as having “mental conditions.” He “killed his workmate and roommate in a fit of madness,” the newspaper described. Since a judge “absolved him of all punishment and responsibility,”⁴²³ the article presented an image in which insane, violent blacks were on the loose, untamable by the law. Uncontrollable sexuality and fits of passion were also produced by black insanity. One article entitled “Black Crime” described the case of a young West Indian man who murdered his girlfriend white she was sleeping. “Two elements of color are the protagonists of this black tragedy” was the subtitle of the article.⁴²⁴ These types of articles served as a warning for young Costa Rican women who were lured towards black culture.

Heralding José Martí and other figures in independence struggles, Costa Rican newspapers participated in the making of a new criollo consciousness linked to the anti-imperial struggle. “The fight is not over,” an article remarked drawing links between the independence era and the current one, as Latin America faced continued threats to its freedom and sovereignty. The political climate called for “militant Bolivarianism.”⁴²⁵ Renewed praise for national hero Juan Santamaría,⁴²⁶ was telling of the significance of historical narratives of anti-imperialism in the making of nationalist anti-imperialist identities in the 1930s. Santamaría, a poor man from the Central Valley, joined Costa Rican troops to fight against the invasion of William Walker

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ *Voz del Atlántico*, 30 September 1939

⁴²² Ibid., 29 June 1941

⁴²³ Ibid., 22 July 1939

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 22 April 1939

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 10 June 1939

⁴²⁶ The international airport in San José is named after him and his supposed date of birth is recognized as a major national holiday.

from the Nicaraguan border, delivering a decisive blow to Walker's troops.⁴²⁷ As a "living symbol," as one article referred to him, Santamaría was "the representation of national patriotism." The legend of Santamaría re-affirmed the idea that Costa Rica was a homogenous nation without meaningful class distinctions, as he was figured as a white agricultural worker from the Central Valley. As he died fighting U.S. imperialism—embodied in Walker—the historical narratives of Santamaría worked in the service of "the future of [Central America]."⁴²⁸

Costa Ricans, like others in the region, protested the actions of the U.S. and its policy of intervention and occupation. "We cannot...respect the conduct of the United States," proclaimed a Costa Rican newspaper, warning citizens to be vigilant to prevent the "Trojan Horse from entering into the interior of our fortress." Recognizing a system in which "the United States has declared itself the crowned enforcer" in the region, the 1920s through the 1940s was a time period in which Latin America reflected on previous eras of anti-colonial struggle. Costa Ricans viewed their nation as a part of the world that was colonized by monoculture, foreign debt, etc. Reflections on the Monroe doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary to the doctrine which established the US as the protector of the Western Hemisphere against the encroachment of European empires were important factors in Costa Ricans' assessment of coloniality. The US had replaced Europe as the dominant force over Latin America. The nation was a new "conquistador," as one Costa Rican put it. With a weakened Europe at war, the writer feared that the U.S. will take over finance and formerly European enterprises in Latin America, and will lead to the formation of a "centralized supercapitalist regime." The "imperial exploitation" of businesses like the UFCO and the fear that WWII will be the "pretext for a new North American expansionist age" shaped the thinking of Costa Ricans.⁴²⁹

Recognizing that other areas in Central America suffered at the hands of UFCO, an article in *La Tribuna* charged the Company with bringing "bad luck to the countries that it conquers." UFCO dominance created "administrative disorder" in the financial sphere as well as in government. Illustrating the compromised sovereignty of the nation, the article argued that the president of Costa Rica did not defend the "true interests of the country" as he had "left the banana planters, the merchants and workers of the Atlantic Zone to the mercy of the voracity of the Company." The article also highlighted the psychological damage of UFCO coloniality, noting that the "people are lost when they feel inferior." Reminiscent of Garveyism and the New Negro, the article claimed that the Costa Rican people need "confidence in their strength" to progress as a nation.⁴³⁰ With a call to protect the "virgin" land of the Pacific and "maintain it in order to conserve [Costa Rican] nationality," Costa Rican nationalists hoped to reclaim the identity threatened by psychological subordination.⁴³¹ With the United States at the forefront of commerce and trade in the region, the formation of "independent enterprises" which were accountable to no entity threatened the sovereignty of "patriotism and nationalism" in Latin America.⁴³²

Workers petitioned Congress in great volume. One such 1932 petition was written by someone who identified as "worker and Costa Rican" in Limón. Writing to aid Congress in their investigations of the UFCO, the worker cites the Company's evasion of the law in the realm of

⁴²⁷ As the story goes, Santamaría was fatally wounded, after setting fire to the building where Walker's troops were, ensuring the defeat of Walker.

⁴²⁸ *Voz del Atlántico*, 26 March 1938

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 29 June 1940

⁴³⁰ *La Tribuna*, 8 July 1930

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 1 August 1930

⁴³² *Ibid.*, 7 August 1930

hiring practices. Since they were obligated to hire a certain number of Costa Ricans by earlier agreements, the Company, the petition charged, was “instructing its black employees on how to become naturalized.” This “mocked” the benefits that Costa Rican workers were supposed to enjoy by “giving preference to the blacks...because they speak the English language.” For the petitioner, “it should be a crime against the nation that “in our own country it is necessary to speak another language as if ours were a dialect of Indians who they came to civilize.” Alluding to the persistent trope of conquest, speaks to the anti-imperialist discourse used to discuss the practices of the Company. The writer was baffled that UFCO power subordinated the white Costa Rican culture to the benefit of blacks. Identifying Costa Rica as a nation of whites and not Indians, the petitioner affirmed Costa Rican whiteness and civilization in the face of imperialism and the exploitation of the Company. Witnessing the disorder of Limón firsthand, the petition warned that the government should “pay attention to this Jamaican race who are not only the landlords of the atlantic [sic] zone but are also invading the interior of the country.”⁴³³

Identifying with other nations that struggled against the coloniality, Costa Rican newspapers frequently published news about Haitian struggles against U.S. occupation, Indians fighting against Britain, Ehtiopians battling Italian encroachment, and black Americans whose lives were threatened by the Ku Klux Klan.⁴³⁴ At the same time, however, Costa Ricans maintained an anti-black nationalism. As both white and colonized, Costa Rican national identity was informed by a double-consciousness. Costa Ricans experienced what Du Bois called a “two-ness.”⁴³⁵ As black American double-consciousness was the result of their “unreconciled”⁴³⁶ yet simultaneous identity as black and as American, Costa Ricans were both white and colonized in a world that only recognized whiteness in the sovereign global North. Costa Rican white double-consciousness inspired the sentiment and reasoning that linked nationalism, racism and anti-imperialism in the reaffirmation of white national purity. While belonging to a colonized world placed Costa Rica within a cohort of black and *colored* nations, Costa Ricans believed that the strengthening of national whiteness via the removal of black elements would liberate the country from the hold of financial, political, and psychological subordination.

The SEAP and the New Banana Contract

Whereas the Latin American elite was often enriched by partnering with foreign enterprises like the UFCO, in Costa Rica “private planters have been fundamental in the formation of an elite anti-imperialist consciousness in Costa Rica.” In Chomsky’s analysis, the Sociedad Economica de Amigos del Pais “reflected the typical elite perspective in associating the interests of large Costa Rican planters with those of the country as a whole, and attacks on their interests with attacks on national sovereignty.” “In addition to having taken possession of a vast portion of the Atlantic Zone,” the SEAP argued, the Company “exercises a power and control over it that even the very Government of the Republic does not exercise; there it is the Company who rules.”⁴³⁷

⁴³³ ANCR Fomento 29 August 1932

⁴³⁴ One such article, “A Fear of a Black Uprising in the United States Against the Ku Klux Klan,” was featured as the primary headline of *La Prensa*, 24 October 1921.

⁴³⁵ Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 2.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁷ Chomsky, 78-79.

The 1899 contract between the Company and the government expired in 1929. Efforts at negotiating a new contract in 1929 were prolonged and complicated by the collapse of the stock market and the Great Depression. The economic climate benefited the Company, which pushed for a new contract that was lenient and light on taxation. Given the economic climate, the company was unwilling to budge or compromise. Although there was much debate in congress, informed by the discourses of SEAP and the like, a contract was signed in September of 1930 and it “guaranteed a low banana tax (two cents per bunch until 1950),” and an agreement to plant 3,000 new acres of bananas, the company would donate 2,146 acres to the government for “colonias agrícolas.”⁴³⁸ In 1932 Congress established a commission to investigate complaints against the company for non compliance with the new contract: small planters were forced to sell their bananas for such cheap prices that they couldn’t even cover the rental costs of land, and of course, the company maintained the right not to buy at all. The government reached a new agreement with the company in 1933 that allowed the company to begin operations on the Pacific side of the country.

The SEAP was comprised of highland intellectuals and large private planters frustrated by UFCO’s monopoly. The concern was economic but also racial for this group. They were concerned with “matters relative to the purely racial question of that immigration the company principally stimulates: black immigration, which, as is known, has a higher predisposition to diseases like tuberculosis, leprosy, syphilis, and madness.”⁴³⁹ The SEAP published an article in *La Gaceta* in 1927. Land and power were “monopolized by foreign companies,” they wrote, referring to the nation as “colonized.” Since these companies enjoyed a “monopoly of lands, railroad and shipping transport in [the] Atlantic zone,” they feared what they called the “reconquest” of the Americas by the U.S.⁴⁴⁰

José Guerrero, prominent member of the SEAP, and the director of the 1927 census, penned an essay entitled “What do we want Costa Rica to be, black or white? The negro problem and the current banana contracts” published in *La Tribuna* in 1930.⁴⁴¹ Opening with a data chart from the 1927 census that listed the population of the country by province according to “race or color.” Only three percent of Costa Rican whites lived in Limón, while ninety-four percent of blacks lived there. But it was the remaining percentage of West Indians that Guerrero’s statistics highlighted as a critical and imposing threat to the nation. 309 blacks resided in the Central Valley province of Cartago, 301 had made their way to Puntarenas on the Pacific coast, and 431 resided in San José, the heart of the nation.

The movement of blacks into the various parts of the nation would produce social chaos. The SEAP, therefore, sought to maintain the “conservation of a social state characterized by peace and constructiveness.” For the organization, Costa Rican civilization and stability were the result of the “homogenous racial composition” of the nation. But the elites who favored modernization through export economies found themselves in quite a conundrum. Pointing out that “the negro is the shade of the banana,” the SEAP highlighted the relationship between black labor and banana production. “The physical resistance” of blacks made them ideal banana producers. Since they belonged to a “primitive race,” blacks were built for labor. While strong in body, Guerrero reasoned, the black race suffers from the “absence of an ethnic and historical ideal” which are “replaced by...superstitions and infantile diversions.”

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 223-224.

⁴³⁹ Putnam, 166.

⁴⁴⁰ *La Gaceta*, 1 February 1927.

⁴⁴¹ *La Tribuna*, 13 August 1930

Guerrero's ideology of black inferiority was therefore both a naturalist and historicist formulation. Blacks were not only a phallic, sexual threat, they were located outside of history and therefore threatened the progress of a nation, in Guerrero's view. The nation should fear by the chaos that blacks' "free entrance [into the country] will produce in the not so distant future." In Limón, "a strong black immigration" had cast a shadow over the region. "This shadow which for now is confined to the Atlantic zone will move toward other parts of the Republic," he argued, and the unrestrained immigration and integration of blacks would "retrograde" the nation with black blood and result in the "disappearance of [the] homogeneity of [the] population." Guerrero referred the idea of persistent West Indian immigration as a "black injection," conjuring interracial sex. An increased black population would lead not only to non-white children, but to "high mortality" and "sickness" in Costa Rica. The "consumption of public benefits" by blacks and their "dominion over the zones formed by the [banana] industry" would collapse the nation. The call for a renewed "integration law that will put in place a banner to the entrance of blacks" was Guerrero's solution to the Costa Rican crisis.

The practices of the UFCO, Guerrero and like minds thought, sought to undermine the sovereignty of the nation through black rule. They believed "the banana contracts of 1930 keeps [the threat of black dominance] quiet deliberately." In fact, the blackening of the nation is "perfectly conceivable if the [UFCO] invades the regions of south Pacific [side of the country] with its banana industry." The Company was one of those "colonizing enterprises that imposes [upon nations] with the force of money." The interdependence of racism, nationalism, and anti-imperialism called for the making of a new criollo agricultural industry, that would enable a shift from the dependence on black workers and foreign companies that banana production had created in the nation.

Guerrero ends declaring that he held no natural bias toward anyone "be they white, Chinese or black," and that his issue was a matter of nationalism. It was a question of keeping the "face of the race" a national rather than foreign one. Concerned about citizenship matters and governmental representation, he argued that black governance would be "dangerous for our collective" and the destiny of the nation. He believed that "this is a problem in which sentimentalism has no place because it is of a biological character and more concretely eugenicism." Making a eugenic rationale to excuse his racism, he defended criollo nationalist rights based on the notion that "when a danger threatens us of an element known" to be degenerate, it was their right to fight back. Guerrero, therefore, used nationalism to deflect from the racism of his claims.

Anti-black laws and the politics of racial segregation

Costa Ricans petitioned the government to restrict the employment, immigration, and residence of West Indians. Anti-imperialism prompted Costa Ricans to make new demands on the Costa Rican government in the name of protecting the nation. One petition to the Congress stated that "the Government assists...workers of foreign nationality into posts that could be perfectly filled with sons of the country [hijos del país]." They demanded the protection of their "rights as Costa Ricans." The proposal of a law that would prohibit foreigners, "even those who are married to Costa Rican women [hijas del país] and have children" reveals the fear of black sexual integration, the black injection that Guerrero wrote about. The fear of black dominance translated into the fear of racial miscegenation. A call to bar blacks from having governmental or public positions was an effort to seal the fate of West Indians as non-citizens. Proposing these

laws for the purpose of “national defense” against mongrelization, Costa Rican petitioners hope to prevent the death of the white nation.⁴⁴²

In that same year, a group of Costa Rican workers in Limón wrote to Congress to express their concerns about the dire economic situation in the province. “Our country,” they proclaimed, “is accustomed to having peace in the home and on the job” Limón, in their view, however, was a site of “misery.” The petition went on to state, “we would like to refer especially to the Negro problem [problema negro].” Depicting Limón as a place where blacks were privileged caused feelings of “inferiority” to develop in the “white race [raza blanca] to which we belong.” Redemption means reclaiming the self-esteem compromised by United Fruit imperialism. The UFCO “is responsible for this difficult situation of ours with the complicity of the authorities of the country.” Costa Rican workers believed there was a “preference for blacks” in hiring “while the whites are wandering the streets.” Pushing to highlight the far reaching implications of this preference, the petitioners believed that “in these conditions the independence of the country is being lost little by little in the province of Limón.” Limón had become a “black colony or fiefdom.” There would soon be a “sign that said: Costa Rica was here [Aquí fué Costa Rica].” Blacks “threaten us in all forms possible and publicly announce that they are properly armed to attack us when they want.” The writers pleaded for a “remedy to this humiliating situation in our own Country.” The residence of “a race inferior to ours,” they argued, “has no right to invade our countryside, our cities, [nor] our homes.” A call for the deportation of West Indians, whether born in Costa Rica or not, back to their countries of origin was the solution. Suggesting a law that “prohibits the admission of blacks into the country [as well as their] naturalization” because they were part of an “inferior race” underscored white Costa Ricans’ investment in race. Leaving no path for black assimilation, placing West Indians regardless of their respectability, education, ability to speak Spanish, outside of the Costa Rican nation due solely to their race, had far reaching implications.

In response to the anti-black nationalist outcry, Article 5 of Decree Number 31 of the banana contract of 10 December 1934 included a clause that prohibited the employment of “colored people” in the Pacific Banana Zone. Known as the companion law, this clause represented, for the Costa Rican government, a “legitimate aspiration of racial protection” and “the opinion of the Executive Office [was] that the final statute of [the Contract was] valid and should be followed in compliance.”⁴⁴³ George Chittenden, manager of UFCO, now called the *Compañía Bananera de Costa Rica*, wrote a letter to the President of Costa Rica, León Cortes in 1937, asking for clarification on the companion law. There are “numerous workers of color” in the Pacific Zone, “many of them are Costa Rican citizens.” He pointed out that “many of the workers from [the Costa Rican province of] Guanacaste are people of color.” In fact, “there are on the Pacific plenty of foreign workers, also of color,” referring to the Central Americans, largely Nicaraguans, who were employed in the zone.⁴⁴⁴

These tensions manifested in the Costa Rican government requesting the numbers of employees by nationality. In the declining banana industry in Limón, West Indians still made up the majority of Company workers, however, not by a large percentage. According to the Company’s data, no West Indians (without Costa Rican citizenship, at least) worked in the Pacific Zone. Although West Indians were restricted from working on the Pacific Zone because of their race, other Central Americans, probably considered to be non-white by Costa Ricans,

⁴⁴² ANCR Serie Congreso 17 July 1933

⁴⁴³ ANCR Fomento y Agricultura 15 June 1937

⁴⁴⁴ ANCR Gobernación Chittenden to President Cortes 8 June 1937

were not restricted from employment and there were over 800 employed there (out of around 3,000 total workers).⁴⁴⁵ The companion law, therefore, was a particular anti-black, anti-West Indian legislation. In the same year, Costa Rican workers outnumbered West Indians in UFCO's Northern Railway Company, a former stronghold of West Indians workers, by almost 2:1.⁴⁴⁶ The tightening of immigration restrictions forced the British consulate to write to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to inquire about complaints that he had been receiving about the "treatment accorded to British subjects on arrival at Costa Rican ports by the Immigration officials."⁴⁴⁷

The companion law was not the only law passed at this time aimed at separating the races and restricting blacks. The construction of the *balneario*, or the public bath and pool, of Limón was one such instance. Conceptualized as a "center dedicated preferentially to foster tourism," the balneario would also be open to the "residents of Limón." The rules of the balneario, however, identified *which* residents of Limón would be allowed to use the facility. One must fit into three categories in order to swim or bathe: One must "be of good behavior [...] comply with the rules," and most critically, one must "belong to the white race."⁴⁴⁸ Hoping to bring Limón into the fold of the nation through tourism of whites from the Central Valley and abroad was the goal of the law. The West Indian community protested the prohibition on their use of the balneario, prompting responses from Costa Ricans who were in favor of the segregation of the bathhouse. They pointed to the fact that a second balneario would be built at Puita, where blacks (as well as other non-desirables, like prostitutes) could swim. Since Puita was said to be "one of the most beautiful"⁴⁴⁹ of the area, the writer justified the racial apartheid through a *separate but equal* logic. The building of a separate facility was for many Costa Ricans, the perfect solution to what one journalist called "the problem of the colored race." Facilities and attraction for tourists were "required conditions to make [Limón] pleasant" and to hopefully permanently attract white persons who could colonize the region. Arguing that "the city of Limón does not have anything that attracts the attention of the national or foreign visitor," racially improving the region was one major step in that direction. A bathhouse would help to "reclaim the city of Limón" and to nationalize the province.⁴⁵⁰

The tense political climate of anti-imperialism against the UFCO informed the 1934 strike in Limón led by the Communist Party, shutting the region down for a few weeks. The strike, along with the new banana contract of the same year, changed the nature of UFCO production in Costa Rica. Chomsky notes that "this labor militancy, along with soil exhaustion and disease, prompted the United Fruit Company to essentially abandon its Atlantic Coast banana production and move to the Pacific in 1938."⁴⁵¹ With the ban on black employment in the new Pacific Zone, the mythology of homogeneity was affirmed, if only briefly. Gudmundson refers to the idea of Costa Rican whiteness, the result of what he calls the rural democratic model wherein all Costa Ricans were the descendents of poor, egalitarian Spanish farmers, as "the subject of one of the most attractive and widely disseminated national

⁴⁴⁵ ANCR Fomento y Agricultura 5 June 1939

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ ANCR Gobernación British Consulate to Secretary of State 31 October 1936

⁴⁴⁸ *Voz del Atlántico*, 16 November 1935

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 31 August 1935

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Chomsky, 13.

mythologies of any Latin American nation.”⁴⁵² Goldberg’s definition of whiteness affirms that discourses of power and belonging underscored the making of whiteness:

‘Whiteness’...is not some natural condition, phenotypically indicative of blood or genetic or intellectual superiority, but the manufactured outcome of cultural and legal definition and political and economic identification with rulership and privilege.⁴⁵³

Seeking to correct the alleged disorder of black privilege in the nation, Costa Rican petitioners, civic organizations, and mediascapes sought ensure the progress of the nation through the affirmation of white national identity. The West Indian contestation of this Costa Rican identity, however, would unsettle the apartheid of Costa Rican national narratives and citizenship.

⁴⁵² Gundmundson, 1.

⁴⁵³ Goldberg, 11.

Chapter Four: Mapping Afro-Costa Rica: Nationalism, Citizenship, and the Practice of Garveyism

I. Competing Nationalism and the Contestation of Belonging

On August 23 1930, the *Searchlight* published a letter from W. A. Pettgrave, who had written to the editor in response to José Guerrero's anti-black nationalist article that appeared in the *La Tribuna* newspaper. Representing the Sociedad de Amigos del País, a leading civic organization in San José, Guerrero argued (using both eugenic and cultural arguments) that West Indians were a racial threat to the Costa Rican nation. His organization had advocated not only for the deportation of West Indians, but the sterilization of those who remained in the country.⁴⁵⁴ Writing passionately on behalf of West Indians in Limón and the black race at large, Pettgrave, an active member of the UNIA who would go on to become President of Limón's Moín Junction Division, invoked the language and political philosophy of Garveyism. Pettgrave's scathing critique of the Guerrero article set the record straight by re-narrating the history of Limón, countering ideas of inherent black inferiority, and making claims to an Afro-Costa Rican identity.

Opposing the representation of West Indians as a foreign body seeking to invade the nation, Pettgrave offers a different perspective on West Indian immigration to Costa Rica. "The Negro was invited here to work when others failed, including the Costa Rican," he wrote, "when Port Limon, was only a belt of swamps malarious [sic], where only bush existed, yellow fevers, [and] wild animals, where not even the real natives (Indians) could exist." West Indians would often invoke this history highlighting their role in the development of Limón during these years, to counter the attacks of nationalist groups and anti-black legislation. They pointed out the fact that without West Indian labor, the Atlantic coast would have remained undeveloped, unproductive, and isolated from the rest of the nation. West Indians, Pettgrave and his associates argued, had turned Limón from a jungle into a site of modern, capitalist enterprise and had labored to create the most important industry in the nation, the banana industry. Having contributed to the modernization and enrichment of Costa Rica with their blood, sweat, and sometimes their lives, especially in the early years, West Indians, in Pettgrave's words, "can with as much reason claim Costa Rica as the land of their adoption as the Spaniard can." After all, the "real natives" of Costa Rica, in Pettgrave's assessment, were Indigenous and not white. Pettgrave critiqued both the idea that blacks could not assimilate into the nation and the idea of Costa Rican whiteness, and therefore, superiority. Following the Garveyite line of thinking, for Pettgrave, "the Negro's backwardness [was] painfully due to his lack of opportunities...[and the existence of] discrimination" rather than a natural racial order. With "equal privileges and opportunities," he argued, debunking naturalist and biological claims of black inferiority, blacks are "second to none in all the arts and sciences." Although questioning the whiteness of Costa Rican identity ("as White as they try to make it"), Pettgrave nonetheless affirmed a belief in the idea of race, arguing that blacks were "as pure a race...and as progressive as any other race groups."⁴⁵⁵

While the UNIA in Limón, the Port Limón Division in particular, experienced obstacles and conflict in the 1930s, West Indians' conceptualization of race, racial solidarity, and racial uplift were mediated through a Garveyite worldview. West Indian community leaders,

⁴⁵⁴ See Harpelle, *West Indians of Costa Rica*.

⁴⁵⁵ *Limón Searchlight*, 23 August 1930

petitioners, journalists, and others employed Garvey's ideas to make sense of the chaos that seemed to intensify around them, as Limón faced economic depression and uncertainty. National laws upheld explicit racial segregation, as noted in the previous chapter, and the United Fruit Company, focusing on its new holdings in the Pacific, withdrew from the region, removing bridges and railroad tracks and other infrastructure from the province of Limón.⁴⁵⁶ Costa Rican nationalism was articulated in conversation with anti-black racism, and branded West Indians as undesirable and dangerous based on their race. Garveyism allowed West Indians to imagine and enact a redemptive framework through which to critique the representation of black savagery and immorality embedded in Costa Rican nationalism. Despite the reports of anti-immigrant Costa Ricans who warned of a black invasion, West Indians were *leaving* Limón and the population was in decline, as older West Indians passed away and the young and able left for more promising lands. Harpelle estimates that the population decreased sixty-two percent from 1927-1950.⁴⁵⁷ Those who stayed behind were faced with the dilemma of citizenship, and West Indians would not gain Costa Rican citizenship en masse until 1950. West Indians made citizenship claims, however, within the discursive spaces informed by a Garveyite ideology. Garveyism made a political and philosophical opening through which West Indians intervened in the highly contested terrains of Costa Rican national identity.

Counter-Narratives of Black Belonging

For the managers and bosses of the United Fruit Company, British West Indians, were regarded as “extremely courteous” due to the “triumph of empire” in the West Indies.⁴⁵⁸ Such cultural traits coupled with the fact that West Indians spoke English, were familiar with the UFCO system, and had been resident in Limón for decades, made them the preferred laborers of the Company. The Costa Rican government, Costa Rican workers in Limón, and nationalist civic organizations in San José, however, did not view West Indians in such a positive light. Instead, this period of heightened Costa Rican nationalism included anti-black discourse that renewed national white identity. Defining who was and was not Costa Rican, who was *native* and who was *foreign*, was a high stakes debate in the nation. Defining who belonged to the nation and who had the right to be Costa Rican became more and more a legal matter informed by the logic of racial segregation.

While Costa Ricans adopted anti-foreign and anti-imperial rhetoric and protest, the 1934 banana contract between the Costa Rican government and the UFCO benefited the Company greatly, giving it a “new lease on life”⁴⁵⁹ in the nation. Despite the strike of 1934 and the anti-imperialism of Costa Rican nationalist discourse at this time, in the end the new contract strengthened the Company's power as well as the position of large landowners in the Pacific. The UFCO continued to enjoy a monopoly over transportation and marketing, and continued to be enriched at the expense of Costa Rican laborers.⁴⁶⁰ For the Costa Rican government, the new contract did offer advantages, even as the UFCO maintained its dominance. The new contract and the transfer of UFCO operations to the Pacific coast created jobs and development on the

⁴⁵⁶ Harpelle, “Bananas and Business,” 71.

⁴⁵⁷ Ronald Harpelle, “Identity in Transition: From West Indian Immigrant to Afro-Costarricense,” in *English Speaking Communities in Latin America*, ed. Oliver Marshall (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000) <http://bolt.lakeheadu.ca/~sojourners/pubs/article1.html> (accessed 14 February 2008).

⁴⁵⁸ Chapman, 76.

⁴⁵⁹ Harpelle, “Banana and business,” 57.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

Pacific side of the country, enabled the nationalization of the Atlantic coast, and facilitated the government's containment of and attempts to assimilate West Indians. English language private schools were closed and replaced with government schools taught solely in Spanish. West Indian squatters and farmers were expelled from their land, and those who were non-compliant were deported.⁴⁶¹

Along with the companion law of the 1934 contract that prohibited the employment of people of color in the new Pacific banana zone, immigration and citizenship laws were adopted in the 1930s and the 1940s, including the 1942 prohibition of the immigration of "visible minorities" in efforts to restrict the entry of non-whites.⁴⁶² These trends greatly impacted West Indians, who suffered in the economic climate.

Unlike Central American day laborers, private West Indian farmers were not guaranteed a wage. The Company had the right to reject bananas or to refuse to pick up bananas on the rail line that it owned and operated. Those West Indians who were employed directly by the Company—the middle strata of the banana plantations hierarchy, like the carpenters, repairmen, engineers, clerks, banana loaders—were laid off first as Limón's banana industry declined. Long-employed West Indian workers, "many of them dating from the [old] days,"⁴⁶³ were forced into retirement. By 1937, as the *Voz* reported, only two boats of bananas per week were loaded for export.⁴⁶⁴ For the West Indians who wrote in to the *Searchlight* and the *Voz*, the economic situation was "disastrous" and a "crisis."⁴⁶⁵ "Can nothing be done to save us from starvation?" one writer asked.⁴⁶⁶ Unable to seek employment in the Pacific Zone because of the companion law, and suffering without relief from the collapse of Limón's banana industry, West Indians viewed themselves as experiencing "set-backs of the most serious nature."⁴⁶⁷

While racial segregation was not the norm in Latin America, Costa Rica had implemented laws that explicitly restricted the movement of blacks, barring them from certain public spaces and from being employed in the new Pacific enclave. Keeping a close eye on black politics in the United States, West Indians quickly exposed the Costa Rican system for what it was: *segregation*. West Indians used the term to describe the restrictions placed upon their movement and employment. "We find that in every instance where Governmental work is being carried on" blacks "are unjustly discriminated against," they protested.⁴⁶⁸ Not only were blacks being barred from seeking employment on the Pacific side of the nation, thereby restricting their movement within the nation, but they were also being restricted in new ways in Limón. A law restricting the patronage of the new Public Bath in Limón to whites only was an explicit attempt to not only separate the races, but to mark black bodies as unsanitary, as discussed in the previous chapter. A separate bath was to be built in a town called Puita, where blacks and "women of dubious character" were allowed to bathe. Equating blackness with the sexual immorality and dirtiness of prostitutes, West Indians were denied the individual rights of citizenship. As one writer put it, "regardless of their moral or social standing, our coloured ladies and gentlemen are all regarded as vagabonds."⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶¹ Ibid, 58.

⁴⁶² Ibid., 70.

⁴⁶³ *Voz del Atlántico*, 19 September 1942

⁴⁶⁴ *Limón Searchlight*, 16 November 1929

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 9 November 1929

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 8 February 1930

⁴⁶⁷ *Voz del Atlántico*, 19 September 1942

⁴⁶⁸ *Limón Searchlight*, 28 June 1930

⁴⁶⁹ *Voz del Atlántico*, 14 September 1935

“Things for us are getting worse each day,” the anonymous writer proclaimed in desperation, as West Indians occupied a space in-between immigrant and citizen, no longer protected by the British consulate and not protected by Costa Rican citizenship laws. While offering no specific suggestions, the writer hoped to see “an energetic protest be raised by the influential section of our community, and a definite plan of action.” He was undoubtedly referring to the Garveyite leadership of the community. “Should this precedent be allowed to go unchallenged,” he warned, “other and more objectionable [laws] may be expected” and “the disdainful Jim Crow system [of the United States] might be attempted here on the Railroad and other public places.”⁴⁷⁰ In fact, efforts at racial segregation became more and more commonplace in Costa Rica. Although there were small numbers of West Indians who had migrated to San José in the 1930s and 1940s, most West Indians believed that a law existed that prohibited blacks from entering the Central Valley.⁴⁷¹ While such a law never existed, the fact that West Indians believed it was a reflection of the political climate in which racial discrimination and segregation were upheld by Costa Rican law.

As it became crucial to follow the debates in Congress and national politics, not just the local politics of Limón, West Indian journalists translated national news and debates in the Limón press for those who could not read Spanish. The translation of nationalist articles featured in Central Valley newspapers enabled UNIA leaders and others who contributed to the Limón English language media to rally the West Indian community. An article entitled “A False Attack,” featured the translation of a Spanish language editorial, and gave West Indians in Limón a glimpse of the way they were being portrayed. Creating public anxiety around the issue of “excessive immigration,” Central Valley nationalist groups and news media portrayed Limón as a place of chaos where blacks “arrive daily in greater quantities.” “They invade every department of the Fruit Company,” the writer translated, and Costa Rican “natives” were discriminated against to the extent that “there are no white Time-Keepers, nor white Foremen, and the best positions & [sic] works in which the natives should be found there are colored employees.”⁴⁷² In their depiction, Limón was a site of racial disorder, where blacks subordinated whites, and the foreign Company and its foreign workers were dominant at the expense of putatively *native* white Costa Ricans.

Editor and Garveyite leader Samuel Nation offered a counter-narrative to these claims. West Indians were leaving the economic insecurity of Costa Rica and moving on to “more propitious fields.” Indeed, the West Indians population of Limón had decreased significantly. Furthermore, West Indians, in Nation’s analysis, rose to the ranks of foremen and time-keepers, because they had been working in Limón since a “time when [the province] was not considered good enough” for Costa Ricans. They worked hard to attain upward mobility, working in “Rains and Shine.” The editor questions the Central Valley Costa Rican’s right to the best jobs in the banana industry “simply because he calls himself white.” Casting doubt upon the purported racial purity of Costa Ricans and critiquing the idea that blacks enjoyed undeserved opportunities in Limón, the editor exposes the racist foundation of nationalist claims. The idea that West Indians, because of their blackness, “should not even be given employment in the Zone which he has helped to make habitable,”⁴⁷³ was not only racist, but was illogical and dangerous for the development of the nation, Nation and others argued. Discrimination in Limón was the worst

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 2 March 1935. Scholars have revealed that this law, in fact, never existed. See Putnam.

⁴⁷² *Limón Searchlight*, 15 March 1930

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

insult to West Indians, who felt that their labor was the reason that Limón had developed into a province fit for incorporation into the nation-state, whereas it was previously isolated and abandoned. “We can excuse the heads of departments in the interior because they do not sufficiently know the merits of [black] people,” one commenter noted, “but such an indifference to [blacks] by the Officers of the Siquierres Municipality is an almost Criminal Act” since West Indians had “built up the town of Siquierres.”⁴⁷⁴

While critiquing the idea of inherent black inferiority, West Indian contributors to the *Searchlight* wrote about the intrinsic attributes of black workers, highlighting the role of West Indians in the making of modern Costa Rica. The idea that “the coloured worker has an inherited adaptability; is a staunch adherent to law and order, with a true respect for authority” depicted blacks as not only the ideal laborers, but as necessary to the progress of the world. “There is no heroic achievement from time immemorial in which the man of colour has not gained distinction,” the article declared, offering examples such as the building of the Egyptian pyramids to show how human advancement relied on black labor and insight. The most recent example of this was the building of the neighboring Panama Canal by West Indians. Since “he readily tackles manuel [sic] labour in agriculture, railroading, excavations, highway construction, sanitation—in fact almost everything,” the “labour problems” of Costa Rica would be “best solved by the use of [the black] worker.”⁴⁷⁵ West Indians, the article urged, should take their rightful place as a part of the Costa Rican nation and modern civilization at large. This language, re-narration of history, and development of racial identity was a reflection of the central role of Garveyism and the politics of black capitalism and citizenship in the West Indian conceptualization of their social, political, and economic position in Costa Rica.

Black Capitalism

By 1929, ten years after the formation of the first division in Costa Rica, there were more than 1,000 members of the UNIA in the province of Limón, and the organization had a number of branches in the province.⁴⁷⁶ Scholar of West Indian migration Ronald Harpelle understands the UNIA in Limon as deviating from the fundamental tenants of the organization in that it was conservative and non-radical.⁴⁷⁷ This section will reveal, however, that West Indians’ conservative political practices in Limón were indeed based upon the ideology of Garveyism, particularly that of black capitalism.

It was in the interplay of the local politics and tenuous citizenship in Limón, the political philosophy of Garveyism, that West Indians chose to abstain from the strike of 1934. West Indians were not always anti-union in Limón. They had organized a strike in 1910.⁴⁷⁸ But the Communist Party of Costa Rica, founded in 1932, had organized the largest strike in Costa Rican history via the Union of Atlantic Workers.⁴⁷⁹ The West Indian community, however, did not see its interests as aligned with that of Costa Rican workers in the province as “the ‘independent’ producer was less likely to join with other workers to protest working conditions, since these

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 28 June 1930

⁴⁷⁵ *Voz del Atlántico*, 9 March 1940

⁴⁷⁶ Chomsky, 205.

⁴⁷⁷ Harpelle, *The West Indians of Costa Rica*, 58.

⁴⁷⁸ See Chomsky.

⁴⁷⁹ Ronald Harpelle, “Racism and Nationalism in the Creation of Costa Rica’s Pacific Coast Banana Enclave,” *The Americas*, 56.3 (2000): 42.

conditions were not perceived of as imposed by the company.”⁴⁸⁰ The anti-communism of Garvey, rather, appealed to the West Indian population, as it was largely removed from the life and concerns of a day laborer on the Company plantations. At the time of the 1934 strike, most West Indians did not work directly for the Company. By 1927, forty-seven percent of West Indian males were self-employed or employers themselves. Only around thirty percent of them worked on banana plantations.⁴⁸¹ Of these workers, given the racial stratification of banana production, the majority were not doing the back-breaking labor of planting and cutting bananas, but were mid-level workers who oversaw this process or served administrative roles such as foremen and clerks.

Although the United Fruit Company first perceived Garvey and his organization as a threat because its race-based politics resonated with the bulk of its workers, the UFCO ultimately realized that Garveyism fit perfectly into company’s system. As a Jamaican migrant who migrated to Costa Rica in 1910, where he worked as a UFCO timekeeper (a privileged position), Garvey was aware of the inequalities inherent in the banana enclave and the hegemony of North American interests. But when Garvey returned to Limón after establishing UNIA headquarters in New York, and developing a formidable organization, he made it clear that he and his organization sought to work with the company rather than against it. As a capitalist, Garvey aimed to keep UFCO production continuous and had no desire to disrupt the work of West Indians. Since Garvey opposed “talk of strike action or agitation for wage increases or better conditions,” he did not trouble the racial hierarchy and the fundamental structures of UFCO control.⁴⁸² Garveyism in Limón did not operate as a radical ideology in Costa Rica, rather, the anti-communism of Garveyism and the dominance of UNIA leaders in Limón’s news media played a central role in keeping West Indians from participating in the 1934 strike.

The development of Garvey’s ideology of black capitalism was informed by his experiences in U.S. enclaves and his admiration for enterprises like the United Fruit Company. As he had traveled on their ships and would have seen them in various locations in the Caribbean and Central America, United Fruit’s Great White Fleet inevitably inspired Garvey’s Black Star Line. Garveyism was also informed by Garvey’s experiences of empire, first as a British subject, then as a worker in the newly formed U.S. empire in the circum-Caribbean. After working in Costa Rica and Panama (and also editing newspapers in both countries) and traveling elsewhere in Latin America, Garvey returned to Jamaica with a first-hand perspective of the poor living and working conditions and racial discrimination that West Indians experienced abroad. A black nation and empire formed through black capitalism, he surmised, would free blacks from what seemed to be a permanent position of subordination in the Americas. For West Indians who labored in U.S. enclaves in Central American nations that sought to exclude them from citizenship and equal rights based on the idea of black savagery, Garveyism not only affirmed black humanity, but insisted on the capability of blacks to develop industries and participate in modern nation-building.

Being a part of the UNIA required having money to pay membership dues and fund specific campaigns. Garveyites, including West Indians in Limón, lost money through buying shares of the failed Black Star Line. The UNIA collected over \$2000 per month from the Limón divisions in the 1920s. In his *three day* visit to Limón in 1921, Garvey raised over \$50,000 to

⁴⁸⁰ Chomsky, 63.

⁴⁸¹ Harpelle, “Racism and Nationalism,” 46.

⁴⁸² Harpelle, *The West Indians of Costa Rica*, 59.

buy the “mother ship” of the line.⁴⁸³ The purchase of Black Star Line shares kept West Indians at work, therefore yielding him political clout in Costa Rica. During his 1921 visit Garvey met with both the manager of the UFCO and Julio Acosta, President of Costa Rica.⁴⁸⁴

Black capitalism was the foundation of the UNIA and the ideology of Garveyism as a whole. In an editorial letter for the *Negro World*, Garvey instructed blacks to “wake up,” arguing that “the Negro should be a party to the commercial conquest of the world.” He went on to prescribe the remedy for black subordination: “If we are to rise as a great [people] to become a great national force, we must start business between America, the West Indies and Africa.” As whites have “for hundreds of years made a market for his goods among Negroes and alien races...Negroes have the same right to make a market among white people for his manufactured goods.” Judging the success and power of a race by its ability to develop industrially, for Garvey, “if the white man is manly enough to put up a factory, the Negro ought to be manly enough to do the same things.” “Develop yourselves into a commercial and industrial people,” he commanded and “you will have laid the foundation for racial greatness.”⁴⁸⁵ This was advice echoed by Elijah Muhammed, Malcolm X, and even James Brown’s “Funky President.”

While the ultimate aim of Garveyism was the making of a black nation in Africa for blacks displaced in the Americas and beyond, participation in the UNIA offered West Indians in Limón an ideology of race and modernity that they employed to form an Afro-Costa Rican identity. By being a part of rather than fighting Costa Rican Capitalism, West Indians articulated a Costa Rican identity as well as a desire for the industrial development and capitalist uplift of the race.

Garveyism in Limón saw anti-communism as a way to articulate their Costa Rican nationalism. A number of articles were submitted to the *Voz* by a group that called itself “the Sojourner Committee.” The Committee, made up of UNIA members from the Port Limón Division,⁴⁸⁶ sought to “warn” West Indians against joining the strike of 1934—the largest in Costa Rica’s history. Affirming the idea of white vanguardism in Capitalist modernization, the Committee proclaimed that Costa Rica was a “Capitalist Government [that] is and has been administered by white men of the highest social and intellectual standing, some from the most noble of the Spanish caste inhabiting Costa Rica during the Colonial age.” Arguing that the “presence [of West Indians] in the country is due entirely to the industrial activities of the United Fruit Company” the Committee believed that the “passive and law abiding characteristics” of West Indians kept the Costa Rican government from “[acceding] to the Request to reject and deport” blacks.⁴⁸⁷ Translating the anti-black editorials of those they identified as Communists into English, the Sojourner’s Committee effectively depicted Communists as xenophobic racists who sought the removal of blacks from skilled positions and called for the deportation of blacks from the country. As “colored foreigners,”⁴⁸⁸ they argued, West Indians would gain nothing from a Communist victory in Costa Rica. Respecting capitalist development, Britain would offer West Indians no protection, and so showing their alignment with the Costa Rican government was their only hope.

⁴⁸³ Luciano Capelli and Yazmín Ross, *The Promised Ship* (Costa Rica: Río Nevado Producciones, 2000).

⁴⁸⁴ Harpelle, “Racism and Nationalism,” 44.

⁴⁸⁵ 31 January 1919 Editorial in *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, ed. Robert Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 351-353

⁴⁸⁶ Harpelle, “Racism and Nationalism,” 44; “Bananas and business,” 67.

⁴⁸⁷ *Voz del Atlántico*, 18 August 1934

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 25 August 1934

Describing the strike leaders as outside agitators from San José, former editor of the *Searchlight*, Sam Nation, wrote an editorial to the *Voz*, claiming that the Communist “knows nothing of conditions existing on a banana farm.” Nation, himself, like other self-employed West Indians of his generation (he had spent over thirty years in Costa Rica), was also far removed from conditions on banana plantations. An increase in wages was an impossible (“let us be reasonable”) request in such an economic climate, he reasoned. Instead Nation, perhaps the most widely read and well-regarded voice of the West Indian community of Port Limón, put forth a Booker T. Washington-esque call for patience and moderation. He advocated “toleration on both sides, and a judicious mode of soliciting the attention of our superiors...to bring desired results, rather than an appeal to FORCE AND VIOLENCE.”⁴⁸⁹ Garveyism in Limón was, as shown in the editorials of Nation and his contemporaries, a political philosophy that lent itself to moderate, or even conservative political action on the part of West Indians in Limón. The UNIA, therefore, did *not* facilitate the development of a radical movement in Costa Rica even as West Indians political engagements were founded upon the language and logic of Garveyism.

Nation called communism “evil.” For him, it was nothing more than “political trickery” that sought to co-opt blacks, putting their livelihoods and their residence at risk. “Horse got no business in a cow fight,” Nation wrote, using folk wisdom to explain that the fight of the Communists was not a West Indian fight. “Beware...of your actions as Sojourners in a Beneficent Country,” Nation reminded West Indians, the vast majority of whom were not naturalized by the mid-1930s. Nation employed an analysis that resonated strongly with West Indians, for whom the legacy of slavery shaped their political yearnings. “As Communists we all become slaves of the government,” he warned, and “we can own no property.” Reminiscent of the post-emancipation West Indies from which the older generation fled, Communism would move West Indians backwards to a position without land, economic opportunity, or political rights. Ushering in the “destruction of individual initiative,”⁴⁹⁰ Communism, in their analysis, was a threat to black redemption.

West Indians used the discourse of black capitalism to make a case for black belonging in Limón. They wrote into the newspapers with recommendations for the development of new industries, like a pig-butchering industry,⁴⁹¹ for example, since the banana industry had proved unstable. One contributor proposed that those who had returned to Jamaica from Cuba should be welcomed to migrate to Costa Rica, as “they are versed in Sugar Cane and Banana cultivating and are also conversant with the Spanish language.”⁴⁹² Making the argument that blacks are best suited for certain types of cultivation, the writer advocated an *increase* in West Indian immigration to help solve the nation’s economic problems. With a firm belief in the truth of race, West Indians argued that specific traits made some racial groups more predisposed to the building of certain industries. “It was by means of [the] hardy constitutions and forbearing [sic] dispositions” of West Indians, wrote one contributor, that United Fruit “was able to realize...success.”⁴⁹³ As they saw it, the development of Limón, central to the nation’s economic development, was “brought into possibility by the Industrious determination of an English speaking populace.”⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 1 September 1934

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 19 September 1942

⁴⁹² Ibid., 29 May 1937

⁴⁹³ *Limón Searchlight*, 28 June 1930

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 26 December 1929

West Indians viewed themselves as colonizers of the province of Limón. The colonization of Limón via black labor moved the province “from a settlement of Huts in a swamp jungle unfit for the residence of the white race”⁴⁹⁵ to a productive part of the nation. For West Indians, this affirmed the idea that blacks were a “special class of labourers,” as they were able to withstand the malaria and rough conditions of Limón in the late nineteenth century.⁴⁹⁶ The ideology of Garveyism depicted blacks as being the best types of colonizers for tropical climates, like those found in equatorial Africa. During this period of uncertainty and legal segregation, Garveyites in Limón proposed the founding of a “1000 Hectarea [sic] Negro Colony” in Tortuguero in the northern region of Limón. The same article refers to Garvey as “the idol of the Negro people,” comparing him to Ghandi.⁴⁹⁷ West Indians in Limón saw themselves as proof that black colonization of *uncivilized* regions led to development and progress.

While UNIA branches developed across the Americas in the early 1920s, by 1925, Garvey and his organization were facing serious financial setbacks. Garvey was charged with mail fraud in United States for the selling of Black Star Line shares. In 1925 he was imprisoned for two years, and then was deported in 1927. Following his forced return to Jamaica, the UNIA headquarters moved from New York to Kingston, Jamaica. Arrested and indicted again, this time in Jamaica,⁴⁹⁸ Garvey continued to be discredited by the media and in Jamaican politics. Through the 1930s, Garvey had a tumultuous political career in Jamaica and then England, and he struggled to keep the organization afloat. At the request of U.S. officials, he was banned from entering Costa Rica, Panama, and other nations in the region, losing the clout that he enjoyed in Central America in the early 1920s. In 1934, Garvey initiated a five-year plan to re-invigorate the UNIA. Garvey wrote to Presidents of UNIA divisions in various locations, including the President of the Moín Junction division of Limón, Mr. Pettgrave. Pettgrave sent the letter to the English section of the *Voz del Atlántico* for publication. The letter was a call for every division to raise funds for the five year plan which were to be “forwarded to the Headquarters” in London.⁴⁹⁹ Although lack of records fail to substantiate how much money was sent from Limón, Garveyism continued to shape Afro-Costa Rican’s sense of belonging to the transnational Garveyite community.

II. The Persistent Influence of Garveyism and the Future of the UNIA in Limón

In the midst of uncertainty and placelessness, the UNIA was both central to articulations of black belonging in Costa Rica and a site of great conflict and division within the West Indian community in Limón. Looking at the politics of race, gender, and the longings of a new generation born in Costa Rica, I examine the relationship between the local and transnational manifestations of Garveyism and the shifting role of the UNIA in Limón. Highlighting the making of female leadership and the participatory practice of Garveyism in Limón reveals that West Indians appropriated the transnational ideology to make claims on belonging in Costa Rica.

The UNIA provided a governing structure for blacks denied participation in modern political institutions. The UNIA was a well-ordered transnational organization, and the

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 7 December 1929

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 22 August 1931

⁴⁹⁸ Garvey would acquitted shortly thereafter.

⁴⁹⁹ *Voz del Atlántico*, 28 December 1935

relationship between the local branches and the Parent Body reveal that local and translocal dynamics shaped the development of Garveyism. While the UNIA functioned as a transnational body, its creation of “networks that might have otherwise been the responsibility of a nation-state or states,”⁵⁰⁰ had implication for citizenship on a local level. West Indians in Limón were *practicing diaspora*⁵⁰¹ and Garveyism in a political climate informed by the local climate of anti-black nationalism *and* the global condition of black subordination.

Local and Transnational Dynamics of Garveyism: Women’s Leadership in the Redemption of Limón

Women enjoyed a majority of the vote in the Limón Division. As noted in chapter 2, defining and lauding redemptive black womanhood was central to the making of redemptive blackness. I examine the role of women’s leadership within the UNIA, highlighting the dynamics between the local and transnational Garveyite community in defining redemptive womanhood. Women were central to the functioning of the UNIA from the inception of the organization. Garvey’s first and second wives played critical roles in developing the organization.⁵⁰² For Garvey, female *leadership* was as important as female membership in the UNIA, and was written into the bylaws, as the branches of the UNIA were required to have a “Lady President” and “Lady Vice President.” Women held a number of prominent positions in local branches as well as in the governing Parent Body of the organization over the years. The leadership of women was not limited to the divisions. Lyllian M. Galloway, for example, was manager of the Universal Printing Plant.⁵⁰³ The Black Cross Nurses, UNIA women trained in nursing and medicine, were the most visible auxiliary within the organization, and were featured prominently in parades.⁵⁰⁴

Amy Jacques Garvey, the second wife of the President-General, was at the forefront of the formation of what Ula Taylor calls “community feminism” within the organization. “Formulating conceptualizations of womanhood that rebuffed male dominance while still embracing aspects of patriarchy,” Jacques Garvey’s community feminism functioned at the intersection of feminism and patriarchy.⁵⁰⁵ A *Negro World* interviewer described her as a woman who was “helping a man to make the present and future of Negroes secure and happy; doing her full share as a good wife and helping him to accomplish his task as a Negro leader.”⁵⁰⁶ While Jacques Garvey would affirm this role as “helpmate,” she set a standard for female leadership and the right of black women to define redemption for themselves.

As the editor of the “Our Women and What They Think” section of the *Negro World* Jacques Garvey shaped the tone, language, and topics that circulated throughout the transnational community via the newspaper. She helped to define a New Negro Woman whose place was not

⁵⁰⁰ Grant, 295.

⁵⁰¹ See Edwards. I explore the practice of diaspora in Chapter 3.

⁵⁰² See Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey*.

⁵⁰³ *Negro World*, 8 July 1922.

⁵⁰⁴ See Anne Macpherson, “Colonial Matriarchs: Garveyism, Maternalism, and Belize’s Black Cross Nurses, 1920-1952,” *Gender & History*, 15.3 (2003): 507-527.

⁵⁰⁵ Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey*, 2; 64. For Taylor, “despite this ‘helpmate’ focus, community feminists are undeniably *feminists* in that their activism discerns the configuration of oppressive power relations, shatters masculinist claims of woman as intellectually inferior, and seeks to empower women by expanding their roles and options.”

⁵⁰⁶ *Negro World*, 17 March 1923

limited to the home, and who had a central role in black uplift. Jacques Garvey “wanted her readership to understand how the familiar and public spheres were complementary,” and how this re-conceptualization of a woman’s place was central to black uplift and redemption.⁵⁰⁷ “There are many people who think that a woman’s place is only in the home,” one article in Jacques Garvey’s section read, “this idea, however, does not hold true with the New Negro Woman.”⁵⁰⁸ Another article listed “alternative rules for the housewife.” The cleanliness and orderliness of the home, the writer reasoned, “cannot be achieved by any one individual—it depends on collective effort.” On the cleaning of the bedroom, the article asks, “Is there any reason why Mrs. Homemaker should spend her time picking [up clothes]? Cannot every one hang up his own night clothes...?” Why, the writer begs to know, “should only one person be expected to hang up the towels, wash out the basin and clean the ring off the tub?” The housewife is not the family’s servant, but the keeper of order.⁵⁰⁹ The job of domestic worker was one that black women in the Americas, including West Indian women in Limón, were often limited to. That “many white people were inclined to feel that the Negro woman’s position in their household or her own were her fixed status,”⁵¹⁰ was erroneous, according to the “Our Women...” section. Racial improvement required producing “the higher type of womanhood,”⁵¹¹ one that countered dominant representations of black women and challenged hegemonic constructions of both race and gender.

Through the *Negro World* and participation in the UNIA, women dictated the terms of what a Jamaican woman contributor to the section called “emancipated womanhood.” “One cannot help feeling proud that one belongs to this special sex in this particular age,” she remarked. During a time period in which white women enjoyed the privileges of suffrage, and increased political rights, black UNIA women demanded recognition within the new definitions of womanhood.⁵¹² The era “when the ambition of the young girl was never any further than the matrimonial altar” was over in the minds of UNIA women.⁵¹³ She had “Overstepped the Home Boundary and Is Serving All Humanity,” read one headline.⁵¹⁴ “Besides decorating their homes and firesides,” they demanded, women can “serve mankind as lawyers, doctors, editors, artists, jewelers and farmers.” Women even take on goals that the author calls “quite masculine,” in the realm of athletics and piloting. Both rejecting and affirming the gendering of space and place, they cautioned, “in doing these her aim is not to infringe on men’s rights, but to develop her personal abilities and make life worth while.”⁵¹⁵ As community feminists, UNIA women theorized black women’s role in race leadership. In addition to demanding the right to “work on par with men in the office as well as on the platform,” women were rising to “demand absolute respect from men of all races.” At the forefront of racial uplift and redemption, they argued, “the New Negro Woman [was] revolutionizing the old type of male leadership.”⁵¹⁶

⁵⁰⁷ Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey*, 75.

⁵⁰⁸ *Negro World*, 19 April 1924

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 18 April 1925

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15 November 1924

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁵¹² See Ann Bausum, *With Courage and Cloth: Winning the Fight for a Woman's Right to Vote* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2004).

⁵¹³ *Negro World* 15 November 1924

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Scholars “take for granted the gendering at work” in the production of the *race man*.⁵¹⁷ E. Francis White points out that “a politically active woman was consonant with a respectable black woman; it was her duty to uplift the race.”⁵¹⁸ The idea of racial uplift and race work and the practice of Garveyism fostered an idea of redemptive womanhood that located a woman’s place as both inside and outside of the home. The idea that black success was dependent on the redemption of black women was key among West Indians in Limón.

A young West Indian woman, Philomela, became a regular contributor to the *Searchlight*, writing *Philomela’s Serious Talk With Girls*, a column series featured in the newspaper in 1931. For Philomela, young women had a central role in the uplift of West Indians in Costa Rica, and she defined redemption within the social and political landscape of Limón. The development of the mind and intellect, in her opinion, was a means of resisting the purported inherent sexual desires of young West Indian women. While affirming patriarchal control over women’s sexuality on the one hand, Philomela also sought to empower West Indian women to take control over their own destinies. Acting “ladylike” and protecting one’s “modesty,” a young woman’s “greatest gift,” strengthening one’s mind and intellect as a means of putting one’s body at the service of the race. The behavior of middle-class women, however, was not always in the service of redemption and uplift. For example, some privileged women were preoccupied with attire and manners and unwilling to “lift as they climbed.”⁵¹⁹ While redemptive geographies drew borders of belonging that excluded certain non-redemptive segments of the West Indian community, both Philomela and Jacques Garvey defined women’s redemption as based on a philosophy that attempted to be *inclusive*. Philomela publicly scolded members of the Young Women’s Standard Club who discriminated against young women who are “not of [high] educational rank [and] not as presumably modest...but who aim for upliftment” when they are admitted into the club. Urging the participation of all women in the mediascape of the *Negro World*, Jacques Garvey invited women who could not “express [them]selves on paper [to] get some one who is better equipped to clothe [their] sentiments in proper language and send them into [the] office.” Since “some of the most beautiful sentiments and lofty ideas emanate[d] from the brains of women who have [had] very little education,” all types of women had gifts to add to the movement.⁵²⁰ Garveyism placed a premium upon solidarity. For Philomela, “charity towards all,” especially “our defective fellowbeings,” was the mantra of racial uplift. Offering one’s “unselfish support” and scorning “snobbishness” and “egoism,” a woman of high social standing had a responsibility to instruct other women how to “follow [her] footsteps.”⁵²¹

The success of women is not found in being “some overburdened mother of illgotten children, or playthings of licencious, or painted butterflies who lose their beauty when a tough wind blows.” For Philomela, the success and progress of black women would raise the standard of life in the province at large. “Better your situation for a better Limón,” she instructed. With the right aims, Philomela envisioned UNIA and other club women as part of a vanguard that would help to improve the position of West Indians within Costa Rican society and would make Limón “better and cleaner by [their] good example.” Her hopes for a future Limón in which the “present day generation [will be] fully developed, socially, intellectually and morally,” puts

⁵¹⁷ Hazel V. Carby, *Race Men* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), 5.

⁵¹⁸ White, 36.

⁵¹⁹ Motto of the National Association of Club Women.

⁵²⁰ Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey*, 69.

⁵²¹ Philomela’s articles appeared in various issues of the newspaper in 1931. *Limón Searchlight* 4 July 1931; 18 July 1931; 15 August 1931; 22 August 1931; 5 December 1931; 12 December 1931; 26 December 1931

young West Indian women at the forefront of racial uplift in Limón. Community feminism in Limón was shaped by a desire for racial improvement and a belief in the central role of women to lead the race toward an equal position in Costa Rican society.

Leonie Aiken, a leading member of the Young Women's Standard Club (YWSC), wrote an article entitled "The Ladies." Critiquing the lack of debate and discussion of gender and the place of women in racial uplift organizations like the University Club, she remarked, "I have waited patiently and anxiously to hear the gentlemen...even breathe upon the name of 'Women.'" While she refers to herself and the women in her clubs as "ladies," she critiques the idea of a single, inherent nature of women. "The phases of womanly nature are infinite in their variety," she argues. The equality of men and women was evident in the fact that "there are very few places, if any, that men are and women are not; there are few things that men can do and women cannot." Commemorating the second anniversary of YWSC, Aiken viewed the redeeming behavior of the young West Indian women as proof that "Limón has intelligent Negro girls."⁵²² As young men had moved away and the older generation was passing away, women shouldered the burden of redemption.

Conflict in the Limón Division

As the UNIA weakened and Garvey faced his own personal, political, and financial problems, the Port Limón division was disintegrating. The activities of the division were not as well attended as they had once been. Of the yearly Harvest Festival, one division member noted, the "offerings were scanty." In the year of 1929 the Port Limón division began to disintegrate, according to member Sydney Montague, who wrote to the *Searchlight*. "Just a little more than a year [ago], we saw a flourishing Organization among the Negroes of Costa Rica," and that division alone had more than 1,000 members.⁵²³ The UNIA persisted in Costa Rica much longer and played a more central role than it had in other parts of the Americas through the late 1920s and into the 1930s.

Former Port Limón division president Samuel Nation thought of his newspaper as the organ of the UNIA in Limón. "This journal has avowed itself at the disposal of the Organization at all calls," he wrote, "in bringing to public gaze the benefits to be derived by enlisting oneself to the movement for the uplift and intellectual improvement of the coloured peoples of this country." But "while other divisions have been recording their activities" and submitting them to the newspaper, the Limón division "had been very much pronounced in its silence with regard to these publications." "Whether it is that there is no *forward* progress to announce, or that its progress cannot Stand [sic] the glare of a 'Searchlight' we know not,"⁵²⁴ he remarked, suggesting that the division leadership had something to hide. Nation used the newspaper to open up public dialogue about the growing frustration among the Port Limón Division membership. By 1930, the division was the site of chaos and scandal.

The *Searchlight* was the means through which members of the Port Limón division could voice criticisms against the leadership, when they were silenced within the organization meetings. Opinions and testimonies could be submitted anonymously, if so desired. For instance, the "Night Hawk" and "Special Correspondent" were regular contributors to the debates about the Port Limón division. The Night Hawk complained of the corruption,

⁵²² Ibid., 6 June 1931

⁵²³ Ibid., 21 December 1929

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

infighting and financial mismanagement of the division, describing the leadership of the branch as acting “like a bunch of Kindergarten[ers].”⁵²⁵ The Division meetings were like “volcanic eruptions,” he explained, and the leadership refused to respect the rights of the membership body, going as far as impeaching board members and expelling others who do not agree with them. “We thank God...that we can ask [questions] through your papers [sic] without being expelled for ever,” wrote someone who signed with the pen name “a faithful member.”⁵²⁶ Other anonymous “prominent members” of the division sent letters to *Nation* citing similar “irregularity” in its inner workings.⁵²⁷ Theodore Smith, Charles Cornwall, and Jonathan Mitchell were referred to as the “trinity” that ruled the Port Limón division with an iron fist and in much secrecy.⁵²⁸ Since Mitchell and Cornwall were “powerful enough among the Ladies who have the majority of votes” the rule of the leadership could not be overturned by the dissenting members.⁵²⁹

Samuel Nation sued the president, vice president, and second vice president of the division for defamation of character and won.⁵³⁰ The men claimed that Nation robbed the organization of documents and money and told the membership not to buy the *Searchlight*. Nation wrote to the *Blackman*, the successor of the *Negro World*, to clear his name. The “trinity” had reported to the *Blackman* newspaper that Nation had been ousted as President for fraud and theft. Nation, a long time resident of Port Limón had a publicly renowned reputation to uphold. Along with thirty-five members of the UNIA, Nation went to the Governor of the province of Limón to complain of the mismanagement in the division.⁵³¹ In light of purported death threats, pleas were made to the Governor “to intervene ere blood is shed.”⁵³²

John J. Samuels, a Limón resident, was a long time member of the UNIA, and had even established the Central Francisco Division in Cuba in 1922, where he was President for two years. “Some say it is because I have joined a Lodge [that] I [gave] up my membership in the U.N.I.A.,” he wrote, but “this [was] a great mistake.” “To give up membership in the U.N.I.A., he clarified, “and to give up membership in the Limón Division of the U.N.I.A. are two different things altogether.” He left the Port Limón division because he did not want to associate with “Immoral, Spiteful and unfair leaders.” Since the spirit of the UNIA demands that “Officers...live up to a high order of respectability as [the organization’s] Constitution demands,” Samuels continued to refer to himself as Garveyite despite his non-participation in the local branch.⁵³³

Port Limón resident and self proclaimed Garveyite Julio Arango also distinguished between the Parent Body and the Port Limón division. He referred to himself as a “Parent Body member” who had paid his dues through the following year. Even though he no longer participates in the Limon branch because he has been “denounced” by Mitchell and Cornwall, he

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 1 November 1930

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 4 January 1930

⁵²⁷ Ibid., 30 November 1929

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 15 November 1930

⁵²⁹ Ibid., 22 February 1930

⁵³⁰ Smith, president of the division, was thought of as a puppet figure, who followed the orders of Cornwall and Mitchell, the vice president and second vice president, respectively. Smith, Cornwall, and Mitchell were found guilty of slander and were required to pay a fine.

⁵³¹ *Voz del Atlantico*, 2 November 1935

⁵³² *Limón Searchlight*, 26 April 1930

⁵³³ Ibid., 25 January 1930

still considered himself to be a part of the organization.⁵³⁴ Members like Arango believed that the Port Limón division was going against the intent of the Parent Body. The division sent a delegate to the UNIA international convention but did not report back to the division, as was protocol. Nor did the division submit reports to the *Negro World*. In addition, the president of the division “did not obey the order of the parent Body [sic] to celebrate the day Mr. Garvey came out of jail.” There were rumors that the leadership was searching for a lawyer to “cut lose from the Parent Body and Jamaica Jurisdiction.”

The drama in the Port Limón division highlighted the shortcomings in the organization as a whole, but also the persistent significance of Garveyite ideology, even as the UNIA lost its international force. Disgruntled members were dissatisfied with the way that the Parent Body, located in Jamaica after the deportation of Garvey from the United States, reacted to the situation in Limón. “Much annoyance was felt over the carelessness of the Jamaica Headquarters,” a member wrote, “in not replying to communications sent enquiring as to the acknowledgement of finances set up and the forwarding of a new Chart [sic]; as well as the financial Standing of the Division.”⁵³⁵

Nicaraguan-born Maymie Leona Turpeau De Mena, also known as Madame De Mena, served as the International Organizer of the UNIA starting in 1929. Described as “an energetic little woman with good command of English,”⁵³⁶ she traveled to Costa Rica amidst much conflict in the Port Limón division. Lecturing in Siquierres, Port Limón, Estrella, Cahuita, and Puerto Viejo, she praised Costa Rica as a “blessed country” and made a “special appeal for new members.”⁵³⁷ De Mena also removed Cornwall and Mitchell from their positions “on account of the general dissatisfaction of the membership and pressure of certain facts against the gentlemen.”⁵³⁸ Smith was suspended from the UNIA for three months after the reconstitution of the division.⁵³⁹ In a strange turn of events, De Mena appointed Mitchell as the “Special Parent Body Representative” for Costa Rica at large. She instructed the Division to pay Mitchell fifty percent of the monies raised for the Parent Body, to cover his “expenses.” He was also to receive five dollars “when in active service.” Whatever was left was to be “forwarded immediately to Headquarter[s in] Jamaica.” Yet neither Cornwall nor Mitchell was permitted to address the membership.

In addition to appointing Mitchell as a representative for the Parent Body, the highest UNIA position within Costa Rica, De Mena legitimized his formation of a competing organization, the Garvey Club, which he presided over. Lastly, De Mena made a declaration that went against the practice of Garveyism in Costa Rica. She insisted that only the Secretary and President of the Division had the authority to “make publications” in the name of the Division, barring “private individual[s]” from doing so.⁵⁴⁰ De Mena was attempting to assert the authority of the Parent Body, sending a message to Nation and others, who used local mediascapes to define Garveyism for themselves. The practice of Garveyism in Limón, whereby the *Searchlight* served as a platform for public debate, criticism, and discussion, was a check to the leadership of the UNIA in Limón, and initiated a participatory space of reflection, as well as redemption, for UNIA members.

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 4 January 1930

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 10 January 1931

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 17 May 1930

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 7 June 1930

⁵³⁸ Ibid., 17 May 1930

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 10 January 1931

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 14 June 1930

With the rulings of De Mena, West Indians in Limón began to critique the Parent Body's handling of the Port Limón Division fiasco. Contributors to the newspaper question De Mena, calling her actions "inconsistent." "This is a great indiscretion on the part of Mrs. De Mena," they wrote, and "we cannot shut our eyes to such maladministration."⁵⁴¹ A group of banned members organized in the midst of the conflicts in the division, calling themselves the "Reorganizing Committee of the U.N.I.A." They wrote to Marcus Garvey to let him know what was going on in the Division. He acknowledged with a letter, stating that "owing to his actions" Mitchell's name was "struck...off [the Blackman] Agents list."⁵⁴² Mitchell and the Garvey Club, however, continued to hold power in Port Limón.

The fundamental tenants of Garveyism would continue to resonate among West Indians in Limón and various forms and offshoots of the UNIA persisted, even through the present day. As young West Indians made the case for citizenship in the 30s and 40s, they were informed by the epistemology of Garveyism. But it was also in their critique of the UNIA that they formed specifically Afro-Costa Rican organizations and identities that reflected the longings and the viewpoints of a generation of West Indians that was largely born in Costa Rica, had no allegiance to United Fruit, and who began to forge a new relationship with the Costa Rican government.

III. Making the Case for West Indian Citizenship and the formation of Afro-Costa Rican Identity

West Indians in Costa Rica had been navigating the complications of space and citizenship since the first migrants arrived in the late nineteenth century. Limón was a site of entanglement as U.S., British, and Costa Rican ideas of power, governance, and belonging interacted and often conflicted. Into the 1920s, West Indians continued to express their grievances to the British consul in Costa Rica in addition to UFCO bosses. In the shifting atmosphere, especially after the banana contract of 1934, West Indians found it less and less useful to claim membership within the British empire, although the UFCO referred to them as "Negros Britanicos" into the 1940s.⁵⁴³

By 1927, thirty-three West Indian English-language private schools existed in Limón with 1,500 enrolled students. As Castillo-Serrano explains, "the English schools flourished during the first half of the twentieth century because the government of Costa Rica did not intervene in the Afro-Caribbean people's affairs; and because these schools received support from different Protestant church denominations, the United Fruit Company, the railroad company (in Limón), and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA)."⁵⁴⁴ With shifting landscapes of governance, Spanish became the language of power in Limón in the 1940s. West Indian parents were increasingly writing to the *Atlantic Voice* encouraging Spanish language instruction in Limón. One writer requested that the whole educational system be standardized with governmental examinations and a "governmental teacher" to "teach the Spanish subjects" for a "few hours each day" in the West Indians schools."⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 7 June 1930

⁵⁴² *Voz del Atlántico*, 26 October 1935

⁵⁴³ ANCR Fomento 6 June 1939

⁵⁴⁴ Castillo-Serrano, 29-30.

⁵⁴⁵ *Limón Searchlight*, 30 November 1929

Frequent contributor Dolores Joseph⁵⁴⁶ wrote a letter to the editor entitled, “Our Political, Social, and Financial Deficiencies” echoing this desire for the political participation of West Indian youth. He criticized those children born of “West Indian parentage” who “have never given the least thought to their nationality.” These “children of no flag” are a threat to the prosperity of the race, he argued, since that lack of nationalism and pride in one’s country would leave West Indian youth, and therefore the future of the black race in Costa Rica, without aim. “They simply remain dormant, sukily [sic] basking in their ignorance,” he described. That many of the “dusky sons of this soil,” referring to West Indians born in Costa Rica, “have not studied the history of their native land,” left them ignorant, and therefore vulnerable in the political landscape of the nation. The young West Indians who “cannot tell you who [Costa Rica’s] President [is], nor where the Capital lies...[who] never worries himself with her politics, nor even care to speak her language,” threatened the redemption of blacks in the nation, which by 1940s was defined by the quest for citizenship and equal rights. The language of nationalism so central to Garveyism was appropriated in the making of Afro-Costa Rican identity.

Young People’s Critiques of the UNIA and the formation of Afro-Costa Rican Organizations

Young West Indians sought to carve a new path to black uplift and redemption in Costa Rica. The formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Young Coloured People (NAAAYCP) was a response to the old guard of West Indian leadership that was tied to the UNIA. In the eyes of the younger generation the UNIA was inefficient due to bickering and infighting, and therefore ineffective in the fight for equal rights and citizenship for West Indians. While bylaws specified the organization be open to “every man, woman and child of the coloured Race,” the NAAAYCP leadership was comprised of young men. The organization aimed to “enhance [the] progress [of West Indians], economically, educationally, physically and socially” and to establish a “real, active con-fraternity [sic] among [the] people of colour for their general permanent upliftment [sic].”⁵⁴⁷ “Upliftment” for young West Indians meant the improvement of the position of blacks in Costa Rican society, and the establishment of permanence and integration into the nation. The leadership established their distance to the UNIA, declaring the organization “absolutely free of all antagonistic and belittling intentions.” The association held weekly meetings and hosted events in St. Mark’s Parish Hall rather than Liberty Hall, the UNIA building that had long been the central non-religious institution of the West Indian community.

In “no other time in the history of the coloured people of Costa Rica was such an Association needed,” they explained.⁵⁴⁸ The social, political, and economic difficulties that West Indians faced in the late 1930s and 1940s required a “second generation of upliftment [sic].” “I am aware that there have been pioneers who laboured to bring the race to this high standard,” the President said at the organizations inauguration, recognizing the legacy of the UNIA in Limón. But, “the future of the race depends on our young men and women.” Breaking with the Christian epistemology and prophecy of Garveyism, he declared, “it is neither fate nor destiny—it is ambition and opportunity” that produces black success.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁶ Joseph was male.

⁵⁴⁷ *Voz del Atlántico*, 8 march 1941

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 15 February 1941

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 8 March 1941

Leonie Aiken of the Young Women's Standard Club critiqued the lack of support from the older generation of West Indians and their negative opinions of youth. While the YWSC was a club that was formed as a type of auxiliary of the UNIA, in the midst of the UNIA's collapse, the group was "without any elderly [sic] leader," according to Aiken, likely because the Port Limón UNIA was in no shape to give guidance to others. The group received "hardly any elderly encouragements; for our elders have not faith in us," so they, by participating in the club, were "fighting for [their] own salvation." Upholding the standard of chastity, education, and *proper* behavior, and defining redeeming *race women* as both helpmate and leader, Aiken and the young women of the YWSC hoped to change the nation's perceptions of Limón. "We aim to disappoint the general belief," Aiken wrote that "there is nothing good in young people and that NOTHING LASTS FOR LONG IN LIMON."⁵⁵⁰ Young West Indians were claiming permanence in the nation, by claiming their own role in shaping of Limón's future.

For Philomela, the uplift of West Indian women required moving beyond Limón and migrating to the Central Valley. After visiting San José, Philomela came to the conclusion that in the capital "exists...a higher social environment than in Limón." In San José, she noted, "the coloured girls feel themselves more important thus they live up to a higher life." "They are more color conscious [sic]," she remarked, meaning they had racial consciousness and pride and sought to showcase themselves as an example of the best of the race. After all, "she doesn't want her white sisters to say "Que negrita más ordinaria [What a common black girl]." West Indian women in San José were also, according to Philomela, "more refined, more intelligent than their sister in Limón." The culture of Limón, Philomela argued, was one in which women behaved poorly on the streets, had "illicit love affairs" and gave nothing but "shame and disgrace" to the province. This was a call for integration into Costa Rican society, particularly the "higher" society of the Central Valley.

There had been much focus on the behavior of young people in Limón, and many older West Indians who wrote editorials cited them as the root of all social ills in the community. Young West Indians who were at the forefront of creating distinctly Afro-Costa Rican organizations, however, offered a counter narrative of the moral and social degeneracy in Limón. It was the behavior of older West Indians, they argued, that threatened the improvement of the race. The Night Hawk identified himself as a young man and offers a "word of warning to [the] elders." In light of the battles within the UNIA, he begged the older generation of West Indians to reconcile the situation. "Do not make your children be disgusted of being a child of the Race, but let them be proud of the name Negro, because [of] your fine example," he wrote.⁵⁵¹ Dolores Joseph, a frequent contributor to the *Searchlight* shed light on the youth perspective in the conflict within the UNIA. He was a member of the Alpha Club, another youth-led alternative to the UNIA. "I have seen," he recalled, "officers and members standing in the streets quarreling" after UNIA meetings. He noted that young West Indian men were meanwhile idle in Port Limón without the desire to be a part of such an organization, although they "should be the back-bone [sic] of [the] noble organization." In Joseph's opinion, the UNIA was doing a disservice to Garvey, who he referred to as the "Great Negro [and] the [Honorable]." The tenant of Garveyism continued to resonate with young West Indians, although the politics and practices of the UNIA informed the making of new Afro-Costa Rican organizations.

By the 1930s some of the most frequent contributors to the newspapers in Limón, including Dolores Joseph, the Night Hawk, and Philomela, were young adults. The NAAAYCP,

⁵⁵⁰ *Limón Searchlight*, 6 June 1931. Original Emphasis.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1 November 1930

along with the Afro-Costarrican [their spelling] Youth Uplift Association, and the National Association for the Progress of Coloured Costa Ricans, and other such organizations formed in the late 1930s and throughout the 1940s.⁵⁵² Young adults took matters into their own hands and defined redemption for themselves, citing the failures of the earlier generations of West Indians in Limón. “Do not call yourself a representative of this wonderful race of ours,” one young writer proclaimed, “because you are a very poor specimen.” They put forth a new call for racial uplift *and* the articulation of what would become an Afro-Costa Rica identity. There was little discussion of Africa, but rather, a focus on the politics of incorporation into Costa Rican society.

Petitioning the Costa Rican Government

As Garveyism urged blacks to participate in modern political culture, West Indians used the petition as a way to make claims on Costa Rican citizenship. In 1935, the Costa Rican congress developed a commission to investigate complaints against the company for non-compliance with new contract. The government received a barrage of petitions from small planters who were forced to sell their bananas for such cheap prices that they could not cover the rental costs of land.⁵⁵³ The company maintained the right to buy or not buy bananas from these farmers, but the petitions poured in, nonetheless, and West Indians farmers took this opportunity to make claims to the Costa Rican nation and the protection of Costa Rican law.

In 1936 Joseph Pomair Pusey and forty-six other small-scale banana farmers in Puerto Viejo, Limón wrote to the government.⁵⁵⁴ The signers of the petition were largely West Indians, judging from their British names, and the petition was written in Spanish. Adopting the language of nationalist anti-imperialism, the petitioners declared that that UFCO was exploiting them (“nos está explotando”). The monopoly control of the company dictated the costs of transport and small farmers had to pay what the company demanded, although it was in direct conflict with the new banana contract. Pusey argued that paying the twenty cents of gold per banana bunch for transportation of a distance of twenty kilometers was both unfair and pushed small farmers deeper into poverty. Working the land themselves “in this deadly climate with great difficulties,” the farmers saw themselves as doing the backbreaking work of developing Limón and an important national industry.

For this reason, as well as their long-standing residence in Limón, Pusey and the other West Indians who signed the petition justified asking the Costa Rican government to protect their rights against the UFCO. “Laws are to keep us in compliance, not to deceive us,” the petition read. The petitioners were asking no special favors of the government and wanted “nothing more than what [was] said in the [banana] contracts by the law.” With the decline of the banana industry in Limón and the divestment of the UFCO from the province, the railway line was in an “abysmal state.” When bananas were not received in a timely fashion or not received at all due to poor transportation facilities, farmers lose their fruit and a chance at making a profit. Meanwhile the Company “loses nothing” and “always takes the biggest slice” at the expense of the farmer.

Another smallholding farmer, Nathaniel Sandcroff of Cahuita, Limón wrote a letter, also in Spanish addressed to President of the nation, Leon Cortes. He had a contract with the UFCO (at this time called the *Compañía Bananera de Costa Rica*), and received an order for one

⁵⁵² Harpelle, “Identity in Transition,” <http://bolt.lakeheadu.ca/~sojourners/pubs/article1.html>

⁵⁵³ Chomsky, 224.

⁵⁵⁴ ANCR Secretaria de Fomento y Agricultura No. 4428 28 December 1936

hundred bunches of bananas. Sandcroff placed the “100 bunches in perfect condition” on the rail line for pick up, but his bananas were rejected when the inspector charged that he had cut the bananas the day before, which would compromise the freshness. Insisting that he cut and laid out his bananas on the same day, offering the testimonies of witnesses, Sandcroff wrote to the President of the country in hopes that his “good officials intervene.” Sandcroff wanted the government to intervene in the practices of the UFCO on his behalf and that of thousands of other small farmers who were being exploited. In the end, the matter never reached the President, but was forwarded to the Governor of Limón, who threw out the complaint of the “negro Sandcroff.”⁵⁵⁵ While hoping to appeal to the Costa Rican government through participating in the institutions of modern citizenship, Sandcroff was, after all, a “negro” first and foremost, as the Governor declared in throwing out the case.

The 1940 correspondence between Jorge Curling de Lissier and Roberto Sutherland Polson and the Office of the President over article 5 of the 1934 contract, the companion law, further highlights West Indians appeals to Costa Rican law and modern citizenship. Naturalized Costa Rican citizens and residents of San José, Curling and Sutherland, who had Hispanicized their names, appealed to the Costa Rican government based on the rights of citizenship. The two men were well educated in the Spanish language and Costa Rican law judging from their writing, and while it is unclear how long Curling and Sutherland lived in San José, they seemed to be well integrated into Central Valley society. Petitioning the government on behalf of that small percentage of West Indians who had become naturalized citizens, Curling and Sutherland were, therefore, not speaking on behalf of the West Indian community at large, although their arguments did make claims for black citizenship at a time when dominant Costa Rican nationalism was entangled with anti-black racism.

The companion law was discriminatory and illegal in that it left West Indians who were “Costa Rican citizens by naturalization” without the equal rights of citizenship, they argued, as it placed restrictions on their movement and employment. For Curling and Sutherland, the law as stated compromised national democracy since it “asks of the Supreme Court of Justice to interpret [a] law that opposes the exercise of these rights.”⁵⁵⁶ As the Costa Rican constitution stated, “all citizens who gain Costa Rican citizenship, will enjoy the same privileges that the natural citizen enjoys.” If the companion law marked naturalized blacks as non-Costa Ricans, in that they were unable to apply for work in the Pacific zone based on a preference for Costa Rican workers, then naturalized West Indians were left without either citizenship or nationality. “To which citizenship do we belong,” they asked, “to that of our fathers or to Costa Rica?” If young West Indians were not able to fully participate in the nation, then “what importance should the naturalization of the citizen have if it is not in serving his new fatherland[?],” they pondered rhetorically. If blacks are unable to take their place in the nation and in the practice of citizenship, then why should they be interested in social and political assimilation?⁵⁵⁷ The situation compromises their position “as citizens of Costa Rican origin.” Appealing to the President, who they call a “renowned jurist,” on the basis of the law, they pointed out that the Costa Rican constitution does not distinguish “color nor size.” Yet, the restrictions of the companion law “refer exclusively to people of the black race.” It was unjust, they argued, for Costa Ricans to be restricted from the full rights of citizenship simply because they were “born

⁵⁵⁵ ANCR Gobernacion de la Provincia (Limón) No. 2576/106 13 July 1938.

⁵⁵⁶ ANCR Secretaria de Fomento y Agricultura 23 February 1940

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

with black skin” “People of color” are burdened with the “responsibility” of having to deal with “imaginary matters” and the “illegal and unjust propaganda of the white man.”⁵⁵⁸

Curling and Sutherland continued to write back to the President after they got no response. This period represents the first consolidated attempts at articulating Afro-Costa Rican identity, still in its nascent phase due to the tenuous citizenship of West Indians and the anti-black backlash of the nation. With young West Indians at the forefront of challenging the law and the depictions of West Indians in the media, an Afro-Costa Rican space of belonging was being defined. Drawing from the discourse and reasoning of Garveyism, which claimed that blacks could participate in modern citizenship, Curling and Sutherland, and others, appealed directly to the Costa Rican government.

Black citizenship in the midst of Civil War

By 1927 only twenty-five out of 20,000 West Indians were citizens of Costa Rica.⁵⁵⁹ Between the years 1935 and 1950, 2,191 West Indians had become naturalized. It is significant that of that number, eighty percent of those West Indians were between the age of twenty-one and thirty-six years old. One third, alone, fell in the twenty-one to twenty-five age range, and young people, were therefore, more likely to become Costa Rican citizens. The majority of these naturalizations took place between 1941 and 1947, when West Indians had few other viable options for permanence, protection, and integration. Regional location, however, was the greatest factor in determining the likelihood that a West Indian had become naturalized. By 1950, almost eighty percent of West Indians in San José had done so, compared to the seven percent of West Indians in Limón who had completed the process.⁵⁶⁰ While the number of persons of African descent in the country dropped from “21,257 in 1927 to 15,188 by 1950,”⁵⁶¹ the number of Afro-Costa Rican citizens was at an all time high of 5,000 by 1950.⁵⁶²

In the wake of a brief and minimally destructive Civil War⁵⁶³ in Costa Rica in 1948, “sixty unions were disbanded, seven thousand people were sent into exile, three thousand people were jailed and at least fourteen were executed.” West Indians sided with the winning side of the Civil War, in hopes of staying safe from expulsion, since “to have done anything else would have been to risk the same penalties imposed on the government's enemies.”⁵⁶⁴ But they kept a keen eye on Otilio Ulate and José Figueres, leaders of the new government, who had attacked the West Indians community in the past. In 1949 and 1950, Alex Curling wrote many appeals and petitions to them on behalf of West Indians. In the period after the upheaval was contained, Curling argued that it made sense to integrate the nation’s largest minority into citizenship. He saw the Civil War as an opportunity for blacks, putting the companion law back into public debate, and bringing it before the new government for review. In 1949 Curling wrote to the United Nation’s League for the Defense of Human Rights, enumerating the discrimination that West Indians suffered from in Limón. He publicized this letter in the Costa Rican news media embarrassing the government to such an extent that it responded by repealing the companion law

⁵⁵⁸ ANCR Presidencial 5 February 1940

⁵⁵⁹ Harpelle, “Bananas and Business,” 61.

⁵⁶⁰ Harpelle, “Identity in Transition,” <http://bolt.lakeheadu.ca/~sojourners/pubs/article1.html>

⁵⁶¹ Harpelle, “Bananas and Business,” 71.

⁵⁶² Harpelle, “Racism and Nationalism,” 51.

⁵⁶³ The Costa Rican Civil War lasted for 44 days in 1948, sparked by the charge of fraud in the Presidential election of the same year.

⁵⁶⁴ Harpelle, “Identity in Transition,” <http://bolt.lakeheadu.ca/~sojourners/pubs/article1.html>

on November 4, 1949, in addition to granting women and blacks the vote. Since only those West Indians who were citizens would benefit from the lifting of the ban and the new franchise, more West Indians decided to become naturalized. In addition, in 1950 the government of Ulate imposed a tax on foreigners living in the country that required unnaturalized West Indians to renew a residential certificate annually or face expulsion from the country. With Stanly Britton, who served as a municipal official, Alex Curling was a part of the first cohort of naturalized Costa Rican-born West Indians to be elected to political office in Costa Rica.⁵⁶⁵

The ideology of Garveyism persisted to inform the strategies of West Indians who claimed an Afro-Costa Rican identity. West Indians formulated counter-narratives of black belonging through the politics of redemption. Garveyism gave West Indians in Costa Rica a language with which to critique and overturn ideas of black degeneracy. Identifying the West Indian community as capitalist participants in modern political culture, West Indian leaders, organizers, and petitioners argued that black residence and integration into the nation had only positive results for Costa Rica. Garveyism also informed the participation of women in the making of Afro-Costa Rican identity, as redemption encouraged women's critiques of gender roles and defined the stakes of redemption for themselves. Entangled with the hegemonic epistemology that it sought to counter, however, Garveyism reaffirmed the logic of race, the stakes of sexuality, and the definitions of power that underscored Eurocentrism and white dominance.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

Conclusion: The Intervention of Redemptive Geographies and the Continued Significance of Race in Costa Rica

In the midst of incorporating the Atlantic province of Limón into the nation-state, West Indians were deemed unsuitable for Costa Rican citizenship based upon the alleged inherent traits of blacks—including sexual immorality, savagery, and backwardness. While my dissertation focuses on the period between 1921 and 1950, this important historical juncture has impacted how ideas of race and belonging continue to play out in Costa Rica today. Afro-Costans and the region of Limón linger on the periphery of dominant discourses of Costa Rican national identity, and the idea of Costa Rican whiteness persists in shaping the borders of belonging.

Critically engaging dominant narratives of Costa Rican history that ignore black and indigenous heritage in favor of Spanish ancestry, is an effort to highlight the role of historical discourses and historicity in the marginalization of non-whites in the country. This troubling discourse of both invisibility and unsuitability has material repercussions whereby the representation of Limón as uncivilized and deviant performs the ideological work of maintaining its exclusion and peripheralization. In other words, the conceptualization of Limón as a racially other space has helped to shape its state of poverty and underdevelopment. Being outside of the *authentic* nation legitimizes the lack of resources and investment in Limón, where currently a significant number of residents do not have permanent access to clean water, electricity, quality education, or job opportunities.

My historical project offers insight on the stakes of cultural identity and the incorporation of racial minorities in present-day Costa Rica, including Nicaraguan immigrants, who make up nearly twenty-five percent of the Costa Rican population and are racialized as non-whites. I examine the making of racial and cultural identity by West Indians in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s as a strategy of survival in the face of displacement and a means of contesting claims of inferiority. This may provide insight on how and why racial minorities continue to formulate diasporic identities and transnational spaces of belonging in Costa Rica today. Studying this population at the margins of society can offer unique ways to think about social inequality and domination, as well as the cultural politics of diaspora and immigration.

The idea of Latin American *racial democracy* performs what Sylvia Wynter calls “discursive violence,” making invisible the existence of racism and racial hierarchy, and enabling the marginalization and subordination of persons and regions that do not fit into conceptions of national progress. Citizenship in Latin America has a bias towards whiteness that informs not only the way that history is told, but perpetuates a logic in which modernity, improvement, and progress are understood to be achieved through whitening, whether culturally or biologically. The interdisciplinary methodology and employment of critical and social theories of race, power, and ideology in this dissertation is an attempt to bring these entangled issues to the forefront in scholarship on Latin America.

I. Dark Continent Discourse, Dual Narcissism, and Entangled Logics of Race

Returning to Donald Moore’s analysis of Kaerezi offers further theoretical insight on entanglement in Limón and the relationship between cultural memory and landscapes of power.

Kaerezi’s multiple and simultaneous spatialities conjured heterogeneous histories. Some Kaerezians wove colonial rule into the fabric of ‘traditional authority’ that they insisted was precolonial, intertwining temporalities in a postcolonial resettlement scheme.

Kaerezi's landscape of rule was not the result of a serial succession of new rationalities and administrative designations *occluding* previous power relations. Rather, previous sedimentations remained consequential even as they became reworked.⁵⁶⁶

The “multiple and simultaneous spatialities” and “intertwining temporalities” existent within Kaerezi form an entangled space in which power was not located within a single entity, but within many—including the state, systems of chiefdom, and in the practice of rainmaking. Similarly, authority was contested and destabilized by the “heterogeneous histories” remembered and formulated in Costa Rica. Entangled in varying conceptualizations of history, culture, and sovereignty, “problem-spaces” exist in a “context of dispute, a context of rival views, a context...of knowledge and power.”⁵⁶⁷ Both Costa Rican citizens and West Indian residents deployed cultural identities rooted in particular remembrances of the past. Competing mythologies of origin—the Costa Rican rural egalitarian myth of white homogeneity based on shared Spanish ancestry as well as the Garveyites construction of an African history of glory and greatness—shaped the discourses of race and belonging and the contours of diaspora and redemption. The competing discourses, however, were also entangled, complimentary, and informed by “dark continent discourse.”

The creation of Europe as universal is juxtaposed to the idea of an ahistorical and deviant Africa, through a rationalization that Signe Arnfred names “dark continent discourse.”⁵⁶⁸ Framing the abnormal black/African as the opposite of a white/European norm, dark continent discourse defines Africa and Africans as premodern and outside of Eurocentric time, non-thinking, solely body, and deviant in culture, gender, and sexuality. Dark continent discourse defines the black/African as constituted by abnormal sexuality. As Frantz Fanon argues in *Black Skin, White Masks*, “in relation to the Negro, everything takes place on the genital level.”⁵⁶⁹ It takes as foundational the idea that “African sexuality was, and has always been, ‘primitive,’ uncontrolled and excessive, as such it represented the darkness and dangers of the continent.”⁵⁷⁰ Dark continent discourse is a logic founded upon the dichotomy of civilization and primitiveness, positing that only through civilization, based upon the European example, could modernity be achieved.

Fanon explains, “the Negro has to be shown in a certain way” and blackness is a “fixed concept” in a system where “not only must the black man be black, he must be black in relation to the white man.”⁵⁷¹ Dark continent discourse, therefore, has implications for the entanglement of black and white identities as the making of racial identities amongst both Costa Ricans and West Indians were shaped in interaction with ideologies of race that held Africa and blackness at the bottom of a global hierarchy. In the central role of respectable motherhood, the making of racial purity, and the goal of modernization and sovereignty through racial improvement, black and white redemptive geographies in Costa Rica were entwined in what Fanon called “dual narcissism.”⁵⁷² The “juxtaposition of the black and white races”⁵⁷³ and the dialogical

⁵⁶⁶ Moore, 3.

⁵⁶⁷ Scott, 4.

⁵⁶⁸ Arnfred, 11.

⁵⁶⁹ Fanon, 157.

⁵⁷⁰ Heike Becker, “Efundula: Women’s Initiation, Gender and Sexual Identities in Colonial and Post-Colonial Northern Namibia” in Arnfred, 37.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 34; 110.

⁵⁷² Fanon, 110.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*, 12.

relationship between whiteness and blackness entraps those who invest in either identity into this dual narcissism.

Both West Indians and Costa Ricans had a double-consciousness, which marked the discrepancy between their self-defined racial identities and dominant ideas of blackness and whiteness. For Fanon, the “psychology of colonialism” fixes the colonized in a state of inferiority, controlling her image and representation. Frantz Fanon credits European ontology as the source of discourses of black inferiority, as it negated the existence of blacks as thinking subjects and therefore sovereign beings.

As blacks are “overdetermined from without,”⁵⁷⁴ the body is a site of contestation in the struggle for black redemption. Both Oyeronke Oyewumi and Michel Foucault highlight the central role of the physical body in the making of the social body and the ways of knowing that govern the borders of belonging. For Oyewumi, “the cultural logic of Western social categories is based on an ideology of biological determinism.” She refers to this idea that biological differences provide “the rationale for the organization of the social world,” as “bio-logic.”⁵⁷⁵ Bio-logic, as the organizing principle of modernity and its constituent coloniality reveals the interdependence of knowledge and vision as “the body is always *in view* and *on view*...[inviting] a *gaze*, a gaze of difference, a gaze of differentiation.”⁵⁷⁶ Foucault’s notion of “bio-power” in which “the body is...directly involved in a political field...[as] power relations have an immediate hold upon it,” names the nation-state as a key facilitator of bodily differentiation.⁵⁷⁷ As bio-power is “disciplinary power,” the Costa Rican government’s attempt to control the nation through the control of the body lends itself to “the idea that man is the true object of the state’s power.”⁵⁷⁸

Both discourses of redemption had a central interest in controlling the body, particularly that of women. For those invested in the making of redemptive geographies, the redemptive race would cease to exist without the redemption of female sexuality. Costa Rican workers in Limón argued that West Indians and their culture threatened national exceptionalism, and cited a lack of hygiene, sexual morality, and civilization among blacks in their correspondence with government officials. The discourses of health, morality, and normality was racialized for both discourses of redemption. “*Tica* [or Costa Rican] female modesty and *tico* male restraint [were] counterposed to the...domestic disorder” of West Indian migrants.⁵⁷⁹ Limón was conceptualized as a space of immorality and the site of the potential breakdown of the national body. In 1936 and 1937, for example, “one third of all morality charges were laid in Limon, where only about 7 percent of the population lived.”⁵⁸⁰ Blacks, in their sexual *deviance* and *abnormal* family structures and gender behavior were unfit to be members of the Costa Rican nation.

But West Indian community leaders praised the passing of laws aimed at improving national hygiene and morality, even at the expense of the community. An article in the English language section of the *Voz del Atlántico* expressed support for the new law that required a Certificate of Health before a couple was able to be legally married. Such a law would have

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., 116.

⁵⁷⁵ Oyeronke Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women: making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), ix.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁷⁷ Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 112.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., 134-138.

⁵⁷⁹ Putnam, 171.

⁵⁸⁰ Harpelle, “Bananas and Business,” 115.

undoubtedly affected blacks negatively, as ideas of health, hygiene, and decency were racialized with an anti-black bias. At a time when discussions about sterilizing certain *degenerate* persons, typically identified as blacks, were common among Costa Rican nationalists and government officials, West Indian mediascapes confirmed the idea that “the time has certainly been reached when it is absolutely necessary for our Public Health authorities to take the most rigid precautions for the preservation of the nation’s health.”⁵⁸¹ West Indians similarly employed discourse around cleanliness and morality to internally govern the borders of redemption within the West Indian community.

In the “página castellana,” or Spanish page, of the *Searchlight*,⁵⁸² editor Samuel Nation’s publication of a photograph of one Señorita Claudia Garcia Quiros,⁵⁸³ mimicked the display of white women “of honor” found in Costa Rican newspapers. The *Searchlight* also devoted much attention to Julia Salazar, Miss Costa Rica, praising her for her refusal to “promenade practically naked” in a swimsuit in the Miss Latin America competition. Calling her the “Queen of Ethnical Beauty” and the “Queen of Modesty” because she refused to “violate the laws of decency,”⁵⁸⁴ the lauding of Miss Costa Rica was meant to serve as an example for young West Indian women. In the end, however, highlighting these women affirmed what other Costa Rican newspapers posited through their choice of visual imagery; that white women were the prototype for respectability and modesty.

Since “the way that one defines an alternative *depends* on the way one has conceived the problem,”⁵⁸⁵ redemption was informed by what Costa Rican citizens and West Indian residents conceptualized as the problems of subordination and misrecognition. While attempting to overturn the world order that subordinated them, compromising their sovereignty and self-determination, nationalist Costa Ricans and Garveyite West Indians made alternative racial identities and crafted national and diasporic citizenship in efforts to prove their humanity and modernity. Both intertwined redemptive geographies, however, left the foundational premises of that world order intact.

II. Implications for Academia and Beyond

As an interdisciplinary project, my dissertation functions in the overlap of African Diaspora Studies, Latin American and Caribbean Studies, and Cultural and Intellectual History. Reading the political engagement of West Indians and their negotiation of Afro-Costa Rican identity, I investigate a population and topic that is largely absent from Costa Rican historiography and underrepresented in the three fields. As the study of people of African descent is often peripheral in Latin American History, Central America is similarly under-theorized within the field of African Diaspora Studies. My examination of productions and counter-productions of racial identities and spaces of belonging, not as they are fixed or imposed upon persons, but as they are formulated in confrontation with local histories, political stakes, and global relations of power, highlights the complexity of race, culture, and identity, as well as the production of intellectual thought and “counterarchives” among marginalized populations. By

⁵⁸¹ *Voz del Atlántico*, 12 November 1938

⁵⁸² The newspaper would later rename itself *La Linterna*, the word for “searchlight” in Spanish, and featured many Spanish language articles.

⁵⁸³ *Limón Searchlight*, 20 September 1930

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 15 March 1930

⁵⁸⁵ Scott, 6.

drawing from both humanities and social science research my goal was to formulate an analytical framework that accounts for the interplay between the discursive (ideas and representations of race, identity, and belonging) and the material (export economies and enclave politics).

My work on Latin America has implications for both academia and the larger community. While the study of *ethnicity* dominates research on black and indigenous populations in Latin American Studies, I hope to shed light on the centrality of race, and the relationship between race and modernity in Latin American nation-making. The study of Latin American societies without a theory of race hides the persistent relationship between whiteness and power in the region. This dissertation is an effort to contribute to scholarship that unsettles the normalized ideas of *mestizaje* or *racelessness* in the region, and expose a foundational logic in the region; that *blanqueamiento*, or whitening, is a vehicle to national improvement, development, and a prosperous future. As fears of Africanization and backwardness informed both official (i.e. the federal subsidization of European immigration in early twentieth century) and popular advocacy for racial improvement through whitening, that the relationship between race, nation, and modernity is one that is key to, yet undertheorized, in the study of Latin America.

The correlation between power and whiteness persists in Latin America today, although political figures like Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales challenge the five centuries long traditions that consolidated political power in the hands of a small white elite. In Latin America at large, the *face* of the nation continues to be a white one in advertisements and in popular culture. While persons of various colors and ethnicities experience poverty in Latin America, my dissertation is an effort toward uncovering the frames of knowledge and hierarchies of race whereby persons of African and indigenous descent—whether referred to as *negros*, *mulatos*, *pardos*, *indios*, or *morenos*—are overrepresented in the *favelas* and shantytowns, and underrepresented in institutions of higher education, in political office, and in national mediascapes.

Costa Rica's peacefulness, lack of military, democratic elections, stability, and relative prosperity—all invoked in the representation of Costa Rica as a showcase nation and ideal tourist destination—continue to be understood in terms of the nation's purported homogeneity. Websites, tourist guides, and even the CIA factbook characterize the population as 97% white, noting that this is an exception in the region. This not only continues to place non-whites outside of the borders of belonging, but also reproduces the unspoken link between whitening and progress. As an entangled space, Limón is an analytically rich, yet understudied location where Central America meets the Caribbean, where the infamous United Fruit Company first emerged, and where an *other* Costa Rica has existed since its inception as a Spanish colony.

The small body of scholarship on West Indians in Costa Rica has largely ignored the *longue duree* of anti-black racism and racial exclusion in the country, identifying the climate of political and economic instability and decline starting in the 1920s as the sole impetus for the development of racist nationalism in Costa Rica. Scholars often identify West Indians as an "ethnic minority" within Costa Rica,⁵⁸⁶ obscuring the significance of race. If ethnicity was the central problem that West Indians faced in the path to incorporation and citizenship, then why have European immigrants in other parts of Latin America (i.e. European Jews in Cuba and Italians in Argentina) been able to gain citizenship and incorporation into the national body with relative ease and prosperity?

⁵⁸⁶ See Bourgois.

In highlighting the multiple, competing, and entangled struggles over race and sovereignty within Costa Rica, my dissertation highlights the instability of national and racial borders. Reading Costa Rica within the space of multiple diasporas and the entanglements of coloniality denaturalizes the persistent narrative that equates *Costa Rican* and *white*, revealing that whiteness in Costa Rica, and indeed all notions of race and racial identity, are made and remade against and within imperial borders and relationships of power. Not singularly focused on *agency* at the micro-level or *oppression* at the macro-level, my analytical framework is centered upon exploring the complications of power and resistance, highlighting the ways that ideas of race and nation were negotiated, resisted, reproduced, internalized, re-signified, and informed by experiences of coloniality.

This project is also an effort to reveal the interdependence of conceptualizations of race, gender, and sexuality. For Kamala Kempadoo, two related concepts shape notions of sexuality in the Caribbean. The first is the idea of “hypersexuality,” a “long-standing ideology that holds that Caribbean people possess hyperactive libidos and overly rely upon sexuality as a marker.”⁵⁸⁷ The other, “heteropatriarchy,” which attempts to counter images of hypersexuality, and “privileges heterosexual, promiscuous masculinity and subordinates feminine sexuality.”⁵⁸⁸ Complicating Paul Gilroy’s conception that “gender is the modality in which race is lived,”⁵⁸⁹ Kempadoo argues that “sexuality appears as the modality through which race is made and refashioned.”⁵⁹⁰ In efforts to overturn dominant images of blacks as deviant, non-thinking, and motivated by bodily passions, the sexuality and morality of black women was the central issue of struggle in the making of the black redemption.

III. Redemptive Geographies, World-Making, and Africana Thought

The concept of redemptive geographies highlights the ways that nationalist Costa Ricans and Garveyite West Indians viewed the world, understood themselves in relation to the world, and imagined freedom, sovereignty, and identity in an atmosphere of entangled colonialities. Interrogating the relationship between written and visual discourse, namely the imageries and representations of race, I engage the epistemological framework, or the ways of thinking and knowing, employed by Costa Ricans and West Indians in crafting what they perceived to be racial counter-identities.

Garveyism informed the ways that West Indians in Costa Rica saw the world and their place in it as well as their conceptualization of how to transform that world. The future African Empire of the Garveyite imagination, the ultimate aim of the movement, however, affirmed the historicist model of evolution based on the European example. Referring to placeless and nation-less blacks as the slaves of others, Garvey hoped to inspire the racial solidarity that would unite blacks across the diaspora in the industrialization of Africa and the making of black capitalism. As a result, Garveyism affirmed that blacks had not yet advanced along the European path of development, employing a logic in which “all non-Europeans could be considered as pre-European.”⁵⁹¹ In equating power with strength of nation and empire and

⁵⁸⁷ Kamala Kempadoo, *Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, Race, and Sexual Labor* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 7.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁹ Gilroy, 85.

⁵⁹⁰ Kempadoo, 29.

⁵⁹¹ Quijano, “Coloniality of Power,” 556.

capitalist production, Garveyism did not disturb the frame of knowledge that held European history as the prototype of all history.

Urging West Indians to contribute “a colon [Costa Rican currency] a month for twelve months” to form a “Colony with an Industrial School,” an article in the *Limón Searchlight* highlights the impact of the ideology of Garveyism on West Indian efforts to incorporate themselves into the Costa Rican nation. Impressed by the efforts of West Indians, the article guaranteed, “the [Costa Rican] government will be attracted to cooperate with us and subsidize our thoughts.” The development of black capitalism in Limón, the article insisted, would enable blacks to establish a niche and economic foothold on the region as “there would be but few chinamen in business and very few of other nationalities would remain in trades.”⁵⁹² With racial solidarity and industrial initiative, the author reasoned, West Indians could take their rightful place in Limón and within the Costa Rican nation.

West Indians took their cues from Garveyism on how to confront the problems imposed upon them by anti-black nationalism. For Garveyite West Indians, the adoption of a pan-African political platform should not lead blacks to be “agitative [sic] or radicalistic [sic].” Urging West Indians instead to insert themselves into the path to modernity by “[assimilating] those methods of self-preservation through which other races have erected their success,” UNIA leaders in Limón echoed Garvey’s logic.⁵⁹³ In his critique of Garvey’s racial project, and the shortcomings of his efforts to insert the continent into apply European solutions to African problems, Padmore believed that

it required more to drive the imperialists out of Africa. That is what Garvey never seemed to have understood, so that, in spite of the tremendous prestige and mass support he enjoyed during the early period of his career and the millions of dollars he collected from the Negro masses, nothing was left to Black Zionism when he came up against the stern realities of the African situation.⁵⁹⁴

Despite the failure of Garvey’s goal of building a black nation, however, the ideology of Garveyism inspired the hopes and desires of people of African descent.

In *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, Sibylle Fischer poses a key question in the conceptualization of black political thought: “Was the Haitian Revolution an extension of the French Revolution, or was it an event in its own right, as Aime Cesaire argued?”⁵⁹⁵ For Cesaire, whose poetics of Negritude claimed a black personality, blacks were able to re-articulate blackness in the service of independent black politics. C.L.R. James, on the other hand, reads the Haitian Revolution not as an extension of politics in the metropole, but as interdependent with the French Revolution; “The history of liberty in France and of slave emancipation in San Domingo is one and indivisible.”⁵⁹⁶ Armed with “the advantage of liberty and equality, the slogans of [the French] revolution,”⁵⁹⁷ L’Ouverture’s allegiance to the France “made him what he was [,] but this in the end ruined him.”⁵⁹⁸ In his appeal to plantation owners for their expertise in productivity and “culture,” and in the appointment of whites to crucial government positions like governor, L’Ouverture’s “desire to

⁵⁹² *Limón Searchlight*, 4 January 1930

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, 20 September 1930

⁵⁹⁴ George Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism* (Garden City, N.Y: Anchor Books, 1972), 117.

⁵⁹⁵ Fischer, 13.

⁵⁹⁶ C L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 61.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 290.

avoid destruction was the very thing that caused it.” For James, “it is the recurring error of moderates when face to face with a revolutionary struggle.”⁵⁹⁹

In *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, Robert Allen notes that “rebellion and revolution are interrelated but they are not identical.” Distinguishing between reformism and radicalism, he argues, is crucial to black liberation. “Are black militant leaders simply opposed to the present colonial administration of the ghetto, or do they seek the destruction of the entire edifice of colonialism, including that subtle variant known as neocolonialism?” asks Allen.⁶⁰⁰ Because bourgeois nationalism and black capitalism function within the coloniality of power, Allen posits “at best, traditional black nationalism is a pre-revolutionary development.”⁶⁰¹ In her analysis of Western-derived category of *woman* and its application in the study of gender among the Yoruba people, Oyeronke Oyewumi argues, “it is precisely because African intellectuals accept and identify so much with European thinking that they have created African versions of Western things.”⁶⁰² Malcolm X echoes this concern in a call for new epistemes. Since “what is logical to the oppressor isn’t logical to the oppressed[,] there just has to be a new system of reason and logic devised by us who are at the bottom,” he argued.⁶⁰³

What does it mean to read black political thought, when the very idea of black politics are either read as derivative of Western thought as Anthony Bogues argues,⁶⁰⁴ or described by the academy as essentialist, Afrocentric, and unworthy of serious interrogation in its own right? Bogues challenges us to read black radical thought and black political intellectual production as critiques and counternarratives to modernity worthy of interrogation both on its own terms and as a part of modern political discourse. Evident in critiques of the work of DuBois by Marxist analysts, which reads fallacy in the unorthodoxy of his Marxist framework, is the notion that black thinkers “are never credited with intellectual independence or originality [as] [t]heir ideas exist only *in relationship to* and *because of* the already accepted systems of thought.”⁶⁰⁵

Paiget Henry’s conceptualization of Afro-Caribbean philosophy, however, critiques the idea that the independence or originality of black thought is easily identifiable, and instead highlights its entanglements. Henry defines Afro-Caribbean philosophy as a tradition of thought “engaged in the production of answers to everyday questions and problems.”⁶⁰⁶ These problems were “marked by the forces of an imperial history,” and therefore Afro-Caribbean philosophy was “an intertextually embedded discursive practice, and not an isolated or absolutely autonomous one.”⁶⁰⁷ In my analysis, black redemption attempts to function as a counter-discourse and engages with radical ideas, while at the same time operating both within and against the very frame of knowledge that legitimates racial hierarchy and coloniality. Entanglement was an unequal process producing “the paradoxes of anti-African biases in an Afro-Caribbean philosophy, its patterns of creolization, and the overidentification with European philosophies in a tradition that is supposed to be critical of the European heritage.”⁶⁰⁸

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid, 300.

⁶⁰⁰ Robert L. Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America: An Analytic History* (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1969), 1.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid, 125.

⁶⁰² Oyewumi, 19.

⁶⁰³ Malcolm X, 133

⁶⁰⁴ See Bogues.

⁶⁰⁵ Bogues, 2.

⁶⁰⁶ Henry, 2.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., 8.

Through conversations and friendships with Afro-Costa Ricans and in my own experiences as a person of African descent living in Costa Rica, the persistent significance of race in Costa Rica is evident. Those Costa Ricans who assumed that my foreign-accented Spanish meant that I was from Jamaica or Limón (and not the U.S. since North American tourists are assumed to be white), participated in a process of *othering* which has a legacy in this period of national consolidation and anti-imperialism between 1921 and 1950. Even for the Afro-Costa Rican born and raised in San José, who speaks perfect *Josefino* Spanish, shadows of doubt cast a veil upon his or her national identity. Locating blackness in Limón, the dominant national imaginary assumes that all black people in Costa Rica are from that province, although persons of West Indian descent have moved to and established themselves in other parts of the nation, including the Central Valley, over the past several decades. My black Costa Rican friends who were born and raised in San José were asked with frequency, “De donde eres?/Where are you from?” “Limón?” they guessed, or “Panama?” For Costa Ricans who identify the nation as a white one, people of African descent represent a deviation from the white norm, and continued to be marked as foreign or peripheral to the *authentic*, criollo nation.

Garveyism continues to inform worldviews in Costa Rica and the African Diaspora at large. In fact, in Jamaica in the early 1930s, three returnees from Central America “began preaching the cult of Ras Tafari among men of the urban poor, including thousands of laborers recently arrived from Cuba.”⁶⁰⁹ Informed by the politics of race, power, and belonging, and the ideology of Garveyism in Central America, Rastafari emerged as a philosophy and political platform based upon the discourses of black redemption. Remnants of Garveyism as well as practices of Rastafari persist in Limón and other Afro-Costa Rican spaces today. Costa Ricans of West Indians descent, therefore, continue to articulate diasporic citizenship. As Costa Rican national identity still rests on the idea of white exceptionalism, Afro-Costa Ricans critique this narrative through transnational belonging and a diasporic imaginary.

⁶⁰⁹ Chomsky, 203.

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