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Gómez Menjívar, Jennifer Carolina and Héctor Nicolás Ramos Flores (Editors).
Hemispheric Blackness and the Exigencies of Accountability. University of Pittsburgh
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Jennifer Carolina Gómez Menjívar and Héctor Nicolás Ramos Flores have collected an impressive compendium of interdisciplinary scholarship on the history, present, and future of the African diasporas in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the United States. The editors root their theorization of hemispheric Blackness in the theory of Améfrica, an ethnogeographic system of reference for Améfricanity, or the lived experience that links Afro-descendants in the Americas coined by Afro-Brazilian intellectual and activist Lélia González. Amefricanity is the historic resistance to denigration and invisibility of Black African and Indigenous people in Latin America that counteracts racism through denial in Latin America, which has resulted from the maintenance of the subjugation of Amerindian and African people (4). The editors define Améfrica as an ethnogeographic system of reference and Amefricanity as the lived experience that links Afro-descendants in the Americas. Améfricanity is the historical resistance to the silencing of Black and Indigenous groups in Latin America. Though the volume is grounded in theory, the focus of the chapters is not purely theoretical since contributors center on the demands and activism of Black communities. The editors assert that their edited volume is an important intervention because they move beyond the idea of talking back to hegemonic approaches to philosophy as previous scholarship has; they show “writing across Black thought” (11). The authors are also concerned with showing the collective evocations of Black and Indigenous communities for what they term embodied intellectual sovereignty, rights to land and resources, and sovereignty.

Blackness, according to the editors, is not just somatic. It is defined as a political agency or “a manifestation of resistance that has the propensity to shift power structures through persistent and methodical actions” and as positionality “informed by local, national, and transnational politics as well as by direction determined from within site-specific Black communities and collectivities (17).” The editors, bringing together work concerning the demands and activism of Black communities, propose an original approach to studying the processes of Améfricanity in Latin America. Their focus on

Mesoamerica and the Southern Cone regions highlights the bonds to the mainland. Including methodologically diverse contributions from scholars of literature, visual anthropology, museum studies, digital media, legal anthropology, and cultural entrepreneurship will appeal to an interdisciplinary audience of scholars and students of Blackness in the Americas. The scholarship included in the volume provides urgent insight into how Black defiance emerges through Améfricanity. The editors are thoughtful in recognizing the expansive and elastic nature of Blackness, taking care not to define Blackness as a monolith but also recognizing it as a collective experience with links to Indigeneity. This point is important because U.S.-based frameworks on Blackness often fail to recognize relationships between Blackness and the lived experiences of other ethnoracial groups or how Blackness functions outside of the United States. At no point do the editors mention the connections between Blackness and Asian diasporas to Latin America and the Caribbean; however, it is a blind spot that is not necessarily glaring since research exists on the topic, and the editors rightfully had to make challenging editorial decisions.

In the first part, titled “Epistemic Foundations,” the authors trace the activism of Hemispheric Blackness from the past to the present. The theme of Black embodiment as activism is a thread that unites most of the chapters. Prisca Gayles’ inciteful contribution locates the transtemporal movement for Black recognition in the activism of Afro-Argentines who have struggled over time to claim space in a society that has sought to erase them (25). Gayles highlights the work of Afro-Argentines such as Enrique Nada, who, after 1986, embodied “poner el cuerpo” by working as an activist despite ongoing disappearances after the dictatorship in Argentina and continuing to work for inclusion in the census by showing up in spaces where they are not wanted. Elis Meza finds narrative and activist authority in Black embodiment in the counternarratives of Black ancestral performances in Brazil. Meza argues dance is a “deeper link with ancestrality and freedom” that is intimately connected to history and politics (46). Hector Nicolás Ramos Flores locates embodiment and presence in Juan Francisco Manzano’s autobiography, theorizing Manzano’s presence as an “echoed silence” through which he asserts his existence. The last chapter by Silvia Valero turns the edited volume full circle from the past to the contemporary period, tracing the tortuous efforts by Afro-Colombian activist and scholar Manuel Zapata Olivella to organize a fourth congress of Black culture in the Americas. Valero’s original analysis recognizes the congresses are important because they are “symbolic spaces of political conflicts and discussions” to create tools for the decolonization of Black people in America (78). Valero’s discussion of the debates among the Black organizers sets the stage nicely for the next section of the volume.

The chapters are united by an analytical approach to Black and Indigenous nexuses in the second part. Ashley Ngozi Agbasoga argues Black/Afro-Indigenous communities in Mexico have “shaped spaces” they inhabit beyond the binary of inclusion and exclusion. They disrupt hegemonic notions of Mestizaje by claiming Black and Indigenous identities. Her ethnographic and archival research presents first-person articulations of racial identities that claim both Black and Indigenous identities defy “the ghosts of coloniality (113)” to imagine futures beyond state-sanctioned racial categories. In “Triunfo de la Cruz v. Honduras,” Jennifer Carolina Gómez Menjívar provides another example of Black-Indigenous connections and agency in the Garífuna community in Honduras. Garífuna activism is designed to regain rights to ancestral lands to protect and preserve language. Their legal case and the implications of the case highlight Black Indigenous identity that has not been recognized by anthropological scholarship on the Garífuna people. In the last chapter, by Robin García, the section closes with an analysis of community-produced Venezuelan history through sites such as museums and community archeological sites. The purpose of the chapter is to recount activist history in Lara, which is new as most of these histories are centered on Caracas. This activist history produces decolonial African and Indigenous-rooted frameworks for telling national history to consider redistributions of wealth and power. The author discusses African and Indigenous frameworks. However, a discussion of how the frameworks are connected is necessary to underscore the section's theme. The last chapter by Oleksi Miranda Navarro provides an overview of information regarding the history of oil in Venezuela that is connected to the veneration of San Benito by the Afrodescent community and dates back to the colonial period. The chapter nicely connects the theme of hemispheric Blackness to the colonial past. However, the chapter would have benefited from including more details to connect the argument to the section theme of Afro-Indigenous nexuses beyond the association between oil and evil that is prevalent in the community today.

In the final section, the authors of the chapters discuss the incorporation of Blackness into national projects. Karma F. Frierson argues the Mexican census captures a “politics of Blackness in transition.” Blackness was erased on the national scale, while the regional type “jarocho” associated with Blackness developed in Veracruz in the 19th century. However, the government began to make efforts to recognize the “third root” in the 1990s. There were efforts in Veracruz to teach more about African cultural heritage in the area through music and dance. The census is another part of this effort to reincorporate Blackness into the national heritage. Blackness is in transition, and the census is an imperfect tool for tracking Blackness in Mexico. Alexandra Algaze González's contribution ties the theme of national projects to the Caribbean. She argues Jamaica Kincaid theorizes Afro-Caribbean

identity as a site of friction as a result of colonialism. Within these dynamics, the narrators and protagonists of the novels under study have fraught relationships with mothers who enact and resist colonialism. Gleicy Maily da Silva studies the emergence of the worker profile in Brazil as a cultural entrepreneur because of the deteriorating labor conditions and the loss of labor rights, which are global issues. The author proposes that neither experiments with entrepreneurship nor political engagement, such as the Black Cultural Fair in Sao Paulo, are self-evident. However, the activities of the Black entrepreneurs at the street fair are a “business plan” that is more than a celebration. Black entrepreneurs invest in strategies to expand their activities, giving more “relevance to the circulation in urban spaces (202).” The final chapter by Paul Joseph López Oro connects Blackness in Latin American national projects to the transnational scope of Hemispheric Blackness in the United States and to the arguments concerning Black-Indigenous nexuses in the section. López Oro maintains Garífuna New Yorkers, including the author, make their own Black Indigeneity.

The editors undertook the ambitious task of connecting approaches to studying Hemispheric Blackness across various disciplines, geographies, and periods. Perhaps a thematic title for the third part, emphasizing the transnational aspect of Blackness as a movement rather than a national project, would have been more generative by connecting the chapters back to the editors’ definition of Hemispheric Blackness as characterized by transnational movements and the overlaps between Blackness and Indigeneity. I especially appreciate their exploration of the nexuses between Blackness and Indigeneity, a necessary and cutting-edge approach to understanding race formation in the region. The nexuses of Blackness and Indigeneity originally under analysis in part two are most clearly and eloquently defined by López Oro as “not mutually exclusive” and existing “simultaneously regardless of their mutual dislocations (218).” Recognizing the fluidity of Blackness and its relation to Indigeneity is imperative for Black, Indigenous, and Black/Indigenous people to gain visibility despite the historic and ongoing invisibility and marginalization of Black, Indigenous, and Black/Indigenous communities.