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“Land of the Gods”: Exploring the Evolution of Labor, Resistance and Black
Consciousness in Belize

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Afro-American Studies

by

Nicole Denise Ramsey

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

“Land of the Gods”: Exploring the Evolution of Labor, Resistance and Black
Consciousness in Belize

by

Nicole Denise Ramsey

Masters of Arts in Afro-American Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Robin Davis Gibran Kelley, Chair

In tracing the evolution of black consciousness, class and identity in Belize, this thesis examines key episodes in the history of Afro-Belizean resistance to the colonial state. Given Belize’s unique multiracial, multiethnic character and its connection to Caribbean and Central American economic and political histories, expressions of black identity and resistance have not always been apparent. In analyzing the slave economy, labor riots and the emergence of Garveyism in Belize, I argue that these moments are also representative of black Belizean men and women’s navigation of colonial repression and persistent struggle for equality. This thesis attempts to situate black Belizeans and resistance as part of a larger response to slavery and colonialism in the Caribbean while also looking at the vital role of black women in shaping labor and political struggle.

The thesis of Nicole Denise Ramsey is approved.

Aisha Finch

Robin Derby

Robin Davis Gibran Kelley, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2015

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Introduction

Understandings of race, gender and class in various parts of the Americas have always been closely tied to the histories of slavery, colonialism and imperialism. As a result of the complex history of Belize and its understandings of race and identity, there has been much confusion among Caribbean and Latin American scholars as to what category or region Belize falls under. Having ties to both the Caribbean and Central America¹, Belize comprises of an assortment of cultures. However, this ability to clump various groups under one multicultural umbrella at the expense of black identity, also affects how Belize is perceived by the larger international society. In addition, scholarship on blackness and black identity throughout Central America has primarily focused on anthropological studies of the Garifuna in Belize, Honduras and Guatemala, Miskitu in Nicaragua and West Indian migrant populations in Costa Rica and Panama. In regards to a larger Pan-African framework of Central America, black communities throughout this region are viewed as static and reduced to an anthropological discourse. Exploring what it means to be black in Central America, let alone Belize, alludes to a larger theme of identity-making within the Diaspora. The lack of analysis on the history of African-descended communities in Central America has caused those histories and individuals who identify as black to be cast on the margins of history. The purpose of such examinations of black identities is to conceptualize the relationship of the African diaspora to places where African-descended populations and self-identification have not always been evident.

Prevalent assumptions of Belizean society have always asserted Belizeans as belonging to a unique racial utopia that has focused more on ethnic rather than racial formations. These

¹ Belize is a member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)

common notions are supplanted by the legacy of the Battle of St. George's Caye as an ethnic and nationalistic narrative, as well as the "Latinization"² of Belize and forging of new identities during the final push for independence by then Prime Minister, George Price, during the 1950's and 1960's. In exploring the evolution of black identity and resistance across the Caribbean, Belize has more in common with countries in the Caribbean and West Indies than its Central American Spanish-speaking neighbors. British dominance in the Caribbean, territorial conflicts and empire building resulted in the importation of enslaved Africans into the British Honduras settlement in the eighteenth century. In analyzing slave systems across the Caribbean, Belizean slavery was not entirely different although it had some peculiarities. The centrality of the timber industry in Belizean slavery meant that enslaved African men were vital to the establishment of Belize's place in the world economy. Given the stereotype that slavery was less demanding and violent in the settlement, deeper histories of violence inflicted upon slave women ultimately affected how black women operated within the country and future liberatory struggles while also demonstrating that such actions were not created in a vacuum.

Belize became an independent nation on September 21, 1981, the last country to do so in both the Caribbean and Central America. For the most part, identities are usually established through dealing with slavery and colonialism and given Belize's complex history and long struggle towards independence, it is not as easy to identify where such identities begin and end. Scholarship on Belize has often dealt with the peculiar institution of slavery as it pertains to the mahogany trade. Some scholars of note have always acknowledged the contributions and experiences of African descended persons in Belize such as Narna Dobson, Robert Hill, Winston C. James, C.H. Grant and Evan X Hyde. The three scholars that have informed my research

² Sutherland, Anne, *The Making of Belize: Globalization in the Margins* (Westport, Conn: Bergin & Garvey 1998), 84

tremendously are O. Nigel Bolland, Assad Shoman and Anne Macpherson. In his essays on *Colonialism and Resistance* (1988), Nigel Bolland looks at the social history of conflict, colonialism and resistance in Belize by also tying it to the larger Caribbean region. His analysis of Belizean history demonstrates the role of labor and resistance to colonialism in shaping the political culture and social organization of the colony. Much like Nigel Bolland, Assad Shoman's *13 Chapters of a History of Belize* (1994), situates Belizean society within a larger history of colonialism and labor within the Caribbean. As a Belizean scholar, Shoman's work provides a "people's history" approach, as he believes that Belize's government and education system has not told the full story. Shoman explores themes such as identity (creolization), labor, resistance and organized movements that have been previously excluded. In doing so, Shoman situates resistance in Belize as part of a larger Caribbean response to slavery and colonialism. Anne Macpherson's book, *From Colony to Nation* (2007), traces the evolution of gendered activism and women's political participation in Belize. Considering that Macpherson's work is the first to apply a gendered analysis to Belizean labor and politics, she builds upon both Bolland and Shoman's analyses by centering women in major political struggles of the twentieth century.

In tracing the evolution of black consciousness and resistance in Belize, I begin with the placement of Belize within the historiography of Caribbean slavery and how peculiarities of Belize's slave economy and gendered labor allowed for particular sites of resistance to take place. In chapter 1, I examine how inaccurate depictions of slavery in Belize have allowed for misinterpretations of race, gender and protest to prevail. In my exploration of key moments in the nineteenth century, I look at how black identities have been constructed and navigated through the process of creolization, emancipation and resistance across the Caribbean. I argue that antiquated depictions of slave society and race-relations in Belize as benign and cooperative

are part of a larger narrative of suppression and erasure of black political movements. Rather than viewing Belizean society as developing in different and more amicable ways than that of other Caribbean settlements, I argue that the process of identity-making, labor and resistance are indicators of blacks Belizean's quest for opportunity, equity and an emerging black consciousness.

Chapter 2 argues that the 1919 riot was the culmination of both transnational and domestic politicization of black men and women in Belize. While the riots of 1919 are solely attributed to black servicemen during World War I, I contend that although such action was also prompted by tensions on the home front, the riot of 1919 grew out of a larger practice of resistance among black Belizeans, building upon previous conflicts with the state and colonial elite. I explore both black men's military participation and black women's wartime efforts to demonstrate that both were informed by their role as black subjects under British rule and their positionality contributed to how they saw themselves and their role in reforming the system. Overall, I show that developments of the late nineteenth century laid the groundwork for organizing in the early twentieth century through the use of labor uprisings and development of women's activism in the court systems.

Chapter 3 looks at the aftermath of the riots and the rise of Garveyism as a significant shift in black consciousness and politicization of Afro-Belizeans. Conceptions of black identity are usually located within the early twentieth century as the apex of a rising black consciousness in Belize that included transnational radical organizing, Garveyite political organizing, and collaborative government reform. Through exploring the evolution of the UNIA in Belize, this chapter expounds on previous discussions of black Creole identity by showing how both Garveyism and Black Cross Nurses utilized different methods for community upliftment and

nation-building. Furthermore, I argue that although the reform projects of the 1920's carried out by Garveyite men and women were largely based on respectability projects, their distinct work within the community and adoption of Garvey's doctrine was also fundamental to their evolving socio-political identities. In making these linked connections between slavery and Belizean Garveyism in the 1920's, I aim to demonstrate the development and evolution of black consciousness, gender and resistance in Belize by showing how they have been informed by larger structures of power and ongoing call for sovereignty.

An underlying theme throughout the study also involves the role of women within these histories. One can fully understand the realities of enslavement and repression of the African-descended in Belize by the violence and subjugation imposed upon enslaved black women. This thesis offers new insights into the colonial and imperialist landscape of Belizean society in connection to the broader Caribbean while also dealing with questions surrounding the multiplicity of black identity. I aim not to bring forth an exclusionary idea of slavery in Belize but to show how it has shaped racial, gender and political formations in Belize. In doing this, I too challenge assumptions of racial harmony while exploring black men and women as part of a contested and complicated tradition of black political struggle, identity and resistance. I argue that these three key moments are representative of an evolving black consciousness that has been informed by both black Belizean men and women's relationship to the slave economy, labor resistance and nation-building. Furthermore, their actions worked to challenge and push the colony into new directions while envisioning a nation that was inclusive of black struggles and movements.

Slavery In Name: Blackness, Creolization and Labor Resistance

In order to fully grasp the concept of blackness or black identity and how it has manifested over the course of Belizean history, one must briefly consider Belize's place in the formation of the African diaspora and the slave economy. Unlike other Caribbean and Central American countries whose slave history is well noted—Belize's complex history involving colonization and slavery is particular and elusive. Although an exact timeline of settlement has varied among scholars, English settlers are thought to have first occupied the area in the mid-eighteenth century and soon took up the task of woodcutting. The earliest record of Africans in Belize took place in 1724 in which Spanish missionaries reported that slaves in the settlement were imported from the West Indian islands solely for cutting logwood.³ Unlike most settlements in the Caribbean, British settlers in Belize were invested in promoting a viable timber industry as opposed to the cultivation of crops; therefore slavery in Belize was organized around the extraction of timber (logwood and later mahogany). Various scholars have set forth new ways of understanding this history by introducing and reconsidering aspects such as race and gender during the early settlement and slavery period. In particular, scholars such as C.H. Grant make the claim that the absence of a Belizean or British Honduran⁴ slavery analysis allows for prevailing rhetoric claiming that "if slavery existed it was administered with such compassion by the settlers that it was nominal" to reproduce.⁵ In reference to their treatment and status as property, the Afro-Belizean and later Creole population's place within Belize's slave history has

³ Bolland, O. Nigel, *The formation of a colonial society: Belize, from conquest to crown colony* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), 49

⁴ British Honduras was officially changed to Belize in 1973

⁵ Grant, C.H., *The Making of Modern Belize: Politics, Society, & British colonialism in Central America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 41

generally been ignored and dismissed as less severe or significant than other parts of the British West Indies. Given the lack of a critical analysis of Belize's legacy of a slave economy, it is through such an analysis that the rise of a black political and collective consciousness can be identified. Most importantly, in looking at the placement of Belize within a broader Pan-African and Diaspora framework, the role of Belize's slave economy and gendered separation allowed for particular sites of resistance to take place.

The dominant perception that slavery was milder and differed greatly from that of the wider landscape of the Americas has been met with much criticism by authors such as C.H. Grant, Assad Shoman, and Nigel Bolland. Belize's status as one of the major sites of mahogany production places the country outside of the plantation-based slavery framework and allows for a reconsideration of the various coercive and brutal methods utilized in these mahogany camps. Starting as early as the seventeenth century, the importation of black labor from various parts of the Caribbean into Honduras was a catalyst for the economic rise of the mahogany industry in the settlement. Since there was no direct trade between Belize and Africa, the majority of enslaved Africans were purchased in such places as Jamaica and in some cases seized in transit to Spanish colonies in Central America.⁶ Given the noted scholarship on the importation, marronage and rebellion of enslaved Africans in other British settlements like Jamaica and Barbados, this allows for an interesting investigation into how the struggles and identity of enslaved Belizeans has been negotiated by both political leaders and movements within a greater Black Diaspora context.

Slave conditions that were believed to be peculiar and distinctive to the British Honduras settlement factors into the prevailing conceptions of the impact of race-relations during this

⁶ Dobson, Narna, *A history of Belize* (Port of Spain: Longman Caribbean, 1973), 147

period. Dobson writes, “the slaves were armed with machetes for cutting their way through the dense undergrowth with axes for felling trees and shooting game”.⁷ However, the belief that the slave’s tool could double as weapons and reinforced assumptions that a bond of trust existed between master and slave is debatable being that different slave societies throughout the Americas also had similar labor dynamics.

Since harsh and brutal treatment of slaves by their overseers and slave drivers were commonly associated with sugar plantations in the Caribbean, the British Honduras settlement was lauded as a utopian paradise in travel writing. One particular characteristic that Dobson mentions is that slaves in the mahogany camps had regulated schedules that allowed them a bit more free time than their Central American and Caribbean counterparts. For example, Dobson writes that slaves worked five days out of the week and if willing to work on Saturdays would be paid around 3/4 dollars per day--In addition to this, Sundays were also free.⁸ Within the woodcutting industry in British Honduras, male slaves were used entirely for logging and cutting wood. The demands of this seasonal work made it so that male slaves were away for months at a time which resulted in extended periods of separation amongst families. This particular participation and use of enslaved black men in the timber industry in Belize, most likely assisted in producing unique characteristics that would influence and affect working conditions and the black population’s relationship to labor and ownership.

Although beatings and other forms of cruelty may not have been part of the daily experience of slaves in the mahogany camps, women who served as domestics were not shielded from barbaric treatment and sexual violence. Enslaved women frequently bore the brunt of their master’s brutality by being violently raped and beaten—the women and offspring of these rapes

⁷ Dobson, 150

⁸ Dobson, 151

were in some cases allowed their freedom.⁹ The majority of cases pertaining to harsh and cruel punishment were inflicted upon black women in the settlement. Assad Shoman writes, “Women’s dominant role in resistance based on words was reflected in the fact that female slaves were more often regarded as ‘deserving’ punishment than men in the arguments against abolishing flogging, especially for women”.¹⁰ There are several cases in which some masters were tried and convicted for severe cruelty to their female slaves. It is important to note that although a conviction (with a small fine) was rare, those who were acquitted were entitled under the pretense that every owner was entitled to inflict upon their slaves up to 39 lashes with a whip.¹¹ Among the offenses carried out by the slaves were indolence, bad conduct and stealing, among other things. Dobson writes, “dreadful as these punishments now seem it must not be forgotten that at that period a child could be hanged in England for stealing a loaf of bread”.¹² Regardless of such reasoning, these acts of defiance illustrate enslaved men and women’s performance as political and economic actors within this period, especially in relation to “theft” of food in the context of self-preservation and human survival. Furthermore, investigating the placement of enslaved women within Belizean slave society shows how both violence and resistance served as indicators of their status within the settlement among the white population.

Since enslaved women were not directly tied to the wealth and production of timber, Shoman writes that slave women played a unique role, as they were necessary for “physical and social reproduction that would free up the men for production”.¹³ Since men worked in the logging camps for the majority of the year, the households during this time were also led by women, which had a significant impact on family organization in Belize. The role of the

⁹ Bolland, 57

¹⁰ Shoman, Assad, *[13] chapters of a history of Belize* (Belize City, Belize: Angelus Press, 1994), 53

¹¹ Dobson, 153

¹² Ibid

¹³ Shoman, 27

domestic “housekeeper,” although believed to be favorable and less demanding, was actually less stable and unpredictable. In reference to domestic work, Bolland writes that such treatment emphasized “social distance from the slaves despite their physical proximity”.¹⁴ The tendency to disassociate the development of Belizean society outside of the wider Caribbean inadvertently renders black women’s role in slave society as passive and their resistance as aimless.

In Anne Macpherson’s study of the gendered processing of subaltern politics, she writes that “the Caribbean being a region where particular women of African descent have been prominent in slave, peasant, and wage labor” is representative of the “rich tradition of organization and struggle”.¹⁵ Black women’s experience within the collective black population’s quest for freedom and equality is part of a deep protest tradition throughout the Diaspora as well as an illustration of the progression of black Creole resistance. Through everyday “subversive acts” of resistance it is within Macpherson’s gendered analysis that we can view enslaved Belizean women’s participation in a long tradition of black protest and resistance. Unlike enslaved men whose occupations in the mahogany camps were more fluid, women were confined entirely to the domestic sphere.¹⁶ It is in this setting that enslaved women embraced practices of obeah and abortion, which Macpherson claims was a “potential political threat”—the denial of further enslaved labor and sexual victimization¹⁷. Women expressed their disdain for this system and their status within it by responding in both strategic and violent ways. Similar to

¹⁴ Bolland, 58

¹⁵ Macpherson, Anne S., *From colony to nation: women activists and the gendering of politics in Belize, 1912-1982*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 12

¹⁶ Assad Shoman explains that men were also engaged in other occupations in addition to mahogany cutting which included, “making plantations” and cultivation of small plots of “ground foods” (Shoman, Assad, [13] *chapters of a history of Belize*, 47

¹⁷ Macpherson, Anne S. “Viragoes, Victims and Volunteers: Creole Female Political Cultures and Gendered State Policy in 19th Century Belize,” in *Belize: selected proceedings from the second interdisciplinary conference*, ed. Michael D. Phillips, 23-42. (Lanham: University Press of America, 1996), 28

rebellious expressions throughout the Americas, enslaved women in Belize engaged in poisoning the master's food, complaining, "mouthing off" and satire.¹⁸ Shoman refers to these moments as "feminine modes of resistance" and given the socio-political determination of enslaved women in these spaces, they were aware of their position within Belizean slave society and were deliberate in their actions of disrupting the oppressive power structure during this stage.

Since slave-owners in British Honduras were thought to be more lenient and compassionate than those elsewhere in the Americas, prevalent conceptions of the mild treatment of slaves is proven false when measured against instances of violence against slave women, desertion of labor and significant amount of runaways¹⁹. The fact that some slaves were also allowed to own property and obtain their freedom at a much higher rate than those in the British Caribbean still does not redress this particular history being that slaves were still "entirely dependent on the whims of their master".²⁰ The paradox of Belize's history of slavery demonstrates how black Belizeans were treated with similar incidents of cruelty as elsewhere in the Caribbean while also being allowed certain opportunities that were denied in other spaces.²¹ As previously mentioned, these opportunities consisted of off-days, and the owning of property, however it is also important to note that these circumstances in some form of another were beneficial to the English settlers and white elite. In the midst of these conflicting portrayals and analyses of Belizean slave society, gendered responses to the slave economy played a role in shaping identity, resistance and participation in both civic and community engagement.

¹⁸ Shoman, 53

¹⁹ According to the 1826 census, "the first numeration made after the republics abolished slavery, listed 215 of the total 2,410 slaves as "runaways...other censuses indicating that the slave population as reduced by about one half between 1823 and 1835" Pg. 80. Bolland, Nigel. *The formation of a colonial society: Belize, from conquest to crown colony* (1977)

²⁰ Dobson, 164

²¹ Shoman, xii

If the conception that enslaved Belizeans were content with their treatment is complicated by instances of violence and labor desertion, the arrival of the Garifuna and Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) can be understood as a turning point in perceptions of black identity and resistance in the settlement. The fears of the British settlers' were further exacerbated by the realization that Belize was surrounded by Spanish territories, most of which took pleasure in providing refuge for runaways in hopes of destabilizing the British settlement.²² However, it was the events leading up to the Haitian revolution that fostered anti-black sentiment in the settlement for fears of widespread collective resistance among black African populations. Considering earlier attempts to establish "positive" relationships between blacks and white masters, the settlers were still apprehensive of a slave revolt, especially considering how successful black slaves in Saint Domingue were in obtaining their freedom. Bolland writes, "clearly the masters did not perceive their slaves to be immune from influence and feared the 'infectious' example of Saint Domingue".²³ Haiti's role as the crown jewel of the French empire and the racist social structures instituted on the island was a crucial component and motivation for the ways in which violence and death were seen as viable options for pursuing absolute liberation. The idea of the Haitian revolution and its legacy as vindication for global black liberation also sheds light on the way in which these particular events served as signifiers for black identity and the possibility of collective black power.

The arrival of the black Caribs or Garifuna in 1802, two years prior to the end of the Haitian Revolution, furthermore supplanted fears of black rebellion in the settlement. As the descendants of West African, Island Caribs and Arawak peoples, the Garifuna's rebellious

²² Shoman, 53

²³ Bolland, 76

heritage stems from their ability to evade slavery in the New World.²⁴ The Garifuna were never documented as slaves and this caused them to be despised and abhorred by both French and British administrations. The Carib Wars during the second half of the eighteenth century were brief military conflicts between the Caribs and British over the extension of British colonial settlements in Black Carib territories. Furious over the intransigent character of the Caribs as a whole, the British defeat of the Carib opposition resulted in their deportation from the Island of St. Vincent. Prior to their expulsion the British separated the Caribs according to their indigenous and African features in which most of the latter were sent to Central American settlements on the Caribbean coast.²⁵ It is possible that the objective of casting out Caribs of African descent from St. Vincent had much to do with conceptions that their legacy as perpetually “free” people was not conducive to their expansion seeing that the British would not be able to benefit from their labor. The British were also fearful of having similar revolts that were taking place in St. Domingue at the time. In addition, the French Revolution’s influence on global conflicts and countless slave rebellions throughout the colonized world provided cause for prejudiced sentiment among white settlers and British colonialists. Shoman states “Black Caribs were regarded as infected by the disease of ‘liberty, equality and fraternity’”, since most of them had French names, spoke French and had sided with the French against the British in St. Vincent”.²⁶ The arrival of the Garifuna at the turn of the nineteenth century, contributed greatly to the non-white population in Belize. In addition to growth of the black population, anxiety among the white settler class possibly manifested in distinct ways including an increase in rebellious activity, reproduction and intermixing between blacks and whites. Although solidarity between

²⁴ Garifuna originating from the Island of St. Vincent

²⁵ Although a majority of the Garifuna exiled were “black caribs” the literature does not specify how many of African descent were exiled to Central America or Belize.

²⁶ Shoman, 87

the newly arrived Garifuna and black Belizean population cannot be assumed, their positioning within the settlement reveals a collective struggle. The conception of the multiplicity of blackness fostered by forced migration and transnational rebellion on behalf of freedom and self-determination pushes against a unified black consciousness and demonstrates how black individuals in Belize are able to organize and envision their rights to representation, reform and equality.

Given that the timber and logging industry was generated through the labor of African slaves, the mahogany economy of Belize was also impacted heavily by the importation of Jamaican labourers in the early nineteenth century, with which the settlers had strong ties. Given the considerable amount of black labour transplants from other parts of the Caribbean, the black labor population was a diverse mix derived from Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad—workers who brought with them their own unique cultural characteristics and identity politics. Questions of who is considered black or Belizean begin to take shape through the process of creolization, and emancipation. As Joseph Ernest writes, “British Honduras had the minority white and near white ‘Baymen’ at the top of the financial totem pole, first as logwood/mahogany contractors and later as merchant class, and the majority blacks as a slave class at the bottom”.²⁷ Analyzing race relations and hierarchies within the context of the nineteenth century demonstrates that perhaps the process of being black or Belizean depended on a socio-economic class ranking.

A black identity in Belize can be thought of as corresponding to those partaking or possess a history of forced labour in the settlement. Given the long history of migration and importation of individuals from throughout the Caribbean, complexities of a Belizean or Creole identity have fluctuated to reflect economic and socio-political conditions. Race and identity as

²⁷ Iyo, Joe, and Evan X. Hyde, *Toward's understanding Belize's multi-cultural history and identity* (Belmopan, Belize: University of Belize, 2000), V

an indication of class, can be demonstrated by the growing community of mixed persons of European and African descent during the early 1800's. This navigation of identity was largely contextualized and as Joe Iyo writes "because of economics, [free-coloureds] preferred to emphasize their European-ness as much as possible, and distanced themselves physically and sociologically as well, from their slave antecedents and relatives".²⁸ In reference to what we know about the arrival of the Garifuna and implications of the Haitian Revolution for the white ruling class throughout the Caribbean, the free-coloured population may have perhaps saw their alignment or association with other black populations as threatening to their class status. It is also important to recognize that given the history of free-coloureds as part of the ruling class, the fact that they were unable to utilize their full rights under the Crown based on their disenfranchisement at times reveals how they fit into the black and Creole formulation.²⁹ Although it is not entirely clear who is considered Creole during this time, the reference to Creoles in Belize has historically come to mean white men and women born outside of England as well as descendants of the miscegenation between Europeans and Africans in the settlement.³⁰ However, interventions by scholars such as Nigel Bolland argue for both continuity and discontinuity of African heritage to better understand the implications and contributions of black resistance and de-africanization on the Creole culture. Iyo writes, "by this time [early nineteenth century]... the differences between African-born and Belize-born (black Creole) must have become a factor in racial/ethnic differentiation between the two".³¹ Although the Creolization process was a major factor in mobilizations toward the beginning of the twentieth century, the

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Narna Dobson argues that coloured inhabitants were still affected by discriminatory legislation prohibiting them of equal status to whites and owning land. Pg. 166 Dobson. Also, Macpherson, A. S. (2007). From colony to nation, 71.

³⁰ Iyo, Joe, and Evan X. Hyde, 11

³¹ Ibid

early nineteenth century is when these conceptions of identity begin to emerge with both white and some non-white Creoles placing emphasis on “European-ness”³².

A significant event in the development of black identity in British Honduras was the passing of the Belize Act of 1831, which granted “coloured” subjects in the settlement equal rights. Given that blacks outnumbered the white population, social stratification within the settlement allowed the white minority political and economic control over the entire population. In this particular case, the concept of a “Creole” or “kriol” culture became significant in the classification of non-white persons in British Honduras. White settlers of British ancestry and English Baymen who occupied the territory that is now Belize, although in many ways slightly detached from those in England, still shared many similarities. Given that white settlers in the “colony” were established groups within the general population, the term “Creole” was common when describing their offspring and descendants. Therefore, “coloured British subjects” or “free coloureds” that emerged from the “union of whites and blacks” contributed to the increase of this population and would later be instrumental in fighting for parity within this group.³³

Considering the unique racial stratification within British Honduras, Shoman states that “although ‘free people of colour’ continued to be discriminated against legally and socially, some of them became very wealthy, themselves owning slaves as well as land, and exercised some influence in the affairs of the settlement”.³⁴ Pressures set forth by the free colored population persuaded Britain to grant them, not free blacks, equal rights in 1831—further drawing the line between white and black identity. Shoman also mentions that the proposal to extend these rights and privileges to free blacks was unfortunately denied.³⁵

³² Iyo, Joe, and Evan X. Hyde, V

³³ Shoman, 70

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Shoman, 72

The abolition of slavery in 1838 brought about new forms of subjection in which black Belizeans were still left disenfranchised and reliant on their former masters. For example, land grants and the fixed prices imposed upon them also restricted free blacks from acquiring land. Both black men and women in Belize played a significant role in the farming industry and the growing of crops, considering that now they were only allowed to partake in this when it benefited the former masters was not only ironic but a clear indication of how the colonial structure in Belize used their power to prevent black Belizean's right to survival and self-sufficiency. The termination of slavery in Belize also provided the largest amount of compensation to slave owners than elsewhere in the Caribbean.³⁶ Ironically, both ex-slaves and freedmen were denied access to land, forcing them to continue to labor under their former masters. In this sense, conceptions of slavery and freedom during the first half of the nineteenth century signified a significant transition period from one form of domination to another. Additionally, the restrictions and dominance that accompanied the "non-event" of emancipation also changed the way that Belizeans identified and saw themselves within this new power structure.³⁷ In reference to the cause and effect of emancipation, Bolland writes, "as the former masters sought to develop new forms of coercion, the former slaves sought new means of freedom".³⁸

The establishment of an apprenticeship system required that black Belizeans continue working for their masters without pay before engaging in their own work. Shoman states,

"The abolition law, however, instead provided for compensation to the slave-owners. And in Belize, they were granted higher awards (more than 53 pounds per slave) than in any other British colony, despite their gross abuse of the apprenticeship laws, such as

³⁶ Shoman, 59.

³⁷ "nonevent" as mentioned in Hartman, Saidiya V, *Scenes of subjection: terror, slavery, and self-making in nineteenth-century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997)

³⁸ Bolland, O. Nigel, *Colonialism and resistance in Belize: essays in historical sociology* (Benque Viejo del Carmen, Belize: Cubola Productions, 1988),155.

working the apprentices for fifty hours per week rather than the legally required forty-five”.³⁹

Although ex-slaves were in fact legally “free”, the denial of land, sufficient wages and free will to work wherever, is representative of a long-standing system of repressive labour, and practices within British Honduras. Furthermore, in contrast with earlier depictions of slaves in Belize having generous schedules and pay through their masters, we can see how the various developments and uprisings across the black Atlantic had a profound effect on the treatment and behavior towards the black population in British Honduras. Bolland claims that during this time, Belize also saw an increase in spontaneous strikes, and desertions that also coincided with an economic depression, affecting laborers from also finding work outside of their former masters. Hostile relations between Spanish and British colonies became a site of resistance, as ex-slaves would frequently flee to neighboring countries where many believed they would be treated better.⁴⁰ Given that the “free coloured” had a stake in the slave economy as well, apprenticeship caused them to assimilate further into the ruling class for means of advancement and protection. It is not until the second half of the nineteenth century that “Creole” social societies begin to emerge and the inclusion of a black Creole identity takes shape.

Acts of oppression and rejection of black humanity can also be seen within the context of British Honduran-U.S. relations and the Civil War. Notwithstanding the British experience with racism and race relations within the settlement, the relationship and collective ideology amongst white power structures across the Americas is evident in the development of transnational trade in Central America. As a result of the trade between merchants in British Honduras and those in the southern Confederate States, it was believed that the white population in Belize supported

³⁹ Shoman, 59

⁴⁰ Dobson, 64

Southern secession.⁴¹ Also, bearing in mind that the colony worked hard to attract whites from the U.S. in hopes of establishing business in British Honduras is also very significant in the rise of growing white supremacy in the settlement. The fact that white settlers denied land to free blacks while in the same breath willingly granting land access and enterprise to southern white Americans in particular illustrates transnational colonial formation amongst the white elite in the Americas based on resources (timber) and labour. Taking into account the commemoration of September 10th/Battle of St. George's Caye that continues to define the multicultural nation, the myth of collaboration, partnership and loyalty between blacks and white settlers is obvious (especially in the denial of land—of which they “fought” to protect). In conclusion, the growing influence of America on the British Settlement along with the continuous contradictions and rejection of black humanity would soon spill over into working class disturbances, and protests, with some taking a second route through military service and labor.

The blatant racism fostered by the white elite in British Honduras did not go unnoticed. The efforts by the working class, which now included the Maya who fled from wars in the Yucatan and the Garifuna from St. Vincent, demonstrated their discontent with their living situations and treatment. Two incidents in which Mayan workers and Creole⁴² women demanded just working conditions indicated built up aggression towards major landowners. One such incident took place outside of the city in the Corozal district in 1886, in which the workers marched to the office of the local magistrate and threatened to continue their protest in Belize Town if their issues were not resolved.⁴³ Since Belize Town was the de facto capital during this time, the possibility of a riot here would not have only caused great concern for high ranking

⁴¹ Shoman, 117

⁴² term now used to describe black Belizeans with some white ancestry or other mixes. Used to contrast with the Garifuna

⁴³ Shoman, 174

white settlers but also potentially arouse similar grievances among the black Creole population in this area—especially considering that Belize Town held the largest percentage of black Belizeans throughout the country. The second incident, although not as contextualized and detailed as the first, consisted of Creole women and children “taking stones from the sea bottom” and “showering” the commonly despised Governor of the settlement with them.⁴⁴ This incident was brought on by the Governor’s failure to take responsibility for the administration’s role in the spreading and neglect of yellow fever in the settlement. Although there is no explanation or evidence of the consequences of this action, both incidents show how working class struggles coincided with black and subaltern notions of public opposition and collective resistance.

The 1894 Riots, considered by many scholars as a major turning point in the politicization and consciousness of the working class, was influential in setting the stage for future actions and demonstrations.⁴⁵ As a result of currency devaluation in the colony, working class black Belizeans as well as policemen imported from Jamaica and Barbados—in place of the West India Military Regiment—revolted against the colonial leadership given that their wages made them unable to afford basic necessities such as food. Shoman explains that a “mutiny by members of the constabulary, a paramilitary force made up of black Jamaicans and Barbadians” refused to accept the reduced pay and proceeded in the take over of army barracks until their demands were met.⁴⁶ Consequently, the paramilitary informed the colonial administration that they would surrender only under the provision that they be honorably discharged. Although the Governor agreed to their demands, Shoman states, “they quietly left the colony”. But the HMS Partridge, which responded to the call, arrived and remained in harbor, and it was soon to prove

⁴⁴ Shoman, 175

⁴⁵ Scholars include, Nigel Bolland, Assad Shoman, Peter Ashdown and Anne Macpherson.

⁴⁶ Shoman, 175

necessary to suppress a riot of the people in Belize Town”.⁴⁷ Peter Ashdown’s description of the riot as caused by both a currency devaluation and petition of grievances set forth by the Labourer’s Association, is also representative of the growing opposition between the working class and propertied class (which included some coloured Creoles).

Given that the causes of the 1894 riots were based on wage cuts and the increase in cost of living, the reaction to the riots proved that frustration with the colonial administration was clearly linked to long-standing grievances among the black population. Governor Moloney’s response to the riot demonstrated that he was less concerned about the causes but rather how to suppress agitation while protecting the interests of mahogany merchants and the propertied class. The collaboration between the colonial administration and merchant class supports the claim that class and property took precedence over racial classification and equity, however, the mobilization of black men and women against their employers were important in making the connections between slave labour and exploitation of the black working class. Similar to the quasi-slave narrative of Belizean society, the implications of the 1894 riot complicate conceptions of a multicultural society where race and class were absent.⁴⁸ Furthermore, in contrast to the previous century, the inclusion of Garifuna and Caribbean migrant laborers may have blurred the lines between a black Creole or Afro-Belizean identity, however their shared investment in both racial and economic equality through various labour uprisings exemplified their stake in the black Belizean protest practice. In reference to the legacy of the riot, Ashdown writes, “ the riot, in fact, apart from a temporary increase in wages, achieved very little...it did, however have several significant features which were to be important in future clashes between

⁴⁷ Shoman, 176

⁴⁸ Ashdown, Peter David, “The Labourer’s Riot of 1894,” *Belizean Studies* 7, no. 6 (November 1979): 26

labour and capital in the Colony”.⁴⁹ Black Belizeans saw this moment as an opportunity in which they could possibly take part in destabilizing and publicly challenge the racism that was ingrained in the configuration and modernization of the Belizean economic society.

Equivalent to prior actions of resistance amongst enslaved women, black Creole women’s active role within this movement also cannot be ignored. In considering their part in the disturbances of the late nineteenth century, black women’s stake in “getting a bit of their own back” also was a clear indication of their stance on the continuous exploitation of white rule.⁵⁰ Seeing that the majority of black men worked in the timber industry, their time away from their families in the city was a factor in the women’s reactions towards the wage increase. The effect on household income hindered women from providing for their families in addition to racist treatment they encountered through their work in the domestic. Shoman states, “at the trial of the rioters, policemen testified that women pulled down fences, smashed plate glass, attacked the police station and that they urged men on with cries of ‘lick them, boys’”.⁵¹ Although we can look at this as an instance of working class frustration with the growing elite and white establishment, the coalition of both black men and women shows how this particular “community uprising” was born out of existing complaints shared by the collective black community.⁵² Furthermore, the mistreatment endured by black women and men in the domestic and timber industry, was also an indication of the denigration of black labor as capital and to the socio-economic expansion of the Belizean settlement.

The uprising and overall people power of the black Belizean population was successful in that the merchants agreed to a 50 percent wage increase while most importantly demonstrating to

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Macpherson, 69

⁵¹ Shoman, 177

⁵² Collective black community consisted of the Garifuna as well as other Caribbean migrants living in Belize at this time.

the ruling class exactly how they felt about the hierarchical and racist nature of the settlement.⁵³

However, history shows that this public sentiment was ephemeral, five years later in 1899, the Labour Association garnered petitions to the Governor who later dismissed their demands by downplaying the nature of black Belizean's work ethic. The creation of the Labour's Association, which contained a mix of Garifuna and Mayan peoples, is an example of early multiracial coalition building—but one that is apparently steeped in the experiences and trajectory of the black community in Belize. These series of uprisings and protest in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, when viewed in the context of emancipation and the evolution of Belizean identity illuminate processes of resistance and emerging black identities born out of transformative moments in the early nineteenth century. From slave rebellions to working class uprisings, the rise of a black political consciousness and transformation from a slave economy to a Creole oligarchy, has constantly allowed for new conceptions of identity, race and protest to transpire.

⁵³ Shoman, 178

1919 Uprising, Transnational Radicalism and Women Activism

The organizing and politicization of working class black Creole men and women provides a framework for re-envisioning anti-colonial configurations and nationalist alliances. Alongside the previous riot in 1894, in which Mahogany workers protested unfair wage labor, the 1919 riot is often overlooked due to its affiliation with race and gender inequality—issues that conflict with Belize’s contemporary multicultural identity narrative. Examining the riot within the context of empire loyalty, organized labor and Caribbean radicalism considers the many ways black Belizean’s history of resistance and protest contributes to the complex identity of the crown colony. The development of both subtle and visible Black Nationalist ideologies has grown out of the struggle for representation, reform and equality. Furthermore, working-class women gave new meaning to their struggles and frustrations with the colonial state. The World War I period placed black Belizean men and women in positions that illuminated a larger structure of systemic injustices fostered by the colonial state and empire. It is through these conditions that female leadership evolves into providing women with a space to carry out their authority and influence within the community in unexpected ways.

The early decades of the twentieth century in Belize is arguably the most significant in terms of placing the political trajectory of working class black Belizeans in the colony. Power struggles in the late nineteenth century amongst middle class Creole and white elite further shunned individuals who sought to align more with European landowners and the tiny white settler population. Given the elusive and sometimes fluid nature of “Creole” identity, military service and the treatment of Caribbean⁵⁴ and West Indian soldiers abroad in many ways informs how black identity and resistance in British Honduras has been viewed through the lens of the

⁵⁴ Both British Honduras and Guyana

Black Diaspora. Although previous discussions pertaining to labor centered on black Belizean's role in both the domestic and agricultural economy, the enlistment of several Belizean men into the British West Indies Regiment (BWIR) during the first World War, sheds lights on collective grievances across the Caribbean involving race, citizenship and wage labor.

Military service was a common expression of imperial loyalty. Afro-Caribbean and West Indian soldiers serving in the late nineteenth century played a key role in suppressing the riots in 1894 in which Caribbean soldiers stationed in Belize revolted against the white British colonial establishment. As Brian Dyde mentions, "black soldiers in a white man's army" have played an important role throughout the course of history—especially in cases where colonial subjects are used as tools in "preserving and enlarging Britain's colonial empire in the West Indies and Africa".⁵⁵ Looking at military service as an extension of black Belizean's status as laborers of the British Empire also allows us to interpret the various modes and evolutionary patterns of resistance that are gendered and nationalist.

Similarly named, the West India Regiment (WIR) arm of the British army that preceded the BWIR was formed in the late eighteenth century to provide assistance to England against the French. Considering that these regiments were formed entirely of men from Afro-Caribbean communities throughout the West Indies, the legacy of slavery within these colonies and settlements permeated the military culture of this group. Brigadier-General Thomas Hislop, who served as senior British Army officer for much of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, states, "the soldiers of the West-India Regiments are amenable to the Slave Laws and therefore subject to every degradation, that the unfortunate and wretched Slave is doomed to

⁵⁵ Dyde, Brian, *The empty sleeve: the story of the West India regiments of the British Army* (St. John's, Antigua, WI: Hansib Caribbean, 1997), 9

endure”.⁵⁶ General Hislop’s proclamation of the black man’s status in the white man’s army demonstrates prevalent justifications for their abuse and exploitation. In their reference to these men as “slaves in red coats”, Brian Dyde and Roger Norman Buckley⁵⁷ explore conceptions of a “military enslavement” society in which black soldiers were still to be dutiful in their servitude to the white power structure.⁵⁸ Military participation as a form of systematic slavery encourages a more critical understanding of the varied institutions of enslavement. Furthermore, in addition to viewing military participation through the lens of colonial and empire loyalty, their enlistment in the army post-emancipation also sheds light on both economic, and racial inequalities more clearly. For example, black West Indian troops were stationed outside of the European theater and forbidden to engage in combat against other whites. James states “they distinguished themselves, winning high honors, fighting valiantly against the Turks in the Middle East, but not allowed to engage the Germans in Europe”.⁵⁹

Among the tasks that black soldiers were subjected to involved cleaning “latrines”⁶⁰, compiling and burying the bodies of dead soldiers as well as carrying cargo back and forth from the ships.⁶¹ Black soldiers were given this work to not only prevent them from engaging in battle, but assigning such demeaning and degrading work to Afro-Caribbean and West Indian soldiers only was meant to keep them in line while also adding to the prevailing belief that they are only competent in this type of work. With thousands volunteering for service during the first World War, some West Indians throughout the Caribbean may have seen this as an opportunity to respectfully serve the mother country while some enlisted as an act of survival in the midst of

⁵⁶ Dyde, 16

⁵⁷ Author of *Congo Jack* (1997) and *Slaves in Red Coats* (1979).

⁵⁸ Military enslavement term as used by Roger N. Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats* on pg. x.

⁵⁹ James, 57

⁶⁰ Community toilets usually in a barrack of military camp

⁶¹ James, 56

a series of economic depressions sweeping across the region. Bolland states, “even the small colonies contributed men, with 441 men from the Bahamas, 533 from Belize, 445 from Grenada, 700 from Guyana, 229 from the Leeward Islands, 359 from St Lucia, and 205 from St. Vincent”.⁶² In the case of Belize, they sent “12.8 men per 1000 of its population” which was higher than the regional average causing recruitment to be suspended in the colony.⁶³

Similar to acts of rebellion and resistance in British Honduras as well as the broader Caribbean during slavery, black soldiers participated in various forms of insubordination and sabotage. For instance, the refusal to carry out their assigned duties and acts of “silent protest” against the discrimination they suffered can be looked at as another way in which black Belizeans and Afro-Caribbean populations exercised their agency through this particular form of working class resistance. In the event where violence did occur, members of the BWIR directed their rage towards their officers and saw this as a chance to petition on behalf of the colonies against continued discrimination and violence. West Indian troops were moved to form the underground Caribbean League at Cimino camp where they discussed their grievances and rallied for instatement of black officers. Among one of the demands was the freedom for blacks to govern themselves, a common sentiment throughout the British colonies. However, Bolland states, that “the Caribbean league was betrayed to the officers and disbanded”, causing some soldiers to be criminalized and convicted of mutiny which consisted of three to five year prison sentences, and executions by firing squads.⁶⁴ Upon the discovery of the underground activity of West Indian soldiers by white officers, the claims of treason and disloyalty were a problem given

⁶² Bolland, O. Nigel, *On the march: labour rebellions in the British Caribbean, 1934-39* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers), 27

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Bolland, *On the March*, 28

the assumption that black soldiers were required and expected to be loyal to the mother country regardless of violence, inequality and citizenship.

It is possible that most perceived military service as an opportunity to achieve status in hopes of bettering their living conditions back home. However, the collective disillusion experienced by West Indian soldiers is emblematic of a shared black consciousness and laid the groundwork for a deeper collective political awareness to emerge. Furthermore, the concerted front of West Indian soldiers for self-governance and self-determination was not only established through their struggles in the regiment but can also be viewed as a response to the legacy of subjugation and oppression throughout the Caribbean. Soon after the West Indian soldiers were disarmed and repatriated back to the islands, the threat of alliance and radical social movement among black soldiers was likely a premonition of what was to come.⁶⁵ James concludes, “because the general population learned of the racism the men suffered abroad, the impact of veteran’s experience was, to a certain extent, generalized among thousands of black people in the region.”⁶⁶ Although West Indian soldiers were important in growing sentiment towards the British autocracy, the consequences that came with the close of war not only affected ex-servicemen’s livelihood, they were ineligible for many of the benefits granted to other troops throughout the Diaspora.

Black Women during Wartime

Simultaneously, black women in Belize were also fighting their own battles with the colonial establishment, albeit through different modes of resistance. If Caribbean servicemen’s protest was an indictment of racist military culture, then working class black women organizing

⁶⁵ Ibid,

⁶⁶ James, 52

in Belize was defined by tensions on the home front. Although Belizean women were prominent actors during the labor riots in the late nineteenth century, not much attention has been paid to the politicization of Afro-Belizean or Creole women in social movements in Belize. Anne Macpherson states, “poor black women’s political assertiveness fueled the imperial assumption that Caribbean and African people were morally, even biologically, disordered and unfit for self-rule”.⁶⁷ Macpherson’s exploration of Creole women’s political presence in Belize demonstrates how these women exerted a gendered “aggression” that engendered new ways of thinking about the relationship between black identity and resistance in the colony. Looking at these events within the context of Creole Afro-Belizean domestic history, both during slavery and post-emancipation, reveals the process by which Creole women were politicized. As mentioned in the previous chapter, enslaved males in Belize spent up to ten months at a time at the mahogany camps, which had a great impact on the socialization of enslaved men and women as well as the gendered division of labor. The women who revolted in both 1886 and 1894 did so to voice their grievances, but most importantly were characteristic of a long history of the mobilization efforts of Belizean women. These events demonstrate that women did not just rebel because men were unavailable; they shared a long history of resistance against the establishment that was informed by their status as black women in the crown colony.

Both black Creole women and men’s frustration with the colonial establishment influenced their organizing and mobilization of the growing non-white population in Belize. In addition to the transnational radicalization of West Indian soldiers, black Creole women in the colony were branded as “viragoes” and women that possessed “masculine strength and spirit”.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Macpherson, 36

⁶⁸ Macpherson, Anne S. “Viragoes, Victims and Volunteers: Creole Female Political Cultures and Gendered State Policy in 19th Century Belize,” in *Belize: Selected proceedings from the second interdisciplinary conference*, ed. Michael D. Phillips (Lanham: University Press of America, 1996), 36

In her piece on Creole female political cultures, Anne Macpherson explains how Belize's history of "labour division" has influenced gendered experiences and responses to the colonial state and authorities as well as laying the groundwork for particular practices of resistance⁶⁹. Macpherson states, "Creole women throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries shaped the emergence of class and ethnic identities, post-abolition political cultures, projects of colonial reform, and the constitution of nationalist struggle and rule".⁷⁰ For example, middle-class black Creole women's collaboration with Garifuna women in their quest for forming stronger alliances was successful in combatting racial inequality, domestic patriarchy and wage labor. Although most Garifuna women's work was in the agricultural economy, both Garifuna and black Creole women saw their issues with economic inequalities and patriarchy as a common grievance. The political alliance between black Creole and Garifuna women is not unlikely, due to their reputation as possessing a "combative" and confrontational womanhood, higher rates of single motherhood and unemployment.⁷¹ As previously discussed, the Garifuna's location within Belizean society has been a complex and contentious one. The decades-long debate about who was or wasn't Creole, although shaped by conceptions of class and race, was also in many ways constructed by the Garifuna's arrival in the early nineteenth century. Although grouping experiences of the two major black populations in Belize together has its complications, their collective activism and protest demonstrates a realization of shared struggles based on racial and class status.

While the majority of the men were abroad with the BWIR, Belizean Creole women performed a different type of politicization involving courts, reform and community service. The courts served as spaces where Belizean women challenged gender norms and "honed their skills

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Macpherson, Anne S, "Those men were so coward: The gender politics of social movements and state formation in Belize, 1912-1982" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin—Madison, 1998), 7

⁷¹ Macpherson, *From Colony to Nation*, 205, 125-126

in negotiation and confrontation” involving domestic disputes with merchants and landlords.⁷²

The increase in court cases involving black Creole women during the war period is an illustration of how women saw litigation as a way to redress intersectional transgressions and confront white patriarchal power. Court cases involving black Creole women, white merchants and landlords contained anti-colonial undertones while cases involving domestic issues, assaults and abuses were geared towards confronting gender violence and sexism. Advocacy in the courtroom also translated to other areas concerning land disputes, community service and voting. Similar to the ways in which Caribbean women have historically both embraced forms of respectability and performed defiant public roles, Belizean Creole women utilized “bembe” or “bully” politics that would designate their agency as masculine and aggressive.⁷³ In keeping in line with the “bembe” tradition, Belizean Creole women were, according to Macpherson, “not identifying with their oppressors”, however they also demonstrated an awareness of the resistance tradition of women in British Honduras dating back to enslavement.⁷⁴ Political consciousness among working class black Creole women most likely encompassed their roles as family heads, housing managers and providers for both immediate family and the community.

As explained by both Nigel Bolland and Anne Macpherson, the absence of men during the wartime period provided the circumstances in which women had to take on initiatives for the survival of black middle and working class Belizeans.⁷⁵ Black Creole or “urban woman” as the scholarship states, created innovative methods to curb the strong demand of good that were essential for food and work.⁷⁶ Although Belizean women were already doing most of this work prior to World War I, their use of the courts, negotiation and confrontation with the colonial

⁷² Ibid, 39

⁷³ Macpherson, “Those men were so coward”, 12

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Which also included some Mestizo, Mayan and Garifuna individuals.

⁷⁶ Macpherson, *From Colony to Nation*, 43

elite, situated them as political actors who were influential in laying the groundwork for subsequent mobilizations of other working class communities.⁷⁷ Macpherson provides the example of “bembe” politicization in her analysis of women and colonial courts during this time to describe the gendered expectations placed on Creole women. Many black Creole women, who found themselves in labor disputes, turned to the court in which Macpherson describes as “indicative of subaltern willingness to confront white masculine power in the court when it endangered family wellbeing”.⁷⁸ Based on the legacy of state-sanctioned violence on enslaved black men and women, it is possible that black Creole women saw the courts as an extension of colonial white supremacy, therefore their participation in using legal avenues to hold the white elite (landowners) accountable was their way of displaying public defiance but also reveals that such opposition was still structured in dominance.

Riot of 1919

As Macpherson explains, “blackness was more clearly linked to the ideas of the Belizean nation in 1919” than in any other period.⁷⁹ As history has demonstrated, a growing black consciousness among the black Creole middle class during the nineteenth and early twentieth century was the result of a complicated shared realization of British autocratic inequality and racial violence. Black Creole men’s radicalized experience during World War I, along with black Creole women’s politicization and militancy within the colony provided the groundwork for Black Nationalist and Creole self-determination in the following decades. Disgruntled members of the BWIR who endured racial hostility under the command of white British soldiers were indeed radicalized prior to their return back home. Around 16,000 black men served during the

⁷⁷ Ibid, 63

⁷⁸ Ibid, 65

⁷⁹ Ibid, 18

war in which a large majority were killed and badly wounded.⁸⁰ With inflation and increase in the cost of food, black Belizeans suffered critical injustice within the colony as well, as merchants used the war as an excuse to charge absurd prices.⁸¹ Although prices rose throughout the Caribbean (some more than others), wages in Belize remained the same. In order to survive, most black Belizeans resorted to “illegal” activities, such as smuggling food products from neighboring Spanish countries. For these reasons, the return of BWIR veterans to the colony was an upsetting and dismal occasion. Not only were the soldiers still traumatized and disheartened by their experiences abroad, they came back home to high price inflations and lack of job opportunities.⁸²

Enraged with both their treatment abroad and at home, hundreds of men, women and children marched through Belize Town on the morning of July 26th destroying property owned by white merchants. Black servicemen who returned from fighting in the Middle East and protested discrimination and inequality have often been held responsible for this uprising, however, Anne Macpherson’s interventions demonstrate that women were also key in this uprising. In the midst of “smashing the plate glass of the ten largest merchant stores”, Winston writes that demobilized soldiers made the argument that the colony should be “the black man’s country”.⁸³ However, Macpherson explains “the largely Creole working class of Belize Town effectively paralyzed the police and Territorial Force militia, beating and insulting middle-class Creole men as well as British officials, who telegraphed the *Constance* for assistance”.⁸⁴ Samuel Haynes, who played a major role in the organized action of Afro-Caribbean soldiers against British officers in the Middle East, also organized veterans in protesting merchant price inflation

⁸⁰ James, *Holding Aloft the Banner*, 52

⁸¹ James, 64

⁸² *Ibid*, 65

⁸³ *Ibid*

⁸⁴ Macpherson, *From Colony to Nation*, 29

and treatment. When the first group of war veterans returned home to high unemployment rates and taxes, Macpherson suggests that the outrage of the ex-servicemen had hints of racial solidarity, Black Nationalism, and anti-colonialism as seen in different areas of the Caribbean. Although prominent historians such as Winston James and Assad Shoman have repeated the narrative of the riot as a result of returning war veteran's and overseas radicalization, Macpherson argues that this disregards political tensions and grievances happening on the ground in Belize simultaneously.⁸⁵

Samuel Haynes is regarded in both academic and social circles as a key figure in the riots of 1919 and patriotism of the Creole middle class. Macpherson in many ways complicates this legacy with the inclusion of Annie Flowers, a Creole woman, who represented middle-class women's participation and frustration with hierarchies and "exclusions of the colonial order".⁸⁶ Anne Macpherson's feminist intervention into the 1919 riot not only fills in gaps of politicization and labor during the wartime period; she also provides an important contribution for understanding black Creole women's politicization and working class consciousness in Afro-Belizeans' quest for autonomy and equality. Furthermore, Anne Macpherson explains that looking at these movements within the context of black Creole women (as opposed to ex-servicemen) recovers the historical role that working class women played in laying the groundwork for labor and anti-racist work within the nation. By relabeling the "ex-servicemen's" riot as a community uprising, Macpherson privileges black Creole women's agency by inserting their activity into Belizean historiography. In her chapter on the 1919 riot, Macpherson explains,

⁸⁵ Macpherson, *From Colony to Nation*, 35

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 4

“existing explanations of the riot caused by male war veteran’s overseas radicalization are inadequate”.⁸⁷

Situating both Samuel Haynes and black Creole women like Annie Flowers within the context of the riots allows for a greater understanding of how black Belizeans have envisioned nationhood and their place within the colony. As one of the many politicized women in Belize, Annie Flowers didn’t represent a gendered activism established by the absence of men, her actions were established prior to the war and rooted in resistance among African-descended women throughout the Caribbean. Even though Haynes as a symbol of early radical politics has prevailed, women like Annie Flowers were moved to the margins of this history. Macpherson demonstrates that leading up to the 1919 riot, an “anti-white and anti-imperialist interpretation of wartime hardships” circulated among the working women of Belize Town that gave new meaning to their struggles and frustration with the elite white population. This inclusive nature of black Creole women’s political activism not only challenges dominant conceptions of gendered leadership but also provides a sense of autonomy from the domestic and patriarchal realm that permeates study of Caribbean women. As Macpherson states, “if black men would not free the black nation from its colonial shackles, by driving out the white foreigners, then black women, borrowing a sexual aggression constructed as masculine surely would”.⁸⁸ We can infer from such statements and the ways in which black Creole women mobilized during this period, each saw their role and position in the nation quite differently.

The challenges and conflicts that Macpherson raises successfully demonstrate how black Creole men and women operated within these spaces. The ideologies and demands promoted by ex-servicemen and black working class women operated simultaneously thus encouraging

⁸⁷ Ibid, 34

⁸⁸ Ibid, 33

disparate struggles for autonomy, self-determination and socio-economic equality. However, black Creole women's activism and their inclusive-based community organizing produced vital interventions in the labor movement and rising black consciousness in Belize by recognizing women as workers, heads of the households, and leaders of the black community. Whereas this particular event is repeated within Belizean historiography as growing out of the struggles of the early 1910's, history has shown that black resistance has its roots in the legacy of the enslaved black population. Although Macpherson successfully demonstrates how black women have historically mobilized in the absence or complacency of male leadership during the early nineteenth century, these events can best be understood within the context of black women's role in the slave economy and divergent labor history being that each period of subjection informed the next. Furthermore, the Riot of 1919 illuminated how black women have always envisioned their role in the settlement as political actors and not ephemeral protestors. Although the protest by the black population resulted in more restrictive and repressive measures by the state, the riot helped to produce racial and class awareness among black Creole men and women. It also demonstrated to the colony what they were willing to risk for freedom and equality—albeit in different ways.

“Land of the Gods”: Garveyism, Reform and the Colonial State

Much like the story of Samuel Haynes, contingent men and gendered protest carried out by black Creole women during the early twentieth century, this period was representative of widespread consciousness and radicalism throughout the British Caribbean and colonial Africa. The 1919 riot symbolized many things among the Belizean population, however, the actions and politicized futures of ex-servicemen and black Creole women diverged into different areas of protest and reform. Scholars such as Winston C. James, Robert Hill and Assad Shoman have maintained that the riot of 1919 was the most recognized and powerful event during the interwar period within the entire Caribbean. Acknowledging this event as being responsible for the rise of Black Nationalism in Belize has remained undisputed. Therefore, the lack of analysis of Belizean protest and politicization within a black Diasporic framework beyond Garveyism has also highlighted alternative ways of examining the evolution of black identity and resistance through women and their relationship to the state.

The influence and effects of the riot on both black men and women as perceived by both the state and non-white Belizean population illuminates disparate impressions of how each saw their role in the nation. Given the large mobilization of black men, women and children during the early twentieth century, implications of a successful riot further determined possibilities of organizing within black Creole communities and against the state. Haynes raised the issue of price inflation, a concern that transcended racial and ethnic boundaries, however, his negotiation with the colonial elite shows that such actions do not automatically mean he was an advocate for women and the majority of the colony’s laboring masses. Because Haynes was deemed a spokesperson for ex-servicemen does not necessarily mean that women and other Belizeans of ethnic origins including the Garifuna, Mestizos, and Mayans would not necessarily benefit from

his proposed reforms. Such ideologies and movements, although operating simultaneously were both significant in the push towards autonomy and self-determination. The inclusive rebellion began with the deployment of contingent men, which soon spiraled into an insurgency where women who were mistreated on the home front during World War I sought to reclaim their dignity. The narrative of Samuel Haynes and his contingent men overshadowed Creole women's mobilization for adequate working wages and recognition for their work within the domestic sphere—further proving that labor and black consciousness does not always automatically mirror collective organization.

In the aftermath of the riots, the colony redirected its focus to state reform and colonial reorganization. It is possible that the persistent mobilization and labor resistance among Belize's black population forced the colonial elite's hand in finally taking action on decades-long grievances. Although grievances set forth by black women as well as internal gender struggles within the black community did not subdue the colonial establishment completely, both of these competing ideologies transformed how the colony may have envisioned collective mobilization and identity among the black masses. Samuel Haynes's perceived determination in negotiating governmental responsibilities within a colonial framework is explained by his leadership in the Garvey movement and his notions of domesticity. On one occasion, Haynes rallied for the release of men arrested in the riots for the purpose that their families were suffering and dependent on them as family providers.⁸⁹ With the arrival of Samuel Haynes and converted-Garveyites, black women from the working class found it difficult to break away from the colonial order and conceptions of their role as agents in the "hegemonic project" of health reform.⁹⁰ The differences between the working-class women and returned servicemen reflected

⁸⁹ Macpherson, *From Colony To Nation*, 112

⁹⁰ Macpherson, *From Colony To Nation*, 71

the power struggles that occurred within colonial society and demonstrated that “black rage” and the politicization of Belizean women and children were not enough to dismantle colonial rule at this time.

Although conceptions of black identity are often located within the conflicts of 1919, the inception of Garveyism into then British Honduras alongside Creole women labor resistance contributed to the evolution of a black consciousness as well. Due to the influence of Garvey and his philosophy on self-determination and Black Nationalism, the riots were used by the colonial administration as a vehicle to produce “respectable” women in the “streets and homes of poor neighborhoods”.⁹¹ According to Robert Hill, the first document detailing the relationship between Garvey, the Americas and the Caribbean took place in Corozal, Belize on November 1st 1918.⁹² The founding of the UNIA by Marcus Garvey and Amy Ashwood in 1914 coincided with several domestic struggles in Belize and across the Americas. It can be suggested that Garvey’s initial correspondence with the Belizean population had more to do with their potential in organizing rather than a consequence of the riot. Hill explains that Garvey’s interest in establishing a strong branch of the UNIA in British Honduras stems from his belief in the possibility of Belize or Belizeans as a potential powerhouse of Black Nationalism. Given the context of Belize’s process of creolization and multi-racial identity making in the mid-nineteenth century, the fact that Garvey saw Belize as a place capable of mobilization conceptualizes the tiny colony within a Pan-African framework. Furthermore tension between the black population and the colonial government prior to the 1919 riot, resulted in a ban of the *Negro World* in Belize.

⁹¹ Ibid

⁹² Hill, Robert. Bliss center for the Performing Arts. Belize City, Belize. 17 August 2008. Lecture

The *Negro World*, a weekly newspaper established by UNIA founders Marcus Garvey and Amy Ashwood, focused on the uplift and unification of people of African descent internationally. Consisting of poetry, political commentary and editorials, the *Negro World* served as a reminder to European colonial governments that their colonial subjects yearned for their own form of freedom and self-determination. Given the ideology that associated loyalty to the empire as a form of obedience, the *Negro World*, exacerbated fears throughout the colonial elite regarding racialized disturbances. The ban and subsequent smuggling of the newspaper into the colony raises questions about what pro-black content might have meant for black Belizeans and global blacks during the wartime period. The perceived loyalty to the British Crown alongside the harsh treatment encountered by both contingent men and women laborers on the home front, provided an audience that would more than likely resonate with the ideals and principles set forth by the UNIA. The contribution and inclusion of various voices and expression throughout the Black Diaspora maintained a transnational approach that placed black struggle at the center. In regards to Belize's history of creolization, marginalized poor, working and middle class black persons perhaps saw this as an incentive to organize on behalf of a shared heritage.

Columns in the *Negro World* and the *Belize Independent* (established in 1914) praised the efforts of the UNIA in Belize prior to 1919 and Garvey regarded the Belize branch as one of its most successful. As previously discussed the lack of analysis regarding a black consciousness in Belize can also be seen in the absence of a Pan-African analysis as well. Robert Hill's archival publications of the Garvey Papers, places Belize within these conversations by making the connection between Garvey's socio-political endeavors and the small colonial nation's Pan-African elements. Founded in 1920, the Belize UNIA branch was reported to have either interest

or membership of 8,000 persons in which Garvey joked, “If we can have eight thousand in the U.N.I.A, you might see that we own Belize.”⁹³ The influence and mass support of the UNIA on the black population and specifically Belizean soldiers can be placed within an evolving and long tradition of performances of black consciousness and resistance. It is possible that pressures to integrate into the Creole elite class and emulate “britishness” were lessened with hopes of a collective awareness of their place within the colonial society. Although issues during the first latter half of the nineteenth century were based on labor and economic abuses among the black working class, the emphasis on cultural issues and promotion of global black solidarity within the UNIA also reveals the Belizean population’s visible and latent response to racial injustice.

After the suppression of the 1919 rebellion, Samuel Haynes began to organize solely on behalf of the UNIA in Belize, serving as the organization’s general secretary. In reference to the popular support set forth by the UNIA, Kurt Young writes, “success of the UNIA chapters in Belize was a function of its ability to aid ordinary Belizeans in grappling with the problems that confronted them on a daily basis”, given his well noted struggles and organization abroad, Haynes would become the face of the movement on these grounds.⁹⁴ Governor Eyre Hutson (1918-1924) ultimately lifted the ban on the *Negro World* for fear of growing resentment to the colonial establishment. Seeing that copies of the UNIA publication were continuing to make it’s way into the colony, he also accepted the presence of the local UNIA Branch partly because of his beliefs that black Belizeans would identify more with being Creole than “negroes”, that their racial sentiment was misdirected anger towards American racism, and that the UNIA influence

⁹³ Hill, Robert A., and Marcus Garvey, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association papers* (Berkeley: University of California Press Vol, 2), 293

⁹⁴ Young, Kurt B, “The case for a Belizean Pan-Africanism. (Report),” *Journal of Pan African Studies*. 2 (9): 17

would ultimately phase out.⁹⁵ The question of how and why the UNIA and Garveyism had all of a sudden become less threatening to the colonial establishment lies in the evolution of the UNIA in Belize, and subsequent reforms fostered by both Haynes and the Black Cross Nurses.

While some may have perceived Samuel Haynes to be in an opportune position to affect social and economic change for some of Belize's most disadvantaged communities, his departure for America in many ways affected and weakened the movement.⁹⁶ As a result of Garvey's increasing influence and demand in the U.S., Garvey's decision to use Samuel Haynes leadership in the main UNIA chapter of Harlem and later Philadelphia, signals a shift in Belizean radicalism. Two years prior, Haynes helped to initiate one of the largest protest movements in Belize and with his departure in 1921 and new role as *Negro World* editor, many felt that the UNIA movement and Belize's potential in shaking up the colonial administration had disappeared.⁹⁷ Although Garveyism and civic participation in Belize had shifted at the start of the 1920's, black men and women's activism began to take a different form, one that involved new ways of working with or within the system to promote fairness and justice.

In 1925, Samuel Haynes penned the poem "Land of The Gods" which touched on matters of identity, patriotism and history. Regardless of the many reasons as to what tempted Haynes to write the poem, the lyrics were a characterization of Belize's colonial period and negotiation of black Creole identity. In terms of the "fragile peace" period that Belize experienced post 1919, Anne Macpherson writes that the lyrics "exemplified Belizean Garveyism's accommodation to Britain's interwar policy of evolutionary, earned movement toward stable, capitalist self-

⁹⁵ Hill, Robert A., and Marcus Garvey, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association papers* (Berkeley: University of California Press Vol 12. 1983),508

⁹⁶ Shoman, Assad. "13 Chapters of Belize History". Pg 183

⁹⁷ Assad Shoman, James Winston and Anne Macpherson have spoke about Haynes departure as a turning point in public opposition and activism. Shoman, 13 chapters, 53. Macpherson, *From Colony to Nation*, 33. James, *Holding Aloft the Banner*, 66

government”.⁹⁸ Much like Governor Eyre Hutson’s earlier perception that black people in Belize aligned more towards being Creole than negro, Hayne’s lyric “arise, ye sons of the Baymen’s clan” revisits the story of September 10th while also contributing to the complexities of a black identity in Belize. Furthermore, considering Garvey’s emphasis on Black Nationalism, solidarity and racial pride it is difficult to understand the erasure of slave society within this association.

Haynes elaborates on this concept further in his lyric “Our fathers, the Baymen, valiant and bold”. It is possible that Hayne’s reference to the Baymen as “our fathers” designates these European settlers as founding patriarchs of the nation. Considering that the Baymen were responsible for the establishment of slavery in the settlement, the ode to this group is seen as contradictory and reveals a larger process of disavowal. Given historical conflicts and displacement of the Maya at the hands of British settlers, the inclusion of the Baymen did not resonate with other ethnic communities living in Belize as well. Race and nationalism were not the only themes in Haynes poem that were at odds with the history of black Belizeans resistance. The black Creole’s journey from slavery to emancipation was characterized by Hayne’s verse, “brought freedom from slavery, oppression’s rod...no longer shall we be hewers of wood”. In Hayne’s reference to the slave economy and production of timber (log [wood]), he alludes to a long history of mostly men’s labor in the mahogany camps. Not only does he disregard women from discussions of slavery and their relationship to the slave economy as well, in his sentiment he situates slavery and oppression as a thing of the past without associating it with more recent confrontations with the colonial establishment. This mild handling of the colonial establishment is also present in Hayne’s preceding description of Belize as a “tranquil haven of democracy”.

The lack of reference to the struggle of women in the colony has also been met with much criticism. Hayne’s lyric “Our manhood we pledge to thy liberty”, has also showed the

⁹⁸ Macpherson, *From Colony To Nation*, 117

ways in which power relationships between men and women dating back to the slave period has manifested in different ways. Seeing as the focus of twentieth century radicalism in Belize has been on ex-servicemen and their contributions to the British war effort, black Belizean women who dealt with their own struggles of survival on the home front were not even a mention. Furthermore, Haynes performance of manhood as associated with military participation and nationalism is constitutive of how their envisioning of a new nation after 1919 was a gendered process. When Belize gained its independence from Great Britain on September 21, 1981, Samuel Hayne's "Land of the Gods" poem was adopted as the country's national anthem and renamed, "Land of the Free". In the context of Hayne's place in Belize's history, Winston C. James writes, "here is a black British man who was verbally abused by white British ruffians for singing Rule Britannia—which is indeed a white man's song—giving a song to his new nation at dawn".⁹⁹ Given the absence of women, the patriotic and nationalistic leanings of *Land of the Gods* is part of a larger conversation regarding the implications and significance of the 1919 riot to early twentieth century struggles.

Black women's active participation in Belizean society resulted partially from their membership in the UNIA and its subsidiary, Black Cross Nurses. Women like Annie Flowers who took part in the growing subaltern frustrations of the early twentieth century were not necessarily tied to an organized group and therefore were missing from this movement. The involvement of middle-class black Creole women had transformed into a public activism that utilized various reform traditions backed by Garveyites and colonial government. Although Macpherson classifies this period as an evolution from domesticity to public leadership, it is

⁹⁹ James, *Holding Aloft the Banner*, 69

important to note the prior experiences and presence of women in both labor disturbances and disputes prior to the 1920's.¹⁰⁰

The alliance and reform projects fostered by the colonial state and the middle class correlates with the Creole working-class' adoption of Garvey's doctrine in their heavy practice of unity and self-determination. Together, the Garvey movement and Black Cross Nurses reveal a larger picture of the country's navigation of identity. The expertise and knowledge of the Black Cross Nurses in health and maternal education marked their influence among the masses and alignment with state practices.¹⁰¹ The notion that their work within the community did nothing to counter colonial, class, and masculine power structures but rather reproduced existing notions of decorum, is suggestive of their promotion of "male-headed nuclear families".¹⁰² Looking at this within the context of the women-led households during World War I and seasonal employment in the mahogany camps, interest in nuclear families can also speak to the historic structuring of the black family unit in Belize.

As mentioned previously, the Black Cross nurses were deemed as one of the most successful components of the Garvey movement and gained much access across middle and working-class communities. The significance of their activism to the Black Nationalist movement and state reform provided them with a space to carry out their own authority within the community as well as establishing a form of respectability and female leadership that Macpherson considers an extension of colonial reform. Although the nurses campaigned for better housing conditions in some of Belize's poorest neighborhoods, their attention to raising the quality of living, overcrowding and "maternal neglect" coincided with a distinctive type of gendered leadership similar to Amy Jacques Garvey's community feminism. Much like Ula

¹⁰⁰ Macpherson, *From Colony To Nation*, 75

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 75

¹⁰² Ibid, 76

Taylor's exploration of community feminism in which women utilized their skills toward family, local community and the Black nation, the Black Cross Nurses and their gender politics countered conceptions pertaining to the black community and also worked to create "respectable" communities through their backing of reforms pertaining to social hygiene and domestic matters.¹⁰³

Looking at Garveyite women and Black Cross Nurses through the lens of Amy Jacques Garvey's concept of community feminism not only contends with Anne Macpherson's analysis of these women as loyal colonial subjects but also allows us to rethink how we perceive black women in Belize during this period. Similarly, Jacques Garvey's belief that women's nurturing trait provided them with a certain level of power and control over their homes, communities and husbands countered the marginalization of black women within male-dominated spaces through her consideration of the home as a site of socio-political autonomy. Ula Taylor argues that historically black women and male relational differences have often manifested as unbalanced relationships and given Marcus Garvey's canonical status as one of the more prominent political leaders of the Black Diaspora, women like Jacques Garvey's stance on the role of black women were in opposition to this conception. In reference to the inconsistencies of feminism and Black Nationalism, Taylor states that community feminism "counters a macro-political model that implies that there is something inherently 'pure' or essential' to feminist theory".¹⁰⁴ Accordingly, Jacques Garvey's inclusion of the multiplicity and intersectional identities of black women and their respective politics decentered antiquated notions of feminism while carving out an inclusive space for black women with Black nationalism. Although gender politics of the Garvey movement may have responded to racist imperial notions of black womanhood, the particular

¹⁰³ Taylor, Ula Y. *The veiled Garvey: the life & times of Amy Jacques Garvey*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2002)

¹⁰⁴ Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey*, 64

positioning of black Creole women in Belizean society showcased their involvement in community engagement and volunteering.

With the backing of the UNIA, the Black Cross Nurses participated in several reforms in the area of social hygiene, penal reform and healthcare. In their efforts to improve living conditions for families in poor areas of Belize City, the nurses surveyed housing conditions that they saw as a major factor in infant mortality and “maternal neglect”.¹⁰⁵ Bringing their expertise and medical knowledge to poor black Belizean populations was something that neither male Garveyites or colonial administration found fault with. In addition, their community work consisted of public lectures on health and programs that focused on raising healthy babies—initiatives that many might argue should have been the government’s job. Furthermore, their middle class status and unpaid hours of community engagement demonstrated their dedication to the cause. However, the nurses were not in a position financially or politically to demand benefits, access or make systemic change. Given the work that these nurses accomplished in the community, the issue of class was still present. Their work in relation to poor and working class women was a depiction of their respective role within the eyes of Garveyites, colonial state and perhaps the general community (especially in terms of their status as a role model to young women). As a form of empowerment, their community engagement could also be viewed as a method that women utilized in hopes of finding spaces in which their public and private roles were seen as invaluable to the emergence and sustainment of the black nation. The rocky terrain of Garveyism and state reform that allowed black women to participate in both nationalistic and issues pertaining to womanhood, exhibits how these women sought autonomy and self-governance within the confines of the roles that many of them have taken on historically. Similar to Jacques Garvey, the perception of this community of volunteers was not only representative of

¹⁰⁵ Macpherson, *From Colony to Nation*, 93

post-riot Garveyism but also blurring the lines and challenging myopic feminist and gender politics by establishing women as political beings. The Black Cross Nurses as politicized agents working within the confines of reform, embody the discourse surrounding black women's task in nation building.

The social reforms of the 1920's focused on the popular classes and in many ways paid close attention to the welfare of the family and community. The second arena of social hygiene reform was geared towards environmental sanitation and attributed the prevention of disease as a way to "improve the human stock".¹⁰⁶ Conceptions of building a black nation through childrearing and domestic work is a common theme within the nationalist discourse and in the case of Belizean women activism after 1920, provides a framework through which black womanhood and the maintaining of perceived gender-specific roles can be viewed. In comparison, social reforms that focused on elementary education are significant due to its emphasis on self-improvement and racial uplift through education. Extreme aspects of the social reform that were problematic was its ban on the sale of liquor to prevent women from drinking in public, and penal reform for boys, men and women who illustrated "disgraceful" behavior. The policing of women and racial undertones of political measure that impacted black Belizean (Creole and Garifuna) women also adhered to the continuities between enslaved and black freedom, especially in regards to the image of the respectable women that was heavily promoted. Additionally the criminality of non-white boys, men and in some cases, young women were a continuation of the policing of morality and decorum among the middle-class. For example, Macpherson writes, "the belief that female juveniles were morally and intellectually hopeless and more prone to evil", relegating girls as useless beyond motherhood and the domestic sphere.

¹⁰⁶ Macpherson, *From Colony to Nation*, 89

There is no way of knowing if the same women who participated in the 1894 and 1919 riots were in fact members of the Black Cross Nurses. Although post-riot Garveyism has been seen as mild in comparison to other places in the Caribbean, certainly the first half of the twentieth century was the most visible in terms of a rising black consciousness.¹⁰⁷ It is also apparent that each group saw themselves as a critical component to the emerging nation post World War I. Belizean ex-servicemen's resentment towards the injustice they faced at home and abroad encouraged them to seek new ways of protest that coincided with their experiences of black transnational struggles. Subsequently Garveyite men who saw their role as Black Nationalist struggled with how to productively move the nation forward while still operating within colonial power structures. The public role of Belizean women in the Black Cross Nurses and their mobilization in favor of public health showed how black women navigated these two spaces (Garveyism and colonialism)—of changing/dismantling the system from operating within. On September 10th, 1931, a devastating category four tropical hurricane made landfall in Belize City causing massive destruction and loss of life—taking 6 percent of the population. In addition to the relief efforts and programs geared towards those who lost everything in the disaster, the Hurricane of 1931 also marked the decline of the social reform period and Garveyite movement—sparking the basis for rapid growth and militancy of urban poor and working class men and women. It is during this period that we can understand the effectiveness of the reforms of the 1920's through the incorporation of the Labour and Unemployed Association (LUA) and multiracial organizing that now included Mayan, Spanish, Garifuna, Creole and other ethnic groups.

¹⁰⁷ Macpherson, *From Colony to Nation*, 75.

Conclusion

Through this discussion of the evolution of black politics, resistance and identity in Belize, this thesis positions Belize within a larger framework of Caribbean and Central American identities. The evolution of black consciousness and resistance in Belize within the context of slavery, emancipation, labor riots and Garveyism has demonstrated how these significant moments have been informed by larger structures of power—allowing particular sites of resistance to take place. As the only English-speaking country in Central America, Belize’s geographical location and its convoluted colonial and imperial histories has the potential to change the way that we study the Diaspora in Central America as well. Due to the heavy out-migration of Black Belizeans and the heavy flow of Latino migrants into Belize, the demographics differ drastically from that of a half-century ago. Much like Nigel Bolland and Anne Macpherson, I too reject that Belizeans are “fixed in unchanging ethnic groups and social identities” while also pushing against the notion that black identities are abandoned in search of new ones¹⁰⁸. The evolving nature of social identities, therefore allows us to interrogate further multiplicities of blackness and what black resistance and identity look like in different regions. I am hopeful that this discussion continues and works toward piecing together a different type of story, one that includes black and gendered mobilizations as part of a deeper history. In this thesis I have shown how sites of resistance and performances of identity have been established and defined, while also exploring black women’s ongoing struggle for autonomy and equity. In making these connections, I have examined how such moments are also part of an evolving black consciousness informed by the black Belizean populations’ positioning in the colony and transnational relationship to other parts of the Black Diaspora. Apart from the absence of

¹⁰⁸ Macpherson, *From Colony to Nation*, 6

women, this thesis redresses understandings of nationhood, citizenship and empire, as it is understood throughout the British Caribbean. Placing black Belizeans at the forefront of these struggles, demonstrates how members of the black diaspora have always struggled with their role as colonial subjects and citizens at the nexus of colonization and independence while also working to challenge and reimagine a more just and egalitarian society.

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