

Chapter 3

Afro-Antillean Presence in the Latin American Melting Pot

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Labels are openly racial in the case of schools ‘colored’ and ‘white’

In buildings where white and colored work together there are separate washrooms and drinking fountains.¹

We might be inclined to believe that this quote refers to the Jim Crow system implemented in the United States from 1865 until 1965. In fact, it refers to the system put into practice by the US government in the Panama Canal Zone,² where thousands of Afro-Antilleans (and approximately 200 African Americans and many southern Europeans), employed in unskilled and semi-skilled positions, were labeled “silver employees,” paid in silver coins, and confined to segregated schools, post offices,³ stores, recreational facilities, hotels, hospitals, and housing. White United Statesians (primarily from the South) in skilled trades, clerical, professional and administrative positions were paid in gold coins and called “gold employees.”⁴ Though there was an implication that the system paid attention to different degrees of skills, in effect it was a scheme primarily based on color.

Panamanians stress that this period of institutionalized segregation resulted from US imposition, and that prior to that period, there was no inequality present as Panama was on its way to becoming a true racial democracy.⁵ In fact, noninstitutionalized discrimination against peoples of African descent had been present throughout Panama’s history and was heightened and exacerbated in different periods. One way or another, Afro-Panamanians (and Afro-Antilleans in particular) have endured great prejudice.

Afro-Antilleans were the key actors in “the most voluminous trans-Caribbean movement of people ever.”⁶ It is estimated that between 1850 and 1950, as many as 200,000 Afro-Antilleans went to Panama to work in several infrastructural projects. In spite of the innumerable contributions of

Afro-Antillean intellectuals, workers, artists, and entrepreneurs, the Afro-Antillean populations in Panama have historically been viewed as a “problem,” and have been marginalized and regarded with suspicion and negativity. Since 1996, I have studied the lives of Afro-Antilleans from an anthropological and historical perspective. In this essay, I offer some of the most pressing illustrations of unequal treatment and racialized policies and actions against Afro-Antilleans.⁷ I propose that Afro-Antilleans have labored (physically and metaphorically) to become recognized socially, economically, politically, and culturally as a group that has Pan-African and Pan-Caribbean legacies⁸ while maintaining loyalty to and contributing to the development of the nation that has become its home. For Panamanians, acknowledging the fundamental cultural diversity of Afro-Antilleans has proven difficult, both because of racist and xenophobic beliefs of Panamanian authorities and society at large and because of Afro-Antillean views of superiority about their own history as British subjects.

THE AFRICAN PRESENCE IN PANAMA

Throughout its history, Panama has been considered a place of transit, a condition that Alfredo Castillero Calvo defines as *transitismo*.⁹ As a result, it has received many immigrants from different parts of the world, producing what Panamanian scholars have termed a melting pot (*crisol de razas*). Panamanian scholars, social scientists, and writers have emphasized the multicultural diversity that populates this so-called Latin American melting pot. In response to the elite’s understanding of the melting pot, the Afro-Panamanian intellectual Armando Fortune argued that rather than a melting pot, Panama was, more accurately, a *sancocho*.¹⁰ A *sancocho* is a traditional soup in several Latin American cuisines, made with tubers, meat, and other ingredients, depending on the region. The reference to Panama as a social *sancocho* emphasizes the *mixture* of elements rather their *fusion*. In this social *sancocho*, peoples of African descent are an essential ingredient.

Panama’s history has produced two distinctive groups of Afro-Panamanians: Afro-Colonials and Afro-Antilleans. Afro-Colonials (*negros coloniales*) are descendants of black slaves who arrived in Panama in the sixteenth century to work in the mining industry,¹¹ and Afro-Antilleans (West Indians, *criollos*, or *antillanos*) are descendants of Antillean workers who migrated involuntarily or voluntarily to build the Panamanian railroad, the French-led Panama Canal, and to work in banana plantations in the nineteenth century.

There are at least three accounts of the date of arrival of black enslaved peoples to Panama in the sixteenth century: 1509, with the expedition of

Diego de Nicuesa, resulting from the *Capitulación de Burgos* opening *Tierra Firme* to settlement, signed by de Nicuesa and Spain's King Ferdinand; 1508,¹² or 1511.¹³ Panama City (and *Nombre de Dios* in particular) was the first major arrival point for enslaved Africans, principally coming from West Africa. Slavery was only marginally connected to plantation life in Panama. Most enslaved peoples worked in the mines of Veracruz, Coclé, and Concepción because mining was by far the most important economic activity of colonial Panama until the eighteenth century.¹⁴

Notably, Afro-Colonials frequently rebelled, as evidenced by several freedom movements developed by leaders such as Pedro, Luis de Mozambique, Anton Mandinga, and maroons or runaway slaves Bayano or Vallano, and Felipillo, among others, during the second half of the sixteenth century.¹⁵ The first recorded revolt of black slaves in the Isthmus occurred in the city of Panama in 1525, and resulted in the execution of its major leaders. These attacks continued throughout the seventeenth century and produced several runaway slave communities.¹⁶ By 1533, it was estimated that there were approximately 800 maroons in Panama, many of whom allied themselves with pirates such as Sir Frances Drake, Henry Morgan, Edward Vernon, William Parker, and John Oxenham, keeping colonists in constant fear.

Manumission of Panamanian slaves was difficult, although two mechanisms used occasionally were the *cartas de libertad* (letters of freedom) given to enslaved peoples as a decree by King Ferdinand in 1526, and the *libertad graciosa*, granted to a slave (in some cases, postmortem) due to affection, good services, or illness. In 1821, Panama was incorporated into Gran Colombia after its independence from Spain, and thus became subject to its laws. Panama was known as Colombia's black province because of its high degree of miscegenation. Slavery gradually waned, and on January 1, 1852, slaves were granted universal freedom. Currently, although racism is present in the country, Afro-Colonials have integrated into Panamanian society.¹⁷

The 1849 gold rush in California contributed greatly to Panama's second major influx of Afro-Antilleans. Because the journey across the United States proved extremely difficult and dangerous, a transportation system that facilitated communication and transportation between the coasts of the United States was needed. A railroad across the Isthmus of Panama was a welcomed option,¹⁸ and construction of the Panamanian Railroad started in May 1850 at Manzanillo Island in Limón Bay.¹⁹ The Panamanian Railroad Company hired workers from different countries: New Grenada, Jamaica, England, France, Germany, India, Austria, and China. Most of the workers, however, were Afro-Antilleans because they were believed to be well adjusted to the tropical environment, and spoke in English. When construction ended in 1855, thousands of Afro-Antilleans settled in Panama, while many migrated to the

province of Colón and to Bocas del Toro.²⁰ The second migration of Afro-Antilleans resulted from French efforts to build a canal from 1880 to 1889, under the leadership of Count Ferdinand de Lesseps. By 1884, there were more than 26,000 workers on the project, most of them Afro-Antilleans from Jamaica, Barbados, Santa Lucía, Martinique, and Haiti.²¹ When the project failed, these workers were left stranded in Panama. Many of them died of hunger, malaria, and yellow fever;²² some returned to their island territories, while others remained in Panama.

The third and largest migration of Afro-Antilleans took place during the first decade of the twentieth century when the United States took charge of the construction of the Panama Canal (1904–1914). The Panama Canal Company brought 31,000 Afro-Antillean men and 9,000 Afro-Antillean women to Panama from 1904 to 1913, most from Barbados. Afro-Antilleans were the largest labor force in both canal projects. For instance, it is estimated that as many as 60 percent of workers in the construction of the Panama Canal were Afro-Antillean.²³ The conditions that Afro-Antilleans endured on both canal projects represented a system of semislavery, and they struggled to improve their wages and working conditions. For example, they conducted several strikes to protest these injustices in 1881 and 1904. When the Canal was finished, many of the Afro-Antilleans who worked on these projects stayed in Panama City and Colon, or traveled to the Archipelago of Bocas del Toro to work on banana and cacao plantations.

THE STATUS OF AFRO-ANTILLEANS IN PANAMA

In general terms, Afro-Antilleans have been at the bottom of the social, political, and economic hierarchy in Panama. As a commentator in *The Panama Tribune* stated in 1947, “Ignorance, poverty, cultural isolation and the tradition of dependence are [. . .] key factors keeping the West Indian unfavorably placed in other spheres of Isthmian life.”²⁴ Upon arrival in Panama in the 1800s (both when Panama belonged to Spain until 1821 and when it became a province of Colombia in 1822), Panamanian Afro-Antilleans perceived themselves and were perceived by other Panamanians as temporary migrants. Because of the isolation they endured—both inside and outside the Canal Zone and in the Archipelago of Bocas del Toro—Afro-Antilleans maintained many distinguishing customs and traditions (language, religious traditions, and architecture, among others).²⁵ This distinctiveness was viewed by mainstream Panamanian society as a problem, particularly since many Afro-Antilleans were determined to maintain their British way of life.²⁶ Alberto Alwood, a Jamaican worker, wrote to the Consul of Great Britain in Panama in 1891:

I am writing to ask you if it is fair that we, poor Jamaicans, should pay a personal contribution and also give three working days free to the Colombian government if we do not even have land, or dogs, or poultry, or cats, or houses, or anything, only because the Canal is finished which made us come to La Chorrera to work for 10 and 15 cents per day, to avoid becoming thieves or dying of hunger [. . .] Sir, it is very embarrassing that some natives say that this is wrong; we try to live in peace with the natives, but I do not know why they hate us so much.²⁷

Most Afro-Antilleans were descendants of British subjects and remained loyal to the British Crown. This was a problem for Panamanians, as loyalty to the British Empire apparently contradicted the possibility of a concurrent allegiance to Panama. Panama Canal worker Alphonso Innis noted, "I cannot stop thinking about the way in which the [Colombian] authorities take advantage of the British subjects. I am very sorry to say this, but that is the way it is. The British subjects are hated by the natives."²⁸

The perception that Afro-Antilleans considered themselves superior to Panamanians fueled this animosity.²⁹ As is noted in an article in *The Panama Tribune* in 1947, "The West Indian [or Afro-Antillean] learned the language, religion, standards, likes, and dislikes of the British to which he clings with pride. It has often been said that the West Indian of the petit bourgeoisie is more English than the English himself."³⁰ The connection that Afro-Antilleans felt toward the United Kingdom was particularly clear during World War II, when over 3,000 Afro-Antillean men from Panama, Colon, and the Canal Zone towns volunteered to support Britain and joined its army. In addition, the majority of Afro-Antilleans were not Catholic but Anglican, another source of alienation. There were thirteen Afro-Antillean Anglican Church congregations in the mid-1900s.³¹

Moreover, Afro-Antilleans were assumed to be temporary migrants who did not fit into the trope of the nation. Discriminatory remarks were common in regard to Afro-Antilleans, called *chombos* by Panamanians.³² As discussed earlier, while building the Panama Canal, there was a division between white and nonwhite workers, the famous gold and silver rolls. Those on the silver roll did not receive the same benefits or pay as those on the gold roll. In fact, the Jim Crow system that was present in the United States was also present in the Canal Zone. Hector Connor, in an article in *The Panama Tribune*, observes that workers on the silver roll could not survive on the meager pensions they received upon retirement: "The 'ex-silver' employee [. . .] upon being retired, they receive such small amounts as pensions that unless they are fortunate enough to find refuge among their children or grand-children," they are not able to survive.³³ While marginalization and discrimination came from the elite and middle class in Panama, the

United Kingdom responded with neglect of the Afro-Antillean population. British consular officers were more concerned with the problems endured by whites “in coping with exotic people of color than they [were with] their own subjects’ concerns.”³⁴ In spite of their allegiance to the British Commonwealth,³⁵ the Afro-Antillean populations in Panama strove to contribute to the life of their new nation and to improve their conditions and those of their relatives.³⁶ Their desire to preserve their distinctive history and heritage went hand in hand with a commitment to demonstrate a connection to the land that had received them. In other words, Afro-Antillean intellectuals and workers strove to assert their cultural citizenship.³⁷ For instance, a news article in *The Panama Tribune* of March 21, 1948, states that British subjects who wanted to participate in municipal elections were free to do so without fear of losing their British nationality.³⁸

In general terms, subsequent generations of Afro-Antilleans continued the connection to the British motherland by highlighting their exceptionality in terms of language, customs, and moral attributes.³⁹ Meanwhile, they nurtured the ambition of integrating fully into Panama’s political life, by participating in local elections or commenting regularly about politics on the media. As Colleymore noted in 1977, “with the achievement of some power and growing self-consciousness, blacks [insisted] on a larger share of identification with the national concept.”⁴⁰

It should be noted that the Afro-Antillean community was not a unified entity. In Panama City, Colon, and Bocas del Toro, Afro-Antilleans were subdivided into distinctive “castes” according to their identification as conservatives (first-generation migrants from the West Indies); society (those who were well educated and had access to privileges), Zonians (those who worked for the Panama Canal and found their affiliations closer to the United States), and integrated (those who were perceived as being incorporated into Panamanian society and its norms and practices). In Bocas del Toro, for example, a thriving rural bourgeoisie developed at the end of the banana export boom of the 1920s and 1930s. Outbreaks of the Panama Disease in the banana plantations and the Great Depression led the United Fruit Company to cut back and in due course close its Atlantic Coast plantations during the 1920s and 1930s. The company had to reduce its payroll, and Afro-Antilleans were promoted to replace United Statesians as clerks and supervisors.

As the plantations closed down in the 1930s, [Afro-Antilleans] who had worked or grown bananas for the company took advantage of its withdrawal to buy parcels of land and establish small- and medium-sized family farms. The result was the creation by mid-century of a *black rural middle class in the old banana zones*, a complete reversal of the impact of the export boom elsewhere.⁴¹

The experience of Afro-Antilleans in the banana zones of the Atlantic coast of Central America differs significantly from that of black workers in other regions of Latin America.⁴² In other words, the Afro-Antilleans, imported to work as plantation laborers, were able to capitalize on their position and acquire small- and medium-sized plots of land on former plantation land when the boom ended. In this manner, they enjoyed a certain upward mobility into the rural middle class. In fact, “the Atlantic Zone [of Costa Rica and Panama] is one of the few places in the world where *bourgeois blacks exploit an under-privileged white minority*.”⁴³ My ethnographic research in the Archipelago of Bocas del Toro analyzes this and other related phenomena in detail.⁴⁴

Constitutional Inequality and Continued Discrimination On February 9, 1956, the Afro-Antillean intellectual, diplomat, journalist, and businessman George Westerman proposed Law No. 25 prohibiting discrimination resulting from birth, race, social class, sex, religion, and political ideas as part of Article 21 of the National Constitution of 1946.⁴⁵ The law, specifically prohibiting discrimination in public places, educational centers, bureaucratic jobs and the police force, was a crucial step toward the achievement of legal equality in Panama, and it became known as the Hurtemate Law.⁴⁶ The Hurtemate Law is an illustration of the constant efforts of Afro-Antilleans in their struggle against discrimination and quest for equality in a country that had rejected them since their arrival in Panama. In Panama City, the situation of the Afro-Antilleans as early as the nineteenth century (when Panama was a province of Colombia from 1822 until 1903) and throughout most of the twentieth century (with Panama’s independence from Colombia in 1903) was uncertain. Panamanian resentment of Afro-Antilleans was clearly demonstrated in the social structure of the country as can be seen in this 1924 excerpt by Olmedo Alfaro from *Semanario Gráfico*:

The Antilleans that infest our cities [. . .] depress our living standards and with their strange customs, give to Panama, Colón and Bocas del Toro the appearance of African villages [. . .] [They] constitute one of the most difficult problems that our country needs to resolve.⁴⁷

In tune with racial theories that prevailed in Europe, North America, and Latin America from the mid-nineteenth century until the 1940s and that profoundly shaped public policies in these regions,⁴⁸ the general antipathy toward Afro-Antilleans translated into racist migratory and other laws. Panamanian workers considered Afro-Antilleans strong competition, and the legal system aimed to prevent them from taking positions of power.⁴⁹ Negative sentiments against Afro-Antilleans were especially forceful once the construction of the Panama Canal ended.⁵⁰ For example, Law No. 13 of 1926 imposed restrictions on those who were from the Antilles and the Guyanas

whose native language was not Spanish.⁵¹ The following year, the law was reformed to allow the immigration of “resident expatriates native to the Antilles” under certain restrictions, which included a special permit from the Ministry of Foreign Relations through a Panamanian Consul. Law No. 6 of 1928 prohibited, in effect, the arrival of black people whose original language was not Spanish, and only allowed the entrance of ten non-Spanish speaking black persons per year.⁵² These isolated laws took a radically racist turn when President Arnulfo Arias Madrid, a Harvard-trained Panamanian physician who was elected president in 1940, included versions of both laws in the Constitution of 1941—also known as the *Panameñista* Constitution (*Constitución Panameñista*)—and developed the idea of “races of prohibited migration.”⁵³ According to Arias Madrid, the constitution reflected the notion that “if the only political creed that will prosper in the country is *Panameñismo*, then the Main Document that we have now given to the children of the Isthmus, as free countries do, is a *Panameñista* Constitution.”⁵⁴ For Arias Madrid, the presence of Afro-Antilleans (and blacks in general) was assumed to “drain the strength of the [Panamanian] race.”⁵⁵ This constitution proscribed immigration of blacks whose native language was not Spanish, the “yellow race and races originating from India, Asia Minor and North Africa.”⁵⁶ They were also denied residency, citizenship, and property rights unless they could demonstrate knowledge of the Spanish language and Panamanian history.⁵⁷ Article 23 of Title II of the constitution makes this very clear:

The State will ensure the immigration of healthy and working individuals, adaptable to national living conditions and able to contribute to the ethnic, economic and demographic improvement of the country. Immigration is prohibited to: the black race whose mother tongue is not Spanish, the yellow race and the races native to India, Asia Minor and the North of Africa.⁵⁸

This constitution stripped approximately 50,000 Afro-Antilleans of their Panamanian nationality. The Caribbean obsession with whitening was clearly expressed in Panama and became the cornerstone of the *Panameñista* movement and the Constitution of 1941. According to Conte Porras, the origins of the *Panameñista* ideology derive from the figure of the well-read Penonomian (*letrado penonomeño*)—that is, the formally educated male of Penonomé, a central Panamanian province whose “influence [. . .] as a prime social and cultural center” began in the nineteenth century.⁵⁹ The *Panameñista* movement was, at the same time, an attempt “to instill national pride, dignity and self-respect for their culture in Panamanians, and a populist and sensationalist movement based on racial discrimination.”⁶⁰ The movement combined economic incentives and nationalistic perspectives in foreign affairs, severing the formerly friendly relations of the Panamanian government with

the United States.⁶¹ The Constitution of 1941 was an instrument to welcome immigrants who were considered able to contribute to the “improvement of the race.” In addition, it proposed the denationalization of those Panamanians whose grandparents and parents belonged to these “races of prohibited migration.”⁶² These racist beliefs were also manifested in other laws that related to cultural traits attached to Latino components of the Panamanian nation.⁶³ Undoubtedly, this constitution deepened the already existing differences between Afro-Antilleans and Afro-Colonial blacks. Arias Madrid’s regime was toppled in October 1941, partly because of his conflicts with the US government, and the Constitution he advanced was revoked in 1946 by President Enrique Jiménez.⁶⁴ The reformed Constitution of 1946 guaranteed that those who had been born in Panama and denied citizenship were able to acquire it⁶⁵ and set forth other nondiscriminatory principles. These principles were expanded in the Constitution of 1972.⁶⁶ The creation of the National Civic League (a collective founded in 1944 to defend the citizen rights of Afro-Antillean, Jewish, and Chinese populations), the formation of unequivocally black organizations such as the *Movimiento Afro-Panameño* in the late 1960s (influenced by the civil rights movement in the United States), the Congress of Black Panamanians (*Congreso del Negro Panameño*) in 1981, 1983, and 1988, and the Panamanian Committee Against Racism (*Comité Panameño contra el Racismo*) in 1999; the approval of the Hurtemate Law in 1956 and Law 11 eliminating labor discrimination in 2005;⁶⁷ the creation of the National Commission Against Discrimination (*Comisión Nacional Contra la Discriminación*) in 2002, and the formation by the Panamanian government of the National Council of Black Ethnicity (*Consejo Nacional de la Etnia Negra*) in 2007, are all examples of the endeavors of Afro-Panamanian activists and scholars to mitigate the damning effects of the Constitution of 1941 and its preceding laws. More recently, Afro-Panamanians have pursued the forging of larger movements of race consciousness, fostered or endorsed by Afro-Panamanians, particularly Afro-Antilleans, abroad,⁶⁸ as well as pan-African movements in Colombia, Cuba, and Brazil.

CONCLUSIONS

The year 2010 marked the first time that a Panamanian national census included a nonindigenous ethnic category. Thus, this census accounted for Afro-Antillean Panamanians, recording 65,300 Afro-Antilleans throughout the country; of these, 12,300 live in the province of Bocas del Toro, 15,000 in Colon, and 42,000 in the province of Panama.⁶⁹ Priestley and Barrow state that the black movement in Panama (mostly led by middle-class Afro-Panamanians) has gained visibility and momentum since 1999 with the creation

of the Panamanian Committee Against Racism, which carries out “a crucial role in the struggle for the rights of black populations.”⁷⁰ Currently, the National Coordinator for Black Panamanian Organizations (*Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Negras Panameñas*)—formed by twenty-four social and cultural groups, lodges, civic and community groups—consolidates the efforts of these groups, especially because “it has overcome partially the old abyss that separates blacks with Antillean background from Afro-Colonials.”⁷¹ It operates in the provinces of Colon, Panama, Bocas del Toro, and Darien. Since their arrival in Bocas del Toro in the 1820s and in Panama City and Colon in the 1850s, Afro-Antilleans have struggled to assert a unique cultural identity and at the same time to demonstrate their allegiance to Panama, for they see themselves not only as Pan-Caribbean but also as Panamanians. While some things have improved for Afro-Antilleans in the twenty-first century, discrimination has not entirely disappeared, despite the tireless efforts of black activists, the laws against discrimination, and the guarantees of equality in the constitution

NOTES

1. John Biezans, “Race Relations in the Canal Zone,” *Phylon* 11 no. 1 (1950): 25.
2. The Panama Canal Zone was an unorganized US territory of 553 square miles (which included the Panama Canal and adjacent areas). It was created on November 18, 1903 with the purpose of facilitating the construction of the Panama Canal and guaranteeing perpetual use, control, and occupation of this territory.
3. Post offices became nonsegregated in 1946.
4. Biesanz, “Race Relations in the Canal Zone,” 23; Julie Greene, *The Canal Builders: Making America’s Empire at the Panama Canal* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009).
5. Biesanz, “Race Relations in the Canal Zone”; Carla Guerrón Montero, “Racial Democracy and Nationalism in Panama,” *Ethnology* 45 no. 3 (2006a): 209–28.
6. Michael Conniff, “Afro-West Indians on the Central American Isthmus: The Case of Panama,” in *Slavery and Beyond: The African Impact on Latin America and the Caribbean*, edited by Darien Davis (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1995).
7. Research for this article was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Ford Foundation, which allowed me to participate in a Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture’s Scholars-in-Residence Program. I thank Colin Palmer, the fellows and staff, and administrators of the Center for their outstanding support and dedication. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities or Ford Foundation.
8. See Franklin Knight, this volume.
9. Alfredo Castellero Calvo. “Transitismo y Dependencia: El Caso del Istmo de Panamá.” *Nueva Sociedad* 5 (Marzo–Abril 1973).

AQ: Please provide the page number for the note 9.

10. Gerardo Maloney, ed., *Armando Fortune: Obras Selectas* (Panamá: Instituto Nacional de Cultura, 1993).

11. Slavery in Panama was not linked, as in other regions of America, to life in the plantation (although some slave labor force was used for tobacco and sugar plantations). The economy of colonial Panama rested in six major economies: mining, agriculture, cattle herding, handicraft production, commerce, and domestic work. The most important of these was the mining industry, which used black labor almost entirely Lancelot Lewis, *The West Indian in Panama: Black Labor in Panama, 1850–1914* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1980), 6.

12. Luis A. Diez Castillo, *Los Cimarrones y los Negros Antillanos en Panamá* (Panamá: Impresora R. Mercado Rudas, 1981), 15.

13. Lancelot Lewis, *The West Indian in Panama: Black Labor in Panama*, 1980.

14. Carla Guerrón Montero, “Afro-Panamanians.” *Encyclopedia of the African Diaspora*, edited by Carol Boyce-Davies, volume 3 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2008a), 744.

15. Armando Fortune, “Presencia Africana en la Música Panameña,” *Actas del Primer Congreso Internacional de Folklorología en Panamá* (Panamá: Instituto Nacional de Cultura, 1973), 339.

16. Guerrón Montero, “Afro-Panamanians,” 744.

17. According to Adela Mendieta and Rogelio Husband, Afro-colonial Blacks had a spiritual concept based on their *panameñidad*, which excluded an African past and emphasized a Hispanic past [Adela Mendieta and Rogelio Husband, “Contribución del Afro-Antillano a la Identidad Nacional,” (*Licenciatura thesis*, University of Panamá, 1997), 204].

18. Lewis, *The West Indian in Panama: Black Labor in Panama*, 14.

19. At this time in history, Panama had four provinces: Chiriquí (created in 1849), Azuero (created in 1850), Panama and Veraguas.

20. Lewis, *The West Indian in Panama: Black Labor in Panama*, 19.

21. George Westerman, *Los Inmigrantes Antillanos en Panamá* (Panamá: Impresora de la Nación, 1980); cf. Edward A. Gaskin, *Blacks Played Significant Role in Improving Life on the Isthmus of Panama* (Balboa: Gebsa de Panamá, 1984).

22. Diez Castillo, *Los Cimarrones y los Negros Antillanos en Panamá*.

23. Leo G. Colley, “The West Indian on the Isthmus: Assimilation and Influences,” *The Star & Herald*, June 26, 1977.

24. *Panama Tribune*, “Proverbial Loyalty,” March 2, 1947, 18.

25. With the exception of General Omar Torrijos’s government, which began in 1968, Panamanian governments have paid very little attention to the Archipelago of Bocas del Toro and Afro-Antilleans. During Torrijos’s regime, a number of infrastructural projects were carried out: schools, electricity, sewage, roads, and water facilities were built or improved under his regime. General Torrijos was killed in a plane crash in 1981, and Colonel Manuel Antonio Noriega took control of the National Guard (and of the country itself) in 1983. A period of brutal political and civil repression followed; Bocas del Toro became a hideout of some sorts for Noriega and his followers. It is in this context of isolation and political repression that Bocas del Toro remained until the tourism boom of the 1990s.

26. Lewis, *The West Indian in Panama: Black Labor in Panama*, 20; *Panama Tribune*, “Proverbial Loyalty,” 18.

27. “Escribo para preguntarle si es justo que nosotros los jamaicanos pobres debamos pagar una contribución personal y además dar tres días de trabajo gratis al gobierno colombiano si ni siquiera tenemos tierra, ni perros, ni aves, ni gatos, ni casas, ni nada; sólo por el hecho de que terminó el Canal lo que nos hizo venir a La Chorrera a trabajar por 10 y 15 centavos al día, para evitar que robáramos y muriéramos de hambre [. . .] Señor, es bastante vergonzoso que algunos de los nativos digan que esto está muy mal; tratamos de vivir en paz con los nativos, pero no se por qué nos odian tanto” (UK Foreign Office: Consulate, Panama (formerly United States of Colombia): General Correspondence Series 288, Vol. 44; No. 164 in D. M. McNeil, “Traducción de la Correspondencia Epistolar de los Emigrantes Antillanos en el Istmo de Panamá,” (*Licenciatura* thesis, Universidad de Panamá, 1982), 9.

28. UK Foreign Office Series 288, Vol. 44; No. 294 in D. M. McNeil, “Traducción de la Correspondencia Epistolar de los Emigrantes Antillanos en el Istmo de Panamá,” 36.

29. This supposition of superiority was not exclusive to Afro-Antilleans in Panama; a similar phenomenon occurred in the United States between Afro-Antilleans and African Americans after large numbers entered the country in the 1920s (Suzanne Model, “West Indian Prosperity: Fact or Fiction?,” *Social Problems* 42 no. 4 (1995): 535–53).

30. *Panama Tribune*, March 2, 1947, 16.

31. *Ibid.*, 17–18.

32. There are several stories around the origin of the word. One story indicates that Christopher Columbus called indigenous peoples “chombos,” and that the term became an insult as a result. Thus, that is why Panamanians used the term to refer to Afro-Antilleans pejoratively (*Panama Tribune*, March 21, 1948, 13).

33. Hector Connor, “Facing Issues,” *Panama Tribune*, March 14, 1948, 8.

34. Robert H. Zieger, Review of *The Canal Builders: Making America’s Empire at the Panama Canal*, by Julie Greene. *Reviews in American History* 38 no. 3 (2010): 518.

35. The British Service Committee later became the British West Indian Welfare Association (BWIWA). There was also the Panama Canal West Indian Employees Association (Jack Jamieson, “Drops and Turnovers,” *The Panama Tribune*, June 20, 1948.

36. Carla Guerrón Montero, “Voces Subalternas: Presencia Afro-Antillana en Panamá,” *Cuadernos Americanos* 111 (2005a): 33–59; Carla Guerrón Montero, “Movimientos Laborales Antillanos y la Chiriquí Land Company en Bocas del Toro, Panamá, 1890–1940,” *Istmo: Revista Virtual de Estudios Literarios y Culturales Centroamericanos* 16, 2008b.

37. Rosaldo defines cultural citizenship as “the right to be different and to belong in a participatory democratic sense. It claims that, in a democracy, social justice calls for equity among all citizens, even when such differences as race, religion, class, gender, or sexual orientation potentially could be used to make certain people less equal or inferior to others. The notion of belonging means full membership in a group

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and the ability to influence one's destiny by having a significant voice in basic decisions" (Renato Rosaldo, "Cultural Citizenship and Educational Democracy," *Cultural Anthropology* 9 no. 3 (1994): 402–11).

38. *Panama Tribune*, "British Subjects Free to Vote in Panama Municipal Elections," March 21, 1948: 2.

39. Gerardo Maloney, ed., *Memorias del Primer Congreso del Negro Panameño*, (Panamá: Impresora de la Nación, 1981); George Westerman, *Los Inmigrantes Antillanos en Panamá*, 1980.

40. Colleymore, "The West Indian on the Isthmus: Assimilation and Influences," 1977.

41. George Reid Andrews, "Black Workers in the Export Years: Latin America, 1880–1930," *International Labor and Working Class* (1997): 7–29. Emphasis added in the text.

42. Andrews, "Black Workers in the Export Years," 17.

43. *Ibid.*, emphasis added in the text. Cf. Koch in Phillipe Bourgois, *Banano, Etnia y Lucha Social en Centroamérica* (San José: Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones, 1994), 112.

44. Carla Guerrón Montero, "Marine Protected Areas in Panama: Grassroots Activism and Advocacy". *Human Organization* 64, no. 4 (2005b): 360–72; Guerrón Montero, "Racial Democracy and Nationalism in Panama," 2006a; Carla Guerrón Montero, "Tourism and Afro-Antillean Identity in Panama," *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 4 no. 2 (2006b): 65–84.

45. National Constitution of 1946, Article 21: "All Panamanian and foreigners are equal before the law. There will be neither personal privileges nor preferences resulting from race, birth, social class, sex, religion, or political ideas. However, for reasons of health, morality, public safety and national economy, the Law will be able to subordinate foreigners in general to special conditions or deny them the exercise of certain activities. In the same manner, the Law or the authorities depending on the specific case, will be able to take measures that affect the natives of specific countries in case of war or according to established public treaties" (translation by Carla Guerrón Montero).

46. Human Rights Everywhere (HREV), "Informe Preliminar sobre Violación de Derechos Humanos en la Ciudad de Colón, Panamá," (October 2012): 5. This law reversed the Constitution of 1941, developed by Arnulfo Arias Madrid. However, it is important to note that it was circumvented in many ways after it was implemented. For instance, social clubs only welcomed white clients, under the façade that they were 'members-only' facilities (Young, personal communication).

47. Quoted in Gloria Scigliani Hassan, "Incorporación del Grupo Negro Antillano en los Aspectos Socioeconómicos y Culturales de la Provincia de Bocas del Toro: Sus Proyecciones," (Licenciatura thesis, Universidad de Panamá, 1973), 151. Cf. George Priestly. "Ethnicity, Class and the National Question in Panama: The Emerging Literature," in *Emerging Perspectives on the Black Diaspora*, edited by Aubrey W. Bonnett and Llewellyn G. Watson Lanham (New York, London: University Press of America, 1990), 226; Human Rights Everywhere, "Informe Preliminar sobre Violación de Derechos Humanos," 2012.

48. Richard Graham, ed., *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870–1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).

49. Cf. Westerman, *Los Inmigrantes Antillanos en Panamá*, 94.

50. In fact, the National Constitution of 1904 was a progressive document based on liberal political thinking, which granted citizenship to every person born on Panamanian soil regardless of his or her parents' country of origin. In addition, "naturalization was granted to those who, after residing in the country for more than ten years, wished to become citizens," not considering their race (Paz 1977: 63).

51. Westerman, *Los Inmigrantes Antillanos en Panamá*, 93–95.

52. Scigliani Hassan, "Incorporación del Grupo Negro Antillano," 18. Law No. 16 in 1960 finally provided the legal dispositions to allow migration without ethnic distinctions in Panama (Scigliani Hassan, "Incorporación del Grupo Negro Antillano," 19).

53. *Asamblea Nacional de Panamá*, "Constitución de la República de Panamá," (1941), 5.

54. Arnulfo Arias Madrid 1941, quoted in Jorge Conte Porras, *Requiem por la Revolución* (San José, Costa Rica: Litografía e Imprenta LIL, SA, 1990), 535.

55. Colleymore, "The West Indian on the Isthmus: Assimilation and Influences," 1977.

56. "Constitución de la República de Panamá," 5.

57. Priestly, "Ethnicity, Class and the National Question in Panama," 220.

58. "Constitución de la República de Panamá," 7.

59. Conte Porras, *Requiem por la Revolución*, 51.

60. Sadith Esther Paz, "The Status of West Indian Immigrants in Panama from 1850–1941," (M.A. thesis, University of Massachusetts, 1977), 97.

61. Marta Lucía, Moncada Vargas. "National Identity in Panama Between 1948 and 1958," (MA thesis, University of Texas, 1990), 22.

62. Carlos Guillermo Wilson, "The Caribbean: Marvelous Cradle-Hammock and Painful Cornucopia," in *Caribbean Creolization: Reflections on the Cultural Dynamics of Language, Literature, and Identity*, edited by Kathleen M. Balutansky and Marie-Agnes Sourieau (Gainesville, Florida and Kingston, Jamaica: University Press of Florida and the Press University of the West Indies, 1998), 41.

63. For example, Law No. 49 of May 13, 1941 stipulated that any place and landmark within the territory of the Republic that was designated with a name in any language other than Spanish (or with an indigenous term) was to be referred to by its Spanish or indigenous name. If the place lacked a denomination in these languages, the Municipal Councils were in charge of providing a name. Law No. 49 also emphasized the maintenance of the Spanish language in general; Article 10 of the Constitution of 1941 stated that the official language of the Republic of Panama was Spanish (Diógenes Cedeño Cenci, 1962. *Provincia de Bocas del Toro* (Panamá, 1962), 27, 38, 39. Cf. Constitución de la República de Panamá, 4. This campaign took place in Bocas del Toro through the development of the Council for the Maintenance of the Spanish Language, and the Commission for the Conservation of the Spanish Language of the Lions Club. These groups developed a campaign in the 1950s by placing signs that highlighted that Spanish was the official language of the Republic, and that "Panamanians Speak in Spanish" (Cedeño Cenci, 39).

64. Cf. Moncada Vargas, "National Identity in Panama, 29; César Quintero, "La Clave del Liderazgo y de la Popularidad de Arnulfo Arias," in *Requiem por la Revolución*, edited by J. C. Porras, pp. 610–15. (San José, Costa Rica: Litografía e Imprenta LIL, SA, 1990), 611.

65. Scigliani Hassan, "Incorporación del Grupo Negro Antillano," 152.

66. Malema De León, "Pasos Firmes Contra la Discriminación," *Panamá América* (2006), accessed December 19, 2012, <http://diadelaetnia.homestead.com/perseverancia.html>.

67. According to Priestley and Barrow, Law 11 pales in comparison with the law proposed as part of the campaign "Do not ask me for my picture," with aimed to make illegal the current requirement that any job application includes a picture of the application. In effect, this practice discriminates directly against black populations, particularly women. Law 11 prohibits labor discrimination due to age, race, gender, social class, religion, or physical limitations (George Priestly and Alberto Barrow, "El Movimiento Negro en Panamá: Una Interpretación Histórica y Política, 1994–2004," in *Política e identidad: Afrodescendientes en México y América Central*, coordinated by Odile Hoffmann, (Mexico: INAH/CEMCA/UNAM/IRD, 2010), 148.

68. Gerardo Maloney, "Sectores in Movimiento Negro en Panama," *Procesos Sociales: Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 2 (2010), 87.

69. Dirección Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, *Censos Nacionales 2010: XI de Población y VII de Vivienda*. Dirección Nacional de Estadística y Censo (2012), accessed October 14, 2012, <http://estadisticas.contraloria.gob.pa/Resultados2010/default.aspx>. For the first time in sixty years, the National Census of 2010 includes a question requesting adscription to African ancestry to Panamanian citizens. It should be noted that the numbers indicated by the National Census do not add up correctly.

70. Priestly and Barrow, "El Movimiento Negro en Panamá," 138.

71. *Ibid.*, 130, 139, 147.

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