The Undergraduate Historical and Critical Race & Ethnic Studies Journal at UC Merced

Volume 9, Special Issue: Afro-Mexico

History and CRES students and faculty viewing “Muerte de Las Culturas” at the Colegio de San Ildefonso, Mexico City in November 2023. This mural was produced by the artist collective Raiz de la Ceiba. (Photo credit: Dr. Sabrina Smith)

THE UNDERGRADUATE HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL RACE & ETHNIC STUDIES JOURNAL AT UC MERCED

Volume 9, Special Issue: Afro-Mexico
(Spring 2024)

The Undergraduate Historical and Critical Race & Ethnic Studies Journal at the University of California, Merced

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Letter from the Editor in Chief

This special issue centers Afro-Latinx history by combining the values of both History and Critical Race & Ethnic Studies; wherein the authors in this journal draw on the contemporary expressions of ethnic studies through art and preserve the systemically silenced history of the African diaspora in Latin America.

It is imperative that the H-CRES Undergraduate Journal upholds the principles that reflect and uplift the communities that are underserved and marginalized. The contributors this semester reflect on the historical experiences for Black populations in Latin America and illustrate the challenges these communities face due to the history of colonialism and oppression. The wonderful contributors shed light on joy and liberation through art, because revolutionary changes cannot be made without joyful movement.

The Spring 2024 Editorial Board was staffed with the most determined and remarkable individuals, including Devon Antonio, Dalila Barragan, Jose Perez, Jadyn Douglas, Billy Mejia, and Carlos Morales. On behalf of the editorial board I would like to thank our faculty advisor Dr. Myles Ali for his support and kindness towards the editors, and for his passion towards reviving the H-CRES Undergraduate Journal. I would also like to thank Dr. Sabrina Smith, whose research and role as an educator has served as a source of inspiration for this semester's issue!

Kayle Fox
Editor in Chief

Faculty Forward

It is a great pleasure to present the Spring 2024 special issue of the HCRES Undergraduate Journal. This issue, which focuses on the theme of Afro-Mexico, is a testament to the hard work, collegiality, and creativity of History and CRES undergraduates at UC Merced, especially our intrepid Student Editorial Board. After a period of inactivity in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the production of this special issue was part of a new wave of community building and research excellence among History and CRES students during the 2023-2024 academic year. The Student Editorial Board's enthusiasm was infectious and HCRES student authors were eager to transform their term papers and independent research projects into publishable essays for the Journal. Given that this was a new experience for all members of the Student Editorial Board (and the Faculty Lead!), I am so proud of the team's impressive rigor, teamwork, and dedication.

Our chosen theme of "Afro-Mexico" originates from the Editorial Board's shared experience in the upper-division seminar, The African Diaspora in Latin America (HIST/CRES 141). Their instructor, HCRES's Dr. Sabrina Smith, incorporated a week-long research trip to Mexico City for the entire class during the Fall 2023 semester. Sponsored by the UC Alianza MX Mobility Program, HIST/CRES 141 students learned about the present-day and historical experiences of Black populations in Mexico through archival research, interdisciplinary workshops, and academic conferences at the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN) and Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia (INAH). This immersive program was designed, according to Dr. Smith, to inspire a new generation of student scholars "who may investigate and develop solutions to pressing issues affecting Latinx populations in Mexico, Latin America, and the United States." Moved by their collective experiences in Mexico City, from viewing centuries-old Spanish Inquisition records in the AGN to chartering an excursion to Teotihuacan, several of the HIST/CRES 141 students volunteered for the Journal's Student Editorial Board with the goal of producing this special issue on African descended people in Mexico and broadly, Latin America.

This special issue is the fruition of the Editorial Board's many months of hard work. It contains a total of eight contributions by UC Merced undergraduates that collectively capture new and enduring trends and approaches in both the disciplines of History and Critical Race and Ethnic Studies. Ranging from interviews, personal reflections, and artistic interpretations to historical demography, quantitative analysis, and comparative history, the pieces published in this issue are representative of the diverse and shared scholarly interests, backgrounds, and experiences of the combined History and CRES student body at UC Merced. I am thankful for the leadership of our Editor-in-Chief, Kayle Fox, and the work of our Editors: Devon Antonio, Dalila Barragan, Jadyn Douglas, Carlos Morales, Jose Perez, and Billy Mejia.

I hope you enjoy reading this special issue as much as I enjoyed working with such an incredible group of student scholars!

Myles Ali
Assistant Professor
Department of History and Critical Race & Ethnic Studies
University of California, Merced

Interview: Micro-study abroad opportunity offers undergraduate students the chance to learn about the history and contemporary experiences of Afro-Mexicans

By Kayle Fox

Kayle Fox (KF): As the editor-in-chief of the HCRES Undergraduate Journal, I am grateful for the opportunity to interview Professor Sabrina Smith, whose research and teaching has inspired this Special Issue on Afro-Mexico. Drawing on funding from the UC – Alianza MX Mobility Program (Research Institute on African-Descended People in Mexico), Professor Smith incorporated a week-long research trip to Mexico City for her students in November 2023. This trip included 17 undergraduate students in History, CRES, Sociology, Anthropology, and Management and Business Economics. As a participant on this trip, I am excited to interview Dr. Smith and learn more about her research and her approach in creating this exciting opportunity for undergraduate students in SSHA.

(KF): In Fall 2023, you offered HIST 141/CRES 141, which examines the historical and contemporary experiences of African descent people in Latin America. How does this course connect to your overall research as a historian of Mexico?

Sabrina Smith: Of all the courses I teach at UC Merced, this class is most closely related to my research. So, I see HIST 141/CRES 141 as an extension of my research, which focuses on the experiences of African-descended people in colonial Oaxaca. When I designed this cross-listed course, I wanted to ensure that students learn about the history of slavery and freedom in Latin America. I also wanted them to see the legacy of colonialism and understand power, resistance, colorism, human rights, migration, and activism among Black populations in Latin America. As I consider the circulation of ideas about freedom in Latin America and the broader Atlantic world, I also wanted students to think about how identity and race relations among Afro-Latines are transnational concepts between and within Latin America and the United States.

KF: How did you become interested in the African Diaspora? When did you know that being a historian of the African Diaspora was a field you wanted to pursue as a career?

SS: Great question! My father is African American and my mother is from El Salvador, so I self-identify as Black and Latina. This means that race relations, blackness, and latinidad are always on my mind. As an undergraduate student at UC Santa Barbara, I brought my personal experiences to the classroom and asked questions about the experiences of Afro- Latines in my Anthropology, Spanish, and Chicano/a courses. By the time I graduated from UCSB, I had

written an honor's thesis on blackness in Mexico and it was clear to me that I wanted to study the history or contemporary experience of Black populations in Mexico. I ultimately decided to focus on the history of the African Diaspora, and I earned a PhD in Latin American history at UCLA.

KF: While I know that you have offered HIST 141/CRES 141 to UC Merced students in the past, can you tell us why you decided to incorporate a week-long, in-semester research trip to Mexico City in this version of the course?

SS: Yes, I had previously taught HIST 141/CRES 141 twice: in Spring 2020 and Fall 2022. Teaching this class at the beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic did not offer the best measure of success. When I taught this course for the second time, I realized that students wanted more engagement and to interact with members of the communities that they were studying. Assigning documentaries and inviting guest speakers came with certain limitations in Fall 2022, so I was left wondering how I could take the students to educational or cultural institutions in the Bay Area or SoCal, so that they could further engage with our course content, in-person. I eventually learned about the UC Alianza MX Mobilities to Mexico grant, which funds these kinds of academic opportunities, but in Mexico. By Spring 2023, I applied for and was awarded this grant, and that funding set the gears in motion to integrate a short-term study abroad experience into the course during Fall 2023.

KF: The UC Alianza MX Mobilities to Mexico grant funded the research trip to Mexico for the students participating in HIST 141/CRES 141. What was the application process like? Can you elaborate on how you planned the trip?

SS: This is another great question. The planning process was long and complex, but I had a few major objectives in mind. I articulated the following goals in my grant proposal: I wanted to enhance this seminar by integrating a one-week trip to Mexico City for students to collaborate with Mexican scholars and activists and attain innovative research experiences. But the primary goal was for students to better understand identity and race relations in Mexico and among Afro-Latines in the U.S. I proposed that students would achieve this objective by visiting and conducting research at Mexico's national archive, and engaging with Afro-Mexican activists, scholars, artists, and filmmakers. My second major goal was to reduce the barriers that prevent minoritized students from participating in and benefitting from study abroad experiences. For this reason, the UC Alianza MX grant supported students' airfare, passport application fees, lodging, meals, ground transportation, and excursions. Pretty much everything.

By Summer 2023, I was deep in the planning process, meeting with stakeholders all across campus, from curriculum committees to Student Financial Services, Risk Management, and the Office of International Affairs. Considering that this was an international university-sponsored

trip, I had to assess all possibilities for student engagement and safety, as well as financial costs. The second part of this process involved planning academic activities of the trip with my partners in Mexico. My colleague in INAH, Dr. Gabriela Iturralde Nieto, was instrumental in helping me coordinate the community conversation with Afromexican women activists and our workshop on the Movement of Enslaved People in New Spain. I also collaborated with the Educational Programs department and archivists at the national archive. I came across other scholar- activists on social media, and those collaborations with muralists and filmmakers were the most fruitful for the students and me.

No matter how much I planned out our trip, I knew that unexpected hiccups would undoubtedly come up. I tried to navigate those circumstances with grace, including dealing with. the heavy traffic in Mexico City, which frustrated all of us!

KF: What was memorable about the trip, especially in terms of cultivating this travel experience for UC Merced students?

SS: There were several memorable moments, and I am sure that each student might offer a different answer to this question. But the workshop with Afro-Mexican filmmaker-activist André Lo Sanchez was most memorable for all of us. This is an example of an academic activity that was hosted at the Casa de California, which is a conference center owned by the University of California. Prior to the workshop, students were asked to upload individual video clips of their expectations of this workshop. My sense is that many were nervous to record themselves and have those videos shared with the larger group! We started the seminar with a discussion about representation and anti-black racism in Mexico, then the students were given the freedom to create anti-racist social media content in the gardens of the conference center. It was fascinating to see the students' creativity flourish as they worked in small groups to create content that addressed racism and anti-racism in Mexico and the US. The students were also attuning to the fact that they are not members, rather allies, to the Afro-Mexican community in Mexico City.

KF: What do you hope the students gained from the trip?

SS: Obviously, my primary goal was for students to better understand the course content, and specifically, the intersectionality among Black populations in Latin America and the interplay between individual actors and structures of power. Aside from this scholarly objective, I hope that this academic trip exposed the students to the possibilities of studying abroad. There is a considerable amount of growth that happens during a study abroad experience. Although this was a short-term trip, prior to Fall 2023, some of the students had never traveled abroad, others had never been on an airplane, and some students only had a limited command of the Spanish language. In addition, many students are children of Mexican immigrants, so traveling to Mexico carried a deeper meaning for them. In short, there were many firsts for all of us. And to truly

immerse oneself in Mexico City is to experience a shock to all the senses! The students proved to step out of their comfort-zone, and they were open to learning during the academic activities that I organized and during their free time.

All of the students in the class are underrepresented students in study abroad programs – many students self-identify as Latinx, African American, AAPI, neurodivergent, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. I was honored to take such a diverse group of students to Mexico. I was also pleased to see the students support each other over the course of that week. When we returned to class the following week at UC Merced, it was clear that the students had built a sense of community and belonging in ways that simply were not possible in the classroom.

Another important outcome of this trip is that several students wanted to produce original research projects. A handful of students used this trip, and ultimately this class, as a means to revive the HCRES Undergraduate Journal. Those students, including you, Kayle, now form part of the editorial board. I am so proud to see that my students are engaging in this important service to the HCRES department, and many students are also publishing their research findings from our academic trip in this Special Issue on Afro-Mexico. I am really excited to read it when it is published!

KF: Do you think this version of HIST 141/CRES 141 could be a model for future upper-division seminars at UC Merced?

SS: Yes, in fact, my grant proposal originally indicated that this class could serve as a pilot program for future research-intensive seminars in History. With funds remaining from this UC Alianza MX grant, I brought two History students and two CRES students enrolled in History 195 to conduct archival research with me in Oaxaca City, Mexico in March 2024. HIST 195 is designed for advanced undergraduates, and the smaller class made it easier for the students to partake in hands-on research in Oaxaca's archives and research libraries. It was a very different experience for the students, but nevertheless transformative and rewarding for everyone.

I would like to design more sustainable and recurring mobilities
for my students. I envision a possible research-intensive seminar in History that involves a one or two-day trip to research libraries in the Bay Area, like the Bancroft Library or the Huntington Library in Pasadena, CA. This kind of trip would be much more cost-effective than international travel, yet it would introduce History majors to the research process, and lead to students engaging in an original research project. Ultimately, the idea is that learning happens inside and outside of the classroom, and I am happy to facilitate that engagement if I can weave it into the courses that I teach.

KF: Thank you Dr. Smith for participating in this interview. I am one of the many grateful students that were able to experience your culturally engaging and interactive course (HIST 141/CRES 141). Reflecting back on our in-class discussions regarding the course material I recall feeling confident engaging with classmates because our mutual knowledge inspired conversation during the trip to Mexico. The trip helped me develop lifelong connections and fulfilled my academic goals. I am thankful to you Dr. Smith for your dedication to truth and knowledge sharing. I am especially thankful for educating future generations about the legacy of colonialism and on-going racism by teaching the history of slavery in Latin America.

Chicanx visits Mexico: A Personal History and Self Reflection

By Devon Antonio

I have always carried a close bond with my Grandpa Manuel and my Grandma Frances. They were both born and raised in California's San Joaquin Valley. Their parents, however, were from various states in Mexico including Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacan, and Sonora. Many of my great grandparents arrived to the SJV by train after fleeing Mexico during the Revolution either solo or accompanied with other relatives. Upon arriving in California, they settled in rural areas including Clovis and Fresno and then began their life's work as migrant farmworkers. Despite working a job that requires an incredible amount of physical demand, many of my great grandparents were blessed with longevity and lived till they were in their 90s and some even till their 100s. I had the incredible honor of meeting many of them. My memories with my great-grandparents include watching them only speak Spanish, never English. Nonetheless, whenever my Grandpa and Grandma took me with them to visit my great-grandparents, they were always very kind and loving. I am grateful to have met my great-grandparents who despite spending most of their lives in the United States, still carried a Mexican identity with them.

Upon arriving in the Central Valley, my great-grandparents began working long hours and days in the fields and agricultural packing houses. Their families grew large within a short span of time and many of my great-grandparents never returned to their hometowns in Mexico to visit. Over the years, I've always heard different reasons for why they never returned. In some instances, their decisions to not return were tied to a changing of their faith from Catholic to Christian, the trauma they endured escaping the Mexican Revolution, and logistical challenges of traveling to their hometowns in Central Mexico with such a large family. Because my great-

grandparents didn't travel to Mexico, neither did my grandparents, nor my parents, and inherently, neither did I. This all changed when I was granted the chance of a lifetime to study and research in Mexico on the topic of Afro-descendants during my fall semester at the University of California Merced. When I received the opportunity to go to Mexico as part of a research project in HIST/CRES 141, I felt called to finally bridge a part of me I never fully got to know: *my Mexican roots*.

Ever since my beloved ancestors immigrated to the United States (over a century ago), the very meaning of Mexican-American identity has undergone many significant changes. Mexican-American identity has been associated with many different labels, including Hispanic, Latino, Chicano, Brown, and of course, Mexican. I've heard many family elders and relatives reference themselves by all these categories. However, all these identifications are in relation to a country that I had previously never been to. But this all changed after I received an opportunity to travel to Mexico as part of Professor Sabrina Smith's seminar course on the African Diaspora in Latin America. This profound experience not only advanced my education and research experience but contributed to my own personal growth as a 4th generation Mexican-American.

The topic of research for our class was on Afro-descendants in Mexico including their history and legacy. The importance of researching African descendants and their communities in Mexico is significant because, in many ways and for centuries, their history and presence in the country has been minimized or improperly accounted for. For example, barely in the year 2020 was the first year that citizens in Mexico were able to identity as Afro-descendent on the

country's census. I was so excited to learn and research all I could during my time in Mexico.

When the morning finally came to depart from Fresno to Mexico, I was so excited that I could not sleep the night before. Visiting Mexico has been my ultimate dream in life, and to be able to be travel there to learn and research the country all seemed like my dream come true. When the time finally came to board from my layover in Arizona to Mexico City, I was anxious yet so excited. The flight from Phoenix, Arizona to Mexico City was anticipated to be a little over 3 hours. I slept for the first 2 hours of the flight but woke up just as we approached our destination. From my window seat, I was gifted a bird's eye view of the sprawling neighborhoods and surrounding mountains of Mexico City. As we began emerging more into Mexico's capital, I thought to myself, "did any of my great-grandparents ever get to visit Mexico City before arriving in California?" In learning about the important role Mexico City has always played as part of Mexico's history, I'm certain my great-grandparents knew of their former country's metropolis. But had they ever journeyed there? I may not ever truly know. However, I'm glad I thought of them because so much of them lives inherently in me, and they are from Mexico. My first visit to Mexico in 2023 taught me so much both academically and personally. I'm better because of it in ways that I am still realizing, and I am so eager and inspired to return.

Photo: (Manuel Nieves Camarena, Frances Ponce Camarena, Devon Antonio, Gloria Ferrer Garcia)

An Understanding of the African Diaspora Through Art

By Kimberly Barillas

Afromexican art is made by and for Afromexican people who seek an expressive and creative way to address and engage with topics like social issues, culture, identity, and history. Contemporary Afromexican artists produce pieces that add to our understanding of Black populations in Mexico and the intersection of identity formation and the pressing social issues facing Afromexican women, men and children. The creation and exhibition of this artwork is important because there is a constant conversation about who can claim a Mexican identity. Stemming from centuries of mestizaje and interracial and cultural mixing, there are many people who identify as Black and of Mexican heritage. It is undeniable that for a long time, Afromexicans have dealt with racism because they do not look phenotypically Mexican. However, many Afro-descendent people have made a home in Mexico.

In November of 2023 I participated in a week-long research trip to Mexico City, where I had the opportunity to see the mural "Muerte de Las Culturas" that was created by artists Baltazar Castellano Melo, Olga Manzano Ranacuija and Jose Luis Hernandez Guzman of the collective, Raiz de la Ceiba. Baltazar Castellano Melo used this mural to regain autonomy over his identity. He has stated, "I am the son of a black mother and a Mixtec father, I am a mestizo, who has experienced transgression and discrimination due to my origin, that is why I began to paint my people and then to interpret my reality so that each work I make is a new historical source that tells this our story, our memory and that will never be erased again."[1] In addition to

[1] Cultura, Secretaría de. 2023. "Presentación Del Proyecto Mural La Muerte de Las Culturas. (El México Negro) Del Artista Baltazar Castellano Melo." *Gob. Mx*.

the theme of identity, the mural depicts other societal issues like immigration, motherhood, assimilation, and cultural remembrance. It is important that artists like Baltazar Castellano Melo, Olga Manzano, José Luis Hernández Guzmán bring awareness to the historical erasure of Afrodescendant people. Representation and awareness will inform people about the Afromexican population in Mexico, and can raise more support for social movements that advocate for more funding and resources in areas where Afromexican people live.

The mural "Muerte de Las Culturas," was presented at the former college of San Ildefonso, which is now a museum and cultural center in Mexico City, best known to be the birthplace of the Mexican muralism movement. It is part of an exhibition that focuses on cultural resistance, which is exactly what Afromexican art is since it represents a community of people that have been historically ignored. "Muerte de Las Culturas" is an impressive mural that extends over two walls filled with many characters, vivid colors, and objects that add texture. There is an abundance of symbolism in the mural that is meant to add to our understanding of the African diaspora in Latin America and what it means to be Afromexican. The artists created a collaborative effort between local residents and passing migrants to contribute to the mural. Individuals could either share their creative input or have a piece of their belongings thoroughly integrated into the mural. The mural "Muerte de Las Culturas," provided a space for marginalized people to demonstrate that Mexican identity is multifaceted and composed of many factors including historical roots, migration and diaspora, class, gender, and more. All of these factors are represented in the mural to showcase the complexity of Mexican identity.

Through the "Muertes de las Culturas" mural, our understanding of Afromexican people is deepened because it addresses immigration, identity, motherhood, assimilation, cultural

remembrance, and intersectionality. The mural's imagery highlights the historical challenges, community resistance, formation and preservation of the Afromexican identity and their culture. To create the mural, the main artists drew inspiration and help from community members who would come and go through the space where the mural was being created, truly making it a community collaboration. Olga Manzano Ranacuija, one of the 3 main artists, shared that certain items that were sewed onto the mural, were the belongings of real people who came by to add to the mural.[2] The addition of the personal belongings adds depth to the mural's theme, which aims to represent and honor the same people that are helping create it. For those who were only passing through, leaving a belonging behind on the mural meant that a part of them would always be in Mexico, the country that helped them get one step closer to their destination. Through their art, Baltazar Castellano Melo, Olga Manzano Ranacuija, and Jose Luis Hernandez Guzman represent the experiences of Afromexican people in a contemporary Mexico that has for very long ignored Afrodescendant people. The artists of the mural "Muertes de las Culturas" use art to visualize Afromexicans and bring awareness to the social issues faced by Afromexicans who live in Mexico but are treated as foreigners. In an interview with the journalism website America Latina, Baltazar Castellano Melo stated that "African origin is intertwined with and shared in all the spaces and territories where the Black diaspora of Latin America arrived,"[3] adding to our understanding of the impact of colonialism and the slave trade. African slaves were forcibly displaced and transported to Mexico to work domestically and agriculturally. Mexican

[2] Olga Manzano Ranacuija and Jose Luis Hernandez Guzman of the collective, Raiz de la Ceiba (2023; Mexico City, Mexico).

[3] "Afro-Hybrid Images in Motion." 2022. *C& AMÉRICA LATINA*. April 6. https://amlatina.contemporaryand.com/editorial/afro-hybrid-images-in-motion-baltazar-melo/.

society and culture were shaped by the language, traditions, food, music, and religious practices that were a part of the African identity. Before the 19th century, African slaves in Mexico were treated harshly and had no opportunities for self-improvement. Even after the abolition of slavery in Mexico in the 19th century, African and Afromexican slaves continued to face discrimination, systemic oppression, and marginalization. Now in the 21st century, Afromexicans continue to face social injustices, but we have begun to see a greater effort to recognize and celebrate African origin, heritage, and history that is present in Mexico. One example being the "Muertes de las Culturas" mural.

On the very far left of the first wall, Figure 3, we can see that there is a Jaguar figure, which is a mask that represents two characters that are important to the indigenous population: The Tecuan and Tlaloc. The Tecuan mask served as a way for people to communicate with the supernatural and was worn in the context of historical dances where people disguised themselves to defeat the Tecuan.[4] While Tlaloc is the Mesoamerican god of rain and fertility, which the Aztecs venerated and made sacrifices to. In Figure 3 we can see that the mask's head is adorned with feathers and hair that resembles braids or cornrows that are worn by African and African descended people. During our discussion with the artists, we talked about two major points regarding the historical importance of braids. First, Olga Manzano Ranacuija mentioned that slaves utilized cornrows to create maps that showed escape routes since they could not vocalize this. Secondly, during the era of the transatlantic slave trade, it was mentioned that enslaved Africans hid their own seeds in their braids, allowing them to bring a part of their identity to this

[4] "TECUÁN MEXICAN MASKS." 2023. *The Mexican Museum*. Accessed December 15. https://www.mexicanmuseum.org/tecuan-mexican-masks.

unknown territory. Thus, explaining how certain African fruits and vegetables are found around the world. Though it is only a small part of the mural, this visual narrative connects the African Diaspora with Afromexican heritage and honors the people who were forcibly taken from their homelands in Africa in the 16th century.

One notable aspect of the mural that resonated with me the most was the depiction of the river flowing through the entire bottom half of each wall, as seen in Figure 1 and Figure 2. The artists explained that it represents the Rio Grande, the river that migrants have to cross, at whatever costs, to reach the U.S. Border. The inclusion of the Rio Grande holds a lot of contemporary and historical importance because of the increase in migrants who are attempting to come to the U.S. In response to this increase, Texas authorities took extreme measures such as a string of buoys in the river and a wire fence at the border, to prevent migrants from successfully crossing, resulting in the deaths of approximately 500 people, reported in September of 2023.[5] It is devastating because these were people who were trying to overcome the obstacles after an already long and hard journey. The representation of the river in the mural serves as a reminder of the ongoing challenges that migrants face in their journeys to the U.S. The artists took it a step further and incorporated birds within the river, portraying them as half alive, and half dead, as seen in Figure 4. Their legs were painted as skeletons to represent the people who have lost their lives in the river, while the visible part of their bodies above the water represents the people who are currently crossing it and/or have been successful in doing so. Additionally, in

[5] Martinez, MaryAnn. 2023. "Migrant Deaths Crossing US-Mexico Border Hit 500, Extra Agents Dispatched to Help Prevent Them: 'Some Just Don't Make It.'" *New York Post*. New York Post. September 8. https://nypost.com/2023/09/08/migrant-deaths-crossing-us-mexico-border-hit-500-in-2023.

Figure 5, we can see that there is a person who is drowning. The river and the details in the river bring awareness to the inhumane treatment of migrants, honor those who have crossed and those who lost their lives and emphasize the need to address the border policies that are resulting in the deaths of many.

Another interesting part of the mural lies in the detailed depiction of the Afromexicans who are on their journeys to the U.S. Upon closer examination, it becomes evident that some people are facing forward while others are looking back, as seen in Figures 6 and 7. The portrayal of individuals who are facing backward was implemented to represent the people who successfully arrive in the U.S. but miss their country and the life they left behind. This resonated with me because a lot of people, including my parents, have moved to the U.S., yet they persistently long for their home countries. This portrayal challenges the assumption that everyone who migrates to the U.S. is content with their decision. This generalization is not true because, for many people, it is a sacrifice that they feel they need to make, not one they want to make. The people who are looking back also represent the fact that Mexico is home for Afromexicans. As a society we cannot deny the fact that Afromexicans belong in Mexico because their history, traditions, and culture are there. The African diaspora has been present in Mexico from the 16th century to now, so the acknowledgement that Mexico is the home they yearn for is important. Even if they are in the U.S. and are able to make a home in the new territory, they will always be Afromexican. The mural acknowledges that many people build communities or move to areas that are populated by people they identify with, as a coping mechanism and to feel close to home. In the mural, some people are looking back because they have hopes that someday they will be able to return to their home country.

Another noteworthy detail in the mural is the depiction of the shoes worn by the birds, as seen in Figure 8, where we can see that each bird has one foot with a shoe on and one bare foot. Olga shared that when the children would come through the space of the mural, they would tell her, "Look at my cuchehuaraches or cuche shirt" instead of saying Gucci.[6] The shoes symbolize the diversity of Afromexicans who embark on their migration journey, where they now wear popular brand shoes that represent their identities. Huaraches are a traditional Mexican sandal that have been worn for centuries and play an important role in Mexican culture. Nike has huarache inspired sneakers also called huaraches. Once in America, children go from wearing the traditional Mexican sandal huaraches to the Nike sneaker huaraches. The depiction of the popular brand shoes holds a dual significance because it represents both people's identities and the process of assimilation that they go through.

Recently, there has been an increase of Haitian and Latin American migrants passing through Mexico, and sometimes even staying in Mexico, contributing to the growing Afrodescendant population. Due to the demographic shift, Mexico must address and increase the resources available in marginalized communities where Afrodescendant people are building their lives. Mexican citizens must learn to combat and stop perpetuating anti-Black racism, colorism, xenophobia, and other forms of racism. Even though there has always been a presence of Afrodescendant and Afromexican people, there has been a lack of consistent acknowledgment of their existence and contributions to Mexican society. While in Mexico, my classmates and I had the opportunity to participate in a workshop led by Andre Lo Sanchez, which he called "Black

[6] Olga Manzano Ranacuija and Jose Luis Hernandez Guzman of the collective, Raiz de la Ceiba (2023; Mexico City, Mexico).

Community: For Whom? How to develop anti-racist transmedia content." Andre Lo Sanchez is an Afromexican filmmaker and social media influencer dedicated to creating activism media that addresses and represents everyday experiences of racism that he and others face in Mexico. His content addresses the challenges faced by Black identities in Mexico and confronts the question of one's identity as either Black or Mexican- when in reality one can identify as both. During the workshop, we had the opportunity to ask him questions about how racism is present in Mexico, how activists like himself respond to racism, and how it affects the daily lives of Afromexicans in education, the workforce, and society. Much like the mural, Andre expressed that Afromexicans and Afrodescendant people are ignored or become victims of social prejudice, but they are never acknowledged. They have to live in a society that forces them to choose between their identities without allowing them to be both African/African descended and Mexican. Sanchez's workshops served as a bridge that connected awareness and action, challenging our perspectives and providing a realistic understanding of the complexities of Black identities in Mexico. The workshop prompted reflection on the broader societal issues that the mural represents and highlighted that institutionalized racism is part of what motivates African and African descended people's identities to migrate to the U.S. in search of better opportunities. It represents the experiences of African and African descended people's identities, like the experiences Sanchez shared with us during the workshop, and encourages them to preserve and prevent their cultures from dying by creating a sense of unity, pride, and community, within and beyond the Mexican border.

Despite ongoing efforts to increase awareness for Afromexicans, there continues to be a disconnect between the needs of the population in Mexico City, where the mural was created and

housed at the Colegio de San Ildefonso, and the availability of social services in more marginalized communities outside of the city. The neglect of the Mexican government in recognizing the percentage of the population that identifies as Black is a formidable challenge. Up until the 2020 census, Mexico was the only Latin American country that did not account for its Black population, therefore perpetuating the invisibility of Afromexicans.[7] The census matters because it helps the government determine the allocation of funding for programs that are supported to further ensure equality for all Mexican citizens. The census collects data on the social and economic groups of different populations within specific areas in the country. Afromexicans were first included in the Mexican census in 2015, so there was no accurate information on what regions had Afromexican communities and what percentage of the population they made up. This was an issue because it meant that Afromexican people were not

[7] Christina A. Sue (2023), Is Mexico Beyond Mestizaje? Blackness, Race Mixture, and Discrimination, Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies, 18:1, 47-74.

accounted for and, therefore not given the resources necessary. It also meant that the language regarding identity was complicated because you were either African or Mexican, but not Afromexican. The inclusion of Afromexicans in the Mexican census paved the way for the government, and society, to acknowledge the African diaspora in Mexico. It gave visibility and recognition to Afromexican communities that already existed but had been historically ignored. Additionally, the inclusion of Afromexicans on the census resulted in the acknowledgment of an equitable distribution of resources because most Afromexicans live in impoverished regions where living conditions are intolerable. Furthermore, the census has the power to influence anti-Black laws and behaviors. The government has long failed the Afromexican communities in Costa Chica because there have been minimal efforts to create employment opportunities and invest in infrastructure, like roads, that allow people to travel in and out of the area to commute for work.[8] Social injustices like these perpetuate the false belief that Black people can't exist in Mexico, impeding the mobilization of advocates for the community. If the government continues to perpetuate social injustices like discrimination, economic disparities, lack of representation, and colorism, it will result in a widespread failure to recognize the significance of Afromexican identities in Mexico.

Based on the mural we can see that art can prevent cultures from dying by creating art that represents marginalized communities. To address this, we can contribute to cultures that persist and thrive through artistic activism and expression, and other forms of cultural preservation. Conversely, cultures run the risk of dying if society and our governments continue

[8] Ibid

to marginalize communities simply for being different. Ultimately, it is our responsibility to recognize that we are all human, and advocacy for equal opportunities and resources is a must. Mexico was affected by colonization, which stripped it of its land and resources. Language, religion, and forced labor were imposed upon its peoples. Mexico was affected by colonization, which stripped it of its land and resources. Language, religion, and forced labor were imposed upon its peoples. Similarly, the continent of Africa suffered because its people were dispossessed, resulting in the loss of their autonomy and identities. Baltazar Castellano Melo, Olga Manzano Ranacuija and Jose Luis Hernandez Guzman created the mural "Muertes de las Culturas" to represent the history of blackness, the history of the mestizo, and of indigenous women who were also part of this great important black history.[9] Through the mural, we can see that it is important to acknowledge Afrolatinx and Afromexican people because they are a part of the country's history. Phenotypic differences do not diminish their Mexican identity. The mural serves as a reminder that cultures will die if we continue to perpetuate the erasure and invisibility of the Afromexican community. Additionally, the mural emphasizes that advocacy, unity, and awareness are key solutions to the preservation of cultures and a way to combat contemporary racism.

Afromexican art is a tool that is used to address social injustices and challenges that people face. This mural honors and represents Afromexican identities that have long been overlooked, marginalized, and denied basic human rights and resources, to address social injustices through art. Despite the title being "The Death of the Cultures," the colors, symbolism,

[9] "Afro-Hybrid Images in Motion." 2022. *C& AMÉRICA LATINA*. April 6. https://amlatina.contemporaryand.com/editorial/afro-hybrid-images-in-motion-baltazar-melo/.

objects, and images challenge this narrative by reviving the cultures through representation. The artists and community members who contributed to the mural actively confront invisibility and prevent these cultures from dying and continuing to be erased and forgotten. The mural not only challenges erasure but also provides a platform for people to see themselves, their cultures, and identities reflected on a piece of art that is accessible to everyone. The mural was made to represent the Afro-Latinx identities within Mexico, particularly focusing on the overlooked Afrodescendant communities that are mostly located in the Costa Chica, challenging the ongoing underrepresentation and invisibility.

Appendix

Figure 1.

Figure 2.

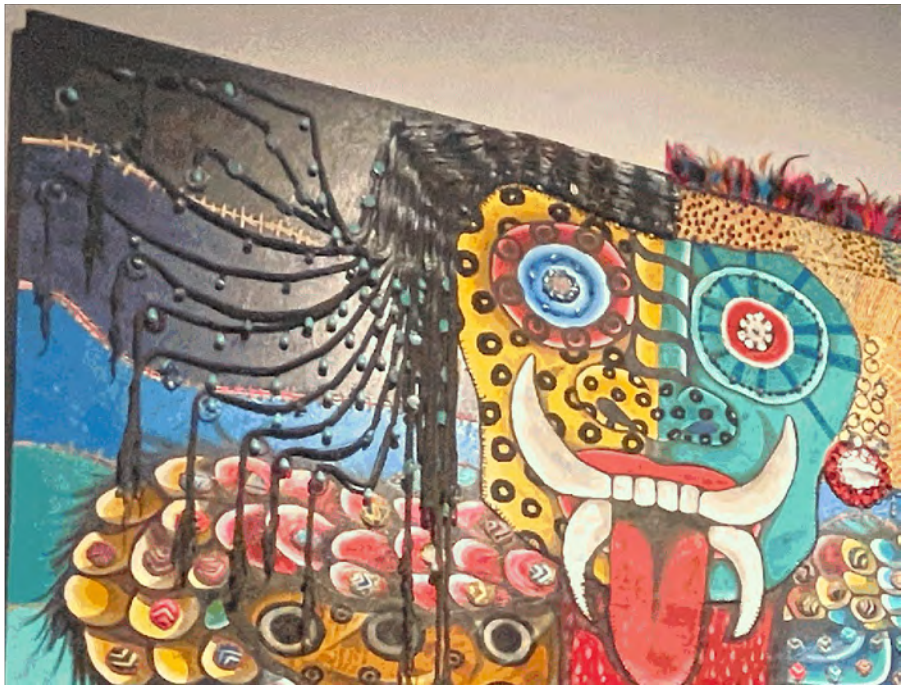

Figure 3.

Figure 4.

Figure 5.

Figure 6.

Figure 7.

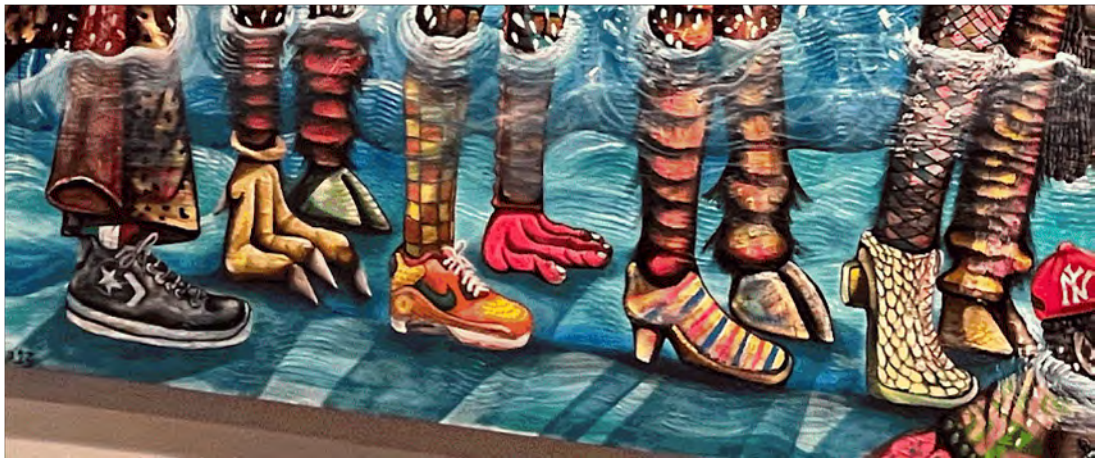

Figure 8.

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The History of Slavery in Mexico

By Virginia Mateo

The modern-day country of Mexico has a significant Afro-descendent population. The presence and ancestry of African-descended women, men, and children can be traced back to the transatlantic and transpacific slave trades and the institution of slavery in New Spain (colonial Mexico). During the colonial period, from the 1500s to the 1800s, Spain colonized the Americas, including regions of present-day Mexico. This colonization included the conquest of Indigenous populations in Mexico and the importation of African captives to Mexico (New Spain). This article explores the movement and lives of enslaved Africans and African-descendents during the colonial period. By foregrounding the lives of the tens of thousands of captives who were imported to New Spain, I emphasize the centrality of violence in shaping their lived experiences under slavery. While this captive population endured almost unimaginable suffering and mistreatment at the hands of their enslavers, this article contends that these African and African-descended women, men, and children still managed to find and create opportunities to resist their subjugation, both in the context of the Middle Passage and during their lives under slavery in colonial Mexico.

The journey that African captives endured through the Middle Passage for enslavement highlights their traumatic experiences at the hands of European colonists. After getting captured by slave traders and merchants, Africans were forcibly marched from the interior of Africa to the Atlantic-facing ports of West and West Central Africa. After an overland journey that lasted several weeks and enduring additional time at dungeons in the West African forts, they would arrive in New Spain. Upon arriving in New Spain, captive Africans faced another forced overland movement to the cities,

towns, sugar-producing areas, and silver-mining regions throughout the Spanish colony. After reaching these destinations, enslaved people quickly realized the extent of the Spanish crown's power over colonial subjects. Aside from coerced labor, Africans dealt with various mechanisms of social control over their religion and legal rights.

The Origin of Interest for Enslaved Labor

Prior to relying on African slave labor, Spaniards in Mexico relied on the natives of the land. As historian David M. Davidson explains, over 25 million Mexican natives were forced to live a life bound to the labor of their oppressors.[1] The Spanish colonists saw financial promise in the resources—both in terms of land and people—that they encountered in New Spain. This desire for economic profit, which was shared with the Spanish crown, became an impetus to exploit the labor of Indigenous people. However, this success was short-lived. As Davidson outlines, the native population declined by just over one million by 1605 because of the smallpox epidemic and the impact of the Spanish conquest.[2] The overall indigenous population in New Spain dramatically decreased by approximately 90 percent, which exemplifies how the European introduction of diseases was deadly. Their immune systems could not fight off the illnesses, and they spread like wildfire throughout the population.

African Captives and Their Journeys Across the Atlantic

With a nearly depleted Indigenous workforce, Spaniards turned their attention to the continent of Africa, which became the primary location to purchase captive human beings.

[1] David M. Davidson. "Negro Slave Control and Resistance in Colonial Mexico, 1519-1650." (*The Hispanic American Historical Review* 46, no 3 (1966)). Page 236.
[2] Ibid. Page 237.

The vast majority of the Africans who were destined for New Spain were forcefully bound and taken in West Central Africa. At times, Spanish merchants were directly involved in the transatlantic slave trade, but generally, they relied on Portuguese, British, Dutch, and French slave traders to send captives to the Spanish colonies.[3] The capture of Africans, for example, involved slaving, trading, and raiding which caught many Africans by surprise and ultimately led to the successful capture of millions in West and West Central Africa. Following capture, Africans' bodies were bound by cords to secure them until more colonists assisted with their removal.[4] These forceful and sudden seizures of human beings was exemplified in the now well-known account of Olaudah Equiano.[5] As Equiano outlined in his first-hand account of surviving the Middle Passage, he and his sister were taken by surprise, with their mouths covered to not alert anyone in their community. In general, many Africans were captured from regions in present-day Guinea, Senegal, and Nigeria.[6] As Africans were taken against their will and forcibly moved to the Atlantic-facing coast of Africa, they were then coerced to embark on slave ships headed for New Spain. As an example, Captain Francisco Rodriguez (alias name) embarked 359 Africans on the slaving vessels, *Santiago* in 1551, and *Nuestra Señora de la Vida* in 1638 respectively, from West Central Africa. *Santiago* arrived in New Spain the same year with 287 captives, and *Nuestra Señora de la Vida* arrived the same year with 287 captives as well. Only 79 percent of the captives who originally embarked on the slave ships arrived in New Spain.[7]

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[3] Linda A Newsom, Minchin, Suzie Minchin. *From Capture to Sale*. Leiden Boston. 2007. Page 1.
[4] "Excerpts from The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano," in World History Commons.
[5] Olaudah Equiano was a widely known formerly enslaved man, who wrote a memoir about his journey before, during, and after the Middle Passage; he was also an abolitionist.
[6] Luz María Martínez Montiel, (1977), "Integration patterns and the assimilation process of negro slaves in Mexico". (Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 292: 446-454). Page 449.
[7] *SlaveVoyages* Database.

Hundreds of enslaved Africans were packed so tightly on the hold of a slave ship that there was a lack of oxygen on board. Some captives tried to resist these horrid conditions by revolting against their captors, or by escaping via suicide on or overboard the slave ship. In response, a ship's crew maintained strict control, through violent punishments, like flogging,[8] in order to prevent any kind of uprising on the slave ship. Many Africans spent up to fifteen weeks at sea before arriving at ports in New Spain. The conditions aboard a slave ship also caused severe health problems for the enslaved. For example, upon arriving in the Americas, those who were severely ill, which included many enslaved adults and children, had to be physically carried off-board because they had no strength to stand.[9] Enslaved people endured a wide range of illnesses on the slave ship, which resulted from the lack of oxygen, food, physical violence, and exposure to bodily fluids for months on end. During the Atlantic Crossing, many enslaved people died at sea. At times, ship owners presented total losses that ranged from 9 to 26 percent in their reports.[10] Moreover, countless ship reports noted the deaths of their captives, and while some reports embellished the truth because ship owners tried to avoid taxation and license fees, most reports accurately counted the number of casualties on board. While the physical challenges that enslaved people endured during their seizure and the Middle Passage were intense and extreme, these processes only marked the beginning of what awaited them in New Spain.

The Port City of Veracruz and Overland Travel

The city of Veracruz faced the Atlantic Ocean and thus, became the primary port of

[8] Flogging: being whipped and hit with a stick repeatedly; beating used as a form of punishment.
[9] Wheat, David, David Eltis, and Alex Borucki. *From the Galleons to the Highlands: Slave Trade Routes in the Spanish Americas* Chapter 3. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2020). Page 73.
[10] Linda A. Newsom, Suzie Minchin. *From Capture to Sale*. (Leiden Boston. 2007). Page 110.

entry for African captives. Over 120,000 captives were processed through the port of Veracruz between 1519 and 1650.[11] In his analysis of this peak in slave traffic to colonial Mexico, historian Edgar F. Love stated that "the greatest number [of imported slaves] belonged to the ports of Acapulco and Veracruz."[12] The port of Veracruz was a vital entry point to Spanish America during the era of the slave trade. Along with Cartagena and Portobelo, it was one of the three ports in Spanish America that allowed the legal disembarkation and entry of captive Africans into New Spain.[13] The licensing surrounding the transportation and arrival of enslaved people forced many ship owners to choose Veracruz as their chosen port of entry into New Spain and the Spanish Americas. Moreover, ship owners faced legal restrictions and financial fees if they failed to comply. They also feared being indebted to the Spanish Crown because their economic investments in slavery outweighed the cost of simply obeying the regulations placed on the importation of enslaved Africans. As both licensing and port access limited ship owners to Veracruz, it became clear that this port city would thrive during the era of transatlantic slave traffic to Spanish America.

Shortly after arriving in Veracruz, some enslaved people provided labor for the port specifically. Spanish colonialists forced slaves to work as ship carriers or dock hands.[14] Their duties as ship carriers included loading and unloading heavy cargo and maintaining the ship grounds. Similarly, dock hands were responsible for securing the people and cargo aboard

[11] David M. Davidson. "Negro Slave Control and Resistance in Colonial Mexico, 1519-1650." (*The Hispanic American Historical Review* 46, no 3 (1966)). Page 237.

[12] Edgar F. Love. "Negro Resistance to Spanish Rule in Colonial Mexico." (*The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 52, no. 2, 1967). Page 89.

[13] Linda A. Newsom, Suzie Minchin. *From Capture to Sale*. (Leiden Boston. 2007). Page 136.

[14] David M. Davidson. "Negro Slave Control and Resistance in Colonial Mexico, 1519-1650." (*The Hispanic American Historical Review* 46, no 3 (1966)). Page 237.

incoming vessels. This labor ultimately facilitated the commerce of enslaved people because hundreds of Africans arrived on each slave ship. Veracruz had other economic channels besides its port. It participated in sugar production which also kept more enslaved people in Veracruz after their disembarkation.[15] Enslaved people were also destined to toil in the region's sugar plantations because sugar was a vital resource for New Spain's economy.

A large part of the enslaved population was subjected to intense overland travel to other regions of the colony. The form by which captive Africans traveled could be by foot or mule. The beginning of their overland journey involved crossing through coastal wetlands near Veracruz, and later, across semi-temperate forests, and rugged mountain ranges in Central Mexico.[16] The enslaved had to cross rivers of cold water, climb to high elevations, and trek through intense fogs, sleet and snow.[17] The challenges of this overland trek were exacerbated by the fact that enslaved Africans had little to no clothing. For this reason, many could not withstand the extreme climatic conditions, from high humidity in the lowlands to frigid temperatures at the highest elevations and they became very ill or died during this overland movement.

It is also worth noting the physical endurance that was needed to walk, hike, and climb for days or even weeks, depending on their destination. The terrains that the enslaved had to cross were physically demanding because of the natural elements, which included summits

[15] Maria Guevara Sanginés. "Propietarios de esclavos en Guanajuato durante el siglo XVIII". (*Universidad Veracruzana*. 2014). Page 129.
[16] Wheat, David, David Eltis, and Alex Borucki. *From the Galleons to the Highlands: Slave Trade Routes in the Spanish Americas.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2020. Page 73.
[17] Wheat, David, David Eltis, and Alex Borucki. *From the Galleons to the Highlands: Slave Trade Routes in the Spanish Americas.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2020. Page 10.

over 7,000 feet in elevation.[18] These climatic conditions, coupled with the critical health conditions that enslaved people had already experienced [on the Middle Passage], created a traumatic reality as they were forcibly moved through the colony. The physical strains on their feet, backs, and bodies were overlooked because their enslavers only considered them as commodities to be sold or disposed of.

The Labor of the Enslaved

The bondsmen and bonds women who survived the harsh climate and the physically punishing journey of overland travel then found themselves under various forced labor systems in the regions of colonial Mexico. The kind of labor that they provided was oftentimes determined by the commerce of a particular region. For example, silver was the most valuable product exported from New Spain. The increase in silver mining attracted indigenous laborers from central Mexico and captive Africans to toil in the silver mines of Chihuahua, Guanajuato, and Zacatecas.[19] Spanish colonists also profited from slave labor in the mines of Michoacán, Tasco, and Zimpango.[20] I should add that mining for coal, silver, and gold was an acutely dangerous job, where the health and safety of laborers were oftentimes disregarded.

Enslaved people also worked in agricultural settings. They could serve and provide

[18] Wheat, David, David Eltis, and Alex Borucki. *From the Galleons to the Highlands: Slave Trade Routes in the Spanish Americas.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2020. Page 82.
[19] Maria Guevara Sanginés. "Propietarios de esclavos en Guanajuato durante el siglo XVIII". (*Universidad Veracruzana*. 2014). Page 121.
[20] Colin A. Palmer. *SLAVES OF THE WHITE GOD Blacks in Mexico, 1570-1650*. (Harvard University Press. 1976). Page 76.

labor as field hands in *haciendas*[21] for their enslavers.[22] Sugar mills and tobacco plantations were maintained by enslaved people who lived within those haciendas.[23] This coerced labor, however, was only afforded by wealthy Spaniards who had the means to purchase enslaved people. As the production of agricultural products became vital to the sustenance of all people in New Spain, bondsmen, and bonds women were needed as cattle raisers, muleteers, and more.[24] The production of sugar, while it did thrive in Veracruz, also appeared in other parts of New Spain. Sugar also demanded skilled and unskilled forms of labor for its production. For example, enslaved people labored as sugar cane gatherers, sugar processors, sugar boilers, and sugar masters.[25] The technical processes required to grow, produce, and manufacture sugar created the demand for slave labor in the lowlands near Veracruz and in the tropical areas of the present-day states of Guerrero and Oaxaca.

Those who did not work in silver mining or agricultural production were bound to perform domestic service for Spanish elites in the colony's urban centers.[26] Domestic work varied from housework, and cooking, to nanny duties. Bondswomen, for instance, engaged in cleaning, cooking, childcare, and some women even served as wet nurses. Bondsmen, on the other hand, could be porters, personal servants, or carriage drivers. While urban slavery was

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[21] Hacienda: large land estate, usually somewhere rural.
[22] Luz María Martínez Montiel, (1977), "Integration patterns and the assimilation process of negro slaves in Mexico". (Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 292: 446-454). Page 451.
[23] Ibid. page 451.
[24] David M. Davidson. "Negro Slave Control and Resistance in Colonial Mexico, 1519-1650." (*The Hispanic American Historical Review* 46, no 3 (1966)). Page 3.
[25] Colin A. Palmer. *SLAVES OF THE WHITE GOD Blacks in Mexico, 1570-1650*. (Harvard University Press. 1976). Pages 11, 30, 34, 38.
[26] Maria Guevara Sanginés. "Propietarios de esclavos en Guanajuato durante el siglo XVIII". (*Universidad Veracruzana*. 2014). Page 122.

not as physically demanding as slavery in plantation settings or silver mining, it was nevertheless demanding and difficult for the enslaved. Take, for example, Miguel de la Flor, a man born to an enslaved woman, and a Spanish father, who provided a variety of labor as an enslaved man including a shopkeeper and personal servant.[27] Regardless of the setting, enslaved people could face multiple forms of violence in their everyday lives. They could be subjected to physical beatings with sticks as a form of punishment.[28] While violence came in the form of beatings, it also came as sexual abuse. For example, a Frenchman named Juan Yubar raped an enslaved girl in 1747, in what is known as modern-day Oaxaca.[29]This form of violence was common for enslaved women at the hands of Europeans. The possibility for ill-treatment was heightened when enslaved people, like Miguel de la Flor, were resold to new purchasers, who sometimes branded captives on their faces or shoulders as a symbol of their ownership.[30] The physical expectations of labor that enslaved captives provided for their enslavers could not be challenged, nor ignored. The violent consequences of refusal worked to maintain authority and power of Europeans over the enslaved.

The Forced Reproduction of the Enslaved

While the slave population in New Spain grew through the continuous importation of African and American-born captives, the enslaved population was also sustained through

[27] Archivo General de la Nación. Mexico City, Mexico. Indiferente Virreinal-Inquisición Caja 4547, exp Año 1664.
[28] Wheat, David, David Eltis, and Alex Borucki. *From the Galleons to the Highlands: Slave Trade Routes in the Spanish Americas.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2020. Page 91.
[29] Archivo General del Estado de Oaxaca (AGEO), Alcaldías Mayores, legajo 24, exp. 15 (Year: 1747).
[30] Edgar F. Love. "Negro Resistance to Spanish Rule in Colonial Mexico." (*The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 52, no. 2, 1967). Page 102.

reproduction. As anthropologist Luz María Montiel noted, black captives "were urged to mate and most of the demand for slaves was met by these 'breeding houses.'"[31] It is not surprising that slaveholders turned to reproduction as a means to sustain the slave population because the indigenous population did not fully recover from its demographic collapse until the nineteenth century. This means that throughout the colonial period, enslaved people continued to serve as a supplemental labor force in New Spain. The value of infants, and thus the practice of encouraging reproduction, is illustrated through the example of a 26-year-old black bondswoman named Ysabel. In September 1689, Ysabel was sold with her eight-month-old son for 500 pesos in the city of Antequera.[32] Ysabel would have been purchased for 300 or 350 pesos if she were sold alone. However, buyers like Captain Juan Baptista de Lizardi saw the financial promise of the infant and were willing to pay up to 150 pesos for young children. Coerced reproduction was also intertwined with sexual violence because enslaved women could be assaulted or raped at the whim of male slaveholders. These instances of sexual violence oftentimes resulted in pregnancies, but bondswomen also resisted enslavers by subjecting themselves to voluntary abortions because they could not bring themselves to bear children in slavery.[33] This was not their only form of resistance to their conditions of captivity.

Resistance and Revolt

[31] Luz María Martínez Montiel, (1977), "Integration patterns and the assimilation process of negro slaves in Mexico". (Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 292: 446-454). Page 448.
[32] Archivo Histórico de Notarías Oaxaca, Protocolos Notoriales, Escrituras de Francisco de Quero, vol. 426, ff. 100, Venta de esclavos.
[33] David M. Davidson. "Negro Slave Control and Resistance in Colonial Mexico, 1519-1650." (*The Hispanic American Historical Review* 46, no 3 (1966)). Page 235.

While facing such acute levels of abuse under enslavement, some captives found the strength to resist slaveholders and the institution of slavery. For example, slave resistance began as soon as captives embarked on the slave ship. Personal accounts, such as that of Olaudah Equiano, detail how African captives often refused to eat before and after they boarded the ships, and that some people succeeded in jumping off the ships.[34] These strategies of resistance impacted slave traders because malnutrition and slave suicide could both result in the death of the enslaved, which was ultimately a financial loss to merchants. More importantly, these tactics show that enslaved people did, in fact, try to resist their condition of captivity. Likewise, enslaved men and women fled from plantation settings in New Spain. In the 1570s, enslaved Africans revolted at the port of Veracruz and fled en masse to surrounding areas which is known as Yanga's Rebellion.[35] This strategy created an opportunity to escape bondage because the chaos of the revolt made it difficult for colonial officials and enslavers to catch all of the runaways. The enslaved Africans who succeeded in escaping during overland transport would be counted as losses. The transporters and slave traders would recount how many ran away, and would then report the bodies as pieces.[36]

Many enslaved people found ways to challenge slavery through the Catholic Church. It is important to note, however, that the spread of Christianity was a fundamental part of the Spanish conquest and colonial rule in New Spain. In the eyes of the Spanish Crown,

[34] "Excerpts from The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano," in World History Commons, https://worldhistorycommons.org/excerpts-interesting-narrative-life-olaudah-equiano [Accessed December 14, 2023].
[35] Miguel A. Valerio (2021) 'That there be no black brotherhood': the failed suppression of Afro-Mexican confraternities, 1568–1612, *Slavery & Abolition*. Page 299.
[36] Wheat, David, David Eltis, and Alex Borucki. *From the Galleons to the Highlands: Slave Trade Routes in the Spanish Americas.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2020. Page 9.

establishing the Church in the Americas would provide spiritual nourishment and sustenance for the souls of the enslaved.[37] With this ideology in mind, religious officials in New Spain encouraged Africans and their descendants to forgo any spiritual practices from Africa and instead, convert to Christianity. Religious officials accomplished this change by building churches, parishes, convents, and missions throughout the colony. The most direct form of religious intervention was conducted by priests, who baptized captives as they disembarked the slave ship, delivered mass at sugar plantations and haciendas, heard confessions from the enslaved, and administered the sacraments to the slave population.[38] Many enslaved people embraced Christianity by participating in orthodox religious practices such as baptism, marriage through the Church, and attending mass on Sundays. Still, others used the Church to challenge or negotiate their enslavement. For example, some bondsmen and bonds women renounced God when their enslavers punished them. Later, during their defense in court, bondsmen and bonds women confessed to renouncing God because of the immense amount of pain they experienced during punishment. Further, enslaved people reported that these episodes of violence were so intense that they could not have been fully aware of their actions.[39] In other words, the enslaved had a legal consciousness and they capitalized on the opportunity to expose their slaveholders for the acute forms of violence that were subjected to. For enslaved people, these pleas could result in better living and working conditions, or an enslaved person could be resold to another slaveholder.

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[37] Palmer, Colin A. *SLAVES OF THE WHITE GOD Blacks in Mexico, 1570-1650*. Harvard University Press. 1976. Page 53.

[38] Palmer, Colin A. *SLAVES OF THE WHITE GOD Blacks in Mexico, 1570-1650*. Harvard University Press. 1976. Page 54.

[39] Joan Cameron Bristol. *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches*. (University of New Mexico Press. 2007). Page 114.

The experiences and agency of Miguel de la Flor, an enslaved mulato, illustrates some of these effective strategies of resistance used by the new enslaved population of New Spain. As previously noted, Miguel de la Flor was an enslaved man who was born to an Angolan bondswoman and a merchant from Galicia, Spain. As a captive in the urban setting of Oaxaca City, he worked as a domestic servant and shopkeeper. Yet as a child, he also learned to read and write from a mulato school teacher, and he studied Latin and grammar with a religious official in Oaxaca. This knowledge would prove to be valuable to Miguel because he later wrote letters for members of his community, and he produced comedies for the Jesuits in Puebla and the vicar general in Oaxaca. As an adult, Miguel was interrogated by the Holy Office of the Inquisition because he was accused of believing in and invoking the devil. In response to these religious transgressions, during his trial, Miguel defended his honor, emphasizing his identity as a Catholic man. Miguel stated that he knew prayer and that he was baptized by a Christian name.[40] While he admitted to producing illustrations that blended Christianity with other spiritual practices, Miguel also expressed frustration with his condition of captivity by declaring that "I can no longer suffer [in] this way. What does this man want[?] That I give him what is necessary for his illness and assist him day and night without shuteye…I do not know what I will do." This powerful statement carries an even stronger meaning if we consider the context in which it was delivered. At the time, Miguel was enslaved to a shop owner and leper named Miguel de Fuentes. As a personal caregiver, Miguel was also responsible for administering medication and financially supporting himself and his enslaver. Moreover, by the age of 24, Miguel had already been resold numerous times

[40] Archivo General de la Nación México (AGNM). Indiferente Virreinal-Inquisición caja 4547, exp 14, Año 1664.

and separated from his mother and four siblings for a long period of time. Thus, the ruptures in these familial and social networks illustrate the fragility of personal connections under enslavement.

Recent African arrivals also contested the Church by continuing to practice their original religion and cultures from the continent of Africa. Historian Joan Cameron Bristol has noted that enslaved Africans engaged in singing, dancing, or expressing themselves through ideas they had learned from their culture of origin.[41] Hence, promoting and expressing their traditions from their homelands illuminates a resistance to their slaveholders and the Spanish Crown. The continuation or recreation of African religious practices signified that although the bodies of Africans were bound to captivity, enslaved people ensured that their minds and souls could not be controlled by the authorities or enslavers. Similarly, the syncretic religious practices that developed in the Americas, which blended Christianity with African spiritual practices altered the purpose and function of the Catholic Church.[42]

Religious brotherhoods also became a space for enslaved people to negotiate their status. Black brotherhoods were formed by enslaved Africans of the same ethnicity or among people from similar regions in Africa. While these spaces were generally built for African-descended people in Mexico to collaborate as a community for support and burial services, some brotherhoods were also designed for unity. These religious spaces were necessary because enslaved people were disposed of after death in a manner that did not humanize them. Therefore, *cofradías*, or black brotherhoods enabled enslaved Africans to practice

[41] Luz María Martínez Montiel, (1977), "Integration patterns and the assimilation process of negro slaves in Mexico". (Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 292: 446-454). Page 447.
[42] Joan Cameron Bristol. *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches*. (University of New Mexico Press. 2007).

Christianity and host burial services for the members of their confraternity. While these practices were not seen as a form of resistance, enslaved Africans and their descendants utilized confraternities in other ways. African-descended people used black brotherhoods to forge social networks with other free and enslaved people. They also used these spaces to maintain communication networks by sharing important information about job opportunities and paths to legal and extralegal freedom. Although religious officials condoned black brotherhoods, they also feared the possibility of enslaved people congregating to create rebellions and revolts.

In contrast to operating within Spanish colonial institutions such as cofradías, maroon communities operated outside of Spanish colonial rule. These autonomous communities were mostly formed by runaway slaves after they had fled their slaveholders. *Palenques* or maroon communities, were also created when Indigenous groups accepted the presence of African-descended people in their communities.[43] Regardless, these communities were known for the support they provided for their members. Male leaders of palenques oftentimes adapted to the ecological niches of a particular location and they provided food and shelter for the members of their group. Since these communities were made up of fugitive slaves who grew and gathered their own food, survival of the community was often tenuous. The most well-known palenque in New Spain was San Lorenzo de los Negros, which was led by a fugitive slave leader named Yanga.

Members of maroon communities could also partake in outright forms of resistance like riots and rebellions. With the allyship from natives, fugitive runaways terrorized regions

[43] Jorge E. Delgadillo Núñez. "Enslaved Women and Creoles in Guadalajara's Slave Market, 1615–1735, Slavery & Abolition"

across New Spain.[44] For example, they attacked travelers, burned ranches, and committed more physically damaging acts.[45] By collaborating with native populations, enslaved Africans were able to create chaos and warfare against slave owners and colonial officials. More specifically, captive Africans actively conspired to incite terror against Spanish elites and they provoked a sense of anarchy for others to follow.[46] Physical attacks and the burning of properties were also possible because runaways understood the terrain and they knew the best travel routes for overland travel. This meant that maroons would purposefully target slave traders and merchants in order to disturb the social order.[47] At times, maroon revolts resulted in the capture of domestic slaves from Spanish elites. These actions not only created alternate forms of authority to enslavers and colonial officials, but slaveholders also had to deal with the financial loss of the enslaved. Furthermore, runaways were fully aware that some slave owners were even willing to pay slave catchers to recapture their bondsmen and bonds women, which added to the economic impact on an enslaver.[48] Slave revolts had a widespread and long-lasting impact too. For instance, a caravan of 500 enslaved Africans rebelled as they were transferred from their port of entry to Mexico City, resulting in the death of an assientist.[49] News of this revolt would have spread quickly to the viceregal capital, where the

[44] David M. Davidson. "Negro Slave Control and Resistance in Colonial Mexico, 1519-1650." (*The Hispanic American Historical Review* 46, no 3 (1966)). Page 244.
[45] Ibid 244.
[46] Luz María Martínez Montiel, (1977), "Integration patterns and the assimilation process of negro slaves in Mexico". (Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 292: 446-454). Page 452.
[47] Wheat, David, David Eltis, and Alex Borucki. *From the Galleons to the Highlands: Slave Trade Routes in the Spanish Americas.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2020. Page 82.
[48] Luz María Martínez Montiel, (1977), "Integration patterns and the assimilation process of negro slaves in Mexico". (Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 292: 446-454). Page 453.
[49] Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán. "The Slave Trade in Mexico." (*The Hispanic American Historical Review* 24, no. 3
(1944)): 412–31. Page 442.

authorities likely created more punitive legislation that controlled the behavior and movement of African-descended people.[50] Therefore, these forms of resistance enabled maroons to acquire goods, food, and weaponry, but most importantly, enslaved runaways found new ways to experience freedom outside of Spanish colonial rule. Every form of resistance aimed to exemplify that the enslaved would not tolerate colonialism. Their struggles in labor, life, and even death probably motivated enslaved people to continue to defy the authorities and slaveholders.

Colonial Responses to Unity

Of course, the authorities quickly responded to these forms of resistance by attempting to stop or prevent any uprising. While the colonial state condoned black brotherhoods, these religious spaces were also suppressed because city officials continued to file complaints, reporting 'abuses' that took place within the confraternities.[51] City official Viceroy Enríquez de Almanza, for example, presented a complaint about the 'inconveniences' black brotherhoods presented to colonial rule.[52] The claims of abuse reported that members of the brotherhood had stolen money, when in fact, the members collected donations for the confraternity. These accusations led to enslaved people disengaging from confraternities due to fear that they would be targeted as well. These complaints also highlight the sentiment of colonial authorities and Spanish elites, who feared the possibility of slave uprisings because

[50] Danielle Terrazas Williams. "Finer Things: African-Descended Women, Sumptuary Laws, and Governance in Early Spanish America." (*Journal of Women's History* 33, no. 3 (2021)): 11-35.
[51] Miguel A. Valerio (2021) 'That there be no black brotherhood': the failed suppression of Afro-Mexican confraternities, 1568–1612, *Slavery & Abolition*, 42:2, 293-314, DOI: 10.1080/0144039X.2020.1755152. Page 303.
[52] Miguel A. Valerio (2021) 'That there be no black brotherhood': the failed suppression of Afro-Mexican confraternities, 1568–1612, *Slavery & Abolition*, 42:2, 293-314, DOI: 10.1080/0144039X.2020.1755152. Page 301.

they were outnumbered by the lower classes. In response to the various forms of resistance, the colonial state set in place punitive laws to prevent enslaved people (and any conspirators) from rebelling.[53] Moreover, as runaways continued to attack wealthy Spaniards, the viceroy of New Spain organized a militia to suppress slave rebellions.[54] This militia ultimately failed to successfully stop the raids and attacks, and instead, would have to compromise with them. It is worth noting that these vigilante patrols were armed and ready to use brute force against any person who defied the authorities. In short, the local and imperial authorities responded to slave resistance with new mechanisms of social control, punitive legislation, and increasing policing in order to regulate and restrict the behavior of enslaved people in New Spain.

Conclusion

The history of slavery in New Spain (current day Mexico) highlights the journeys that most enslaved Africans embarked on. Their journeys under enslavement began with the decline of indigenous populations in New Spain, which motivated Europeans for their capture. Their capture led to their boarding on ships, traveling the middle passage, embarking on overland travels, being forced to provide labor for their enslavers, and violence. They were exposed to violent conditions and expectations that were enforced with *even more* violence. As a result, some captives resorted to resistance and revolt as a response to their experiences. Colonial authorities continuously responded to the resistance of the enslaved to suppress the motivation other captives may form as a result of them. These categories dissect the experiences of

[53] Luz María Martínez Montiel, (1977), "Integration patterns and the assimilation process of negro slaves in Mexico". (Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 292: 446-454). Page 452.
[54] Luz María Martínez Montiel, (1977), "Integration patterns and the assimilation process of negro slaves in Mexico". (Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 292: 446-454). Page 452.

African captives under European control in New Spain.

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Rhythm of Change: The Hip-hop Movements for Social and Political Reforms Throughout Latin America

By Darian Andrade-Diaz

For generations, marginalized populations of African descent in Latin American nations have sought justice for their maltreatment. For those who preceded activists, the cultural and political landscape shaped by colonialist legacies distorted people's views on institutionalized forms of discrimination. Social and political disparities for populations of darker-skinned citizens in Latin American countries sparked a need for change. Colombia, Brazil, Cuba, and Mexico are the focus of this essay on hip-hop becoming a platform for articulating and spreading critiques of injustices. These critiques were crucial in creating political discourse among populations in these societies where government structure was built around promoting a false racially egalitarian society. In these societies, elites created a hegemonic and durable form of racial domination.[1] Activists used hip-hop to communicate new ideologies that challenged this commonplace structure and facilitated the growth of racial consciousness. The messages have created a global network that uses hip-hop as a musical, linguistic medium for conveying ideas. These ideas are about the politics that restrict the rights and opportunities of citizens, generally people of African descent. With a growing racial consciousness, African-descended populations mobilized and exercised unique social change in their countries. Organizations formed cultural centers to promote hip-hop culture in youth, annual festivals brought national and international attention to the ideology behind hip-hop, and hip-hop was used as a medium to persuade young people from gang violence.

[1] Paschel, *Becoming Black Political Subjects*…, 7.

Hip-hop, often charged with political critique, creates a platform to engender social and political change. The messages spread through hip-hop are a call to action in these societies where the population can make the necessary changes. Though the practices of inciting change are different, the characteristics and origins of the hip-hop movements in these countries are similar. Hegemonic structures are legacies of colonial rule. Artists used hip-hop to spread political messages that challenged those legacies. These legacies also include racial ideologies of *mestizaje,* which governments used to control the cultural political narrative. *Mestizaje* is a generational cycle of nationalism used to reinforce false ideologies of egalitarianism for the majority of the populations throughout Latin America. *Mestizaje* narratives erased racial critique as a tool of discriminated populations and promoted the idea that the vast prevalence of race mixture created a society where race was not an issue.[2] Before the development of black racial consciousness movements, the populations of Latin American countries believed in their egalitarian societies, [where] whites had higher incomes, higher levels of education, and better health outcomes than nonwhites.[3] By embracing hip-hop messages, populations were made aware of the need to challenge their countries' social and political structures. By acting upon the messages spread by hip-hop artists, activists, and other performers, Black populations in Latin America have produced a wide array of different changes based on the regions and countries they live in.

Hip-hop spread socio-political critiques of Latin American countries and gave black racial consciousness movements momentum to act on change. In 1990s Colombia, the African descendant populations began lobbying for political recognition as their racial group for rights awarded to citizens and to level the playing field and combat marginalization. The push toward a

[2] Paschel, 46.
[3] Paschel, 7.

collective Black racial consciousness and political acknowledgment began. Before years of lobbying, Black social movements had no real traction or political allies. This was due, for the most part, to *mestizaje* ideology, which has prevailed since the shift from colonization to independence. Despite decades of Black consciousness movements, no legislative changes were going into the 21st century. The socioeconomic practice of institutionalized racial inequality was perpetuated by the lack of legislation to support nonwhites in securing basic rights. By extension, *mestizaje* nationalism was used as a tool to convince the entire population that Black and indigenous peoples were not their political category. Hence, the promotion of racial democracy made a void of racial consciousness possible. This void fostered racial disparities related to poverty, wealth distribution, education, and limited opportunities for social mobilization among the Black populations in Colombia. Yet, despite these obstacles, Black activists found new mediums and spaces to articulate the injustices they lived through.

What made hip-hop accessible to Colombian migrants were the social and political critiques of lived experiences in what English-speaking artists called the "ghetto."[4] The music had strong commentary about the dominant social order that marginalized the communities from which these artists came. Colombians who listened to the music identified with the realities these artists rapped about and considered the lack of critique in their own country. Hip-hop did experience widespread recognition in Colombia, but it was from region to region and depended on exposure. It was not until the mid-1990s when a group called La Etnia produced their hip-hop and self-marketed on the streets of Bogota and Medellin, that hip-hop entered the national spotlight. They had great success, and while seeking national distribution, the group still self-marketed and persuaded radio stations to play their music.[5] In one of their songs, "Real," the

[4] Tickner, 128.
[5] Tickner, 134.

group raps about the violent reality of life in a poor neighborhood in Bogota. When reflecting on everyday events, the group writes, "Atrapado en este ghetto/ban fuego/…Real, parchado en la marginalidad/Real, en la esquina divisando la verdad."[6] Speaking to the disparities of life in the poorer areas of urban cities, La Etnia draws attention to the marginalization experienced by populations in favelas. Artists with these messages encoded in their songs highlight their circumstances and feelings of being marginalized and their voices silenced. Audiences of this music living in similar realities are forced to reflect on their situation. The growing consciousness spread by hip-hop transmits the idea that people must ask why their circumstance is rooted in socio-political polarity in a society that ignores racial disparities. As La Etnia and other artists achieved wider recognition, their success garnered increased support for the movement.[7] This translated into access to cultural centers in major Columbian cities, which became crucial hubs for fostering the development of Colombian hip-hop. These cultural centers actively cultivated a critical consciousness among youth by promoting hip-hop culture. The centers focused on spreading hip-hop culture to the youth so that they began to form their consciousness about social and political critique. These centers and the Institute for Culture and Tourism in Bogota sponsor an annual "Hip-Hop in the Park" that draws over 120,000 people, including national and international artists.[8] Hip-hop events like this are seen in other countries around the world. They all work to promote national and international hip-hop networks and to circulate ideas needed to convey the essential critiques of institutions.

In Brazil, similar to Colombia, the existence of *mestizaje* nationalism deeply rooted in colonialist rule also blinded generations of people to racial disparities. *Mestizaje* nationalism has

[6] La Etnia, *Real* (5-27 Records, 2004).
[7] Tickner, 134.
[8] Tickner, 134.

been institutionalized since the 1930s when President Getúlio Vargas actively sought to discourage Afro-Brazilians from identifying as "black."[9] Racial categories were eliminated from census data to reinforce the ideals of *mestizaje*. In Brazil, the phenomenon of music carrying socially progressive ideas did not start with hip-hop in the 1990s. Similar movements came from Brazilians listening to 1970s funk, notably James Brown, and the examples of Black Panther messages from the United States. These ideas began to form the development of Black power movements in Brazil and a boiling yearning for change. It was not until the re-democratization of the 1980s that Brazilian Black power movements mobilized for change. Since then, political and social whitening had become widespread in Brazilian culture. If an African-descended person reached a specific economic or social status, that trumped marginalization. For the next generation of Afro-Brazilians, hip-hop impacted youth by advocating for the adoption of a Black racial identity to combat racial inequalities in society. The dominant political elements of hip-hop can explain the correlation between listening to hip-hop and racial consciousness among young Afro-Brazilians. The strong ties hip-hop culture also perpetuates this maintains to grassroots activism.[10] The origins of hip-hop in Brazil are similar to those in Colombia, with added influence from rhythms and ideas from TV programs like MTV from the United States. From 2006 to 2008, Bernd Reiter and Gladys Mitchell researched these correlations and existing qualitative studies but wanted to find more conclusive, quantitative data. The authors utilized responses from 346 respondents in their study from the selected neighborhoods of Itapoãn, Federação, and Peri Peri in Salvador, Brazil. Interviews were conducted to ask members of households open-ended and closed-ended questions to gauge the degrees of racial consciousness the respondents had. Questions like "Do you listen to hip-hop music?" and "Do you think all

[9] Bernd and Mitchell, "Embracing hip-hop as their…," 4.
[10] Bernd and Mitchell, 1.

Afro-descendants of different colors are black (negro)?"[11] These questions were relevant in being able to quantify the relationship between Black racial identity and listening to hip-hop. The table below shows regressions between the study's independent variable and the independent variables of listening to hip-hop, gender, age, color, and income. Of all the variables the researchers found data for, listening to hip-hop was the most statistically significant. The coefficient of .20 suggests that the respondents who listen to hip-hop had a higher Black racial consciousness because they also stated in the interviews that all Afro-Brazilians were black, despite their color.[12]

Table I: Regression Analysis of Black Racial Consciousness and Independent Variables (listen to Hip Hop, gender, age, color, and income)

Dependent Variable: All Afro-Brazilians are Black

Independent Variables

	Coef.	S.E.
Hip Hop	.20***	.05
Gender	-.05	.05
Age	-.01	.03
Color	-.02	.01
Income	-.01	.03
Constant	1.12***	.16
N=290		

*p<.10 **p<.05 ***p<.01

Source: Reiter and Mitchell, 2008, 7.

[11]Bernd and Mitchell, 27.

[12] Reiter and Mitchell, Table 1, 7.

Reiter and Mitchell also find that 53% of respondents ages 16-25 and 41% of respondents ages 26-40 are those who listen to hip-hop. This directly correlates to the history of Black power movements in Brazilian history. The previous generation was affected by social movements just like the younger generations, which have a new movement fostered by the ideas spread by hip-hop. The pervasive nature of politically charged hip-hop can also be traced to activism. Specific non-governmental organizations have worked with youth in favelas using hip-hop as a way to bring attention to police brutality and to get young people to think before dealing drugs or being involved with gangs.[13] In Brazil, the hip-hop movement has been used as a voice for those who historically and currently do not have accurate political representation and are marginalized in society. More importantly, the ideals of hip-hop rhetoric have broadened the influence and formation of black racial consciousness, giving one the perspective of knowing there needs to be change. A similar development of racial consciousness was also seen in Cuba.

In Cuba, racial injustice stemming from the colonial period continued to persist throughout the 1900s and hip-hop also served as a platform to critique the inequalities. The unjust institutions set in place come from colonial domination. The racial ideologies of colonialism prevail and have manifested in a racialization of culture, knowledge, and experience. The hegemonic system of *mestizaje* created a Eurocentric hierarchy where African-descended Cubans were marginalized and treated as second-class citizens. Marginalization in Cuba has roots in adapting Western perspectives of othering based on the institutionalization of African forced labor in colonialist economies. The racial inequality that exists in Cuba is a consequence of the colonial legacy and has resulted in the continued manifestation of colonial subordination of African-descended people where critique about race is virtually absent.[14] In modern-day Cuba,

[13] Reiter and Mitchell, 27.
[14] Saunders, *Cuban Underground hip-hop,* 3.

neo-colonial policies perpetuate racial inequalities and are illustrated in laws concerning what the government defines as good taste, appearance, and proper conduct. To combat institutionalized racism in Cuba, a group of artist-activists, calling themselves "artivists," created the Cuban Underground Hip-hop Movement (CUHHM). CUHHM's early discourse by young artivists called for the need for change, and the hip-hop created by its members began to critique the limitations of the government's material-based approach to citizenship and equality.[15] As the movement gained momentum and support, CUHHM helped create an institutionalized, revolutionary, anti-capitalist, anticolonial ideology in the Cuban cultural sphere.[16] The Havana Rap Festival also bolstered recognition of Cuban hip-hop music, which was charged with social and political critique that focused on race, racial discrimination, and inequality.[17] Although some of these songs were banned on radio stations, their national popularity made them well known, and populations of marginalized Cubans rallied behind the artists' messages. One such song, by Clan 537, called *Quien Tiró La Tiza?* Examines the racial disparities that exist in Cuban societal practice. The chorus states, "Quien tiró la tiza?/No fue el hijo del Doctor, no/Quien tiró la tiza?/El negro ese/Porque el hijo del Doctor es el mejor."[18] The blame put on the Black kid to save the son of the doctor speaks volumes to the type of inequalities the artists want their audience to be aware of. They bring attention to the status given to white Cubans, who were valued as being better than African-descended people. The class difference exists because there is an unspoken racial hierarchy where those who have more assigned status, equivalent to those who are lighter, can take advantage of opportunities unavailable to African-descended Cubans.

[15] Saunders, 10.
[16] Saunders, 16.
[17] Tickner, 130.
[18] Tickner, 131.

There is no real foundation for scholarship on the formations and racial consciousness movements of Afromexicaness through hip hop. In the 1990s Mexico's physical and cultural proximity to Los Angeles made gangsta rap's influence particularly visible.[19] The influence of gangsta rap and adaptation to Mexican hip-hop offered a linguistic base for writing lyrics and addressing issues such as violence and the hardships of street life.[20] The political climate of Mexico that ignored Blackness could also explain Afromexican's exclusion from participating in hip-hop to express their hardships. Instead of Afromexican hip-hop is a strong identity of blackness among African-descended Mexicans illustrated by *corridos*. This can be explained by the formations of Black identity in Mexican culture that emerge[s] from a dynamic that merges social science scholarship, government interest, and the consciousness and self-definition of individuals with particular understandings of their own cultural, historical, and political experiences.[21] In post-colonial Mexico, *mestizaje* nationalism took root. In census data and political discourse of independent Mexico, national statistics that omitted blacks and mulattoes…came to characterize the new nation.[22] Despite the political disappearance of Black as a racial group, Afromexicans in Mexico cultivated a strong identity. This identity has been tied with Costa Chica de Guerrero where the majority of the Afromexican population lives. Afromexicans use *corridos* to display their pride and carve out a place in Mexican culture. A *corrido* is a musical folk ballad about situations related to different aspects of Mexican history.[23]

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[19] Tickner, 129.
[20] Tickner, 129-130.
[21] Laura A. Lewis, "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans: The Dynamics of Race, Nation, and Identity in a Mexican 'Moreno' Community (Guerrero)," American Ethnologist 27, no. 4 (2000): 898–926, https://www.jstor.org/stable/647400. Pg 900.
[22] Lewis, 901.
[23] Paulette A. Ramsay, "History, Violence and Self-Glorification in Afro-Mexican 'Corridos' from Costa Chica de Guerrero," Bulletin of Latin American Research 23, no. 4 (2004): 446–64, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27733690. Pg 446.

Afromexican musicians blend their intersectional identities to create corridos that are representative of their heritage in Mexican society often in discussion with the history of their ancestors being imported into Mexico during the 1600s slave trade. These unique characteristics of Afromexican corridos manifest in illustrating the oral tradition, the corridos are thought-provoking, anecdotal, and typified by tradition, action, and performance. They are perplexing, depicting various settings and experiences.[24] Navigating marginalization and political indifference to being Black, Afromexicans have created their form of corridos that display their complex history. Afromexicans have made their place in broader Mexican culture and innovated the corrido to exemplify their role in Mexican history.

By examining the similar origins of institutionalized racial inequalities in Colombia, Brazil, and Cuba, the legacies of colonialism prevail in racialized socio-political landscapes. The influences of *mestizaje* ideologies throughout Latin America kept Eurocentric hierarchies in place. The hegemonic structure in these countries creates a system that automatically marginalizes African-descended people. The countries differ in the responses of those populations to the disparities. By embracing the messages of social and political critique in hip-hop music, undervalued populations can be made aware of and develop their racial consciousness. Their consciousness can be used to educate and further spread the idea that change must be enacted. Hip-hop can and has also been used to strengthen national and international networks to transmit the messages and ideologies perpetuated in the music. Artists seeking such change have been known to create organizations promoting activism and combat the vicious cycles instilled generations ago. Music is not just a collection of beats and notes count on a music sheet or rhythm; music can facilitate changes needed to level the playing field.

[24]Ramsay, 448.

In the countries examined in this paper and beyond, music's power is universal, and like-minded people will find a way to rally support and progress towards change.

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Racial Discrimination of Afro-Cubans: Past and Present

By Jose Perez

From the arrival of the first enslaved Africans to Cuba in 1513, people of African descent have experienced copious forms of discrimination. Cuba's history has shown that from the forced arrival of the Africans to today that people have fought against discrimination for a better future. This essay will argue that racial discrimination in Cuba is still evident today and has been an ongoing issue. First, by way of how sugar plantations affect the labor that is imported from Africa. Next, it will provide additional information on acts of discrimination and violence perpetrated against Afro-Cubans, including the massacre ordered by President Jose Miguel in the "Race War," along with the Morua law that targeted black political groups. Following that, Fidel Castro fought to end racial prejudice. Lastly, the essay will provide research on the population of Afro-Cubans in Cuba and how people are still fighting for racial justice.

Spanish Colonialism played a significant role in the outcome of enslaved African people in Cuba. Spanish colonialism in the New World fueled the missionary zeal to convert non-Christians, the Crown's desire for gold and silver beginning with labor exploitation of native people, and the personal motives of the conquistadors and settlers.[1] As the years went by, torture and abuse by the Spanish caused a decrease in the indigenous population. Despite the Spanish not finding more gold in Cuba, they still structured Havana as a main harbor point. As Havana became a success, the first enslaved Africans arrived in Cuba. Havana became one of the most important cities; with the natural Gulf Stream, many travelers found it

[1] Staten Clifford L. 20152003. *The History of Cuba*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.

helpful to extract riches from the Americas. With Havana's success, there came a need for enslaved workers to work around the urban occupations that many travelers used. Many of the first Africans were immediately forced to work in the mines of Cuba as replacements for the rapidly disappearing enslaved indigenous Taino-Arawak laborers.[2] The first ship to arrive in Cuba bore the name *John*, and its captain, Bisset Andrew, held custody of fifteen prisoners.[3] The ages of these enslaved Africans ranged from six to thirty years of age, all landing in the intended disembarkation port in Havana awaiting work instructions. Also, during this time, the enslaved workers would unload ships, work construction, and work as merchants. The persistent mistreatment and discrimination against Africans in slavery began Cuba's first uprising. Many of them fled into the surrounding mountains following in 1533, which sparked subsequent uprisings. There, they would meet with fellow indigenous enslaved people and create the first free African independent town settlements known as Palenques. The Palenques were strategically located in areas of difficult access, becoming a haven for slave refugees and a place for organizing freedom uprisings. With time, Palenques developed their own economic and social structures and acquired political recognition from the colonial powers.[4]

In the nineteenth century, Havana transitioned into a new form of labor that enabled more enslaved people and caused runaways. Cuba transformed into a highly structured plantation society with all the attendant class and caste relationships, as well as cruelty towards

[2] "Afro-Cubans." Minority Rights group, January 28, 2021.https://minorityrights.org/ minorities/afro-cubans/#.

[3] "Slave Voyages." John 100012,1730. https://www.slavevoyages.org/american/database. Accessed December 14,
2023.

[4] Camargo, Blanca, and Alain Lawo-Sukam. "San Basilio de Palenque (Re)Visited: African Heritage, Tourism, and Development in Colombia." *Afro-Hispanic Review* 34, no. 1 (2015): 25–45. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26334887.

Africans being routine practice.[5] This new plantation society enabled the population of enslaved Africans to increase drastically. By 1840, ten thousand enslaved people entered society, which transformed Havana into the largest market for enslaved Africans.[6] Consequently, with an increase in newly enslaved Africans, many fled their positions and became runaway slaves. A letter to the civil governor on November 8, 1860, documents the events of the runaway slaves.[7] To the Superior Civil Governor - Havana, It would appear that several black escapees are about to disembark on the coast of Camarioca.[8] Due to the continued cruelty and abuse, a large number of escaped enslaved people started to leave. As a result of many escapes of enslaved people, Spanish minister Antonio Fernando Castillo asked for money to prevent any future attempts. To the Governor and Political Chief of Havana - "Dear Sir, The Mayoralty of Santiago de Cuba has asked the Council of the Indies for the reimbursement of the sum of 44,000 pesos to be utilized to prevent the escape of the enslaved Black people from their masters."[9] Subsequently, more enslaved Africans arrived in Cuba, 600,000 arrived in Cuba throughout the 19th century; the majority of them came after 1820 when Spain and Great Britain decided to put an end to the slave trade in the Spanish territories. Consequently, Cuba experienced a flourishing of a new industry centered around sugar.

The Cuban sugar industry impacted the colony of Cuba. Through the use of

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[5] Minority Rights Group International, World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Cuba: Afro-Cubans, 2008.

[6] "Afro-Cubans." Minority Rights group, January 28, 2021.https://minorityrights.org/ minorities/afro-cubans/#.

[7] *Cuban Slavery Documents collection, 1820 - 1892. https://www.riamco.org/render?eadid=US-RPB-ms2014.018&view=inventory#aspace_ref4_w7a*

[8] *Cuban Slavery Documents collection, 1820 - 1892.https://www.riamco.org/render?eadid=US-RPB-ms2014.018&view=inventory#aspace_ref4_w7a*

[9] *Cuban Slavery Documents collection, 1820 - 1892.*, 1820.

narrow-gauge railroads and steam-powered mills, the Cuban sugar industry became the most technologically advanced in the world between 1838 and 1880.[10] From Havana to Puerto Príncipe, the terrain dominated in expanding sugar mills that drove out local farmers and destroyed the island's vast hardwood woods. Four-fifths of all exports by 1850 came from the sugar sector, and by 1860, Cuba produced about one-third of the world's sugar.[11] The sugar industry's extraordinary expansion catapulted a new class of affluent plantation owners. The need for finance, technology, and a sugar market made the growers look increasingly to North America.[12] The first known slave strike took place in 1865, where enslaved Africans demanded their freedom and compensation for their labor through a walkout.[13] Although the walkout was put to an end by the Spanish troops, this demonstrated the increasing challenge of using slave labor for Cuba's primary export. Spanish tax increase on sugar and denial of political autonomy to Cubans led to the outbreak of the Ten Years' War 1868 through 1878, the country's first struggle for independence.[14] With the Grito de Yara (Cry of Yara) proclamation, made on October 10, 1868, eastern planter Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, now regarded as the "father of his country"—declared Spanish independence.[15] Also, he set his slaves free to participate in his revolution. Some landowners, as well as a large number of laborers and farmers who wished to eliminate slavery and gain a more significant political

[10] Encyclopedia Britannica. “Cuba | Government, Flag, Capital, Population, & Language,” December 6, 2023. https://www.britannica.com/place/Cuba/Filibustering-and-the-struggle-for-independence.
[11] Staten Clifford L. 20152003. *The History of Cuba*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin
[12] Staten Clifford L. 20152003. *The History of Cuba*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.
[13] Encyclopedia Britannica. “Cuba | Government, Flag, Capital, Population, & Language,” December 6, 2023. https://www.britannica.com/place/Cuba/Filibustering-and-the-struggle-for-independence.
[14] Encyclopedia Britannica. “Cuba | Government, Flag, Capital, Population, & Language,” December 6, 2023. https://www.britannica.com/place/Cuba/Filibustering-and-the-struggle-for-independence.
[15] Encyclopedia Britannica. “Cuba | Government, Flag, Capital, Population, & Language.”

voice, supported Céspedes. The incapacity of the rebel movement to unite behind a common objective turned out to be its gravest issue, leading to the war's failure. Despite the Ten Years' War's failure, the events demonstrated Cubans' ability to band together against Spain.[16] The Ten Years' War started mainly as an unorganized guerilla conflict but eventually involved over 12,000 warriors and produced several influential leaders.

Revolutionary leader Jose Marti advocated for equal rights to all citizens of Cuba and fought against racial discrimination. In 1878–1879, after being exiled he returned to Cuba and joined an organization with other exiled Cuban revolutionaries in New York. On August 6, 1879, a new revolt broke out in Cuba. The revolution prematurely known as La Guerra Chiquita ended a year later with the surrender of the Cuban patriots.[17] José Martí claimed that there is no racism in Cuba because there are no races in his 1891 essay "Nuestra América." His thesis was that the identification of all Cubans as Cubans, rather than by race, was the basis for Cuban unity and identity.[18] As time progressed, José Marti's call for a society in which there would be no Blacks or whites but simply Cubans kindled hopes for a genuinely egalitarian society; Blacks flocked to Marti's banners during the last war of independence, 1895-98, and made up the bulk of the Army of Liberation; After independence, in the 1900s, many of them formed a Colored Independence Party (Partido Independiente de Color) and took other steps to participate in the political process as equals. But tragically, Marti had been killed in the first battle of the war.

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[16] Dyal, Donald H.. Historical Dictionary of the Spanish American War. Greenwood Press: Westport, CT, 1996.

[17] Suchlicki, Jaime. “The Political Ideology of José Martí.” Caribbean Studies 6, no. 1 (1966): 25–36. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25611924.

[18] Suchlicki, Jaime. “The Political Ideology of José Martí.” 25-36.

Alongside Jose Marti, Jose Antonio de la Caridad Maceo Grajales advocated for equal rights and a passion to fight against racism. The "most popular leader of the nationalist movement," Maceo was the child of an Afro-Cuban woman and a mulatto from Venezuela. Of Afro-Cuban ancestry, Maceo was the first of nine children of Venezuelan-born Marcos Maceo and Cuban-born Mariana Grajales. Marcos Maceo owned several farms in the rural town of Majaguabo, in the eastern province of Santiago de Cuba.[19] In 1868, he became involved in the independence movement. He rose to the rank of general during the thirty years of the Cuban War. Leadership actions that eliminated racial barriers and brought all Cubans together in support of freedom were what defined the Cuban War for Freedom. It was evident from his public statements that racism was unacceptable to him. Because "El Pacto de Sanjon" did not outlaw slavery, Maceo refused to sign it, ending the Cuban War for independence and accepting Spanish control.[20] The rebels under the command of Maceo avoided big fights and concentrated on guerilla tactics and sabotage, such as cutting telegraph wires, demolishing sugar mills, and trying to impede commercial activities on the island, because they were ill-prepared to face the Spanish army; Maceo demonstrated his skill as a master guerilla strategist.[21] Maceo persisted in his refusal to take part in any arrangement that maintained the bondage of Afro-Cubans. During the second stage of the Cuban War of Independence, Maceo made his first public declaration inviting the enslaved people to join the uprising. In 1879, he declared what was the true purpose of the conflict. "[African Cubans] would achieve the

[19] Bodenheimer, Rebecca. "Biography of Antonio Maceo, Hero of Cuban Independence." ThoughtCo, July 2, 2019. https://www.thoughtco.com/antonio-maceo-4688532.

[20] Rivera, Alicia. "Antonio Maceo Grajales (1845-1896)," June 9, 2020. https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/grajales-antonio-maceo-1845-1896/.

[21] Biography of Antonio Maceo, Hero of Cuban Independence." ThoughtCo, July 2, 2019. https://www.thoughtco.com/antonio-maceo-4688532.

emancipation of the 300,000 slaves [then] living in Cuba with the help of [the war for independence]," he said. "The movement's flag [was] the flag of all Cubans, and its principles [were] the equality of men."[22] In addition to being an Afro-Cuban abolitionist and civil rights activist, Maceo was an outstanding general. His horseback march, which covered over 1,000 miles in 92 days and resulted in 27 engagements with the Spanish. His most renowned feat, making him dreaded by the Spanish and famous among the Cuban people. At last, on December 7, 1896, Maceo would be hunted down, taken prisoner, and executed.[23]

Discrimination and prejudice on Afro-Cubans continued with The Morua law and the execution of Afro-Cubans in the twentieth century. Urban society experienced division along racial and social lines in the early 1900s, with whites enjoying superior status over black and mulatto people in all spheres of life. A preponderance of white people held some jobs and occupations, while black and mulatto people held other positions. White people still kept Afro-Cubans apart. In the lowest classes, it was not unusual for mulatto or black women to marry white men; nonetheless, white society opposed black males marrying white women. Private schools that generally did not accept students with darker skin tones limited the access that Black and mulatto students had to higher education, even after integration into public education. There was segregation favoring white people. Public baths and ballrooms were frequently split into two.[24] In 1910, Afro-Cuban Conservative Martin Morúa Delgado sponsored a bill in Congress that specifically targeted the PIC and prohibited political parties

[22] Rivera, "Antonio Maceo Grajales (1845-1896) " June 9, 2020.
[23] Research Guides: World of 1898: International Perspectives on the Spanish American War: Antonio Maceo," n.d., https://guides.loc.gov/world-of-1898/antonio-maceo
[24] Helg, Aline. "Afro-Cuban Protest: The Partido Independiente de Color, 1908–1912." Cuban Studies 21 (1991):101–21. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24485704.

based on race.[25] The Ley Morúa, which forbade parties that grew their membership base based on race and specifically targeted the Independents of Color—a group that included white members despite being primarily made up of Afro-Cuban veterans of the liberation wars from Spain—was a precursor to the practice of accusing people of African descent of practicing racism when they are defending their rights. After independence, the marginalization of Liberation Army members, eighty-five percent or more of whom were of African descent, led to policies that were inherently rooted in racial identity. Following the event of the new law, President José Miguel Gómez of Cuba issued the order to slaughter more than two thousand Cubans of African heritage during the infamous "Race War" of 1912, many of whom were only guilty for being black. The majority of these soldiers who died participated in the island's battles for independence from Spain between 1868 and 1898. The majority of these Afro-Cubans were not just former soldiers but also members of the newly established Partido Independiente de Color (Independent Party of Color, PIC).[26] The PIC was founded in 1908 by Generals Pedro Ivonnet and Evaristo Estenoz to oppose the exclusion of Black people from the national office and to present a more liberal political platform for Cuba. People of African heritage in Cuba, particularly those who lamented their inability to secure steady work or gain entry into specific public areas despite their sacrifices to Cuba's liberation, were generally in favor of the PIC. However, both white and black Cubans supported the PIC's persecution since its success threatened to undermine support for established political parties.

Fidel Castro, an advocate for Afro-Cubans, fought and bettered the lives of many

[25] Benson, "Fears of Black Political Activism in Cuba and Beyond, 1912–2017."
[26] Devyn Spence Benson,"Fears of Black Political Activism in Cuba and Beyond, 1912–2017," AAIHS - African American Intellectual History Society, June 14, 2017, https://www.aaihs.org/fears-of-black-political-activism-in-cuba-and-beyond-1912-2017/.

Afro-Cubans. During his time as leader of Cuba 1976-2008, the Afro-Cuban community in Cuba was disproportionately poor and disenfranchised when Castro took office, with little access to social services, healthcare, and educational opportunities. Castro enacted laws desegregating beaches, parks, workplaces, and social clubs because he felt that overt racism like this went against his dedication to social justice and equality.[27] He prohibited discrimination in work education and other legal and overt contexts. Castro's redistributive social and economic measures had a beneficial and measurable impact on the quality of life for Afro-Cubans. Racial differences in life expectancy and matriculation rates have decreased due to the government's outstanding accomplishments in providing healthcare and education to all Cubans. Furthermore, Afro Cubans used educational reforms to assist the improvement in literacy and educational attainment throughout the entire island. By 1981, there were equal numbers of Blacks, Mulattos, and Whites working in professional fields due to the higher percentages of Blacks (11.2%) and Mulattos (9.6%) who had completed high school compared to Whites (9%).[28] Fidel Castro forbade the topic of racial inequality going forward. In official discourse, racism and capitalism have remained intimately associated. Consequently, racism ended when a just society came into being. With the help of Fidel's new reforms that helped many Afro-Cubans, the population of African descent stayed relatively high.

With the Cuban census, many citizens describe themselves as mixed race; however, most

[27] Naomi Glassman, "Revolutionary Racism : Afro-Cubans in an Era of Economic Change – Centre Tricontinental," Centre Tricontinental, January 9, 2014, https://www.cetri.be/Revolutionary-Racism-Afro%E2%80%91Cubans?lang=fr#nh3.
[28] Glassman, "Revolutionary Racism : Afro-Cubans in an Era of Economic Change – Centre Tricontinental."

of the Cuban population is of African descent. Eleven million people live in Cuba,[29] with 70% of them in cities and 30% in rural areas. Ethnic groups: 51% mulatto, 37% white, 11% black, 1% Chinese.[30] The majority of the population is 51% mulatto (mixed race); the citizens of this mixed race still experience discrimination. Some scholars estimate that over 70% of Cubans have African ancestry. In Latin America, ethnic self-identification is the basis for the official census, and being white is a goal shared by everybody. However, in many contexts, such as professional schools or the tourism industry, where light-skinned Cubans occupy the majority of employment that pays in hard currency, these data are used to legitimize racial mixing.[31] With the Afro-Cuban population still present, many continue to face racial discrimination.

Black activist, religious leader, and president of the Asociación Yorubas Libres de Cuba, Donaida Pérez Paseiro, combats racial discrimination in contemporary Cuba. Donaida was taken into custody on July 16, 2021, and found guilty in February 2022 of "public disorder," "contempt," and "attacking" an official.[32] She received an eight-year prison term. Amnesty International has information that suggests Donaida was not entitled to prosecution for these offenses in the first place. In Cuba, the accusations of "contempt" and "public disorder" are

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[29] U.S. Department of State. Accessed December 14,2023. https://2001-2009.state.gov/outofdate/ bgn/c/13238.htm#:~:text=Population%3A%2011%20million%3B%2070%25,Literacy%2D%2D95% 25.

[30] "Cuba." United States Census Bureau. Accessed December14, 2023.https://www.census.gov/popclock/world/cu#world-footer.

[31] “Race & Identity in Cuba.” n.d. © 1997-2013 AfroCubaWeb, S.A. https://afrocubaweb.com/raceident.htm.

[32] Amnesty International, “Nine Afro-Latina and Afro-Caribbean Women and Collectives Who Have Devoted Their Lives to the Struggle for Justice,” July 25, 2023, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/07/afro-latina-caribbean-women-struggle-for-justice/.

widely employed to restrict the freedom of speech and nonviolent assembly. She and her spouse, Loreto Hernández García, were put on trial among fourteen other demonstrators in what seemed to represent an unfair trial. Donaida symbolizes bravery and tenacity in the Cuban resistance movement against persecution. Her family claimed that she worked as a freelance journalist and established the Laurel Express press agency, where she brought attention to the problems and injustices that her community in the city of Placetas faced.[33] Having been a part of both the core opposition alliance and the Orlando Zapata Tamayo rebel front, her involvement is multifaceted. The legacy of Donaida is international and a great source of inspiration. Black activist, religious leader, and president of the Asociación Yorubas Libres de Cuba, The experiences of Donaida Pérez Paseiro with racial prejudice are related to the discrimination that black lesbians in modern Cuba encounter.

In present-day Cuba, black women must navigate various crucial elements that impact the formation of their identities, including skin tone and gender, material security, racial identity, physical attributes, sexual orientation, and marital status. To control their perceived hypersexuality or feminine masculinity, black women face constant pressure to lose weight, wear clothing that covers up their bodies, and straighten and elongate their hair. Black women have experienced various subjectivities in the post-1959 revolutionary era as a result of revolutionary bans on racial discourse and Cuban cultural taboos on the subject.[34] While some women identify as black and struggle with the psychological and material impacts of systemic racism, others support Cuba's philosophy of racial blindness and do not identify as black women. Black women often receive comments in Cuba to straighten their hair to look more

[33] Amnesty International, "Nine Afro-Latina and Afro-Caribbean Women and Collectives Who Have Devoted Their Lives to the Struggle for Justice."

[34] Tanya L. Saunders. "Black Lesbians and Racial Identity in Contemporary Cuba."

attractive or feminine. Stereotypes in Cuba that black women who have well-defined hips and buttocks and unprocessed hair are overweight and indifferent to their beauty. Women who feel they can make themselves "more attractive" with their hair and weight are frequently the target of suggestions from random onlookers, most of whom are other women. Women in Cuba are primarily assessed based on how they look; Afro lesbians made remarks about themselves, “I received on the bus included advice from women to straighten my Afro hair and remarks from Cuban coworkers that I would be With straight hair and a bit less weight, I would look much nicer.” These remarks are frequently attached to the very physical characteristics of black women—hair, skin tone, weight, hips, and buttocks. In Cuba, race and class are often mediated. Wealthy black Cubans who reject Afro-Cuban culture and accept European fashion and culture as a cultural ideal are viewed as "cultured" or on a "higher cultural level," and as such, they are frequently integrated into the white and Mulatto social spaces. They are invited to concerts and house parties, and their presence is honored at events. At public events that are attended mainly by white, mulata, and black Cubans of all backgrounds, black Cubans who are viewed as belonging to a "low cultural level" are frequently viewed with distrust or dislike or are even ignored.[35] The economic crisis during the Special Period led to employment losses and a rise in the number of women providing care. With racial problems still evident in Cuba, Afro-Cuban professor Amelia Dache calls for a new government in Cuba.

Afro- Cubans have used academia as a platform to protest, for example, Amelia Dache, an Afro- Cuban professor at the University of Pennsylvania, speaks about the ongoing issues of contemporary Cuba. In an interview in 2019 she reveals that, she began a study in Cuba,

[35] Tanya L. Saunders. “Black Lesbians and Racial Identity in Contemporary Cuba.”

where she interviewed Cubans in my area about their political and racial ideas and discovered that their primary revolved around fear. Fear and a great deal of secrecy about what they can say are prevalent. She reveals that she found being a member of the Communist regime is a requirement for obtaining a higher education. Dache explains that people will experience repression from the government if they produce a dissertation or thesis criticizing the Communist rule. It won't be published. There isn't any freedom in academia. Cuban universities lack disciplinary peer review and academic independence, which results in a society where people's knowledge bases are restricted, and they are unable to interact with the outside world due to the Communist government. She goes on to explain about the recent uprisings in Cuba. Young Afro-Cuban people have taken the lead. They reside in some of Cuba's most marginalized, oppressed, and repressive areas. Thus, the starting point of this resistance originated in one of Havana's southern barrios, which are highly marginalized in terms of racial and economic status. She explains that in Cuba, there are still neighborhoods and barrios that are worse in terms of housing and the demographics of the people who live there, including predominantly Black communities that are underprivileged and impoverished concerning the overall level of poverty in the country. However, there is an authoritarian state, and everyone is supposed to be the same throughout the economic system. Thus, there is still a hierarchy of poverty and those most impacted by this type of administration. Dache ends her interview by explaining that Black history can not be studied in Cuba. As it is not a part of the revolution, the Cuban curriculum is unable to participate in these discussions.[36] Engaging with

[36] Jason Johnson, “From Ferguson to Havana, Black Youth Lead the Resistance,” Slate Magazine, July 17, 2021, https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2021/07/afro-cuban-youth-resistance-protests-racism-history.html.

and discussing Black history in Cuba is counterrevolutionary. Black Cubans are ignorant of their past. The Black resistance is unknown to them. They are unaware of how Black and Afro-Cuban Cubans contributed to transforming the island nation's still-developing society between 1901 and 1959.

In conclusion, this paper explained the historical background to comprehend how Africans arrived in Cuba, primarily with the involvement of Spanish colonialism. Next, it went into detail about the long fight against racial discrimination against Afro-Cubans with information on individuals classified as revolutionaries who did not keep quiet about discrimination and fought for every person to have fundamental human rights: the revolutionaries Jose Marti and Jose Antonio de la Caridad Maceo Grajales. Then, it provided information on acts going against Afro-Cubans with discrimination and murder, including the massacre ordered by President Jose Miguel in the “Race War,” along with the Morua law that targeted black political groups. The paper then explained how Fidel Castro fought to end racial prejudice. Castro enacted laws desegregating beaches, parks, workplaces, and social clubs because he felt that overt racism like this went against his dedication to social justice and equality. He prohibited discrimination in work education and other legal and overt contexts. Castro's redistributive social and economic measures had a beneficial and measurable impact on the quality of life for Afro-Cubans. Lastly, the essay provided research on the population of Cuba, with the citizens primarily considering themselves mulatto and also how people are still facing discrimination with the experiences told by black lesbians and how Amelia Dache, professor at the University of Pennsylvania, speaks about all of the ongoing issues of contemporary Cuba.

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Book Review: Danielle Terrazas Williams, *The Capital of Free Women: Race, Legitimacy, and Liberty in Colonial Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022).

By Billy Mejia

Colonial Mexico (or New Spain as it was called after the Spanish Conquest) was an important time period which featured an expansion of colonialism in the Americas and the forced arrival of tens of thousands of enslaved Africans to what would become present-day Mexico. Within this history, many of the stories of free African descended women are not widely known due to the lack of interest from scholars. Danielle Terrazas Williams (Associate Professor of History at the University of Leeds) changes the way in which the history of African descended women in colonial Mexico is told in *The Capital of Free Women: Race, Legitimacy, and Liberty in Colonial Mexico.* Williams goes into detail about the lives of these women in colonial Mexico and the importance of "socioreligious" status within the legal, economic, and social hierarchies of Spanish rule. This review will be broken down into five different sections looking at the important aspects of Williams's work as a whole as well as the broader implications that this work has towards the lives of these women in colonial Mexico.

Williams begins by addressing the story of Soledad and how her tale has been popularized in Mexican society over time. The story goes that Soledad was imprisoned due to a powerful alcalde accusing her of witchcraft because of her rejection of his advances towards her. In the prison cell, Soledad finds a piece of charcoal and begins to draw with it. Surprisingly, once the guards go to check on Soledad later in the day, all they find is a mural of Soledad sailing away with Soledad nowhere to be found. However, Williams compares the story of Soledad to the lives of real African descended women in Mexico and questions why the stories of these women have not made as much of an impact as Soledad. Williams argues

that the lives of Black women are crucial in understanding colonial Mexico, despite their lack of attention in the extant historiography. The impact which these women had on colonial Mexico cannot be understated and the influence which they had on the slave trade and society as a whole. Williams' primary geographic area of research concentrates on Veracruz, which was a major slaving port during the era of the transatlantic slave trade, the nearby municipality of Xalapa, and the colonial capital of Mexico City. The majority of the book looks into the importance which Xalapa had on travelers from Veracruz to Mexico City, usually stopping in Xalapa as a midway point between the two as well as African descended women who lived in Xalapa. Within Xalapa, African descended women carried out important economic roles as slave owners, merchants, and landowners. By focusing on these and other occupations held by African descended women, Williams demonstrates the multifaceted ways these women strove for "social legitimacy" and exercised profound knowledge of New Spain's legal and economic customs.

Although only existing in small quantities, Williams speaks about the sources and the importance that they carry on retelling the stories of the African descended women. These sources are mainly located in the archival collections held in present-day Xalapa and Veracruz. These archival sources, consisting mainly of Notary documents, focus on the different aspects of the African descended women's lives from economic connections (loans and land ownership) to everyday life (social importance and personal accounts). Even though archival sources are relatively scarce, Williams exhibits deft research skills by referencing a diverse range of historical documentation and ultimately creating vivid partial biographies of African descended women from the colonial period. One impactful example of this can be seen with the story of Catalina De Morales and her two daughters. Williams tells the story of Catalina by

mentioning the strength which Catalina had to fight for her daughter's freedom to the alcalde mayor. Catalina's licenciado, Juan de Bera Betancourt had issued a clause in his will which stated that both of Catalinas daughters were to be sent as enslaved servants in a convent of nuns in Puebla de los Ángeles after his death. However, the will also stated that if the nuns did not want to receive them, then both daughters would be granted freedom. As it turns out, the nuns did not want the daughters but this did not mean that they were free, as Catalina still needed to petition for their freedom with different documentation to secure their liberty. This story is very impactful and serves to embody some of the agency and important duties which women of African descent carried out during the colonial period.

Williams uses a mix of historical storytelling with real world examples from African descended women to create a better understanding of the argument for the reader. This can be broken down into the colonial history of Mexico and the microhistory of different stories of everyday people, which were found in the archival sources. The colonial history methodology can be seen all throughout *The Capital of Free Women: Race, Legitimacy, and Liberty in Colonial Mexico* with the mentioning of certain places and events like the slave trade and Xalapa for example. Colonial history is integral to this book as it provides the reader with essential information needed to understand where the argument for the book stems from. At the same time, it is important to use this colonial history to connect the history of the Spanish to the newfound history of the African descended women. This ties into the microhistory of these women as many of the archival sources used in this book are about everyday women living in colonial Mexico. The microhistory allows for Williams to present examples to support her argument within the context of colonial Mexico and provide more of an understanding towards a place in history which is not usually focused on.

Throughout the book, Williams provides strong and thought-provoking case studies to support and further advance her central argument. Williams' retelling of the story of Polonia de Ribas and her two brothers, Juan and Geronimo de Irala, for instance, is one of her most noteworthy case studies. In the story, it is mentioned how Polonia traded two of her slaves for two men from one of Xalapa's most important businessmen at the time. It is later stated however that the two men were Polonia's brother, but even after the trade, Polonia kept her brothers as slaves for 25 years. It is stories like these in the book which show the reader how influential these women were to society in colonial Mexico and how important social legitimacy was to these women. At the same time, having these stories in the book gives context to the time period and shows the amount of power which women had in colonial Mexico. Given that the Black population in present-day Mexico has historically been marginalized, Williams' partial biographies of African descended women in the colonial period are particularly powerful stories, especially for undergraduate students and the general public.

Overall, Williams effectively proves her points about the importance of social legitimacy for African descended women in colonial Mexico and the impact which they had on society in places like Xalapa. Although the amount of archival sources are scarce, Williams does well in using the sources to their best potential in support of her argument. The continuous transition between historical analysis and specific examples from the sources allows for Williams to create an interesting and insightful look into the lives of African descended women in colonial Mexico. The combination of different people into one group, that being of African descended people, does leave room for improvement as it can be seen within the book that different groups of people had different experiences than others.

Categorizing everyone into one group does not provide the full picture of the lives of these women and does not take into account how different titles could have changed these women's lives drastically. Williams does prove different examples of women's stories however, which still gives the reader an insight into how different these women's lives were but could be built upon if their background was specified. Williams provides a look into a part of history which is mainly glanced over at times and gives the reader an opportunity to learn more about African descended women in colonial Mexico and the way in which their lives were influenced by the importance of their social status.

Journal Article Review: Smith, Sabrina. "African-Descended Women: Power and Social Status in Colonial Oaxaca, 1660–1680." *The Americas* 80, no. 4 (2023): 569–98. https://doi.org/10.1017/tam.2023.56.

By Carlos Morales

In "African-Descended Women: Power and Social Status in Colonial Oaxaca, 1660-1680*"* Dr. Sabrina Smith discusses the case of Catalina de los Reyes, a woman of African descent who contested the illegal and unjustified seizure of her home in colonial Oaxaca. In this article, which was published in *The Americas*, Smith pieces together and analyzes the life and significance of Reyes. Despite social constructs that casts African-descent people as inferior, Catalina evidently owned a house of great economic and social value, which provoked the colonial powers of Oaxaca to make a claim for her household. While Reyes may be the focus of Smith's article, she importantly discusses how black women in general retained and managed their properties in the Spanish colonial world. As evidence, Smith uses eyewitness accounts from the trials, showing the influence and social status of Reyes but also displaying he great efforts committed by capital officials to delegitimize her claim to her home.

Before focusing on the case of Reyes, Smith outlines the setting of the Valley of Oaxaca and the broader demographics of the region referencing historian John Chance's analysis of 1,720 marriages between free Black and '*mulato*' people. To introduce this statistic, she establishes the presence of a Black community in colonial Oaxaca, while not overly large, but still significant enough to affect the social climate. As a relatively smaller portion of a larger colonial society, African and African descended people were rarely able to penetrate the landowning class which was predominately held by men who owned heavily mortgaged estates. Smith argues was even more reason that these men saw Catalina as a threat. She makes an

important clarification for the reader, noting that Catalina did not purchase the household, but Iberian inheritance laws allowed her to acquire it upon the passing of her father. This leads to one of the most important parts of Smith's article: the significance of Catalina's property and what it signified to the Bishopric of Oaxaca.

Despite African descendants in Oaxaca not having much social status or power, Catalina owned one of the most sought after and highly valued properties in Antequera, as it was next door to the episcopal palace. While this allowed some economic freedoms and even opportunities to raise funds for her family, Smith argues that it also made her vulnerable to attacks on her character and actions, which was done by the attorney of Bishopric of Oaxaca. Catalina was accused of allowing disreputable people and licentious activities in her home, while her property was also seen as a valuable expansion tool for the palace. However, Smith argues that Spanish elites were less likely interested in an expansion of the episcopal palace, but instead more focused on Catalina's visibility and potential influence within the cathedral domain. This is one of the most powerful aspects of Smith's article. The Spanish elites possessed much of the property wealth and thus relegated free Black men and women to lower positions in colonial society, such as housekeepers, domestic servants, and shopkeepers. This is shown through Smith's presentation of testimonies against Catalina, attempting to portray her as an unfit resident and property owner living in proximity to the city's cathedral. These testimonies are useful tools in displaying the true goals of Spanish elites, which was to purge Catalina due to her race rather than the architectural goals they claimed. But Smith counters the Church's narrative by including testimony from Catalina's peers and members of her social circle, who she herself called upon to testify in her defense.

In having witnesses in her defense, Catalina is shown to have a profound understanding of the social scheme the Spanish elite had created, as she chose four male witnesses and three of them were Spaniards. One of her witnesses Juan Diaz de Vargas confirmed that Catalina lived peacefully and she didn't cause any scandals in the city. Diego Henriquez also stated that she lived a relatively simple life and claimed the Spanish elite used their laws to confiscate property from Catalina. Henriquez owned a haberdashery, supplying clothing and accessories to men, making him a reputable business operator. Smith's inclusion of these witnesses and their statements is important to understanding the simple yet disruptive placement of Catalina. The eyewitnesses argued Catalina had a peaceful life, never mentioning any type of protest or call for change against the Spanish colonial system. But, as Smith shows, the mere presence of Catalina's house next to the city's cathedral was enough of a threat to the strict social hierarchy established by Spanish elite. While Catalina's case is certainly an extraordinary circumstance, Smith concludes by arguing this instance is an example of African-descended people using and creating avenues to defend, contest and even improve their social standing within the existing social hierarchy.