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THE BLACK DIASPORA IN COSTA RICA: UPWARD MOBILITY AND ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION

The history of the negro as a labourer is ancient and simple – perhaps more so than that of any other race or people... With few notable exceptions, the negro labourer has little initiative – he is an imitator... experience has proved over and over again that only with rare exceptions has the negro been able to pursue theoretical studies with any degree of success. [Letter from the manager of United Fruit Company operations in Central America to the British Consul, June 11, 1919.]

...For forty long years we Costa Ricans were displaced from the best jobs of the Atlantic Zone by Negroes. They were warehouse supervisors, chiefs of commissaries, clerks and formans [sic]. ...They think that they are superior to us... They look down upon our language... [Petition by Hispanic banana workers to the Costa Rican National Assembly, 1941.]

Blacks of West Indian descent constitute Costa Rica's largest ethnic minority; they reside, for the most part on the Atlantic coast in Limón province where they comprise less than 25 percent of the total population. In contrast to the Black diaspora in most other parts of the world, Costa Rican Blacks have risen economically relative to the dominant local population. They arrived in the late nineteenth century as landless laborers fleeing poverty and economic crisis on their natal islands in the West Indies. Almost all of them were employed by the United Fruit Company in railroad construction and banana cultivation. By the 1930s most had obtained small plots of land and/or had risen in the banana company's labor hierarchy, replaced by Hispanic and Amerindian immigrants. Today Blacks are better off economically than the bulk of the Hispanic and Amerindian population of Limón province; nevertheless ethnic discrimination against them persists. An analysis of the history of their upward mobility can provide an insight into how

political values and ideology are formed in the context of changing class relations. It also affords a privileged perspective on the crucial importance of ethnic discrimination in shaping a people's political and economic development.¹

THE ARRIVAL OF THE WEST INDIANS

Although there was a small population of African slaves in Costa Rica during the colonial period, these early Blacks intermixed with the European and Amerindian inhabitants and no longer constitute an identifiable ethnic group. Black culture in Costa Rica today, therefore, is the product of the massive immigration of West Indians laborers in the second half of the nineteenth century through the 1930s.² The economic depression of the Antilles combined with the constant booms and busts of the local subsidiaries of the North American corporations active in the region, spread the Black diaspora throughout the Caribbean and coastal Central America as West Indian migrant workers were obliged repeatedly to uproot themselves from company to company and country to country in search of stable employment (cf. Davis 1980; McCullough 1977; Newton 1984; Palmer 1977). Consequently, Blacks in Costa Rica form part of a larger cultural formation spanning the entire Central American Caribbean which arose out of the economic enclaves established by North American transnational corporations beginning in the 1860s. Often the same individual who planted bananas or harvested cacao in Limon had previously shovelled dirt on the Panama Canal, or cut sugar cane in Cuba, and ultimately emigrated to New York city to work as an orderly in a hospital.

The first group of West Indian immigrant workers reached Costa Rica in 1872 (Duncan and Melendez 1981: 70–73). They were contracted by the railroad financier, Minor C. Keith, who was later to become one of the founders of the United Fruit Company. Keith had previously unsuccessfully imported dozens of different population groups to work on the construction of the Costa Rican trans-Atlantic railroad.³ Of all the immigrant peoples, however, only the West Indian Blacks came to tolerate the rigid labor discipline and to suffer exposure to the yellow fever, malaria and poisonous snakes which abounded in the swampy lowlands of Limón. It is reported that 4,000 Jamaicans died in the construction of the first 25 miles of the Costa Rican railroad.⁴

Although Keith imported 10,000 Jamaicans between 1881 and 1891 most of the subsequent waves of West Indian immigrants arrived on

their own without sponsorship, fleeing unemployment and poverty (Rodriguez and Borge 1976: 229).⁵ By 1927 there were 19,136 Jamaicans in Costa Rica, almost all in Limón province (Olien 1967: 126).

WEST INDIAN RESISTANCE

Most historians report that the immigrant West Indian laborers in Costa Rica at the turn of the century were fiercely loyal to their employer – Minor Keith and the United Fruit Company – and that Blacks refrained from organizing unions or provoking labor disturbances (cf. Casey 1979: 119, 125; Fallas Monge 1983: 218; Duncan & Melendez 1981: 77–78, 104).⁶

Even the publications of the Costa Rican communist party and the militant tendency within the labor union movement fail to note the participation of West Indian immigrants in the early years of the labor movement. Blacks in Costa Rica have a reputation among the general population of having always avoided labor confrontations historically. In fact, Black passivity has emerged as a racist stereotype among Hispanics in Limón,

Blacks are conformist; they'll work for peanuts [*trabajan por cualquier cochinada*]. They've always been docile [*han sido mancos todo la vida*]. They're pussies by nature... They bend with the breeze [*Son pendejos; bailen el son que le tocan*].

Nevertheless, a closer scrutiny of the available primary sources, as well as interviews with elderly West Indian laborers from the period, refute this myth that Black laborers in Costa Rica were passive. Newspaper reports and historical archives from the turn of the century⁷ abound with reference to violent strikes, labor disturbances, and attempts at union organizing (see Bourgois 1985a: 116–123; De la Cruz 1979). In fact reports of violent confrontations between Black workers and management date as far back as 1879 (Fallas Monge 1983: 218 citing *Gaceta Oficial*, March 1879).

Resistance by West Indian immigrants to economic exploitation and ethnic discrimination on the United Fruit Company banana plantations climaxed in the 1910s and 1920s. Their strikes were almost invariably repressed violently and usually resulted in serious casualties. Much of this resistance was channelled through Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association [hereafter UNIA], a world wide organization which stressed the dignity of Blacks throughout the

diaspora. Significantly, the UNIA was exceptionally strong in Costa Rica on the banana plantations. In fact, Limón is one of the few places in the world today where the UNIA formally continues to exist. The banana workers used the UNIA to organize against the racist labor hierarchy of the United Fruit Company. The organization's message was invoked in several major strikes (Kepner 1936: 180.)⁸

UPWARD MOBILITY

The availability of unoccupied land surrounding the banana plantations provided the West Indian immigrants with an alternative to plantation wage work. During the 1910s and the 1920s increasing numbers left day labour employment and established themselves as small banana and cacao farmers. This further incited those who remained on the United Fruit Company plantations to demand higher wages and better working conditions. In short, through land acquisition, Black immigrants had begun a process of upward class mobility; they were no longer prepared to submit to the same levels of exploitation.⁹

Emigration out of Costa Rica in the long run also played a key role in accentuating the upwardly mobile class composition of Blacks in Limón. Historically during periods of economic crisis the poorest, working class cohort of the West Indian labor force was forced to leave the region in search of employment elsewhere. From 1927 to 1950, according to national census tabulations, the Black population fell from 18,003 to 13,749 (Casey 1979: 239). A series of racist immigration and employment laws systematically propelled the working class sectors of the Black population out of the country during periods of economic crisis and prevented their re-entry during economic booms (Koch 1975: 378, 385). For example, in 1934 a law was passed forbidding the employment of Blacks outside of the Atlantic lowlands. With the dramatic reduction in employment offered by the United Fruit Company in Limón, thousands of Blacks who depended upon wage work for their survival were forced to leave the country; they were not allowed to migrate to the Pacific coast of the country where new farms were being opened up and where experienced banana workers were in high demand. The Blacks who remained behind on the Atlantic coast of Costa Rica were forced to convert themselves into full-time farmers. At first they squatted on uncultivated lands and eked out a subsistence survival in abject poverty. During subsequent economic booms, however, they

were able to convert their subsistence plots into cash earning enterprises (cacao or banana farms). At the same time, during these booms working class Blacks seeking employment were prevented from entering the country by the Costa Rican immigration authorities.

In this manner, the bulk of the Black population remaining in Costa Rica left plantation employment to become small farmers. Ironically, therefore, the laws restricting Blacks to the Atlantic Coast of Costa Rica ultimately provided those who withstood the economic crises of the 1930s and early 1940s with a first choice selection of the most fertile lands closest to the transport infrastructure. With the rise in cacao prices on the world market in the mid-1950s the formerly struggling small Black farmer/squatters became comfortable landowners. By the 1960s, they constituted what anthropologist Charles Koch (1975: 378, 385) described as a "...rump of well-to-do peasants and old people concentrated in the best cacao districts." An increasingly large population of landless Hispanic migrants – some of whom had originally migrated out of the Atlantic region in 1934 to work on the new farms being planted on the Pacific coast – provided the Black farmers with a plentiful supply of inexpensive agricultural day labor. An ethnic occupational hierarchy emerged contrasting markedly with the pattern prevalent in the rest of the world: "... the Atlantic Zone [is] one of the few places in the world where bourgeois Blacks exploit an underprivileged white minority (Koch 1975: 378)."

Anthropologists who conducted fieldwork in Limón from the 1950s through the 1980s (cf. Bryce-Laporte 1962; Koch 1975; Mennerick 1964; Moock 1972; Murillo & Hernandez 1981; Olien 1967, 1977; Purcell 1982), all report that Blacks shunned agricultural wage labor and tended to own the superior, flat alluvial lands devoted to cacao:

The category of Black peon is almost an empty one... It is only in extremely rare cases that one finds a Black rural dweller who does not have access to some land, whether his own bought land or land inherited from a close kin. Most unskilled agricultural jobs are filled by Hispanics (Purcell 1982: 145).

In fact, one fieldworker in a small village in Limón in 1968 reported: "The only three negroes who did work as peons were considered mentally defective and were treated as isolates by the entire community (Moock 1972: 9)."

Nevertheless, although for the most part comfortable economically, Blacks have not emerged as the upper crust of the elite in Limón. Even at the height of their involvement in the cacao industry in the 1960s,

Black farms were not large-scale, efficiently administered agro-industrial complexes oriented towards accumulating capital. The largest landholdings and the more profitable rural enterprises have always been owned by absentee landlords, often North Americans or San Jose based Hispanics. Black farmers, therefore, represent a middle level rural elite operating small or medium-sized farms.

Ironically, upward class mobility has contributed ultimately to the demise of Black farms as the new generation of educated Blacks (the children of the successful cacao farmers of the 1960s) have for the most part shunned the agricultural way of life.¹⁰ Cacao farming is not considered a satisfactory lifestyle to college and high school graduates, no matter how successful it may appear by local rural standards. Since the mid-1970s, therefore, young Blacks have been leaving their parents' farms and going to Port Limón, San José, Panama City, or even New York City in search of better opportunities for economic advancement and more exciting urban lifestyles. Indeed the reason one sees so few Blacks performing heavy agricultural labor in Limón today is that most Blacks in their prime age for heavy manual labor have emigrated from the countryside.

Significantly, the elderly cacao farmers themselves encourage their children to leave the agricultural sector. Black parents, even those of the humblest class backgrounds, infuse their children with upwardly mobile aspirations. The emphasis is not only on getting out of wage work, but also out of agriculture *per se* and into the big cities (cf. Purcell 1982: 122; Moock 1972: 26). Farming is associated with low status. "It is considered ungentelemanly to chop bush" even on one's own farm. Younger Blacks who still reside in the countryside usually hire Hispanics to work in their cacao groves while they attend to more profitable commercial alternatives such as lobster fishing, administering restaurants, selling marihuana to tourists, working for the government, or living off remittances from kin in the United States.

The flight of young Blacks from the rural sector has led to the decay of Black-owned cacao orchards; consequently by the early 1980s, Black-owned cacao farms on the average were older, smaller, received fewer inputs, and were more diversified than Hispanic-owned holdings (Murillo and Hernandez 1981: 151). Black farmers tended to be elderly and physically on the decline. Over the past decade the pattern has been for Black rural dwellers to sell their holdings to Hispanic immigrants and either to emigrate or to "die out" (Duncan & Melendez 1981: 244-245). This process has been accelerated by a devastating leaf fungus known as moniliasis which has been destroying approximately

two-thirds of the harvest since late 1978 (Murillo & Hernandez 1981: 75). In fact, some of the Black cacao farmers who have been unable to emigrate have actually been forced back into agricultural wage work. Nevertheless Blacks in rural Limón continue to enjoy an above average economic status, superior to that of most Hispanics.

In Puerto Limón, the capital of Limón Province there are high levels of unemployment (23 percent in 1981) and there is a significant sector of working class and unemployed Blacks. Nevertheless, urban Blacks continue to occupy a slightly higher socio-economic niche than the average Hispanic; they shun the low prestige jobs. According to a 1980 survey 30.5 percent of Black workers had white collar jobs in Port Limón compared to 21.1 percent of Hispanics (Vargas & Requeyra 1983: 43, 113). For example, the street sweepers, the construction workers, and the shoe shine men are almost invariably Hispanics rather than Blacks. Blacks have been able to manipulate to their advantage a local patron-client brokerage system which affords them access to preferential employment, especially in the public sector. When one enters a government office in Limón, the orderly sweeping the floor and emptying the garbage will almost always be a dark complexioned Hispanic; the xerox clerk (an especially 'soft' task) will usually be a young Black; while the secretarial and middle-level desk positions will be occupied by both Blacks and Hispanics; and the top level administrator will, of course, almost invariably be a light skinned Hispanic from San Jose.

Those Blacks who have remained on the banana plantations – especially on the farms in southern Limón spanning the border with Panama – represent a miniature labor aristocracy.¹¹ They generally work in semi-skilled jobs, as low level supervisors, or in the 'softer' unskilled tasks. On the United Fruit Company farms, Hispanics have nicknamed Blacks "*la rosca*" [the groove of the screw] because they are so "tight with management." This is clearly visible in the overrepresentation of Blacks as mechanics, clerks, watchmen, paymasters. They are most heavily concentrated in the departments which do not require heavy manual labor such as Electricity, Transport, Engineering, or Materials and Supplies.

The largest single concentration of Black menial laborers in the plantation production hierarchy is on the docks. Significantly, however, dockworkers are better paid than farmworkers and lead more cosmopolitan lifestyles as they are located in the urban centers in the ports. Furthermore, a close examination of the distribution of jobs among dockworkers reveals that, once again, the "softer" jobs are

dominated by Blacks, especially elderly Blacks. This is true, for example of the task of "curving" [*curvear*] which involves standing at a curve point along the loading machine to make sure that no boxes of bananas fall as they are advanced on the rollers. Similarly the worker who sits next to the power switch in order to shut off the electricity in case of an emergency, is usually Black.

Access to alternative sources of income is at the root of Black underrepresentation in the menial tasks in the banana industry today. Blacks do not shun agricultural wage work any more than do those Hispanics or Amerindians who were also born in the plantation vicinity and who also own land and/or have access to better jobs through seniority and contacts. The bulk of the banana worker labor force is composed of immigrants from other provinces or countries (see Figure 3). Native born Limonenses avoid plantation wage work; they tend to have access to land. The only difference between Blacks and Limón-born Hispanics or Amerindians is that Blacks express their distaste for plantation wage work more vocally. They justify their rejection of agricultural day labor in specifically ethnic terms: "I'm nobody's slave anymore. Let the Spaniards do that class of work. It's their turn now." Blacks also explain that they avoid unskilled plantation work because of the racism they are subjected to by Hispanic foremen.

IDEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF UPWARD MOBILITY

Land acquisition, upward mobility and the emigration of most of the poorer, wage earning Blacks (in the 1930s and early 1940s) have contributed to the development of a conservative political ideology among Blacks. There is an emphasis on "proper behaviour" and a "respect for authority" in Black culture. The pro-North American, pro-management orientation of second and third generation West Indian immigrants contrasts dramatically with the labor militancy of their grandparents and great grandparents. Indeed, a political generation gap is clearly visible in Limon today. While elderly Black immigrants who arrived at the turn of the century enjoy reminiscing about strikes and labor union struggles, younger Blacks insist that "First time [in the old days] our people never know nothing about no *sindicatos* [unions], no no no." They prefer to forget that their ancestors were severely exploited landless laborers who had to fight for their rights.

Even the poorest Black families aspire to middle class respectability. The small minority of Blacks who are still objectively at the lower end

of the local occupational hierarchy, (performing machete work in the fields) identify with the conservative political attitudes and values of the more privileged members of their ethnic group – the cacao farmers and skilled workers. Participation in unions and antagonism towards management, are viewed as alien to Black ethnic identity. Strikes and – worse yet – “communist ideas” are abhorred as satanic values introduced by immigrant “Spaniard” day laborers of a “lower cultural level”: “Strikes come when two people can’t reason and Spaniards can’t reason.”

This conservative political/ideological orientation has been further encouraged by the racism of Costa Rican society. Until 1949, even the second and third generation West Indian descendants were denied Costa Rican citizenship. During the 1930s, the threat of deportation made Costa Rican-born Blacks increasingly reluctant during the Great Depression to participate in the labor movement. Their ambiguous nationality status became a Damocles sword that the United Fruit Company invoked during labor disturbances.¹² This vulnerability, combined with age-old ethnic antagonisms prevented Black workers from joining the Hispanic dominated national labor union organizations. In fact, over the years, the United Fruit company systematized an ethnically based “divide and conquer” strategy pitting Blacks against Hispanics against Amerindians (see Bourgois 1985b).¹³ Frequently the strikes and union organizing drives of the original West Indian immigrants at the turn of the century were broken by the importation of Hispanic laborers.

The discrimination of the local population and the national authorities reduced the ability of Black workers to maintain antagonistic attitudes towards their employers. Costa Rican hostility towards Blacks increased dramatically, for example, during periods of economic crisis such as the Great Depression and World War II. On numerous occasions Blacks were forced to appeal to the United Fruit Company for protection from racist national authorities. This constant dependence on the “goodwill” of their North American employers and supervisors spawned a transformation in Black attitudes towards management. This was exacerbated by the legal prohibition against employing Blacks outside of the Atlantic zone in the 1930s and 1940s which augmented their dependence on the North American plantation enclave. Even those who successfully established themselves as small farmers remained largely dependent upon the United Fruit Company for their economic well-being since the Company purchased their produce. They generally did not even have legal title to their land; it was usually formally owned by the banana company.

The upward mobility of the Black population within the United Fruit Company dominated economy, consequently, has always been relatively precarious. Blacks had to remain on good terms with the transnational in order to stay in business. Those who remained directly in the employ of the Company in the "soft" privileged positions lived with the constant fear that they might be demoted at any moment should their loyalty to management be suspect. In order to maintain their position within the hierarchy of the plantation, therefore, Blacks had to emphasize their "reliability and obedience." They heightened the contrast in "culture" between them and the unruly, politically volatile "communistic" Hispanic immigrants. Today, the reputation of Blacks for apolitical passivity is their best recommendation for continued access to preferential employment.

Another important ideological influence on Blacks in Limón has been the emigration of so many of their relatives to the United States. Most Costa Rican Blacks regularly receive letters and/or visits from kin now living in New York, California, or Miami. The dramatic wage differentials between Central America and the United States make life in the North appear almost utopian from a dollars and cents perspective. Photographs and descriptions of North American technology and of large urban centers, accentuate the impression of United States omnipotence. The United States is looked upon as the land of golden opportunity, as a potential savior, a *deus ex machina*. It is not uncommon to hear middle-aged Blacks wish that "the marines would invade Costa Rica."

RACISM

There are two contradictory matrices of ethnic discrimination in Limón. On the one hand Blacks consider themselves more cultured than Hispanics. On the other hand Hispanics are convinced of their racial superiority over Blacks. Black landowners employing Hispanic migrant laborers adhere to the same racist constructs typical of landowners anywhere in the world who employ landless day laborers of a different ethnic group. Blacks often claim that "Whites"¹⁴ are treacherous, lazy, shiftless drunkards with "nomadic tendencies". Whites are even reputed to "smell bad" and have "cooties" [*piojos*] in their hair. It is not unusual to hear Black farmers explain in patronizing tones how they have to be careful never to pay their White workers on Saturday evening lest they spend all their money on liquor before Sunday morning.

Even Blacks who work side by side with Hispanics as day laborers, "...in very explicit terms, regarded themselves as superior to Hispanics..." (Purcell 1982: 76). Black day laborers on banana plantations refer to their fellow Hispanic workers as "less civilized." They criticize them for being loud, violent, alcoholic, and abusive to their women. In a somewhat more poetic vein, anthropologist Trevor Purcell (1982: 79), quotes the racist description provided by a Black woman of her impression of Hispanic immigrant workers:

Dey looks to me laik dey were barbarians. laik dey wud kil an' iit piiple, datz di wey dey looks. Deze piiple wur illiterate an ignorant an wii wuz ahlweys afreid av dem. If yu goin along de striit an yu si dem yu waak on di odder sa'id. Dey always kiari dier kutlas wid dem.

Nevertheless, the hegemony of white supremacist thought is so powerful that the superior economic position of Blacks in the local class hierarchy has not overshadowed the racism lighter skinned peoples direct against them.¹⁵ Even impoverished landless Hispanics who have worked all their lives for Black landlords, continue to maintain the conviction that Blacks are inferior racially. For example, the flip side to the assertion by Blacks that Hispanics are "dangerous, violent, alcoholic savages" is that Blacks are "cowards who run at the sight of blood." The fact that Blacks do not perform menial agricultural wage labour, is cited by Hispanics (and Amerindians) as proof that they are "lazy, ambitionless" and "afraid to sweat." Hence the Costa Rican adage, "Where there is work there are no Blacks."

Ironically, one of the effects of the persistence of ethnic discrimination against Blacks despite their upward class mobility, is the preservation of Black culture. The obvious phenotypical differentiation of the West Indian immigrants from the rest of the Costa Rican population has prevented the second and third generations of Blacks from blending into Costa Rican society as they have risen in the local class structure. Under similar circumstances of dramatic upward class mobility, other immigrant ethnic groups would have assimilated. Although professional Blacks in Costa Rica tend to marry Hispanics and often forbid their children to speak Creole English, the racism of the host society limits the rapidity of their acculturation. Were it not for this phenotypically-based discrimination, Blacks would probably no longer exist as a distinct ethnic group in Costa Rica.

NOTES

1. The information for this article was collected during one and one half years of fieldwork on the Atlantic Coast of Costa Rica and north western Panama from 1982–1983. The fieldwork was made possible by a Dissertation Research Grant from the Inter-American Foundation and by preliminary fieldwork funding from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research.
2. A veritable depopulation of able bodied laborers occurred in the West Indies at the turn of the century. For example, from 1900 to 1910, 40 percent of all adult males left Barbados in search of employment in Central America and Panama (McCullough 1977: 476).
3. In addition to small “experimental” numbers of Canadians, Dutch, Swedes, Black North Americans, Carib Afro-Amerindians, Syrians, Turks, East Indians, Egyptians, and Cape Verdians (Wilson 1947: 52, 61; Rodriguez & Borge 1976: 227) Minor Keith imported “one thousand healthy, robust Chinese of good customs and addicted to work (Costa Rican National Archives, Historical Section #1055: April 6, 1872),” and 1,500 “...good, humble thrifty...[Italians]... of a superior race... (Ibid. #1131, Feb. 23, 1888: 3).”
4. Three of Minor Keith’s brothers and uncles also died while supervising the construction of the first 25 miles of the Costa Rican Trans-Atlantic railroad (Wilson 1947: 52, 59).
5. In Barbados, a day’s wage was 20 cents at the turn of the century, whereas the United Fruit Company labor contractors were offering to pay the same amount per hour. The unemployed were so desperate that riots erupted outside the recruiting stations of the Panama Canal Company in Barbados (McCullough 1977: 170).
6. There are a few passing references to the militancy of West Indian laborers in Costa Rica cf. Bryce-Laporte (n.d.: 23); de la Cruz (1983: 94, 105–121); Duncan & Melendez (1981: 78); Fallas Monge (1983: 218–219); Kepner (1936: 180–181). A more detailed analysis of this issue is provided by Bourgois (1985a: 113–123) and de la Cruz (1979).
7. The newspaper archive of the National Library of Costa Rica has a valuable collection of turn of the century publications from Limón. The United Fruit Company historical archives in storage in Bocas del Toro, Panama are also an extraordinary resource; special permission to consult them must be obtained locally. One of the reasons so many historians and anthropologists have erroneously reported that Costa Rican West Indians were passive laborers is that they relied on company reports and pro-management local newspapers which purposefully emphasized the passivity of the Black laborers in order to persuade the Costa Rican government to allow them to import larger numbers into the country. Furthermore, the comfortably established second and third generation descendants of these immigrants prefer to forget their grandparents’ history of exploitation and struggle.
8. The leadership of the UNIA subsequently shunted the interests of the banana workers. United Fruit Company historical archives reveal that Marcus Garvey and his associates actually struck deals with management:

...[Garvey] states that he too is an employer of labor, understands our position, is using his best endeavour to get the negro race to work and better themselves through work (UFA: Chittenden to Blair, April n.a., 1921).

...Garvey was the most conservative man of any attending the meetings. He told them they should not fight the United Fruit Company... they must have money and that in order to get money they had to work (UFA: Chittenden to Cutter, April 22, 1921).

Garvey's policy seems to be to keep his people industriously at work and I have told a representative here that we would aid them in any way that we could as long as this policy is maintained (UFA: Chittenden to Blair, February 27, 1922).

9. The most systematic and well documented analysis of Black upward mobility in Limón is provided by Charles KOch (1975); see also Bourgois (1985a: chapter 6).

10. Education has played a crucial role in Black upward mobility, and is part of the West Indian immigrant tradition. Today Blacks still maintain scholastic superiority over Hispanics. In 1983, while 55.4 percent of Hispanics did not finish primary school in Limón, the same was true for only 38.5 percent of Blacks (Vargas & Requeyra 1983: 44). Once again, this advantage over Hispanics has been confined for the most part to the middle level echelons of the hierarchy i.e., primary school and high school rather than college. Until the 1960s few Blacks reached the university level. In 1964, for example, out of the entire Limón Black population (over 10,000) there were only four Black lawyers, one civil engineer and five professors (Mennerick 1964: 50). By the 1970s, with the extended boom in the cacao economy, the children of successful cacao farmers have entered the professional occupations in disproportionate numbers; today, there are so many Black professionals dispersed throughout Costa Rica, that it would be impossible to calculate their number.

11. On the banana plantations in central Limón and on the Pacific coast there are very few Blacks of West Indian descent working in banana production. There are, however, significant numbers of workers of Afro-Hispanic descent, but they are immigrants from the northwestern province of Guanacaste. Their African descent can be traced to the slaves imported during the colonial period. They are considered Hispanic or even "white" according to Costa Rican definitions of race and ethnicity. A middle class Black of Jamaican ancestry warned me "You may think you see Blacks working in the banana fields but don't put that in your book. They're not black Blacks; they are Guanacastecans."

12. United Fruit Company management took full advantage of the ambiguous nationality status of Blacks as is documented by the following report by an official sent to evaluate a plantation on the Panama / Costa Rica border during World War II:

...the Division has not been living up to the laws as regards accident pay, severance pay, and other social privileges to which laborers are entitled by law. Apparently these payments were not made... mostly on the assumption that the Company wished to save money and *was safe in not making these payments, as most of the negroes around [here] do not have cédulas [nationality identity cards] and cannot bring action against us in the courts* (UFA: Hamer to Pollan, Feb. 1, 1943, emphasis added).

13. The most spectacular example in Costa Rica of a foreign company manipulating Black/Hispanic antagonisms within its labor force is the case of the Abangares gold

mines (in which Minor Keith the founder of the United Fruit Company also had financial interests) in the province of Guanacaste (Garcia 1984: 17). In 1911 Black West Indians were brought in as foremen to supervise the largely Hispanic work force; in fact all 50 foremen at the mines were Black and Black ditch diggers were paid more than Hispanics (Ibid 1984: 57–62). One of the tasks of the foremen was to strip search workers suspected of stealing gold from the mines at the end of the day as they were leaving the pits. In 1911 this provoked a race riot. Fourteen Blacks were brutally killed by a mob of incensed workers (Ibid: 57–62, Sanchez 1971: 107–108). Although the mines were occupied by the workers and a strike was declared, their anger was vented against their immediate supervisors who were Blacks rather than against the North American owners of the mines. No workers were prosecuted for the massacre and the President of Costa Rica even publicly blamed the “foreigners” (i.e., West Indian Blacks) for having provoked the workers into killing them.

14. In Costa Rica, Hispanics are referred to as “Whites.” In fact this deeply ingrained national myth that Costa Ricans are White is referred to in the scholarly literature as the “white legend” (cf. Edelman 1982: unnumbered citing Creedman 1977: x).

15. For an analysis of racism against Blacks in South America see Wade 1985.

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CHITTENDEN, G.P.: Manager, Limon Division, subsequently responsible for all southern Central American operations and then vice-president of the Chiriqui Land Company, Boston; 1916–1940s.

CUTTER, VICTOR: General Manager, UFCO, Central and South American Department, subsequently vice-president, UFCO, Boston; 1915–1920s.

HAMER, R.H.: Manager of Pacific Coast Divisions, UFCO, Costa Rica (*Compania Bananera de Costa Rica*) and subsequently responsible for Southern Central Operations; 1940s and 1950s.

POLLAN, A.A.: Executive vice-president, UFCO, Boston; 1943.

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