

# JOURNEYING THROUGH JIM CROW

## Spanish American Travelers in the United States during the Age of Segregation\*

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What travel books are "about" is the interplay between observer and observed, between a traveler's own philosophical biases and preconceptions and the tests those ideas and prejudices endure as a result of the journey . . . .

Casey Blanton, *Travel Writing: The Self and the World*

The Negroes who live in the United States and in Central or Latin America . . . their problem is not fundamentally different from that of the Africans. The whites of America did not mete out to them any different treatment from that of the whites who ruled over Africa . . . the whites were used to putting all Negroes in the same bag.

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

*Abstract: Postcolonial criticism and theory have been instrumental not only in showing how Western texts have constructed non-Western peoples and cultures, but also in analyzing discourse on the racialized Other in travel writings by members of formerly colonized societies and cultures who may reinscribe—consciously or unconsciously—the structural values of cultural domination. As privileged members of comparable societies that had assimilated and been assimilated into dominant ideologies of European cultural and biological superiority, Spanish American visitors to the United States during the segregation era uniquely exemplify such discourse and thus merit scholarly attention. Examining—within their respective cultural and historical contexts—selected texts by six Spanish American writers who visited or lived in the United States during the period 1880–1947, this paper analyzes their observations of, experiences with, and reactions to the realities of racial separation and the attendant violence against African Americans in order to determine the extent to which the writers resisted or participated in the "othering" process that represented African Americans as different and inferior.*

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Postcolonial criticism and theory has done much to illuminate the ways in which Western texts, “through imaginative representations, seemingly factual descriptions (in journalistic reports and travel writing), and claims to knowledge” (Berten 2001, 203) have constructed non-Western peoples and cultures. Edward Said’s landmark study *Orientalism* (1978), in particular, provides useful insights for analyzing discourse on the racialized Other in travel writings by authors who, in spite of—or perhaps because of—their position as members of formerly colonized societies and cultures, may reinscribe—consciously or unconsciously—“the formidable structure of cultural domination . . . upon themselves or upon others” (Said 1978, 25). Although Said’s book focuses specifically on “the relationship between power and knowledge in the domination of the East by the West” (Richter 1998, 217), his ideas also have relevance to other geopolitical areas. Indeed, postcolonial studies have shown that

the subalternizing and silencing propensities of the colonialist representations are often—and symptomatically—evident, too, in *élite* representations issuing from within the colonized—and then, after decolonization, the postcolonized (nominally independent)—society: in the language and thought of members of the political classes, national and local leaders and spokespeople, men and women of substance, the rich, the landed, the propertied, the educated. (Lazarus 2004, 8)

If literature has been a vehicle of ideology (Berten 2001, 194), travel literature has been a particularly cogent and successful form of manifesting, transmitting and reinforcing the relationship between power and knowledge. Although the motives of travel may differ, the experience of visiting and observing a foreign land and culture endows the traveler with knowledge and, in turn, authority (power) to speak, to write and thus enlighten his audience not only about the land, peoples, and cultures of the country visited, but also, by comparison, about the advantages and achievements, shortcomings and problems of the homeland. Clearly, Spanish American travelers after independence were not representatives of Western imperialism; as privileged recipients of Eurocentric education and training, however, in general they absorbed and were absorbed into the prevailing ideologies that proclaimed white European culture and ways of looking at the world as correct and superior to others.

Given that travelers carry with them the values and norms of their own culture and assess foreign cultures in light of these values and beliefs,<sup>1</sup> their perceptions contribute significantly to the ways in which societies evaluate and relate to each other, whether one is talking about Alexis de Tocqueville’s impressions of North America in the early nineteenth century or those of Federico García Lorca many generations later. Studies of

1. See, for example, Blanton (1997, 7); Duncan and Gregory (1999, 1); Cornell and Hartmann (1998, 195).

travelers' impressions of the United States, in fact, have tended to focus on European visitors such as these and on the nation's white population, which has given a distorted picture not only of the diversity that marks American society but also of foreign visitors in general and of aspects of the nation that have captured their attention. Until recently, the impressions of Latin American travelers have stimulated relatively little scholarship, and much of this has remained unpublished.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, except for writings by Domingo F. Sarmiento or José Martí, scholars have tended to ignore or undervalue Latin American visitors' commentaries on the black population, even though African Americans have uniquely enriched U.S. culture and are inextricably tied to the nation's overall development. Paradoxically, the racial segregation that characterized much of U.S. life and culture during the late nineteenth century and most of the twentieth century has contributed to this state of affairs.

In light of these circumstances, it is instructive to consider how Spanish American travelers reacted to the realities of the Jim Crow system<sup>3</sup> and the attendant violence against African Americans. To what extent did they challenge, ignore, or share in the "othering" process that represented African Americans as different and inferior? Did they identify with the latter, lump them together in a common negative portrait of gringos, or adopt a neutral stance? What accounts for their different reactions and perceptions?<sup>4</sup> Examining—within their respective cultural and historical contexts—selected texts by six Spanish American writers who visited or lived in the United States during the period 1880–1947,<sup>5</sup> this study seeks to

2. Three important studies of Spanish American travelers in the United States are Onís (1952), Thompson (1976), and Reid (1977). Unpublished studies include Margaret Rudd (1948) and Daniel (1959).

Scholarship on travel in Latin America and on Hispanic (i.e., Latin American and Spanish) travelers has increased markedly in recent years, stimulated in part by Mary Louise Pratt (1992) and the work of ethnographers, such as James Clifford (1992, 96–112). See, for example, Pérez and Pérez, eds. (1996), Carballo, ed. (1996), and Fey and Racine, eds. (2000).

3. The term "Jim Crow" refers to the legislation that southern and border states of the United States passed after the Civil War allowing for and legitimizing racial segregation, especially of black and white persons, in schools, public conveyances, restaurants, drinking fountains, cemeteries, and other facilities. The term also encompasses hard and fast customs based on the pre-Civil War relationship of blacks and whites, wherein the former were obliged to behave deferentially to the latter under threat of punishment. See Packard (2002, 163–171).

4. Most of the scholarship on Spanish American travel writing about the United States mentions or examines some travelers' impressions of the racial problem, but does not explore the matter in depth. My research, however, indicates that while some travelers hardly touched on the subject of race, others devoted considerable attention to it.

5. The number of Spanish American books on the United States that fall under the wide-ranging rubric of travel literature is exceptionally large. Onís (1952) devotes two sections (92–107 and 187–228) of his study to more than twenty five eighteenth- and nineteenth-

explore those questions to show not so much what the texts reveal about race relations and African Americans in the United States during those years but what the writers' commentaries and representations reveal about Spanish American ideologies of race and identity—at home and abroad—and the ways in which the travelers confronted and negotiated North American apartheid. This paper does not pretend to exhaust the writings of Spanish American travelers in the era under consideration. Rather, by showing how some visitors have represented other peoples of the hemisphere and how these looking relations exposed and affected the writers' own sense of self or identity, this discussion aims to contribute to a greater understanding of both the diversity of Spanish American racial thought and the significant role that travel texts play in reinforcing, resisting and disseminating such thought.

Although there appears to be no firm consensus among scholars and historians regarding the precise commencement of statutory racial separation in the United States following the Civil War, indubitably the lawful separation of U.S. citizens by race and origin encompassed the years 1870 to 1970. Between 1870 and 1885 Southern states, beginning with Tennessee, passed legislation banning interracial marriage, legitimizing separate areas for blacks and whites on railroad coaches, in depots and waiting rooms, and on wharves, and mandating separate schools for the races.<sup>6</sup> Racial separation would remain legal until 1954 when in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision the U.S. Supreme Court declared segregation of public schools unconstitutional.<sup>7</sup>

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century visitors, including Francisco de Miranda, Guillermo Prieto, Justo Sierra Méndez, Salvador Camacho Roldán, and others, and a chapter to Domingo F. Sarmiento. Thompson's article, which "covers only books recording . . . visits in the South between 1865 and 1950" (256), lists seventy-three titles by seventy-one authors (in one case three writers are responsible for one title) from Spanish America, Spain, and Brazil. Reid's study uses primarily "printed material, mostly in the form of books written by prominent or representative Spanish Americans" (viii) who had visited the United States. His work, like that of Onís, is not limited to travel literature per se but also examines political tracts, essays, and other texts. Fifty-two of the 133 "authors whose works provided source material" for Reid are identified as "principal sources" (Reid 1977, 273–277). My own research on the period under consideration here encompasses many of the texts that these scholars identify but has also uncovered others. Relevance to the topic, significance of the authors' remarks, personal interest, and considerations of space have dictated text selection for this article.

6. See Franklin and Moss (1988, 238); Packard (2002, 70–71); Bergman and Bergman (1969, 290). Without giving specifics, Franklin and Moss (238), claim that "Tennessee adopted the first 'Jim Crow' law" five years after the passage of the anti-intermarriage statutes, i.e., in 1875. In that same year Congress approved a Civil Rights bill prohibiting racial discrimination in public facilities.

7. Fifteen years later (1969) the court was obliged to render a new decision disallowing the continuation of segregated public schools under its 1955 "all deliberate speed" criterion. See Syrett (1970, 426).

Prior to the enactment of legalized segregation, that is, from about the mid-nineteenth century, European- and North-American-originated theories and studies of race and social evolution, inspired by or based on scientific methods and principles (e.g., Positivism), also emerged, leading to the creation of the new disciplines of anthropology and sociology. Many of the principal exponents of those theories and branches of learning—e.g., Herbert Spencer, the comte de Gobineau, Hippolyte Taine, Gustave Le Bon—developed self-serving arguments and hierarchical ideas about human origins, categories, and capacities that not only refashioned racist stereotypes in the United States but also “provided a scientific justification for Jim Crow segregation and imperial domination” (Baker 1998, 22). These arguments and ideas also permeated the thinking of the privileged and educated classes of Latin America, further strengthening “the Latin American preoccupation with race” (Hale 1986, 398) and elites’ denigration of the black and indigenous elements. Indeed, distinctions of color that privileged whiteness and European culture and devalued blackness and non-European cultures were central to Spanish American colonial societies and created or exacerbated interracial tensions. Moreover, the advantages and assumptions associated with lighter skin, Caucasian features, and European background encouraged *mestizaje*, i.e., biological and cultural mixing, especially among peoples of color, as a means of altering or modifying racial identity in order to improve their social status and gain better opportunities for themselves and their offspring.

By 1896, the year of the landmark *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled racial segregation constitutional, the majority of Spanish American nations—with the obvious exception of Cuba and Puerto Rico—had been enjoying political independence for several decades. Although composed of peoples of Native American, European, African, and Asian descent, the nations were dominated politically, economically, and culturally by Creole (i.e., European-descended) elites who, intent on modernizing their nations, generally disdained the black and indigenous elements as backward and uncivilized, and encouraged European immigration as a viable method of developing their societies, improving their workforce, and reducing or eliminating, through interracial mixing, the less-desirable African and indigenous groups. From these various nations—and for different reasons—came scores of visitors who traveled around the United States throughout the Jim Crow era recording their encounters and observations and, later, publishing accounts of their journeys and impressions. Other travelers, exiled from their own lands, took refuge in the United States where, ironically, they could enjoy without fear of reprisal or intimidation, freedoms often denied to citizens of color. None of the visitors, however, arrived as *tabula rasa*. Their background (upbringing, readings, experiences) had already shaped much of their

beliefs and thinking about races, nations, and cultures. Ironically, as members of societies that were commonly regarded by white North Americans as “Other,” the majority of the travelers—who, for the most part, were privileged, white or fair-skinned mestizo men and women—assumed, and were especially desirous of, acceptance as unblemished foreign nationals exempt from the humiliation of the color line, whether drawn according to law or custom. Nevertheless, as Latin Americans, they could not escape entirely, or be wholly immune to, essentialist notions about their peoples that existed in the host nation. As historian Frederick B. Pike explains, people from the United States applied “to Latin Americans . . . the same stereotypes by which . . . [they] had come to rationalize . . . [their] conduct toward Indians and African Americans” (Pike 1992, 107).

Any study of Spanish American travel literature about the United States during the late nineteenth century must take into account the writings of José Martí (1853–1895), the Cuban poet and revolutionary leader. From approximately 1882 to the end of his life, the exiled Martí made his home in New York City, where he wrote and published much of his work and organized efforts to liberate his homeland from Spanish rule.<sup>8</sup> From New York, Martí not only journeyed occasionally to other parts of the country and the Americas to advance the Cuban independence cause, but also dispatched hundreds of articles for publication in various Spanish American newspapers. One of his best known chronicles is “El terremoto de Charleston” [The Charleston Earthquake], written in September 1886 and published in *La Nación* of Buenos Aires in October of that year.<sup>9</sup> Ostensibly, U.S. race relations are not the focus of the article. Nevertheless, behind the detailed and lyrical descriptions both of the calamity that befell the city and its environs and of the reactions of its terrified inhabitants, Martí evinces a profound awareness of the separation and societal condition of African Americans in the post-bellum South as well as a sensitivity to their suffering and spirituality. This is immediately evident in the opening paragraphs of his chronicle, specifically in the juxtaposition of words he uses to describe the inhabitants of the city: he refers to “los blancos vencidos” on the one hand and “los negros bien hallados,” on the other. The latter “viven . . . parleros y apretados en un barrio populoso” while “el resto de la ciudad es de residencias bellas, no fabricadas hombro a hombro . . . sino con ese noble apartamento que ayuda tanto a la poesía y decoro de la vida” (Martí 1963, 11: 65).

Martí notes the unusual, stark changes in landscape and citizenry that the calamity has wrought. In doing so, he hints that racial separation is the norm in Charleston:

8. According to Onís (1952, 333), Martí’s lengthy stay in the United States made him “the first Spanish American who knew [the country] thoroughly in all aspects of its culture.”

9. See José Martí, *Obras completas*, vol. 11: 65–76.

Y ¡hoy los ferrocarriles que llegan a sus puertas se detienen a medio camino sobre sus rieles torcidos, partidos, hundidos, levantados . . . los negros y sus antiguos señores *han dormido bajo la misma lona, y comido del mismo pan de lástima*, frente a las ruinas de sus casas, a las paredes caídas, a las rajadas lanzadas de su base de piedra, a las columnas rotas! (Martí 1963, 11: 66; emphasis added)

Catastrophe, Martí suggests, brings people together and binds them in common concern and mutual charity.<sup>10</sup>

Martí's choice of words to describe the religious fervor and plaintive song intoned by the black residents in the aftermath of the earthquake reveals an effort to capture characteristics of black religious faith and musical expression without falling into a discourse of essentialist stereotype. Elsewhere, however, his language—notwithstanding the apparently laudatory intent—reflects and reinforces the pejorative “nature-and-civilization imagery” (Pike 1992, 44) that was prevalent in the nineteenth century and had permeated the thinking of the educated, privileged classes:

Tiene el negro una gran bondad nativa, que ni el martirio de la esclavitud pervierte, ni se oscurece con su varonil bravura.

Pero tiene, más que otra raza alguna, tan íntima comunión con la naturaleza, que parece más apto que los demás hombres a estremecerse y regocijarse con sus cambios.

Hay en su espanto y alegría algo sobrenatural y maravilloso que no existe en *las demás razas primitivas*, y recuerda en sus movimientos y miradas *la majestad del león*: hay en su afecto una lealtad tan dulce que no hace pensar en los perros, sino en las palomas . . . (Martí 1963, 11: 72–73; emphasis added)<sup>11</sup>

Martí's use of animal imagery and his attribution to African Americans of “las emociones bestiales del instinto” (73) suggest that he was not entirely immune to the theories of race in circulation that associated African peoples with barbarism and nature and asserted the innate superiority and civilized status of white peoples.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, while his writings

10. Drawing a similar conclusion some years ago, Susana Rotker (1999, 99) wrote: “. . . only for Martí does the catastrophe equalize social classes and races . . . [.] having unleashed ancient needs that stimulate behaviors and even relationships contrary to the norm.”

11. Martí's association of the African Americans with doves recalls a similar and earlier metaphorical usage by the Colombian Romantic poet Candelario Obeso (1849–1884) in his *Cantos populares de mi tierra* (1877). Given the wide circulation of Obeso's poems in anthologies of the late 1880s and in a New York literary magazine, it is possible that Martí was familiar with some of them. See José María Rivas Groot (1886, 65–70); Julio Añez (1886–87, 168–175); and Candelario Obeso (1887, 14). For a study of Obeso's poetry, see Laurence E. Prescott (1985).

12. An in-depth discussion of Martí's writings that deal with African Americans is beyond the scope of this article. A cursory review of those written up to April of 1887, that is, about six months after the publication of his Charleston earthquake chronicle and two years into the first administration of Democratic president Grover Cleveland, suggests that Martí, perhaps somewhat naively, accepted the idea that a new day was dawning for the South, as evidenced by Cleveland's apparent willingness to protect freedmen's rights while appointing Southerners to his Cabinet, purportedly better relations between blacks

exhibit a greater degree of tolerance and sympathy for racial minorities and other marginalized and oppressed groups in the United States<sup>13</sup> than those of many contemporaries, the ambiguity of his deliberately poetic prose raises the suspicion that he, an exile, understood the importance of avoiding direct confrontation with racial conflict in the United States. As he wrote in an article of 1889:

En la tierra ajena se ha de ser siempre comedido como un huésped, y sentarse donde lo manden sentar a uno, y recibir el aire mismo como un favor. (Martí 1963, 12: 282)

As later writings by Martí show, one of the all too common occurrences of the segregationist period that aroused the horror and condemnation of many travelers was the practice of lynch law. Initially applied to persons accused of stealing livestock and occasionally to foreigners suspected of murderous acts (Pike 1992, 180, 183), lynching—that is, the meting out of summary justice by three or more persons, usually by hanging but also by other means—became a punishment directed especially against black men convicted, accused, or suspected of violating the chastity of white women. In an 1892 article published in *El Partido Liberal* of Mexico City, Martí interweaves three discrete yet interrelated news stories involving African Americans, one of which reports the brutal murder of a black man by townspeople of Texarkana, Arkansas.<sup>14</sup> Although Martí offers no direct comment on the incident, the seamless juxtaposition of the

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and whites, and certain celebratory events symbolizing or portending an end to sectional strife. See Martí (1963, 10: 238, 315–317, 459–461; 11: 47–48, 155–158). For information on Cleveland, see Sinkler (1972, 259, 263–264). Like others at that time, Martí may have overlooked or been unaware of Southern efforts to deprive African Americans of their rights and ignorant of the many incidents of disrespect, mistreatment, murder and lynching suffered by blacks which contradicted the optimistic and rosy picture of a new South painted by Atlanta journalist Henry W. Grady. (See Logan 1965, 186–188.) By August of 1887, however, Martí was including in his letters to Spanish American newspapers reports of the violence perpetrated against black citizens by white mobs, led or accompanied at times by law enforcement officials. See his *Obras completas* 11: 237–238.

13. See, for example, his writings on Native Americans (Indians), Chinese immigrants, and the lynching of Italians in *Obras completas*, 11: 263–264; 12: 77–83, 493–499. It should be remembered also that when only seventeen Martí experienced suffering and injustice as a political prisoner in Cuba, which no doubt sensitized him to the plight of other victims of oppression.

14. José Martí, *Nuevas cartas de Nueva York*, 185–188. For more information on this particular incident, see Logan (1965, 224). In her introductory notes, Esther Allen, ed., (2002), offers useful insights on this and other writings by Martí the journalist: “Martí developed a kaleidoscopic new form of journalism that juxtaposed a dizzying diversity of stories—sometimes within a single sentence—and mingled fact and poetry, the personal and the political, the heroic and the banal, the colossal and the petty, *admiration and alarm*” (89); “their diversity of subject matter also embodies a consistent will to present the most complex picture possible, *to round out one image with another that contradicts or serves as a counterpoint to it*, rather than reaching for a simplistic conclusion” (107; emphasis added in both).

account with the other two stories—a debate by African Americans on the relevance and significance of the cakewalk dance and the efforts of a group of black Americans to seek a homeland in Liberia where they can be free from the discrimination and oppression exemplified by the lynching—creates a subtle yet powerful indictment of the violence and injustice perpetrated against African Americans.

Months after the publication of Martí's chronicle on the Charleston earthquake, sociologist, journalist, and former politician Salvador Camacho Roldán (1827–1900) of Colombia visited the United States on personal business. Three years later (in 1890) he published his detailed observations of travel from Bogotá to the United States under the title *Notas de viaje (Colombia y Estados Unidos de América)* (Camacho Roldán 1973). This book, like his other writings on matters political, social and economic, reflects a passionate and patriotic commitment to break with the colonial past and create a discourse of national identity rooted in free labor and general education and conducive to the common prosperity and happiness of all citizens, irrespective of social background and economic condition (See Cataño 1990, 12–13). Acquainted with racial theories that demeaned black and mixed-race peoples, Camacho Roldán, who had once served as governor of the primarily black province of Panama, seems to have largely rejected the virulent racism inherent in those ideas, perhaps in part because of his familiarity with outstanding individuals of color, such as poet Candelario Obeso, whose family he lauded (Camacho Roldán 1973, 1: 74).

Conversant with Positivism, Camacho Roldán intended to give his readers an idea of the contemporary conditions of the United States with some historical explanation of their development by presenting empirical facts and sober opinions. He could not altogether resist or avoid, however, comparing the condition of African Americans with that of Afro-Colombians who, he opined, were more civilized and better integrated into national life (Camacho Roldán 1973, 1: 317). Thus, while he deemed the idea of white superiority so firmly entrenched in the United States that “el negro inspira al blanco sentimientos de antipatía, trocados casi en rencor desde la emancipación” (Camacho Roldán 1973, 2: 207), he offered that in Colombia, as in all Latin American countries, blacks lived in friendship (“amistad”) with whites, or at least were not the object of intense hatred. He credits these amiable relations to the “fusion,” or racial mixing (mestizaje) that characterizes Hispanic peoples, and viewed his nation's increasingly mixed-race identity (Camacho Roldán 1973, 1: 118) not as a danger but as a natural and salutary development that would strengthen the homeland. His insistence on racial fusion, i.e., mestizaje, as the remedy of interracial differences and conflicts, however, might well conceal Creole hegemonic practices aimed at erasing black and other undesirable groups from the national landscape. While he seems to have regarded miscegenation as

a biologically verified means of improving both races, his defense of interracial unions betrays a common belief that the black's contribution to miscegenation consisted primarily of physical attributes ("el vigor físico"), whereas the white's contribution (enhanced by the black) encompassed physical, moral, and aesthetic qualities ("la belleza escultural de las formas, . . . sentimientos conyugales y . . . cualidades domésticas") befitting a superior, civilized group (Camacho Roldán 1973, 1: 117, 118).

On the matter of lynching, Camacho Roldán was more direct and vocal than Martí, denouncing it as "una mancha que afea y deslustra la civilización y el progreso material de ese gran pueblo a los ojos del mundo civilizado" (Camacho Roldán 1973, 2: 313). As a respected elder statesman of a sovereign nation who enjoyed the relative freedom of movement and expression denied to Martí by Spanish authorities, he could afford to be. Moreover, Camacho Roldán wrote from within Colombia and was not beholden to the United States for sanctuary. He was also a distinguished member of Colombia's Liberal Party, which had abolished slavery in 1851 and lost power only a few years before he began his travels. Although Liberal affiliation did not necessarily denote nonracist beliefs, Camacho Roldán seemed to possess a generally open attitude on matters of race in an era that vilified the descendants of Africans and other peoples of color as physically, culturally, and intellectually inferior to their Creole compatriots and hardly capable of literary creativity or national political leadership.<sup>15</sup> For example, he blamed the defects commonly attributed to "the African race" on slavery and not on any "efecto de inferioridad de su organismo, ni siquiera de su ignorancia y falta de cultivo moral" (Camacho Roldán 1973, 1: 115).

Considering a massive migration of Europeans—presumably the desired group—to Colombia unlikely, he regarded both Chinese and African American immigration as "una circunstancia feliz" and argued in favor of welcoming these groups "tanto en las relaciones privadas como en la acción oficial." His motives, however, were not entirely disinterested; not only was he convinced that "algún pequeño auxilio para su pasaje, y tierras baldías . . . en propiedad" could entice disaffected African Americans to relocate to Colombia (Camacho Roldán 1973, 1: 114), but, like others, he believed that black peoples were best suited to perform the hard labor of civilization in hot, tropical regions (Camacho Roldán 1973, 1: 114, 329, 331)—a longstanding idea of colonialist thinking that had served to justify African slavery and, indirectly, linked blacks with disease. Moreover, Camacho Roldán's proposal implies a disdain for his nation's own laborers or suggests that Colombia's black population was

15. Camacho, Roldán (1973: 2: 113–114). According to Jorge Larraín (2000, 90), "racist overtones" were not in every Latin American writer's "reception of European rationalism and empiricism. . . . In many intellectual quarters, rationalism meant only the wish to modernize, an emphasis on the importance of science and a belief in education."

insufficient, unable or unwilling to perform the work that he considered important and necessary for the country's development.

Other instances of biological determinism are evident in his text. For example, upon noting that travelers in need of lodging in New Orleans could obtain quick and willing service by tipping the servants, who generally were "personas de color," Camacho Roldán ascribes to the latter an impertinence that he accepted as characteristic of racially mixed persons in their dealings with strangers (Camacho Roldán 1973, 1: 301–302). Finally, on the proposed confinement of blacks to a separate political entity under the aegis of the United States or their forced removal to Africa, he remarked ironically that it would be "uno de los más negros crímenes que un pueblo cristiano y civilizado pudiera cometer" (Camacho Roldán 1973, 2: 211; emphasis added).

These comments, however, pale when compared to those of Mexican jurist and educator Justo Sierra Méndez (1848–1912), who visited the United States for two months in 1895, traveling by rail from the Southwest to the Northeast and back via the Midwest. The son of well-known Mexican novelist and politician Justo Sierra O'Reilly (1814–1861)—who had written about his own travels in the United States years earlier—the younger Sierra was a member of dictator Porfirio Díaz's inner government circle, a judge of the Supreme Court, and a politician of the Positivist persuasion, who also gained distinction as a poet, writer, and educator.<sup>16</sup> He published an account of his journeys, first in a series of articles and later in a book, which he titled *En tierra yankee (notas a todo vapor)* (1898) (Sierra 1948). Sierra's use of the modifier "yankee"—which in Latin America is almost always pejorative—not only implies a low opinion of the neighboring nation but may also be a poignant reminder that much of the U.S. territory ("tierra") that he passed through once formed part of Mexico, having been lost as a result of the Mexican-American War (1846–48).

Entering through Texas, Sierra reports coming face-to-face with Jim Crow as he prepared to board a train bound for the east: "un vagón que lleva este gran letrero: *for whites*, para blancos: primer contacto con la democracia Americana." Thinking perhaps of his Irish heritage, he chose to project his mixed-race identity and exercise his status as a foreign national: "Entramos en ese vagón en nuestra calidad de semiblanco," he declares (Sierra 1948, 26). In fact, Sierra had little reason to do otherwise, for Mexican nationals and Hispanic Texans "usually were classified as 'whites' with regard to the use of public facilities."<sup>17</sup> The experience, however, led him to conclude that U.S. democracy was "un sueño; una

16. Martin Stabb (1958, 405–423), disputes somewhat the depiction of Sierra as a Positivist (see 406–407; 417–418), while Hale (1986, 419) describes him as "ever-flexible."

17. See Leiker (2003, 159). For an opposing view, see Martha Menchaca (2001, 277–278): "De jure segregation followed the enfranchisement of people of color, and Mexicans became part of the "colored" races who were not allowed legally to move among White people."

democracia constantemente asaltada por los que quieren entrar en ella" (Sierra 1948, 26–27). Sierra must have included African Americans among the assailants of democracy; exhibiting remarkable cynicism and, perhaps, latent fear, he surmised, "¡Si los negros lograran tener la mayoría en el Capitolio, como la tienen en las calles de Washington, reducirían a los blancos a la esclavitud!" (Sierra 1948, 27)

These and other statements reveal that while Sierra questioned U.S. democratic ideals and practices, he expressed little sympathy toward African Americans and their plight. Indeed, his writing, which often displayed a penchant for the lyrical, exhibits an arrogance and superiority based on race that identifies blacks with animals, as in the following description of a group of women and children who were heading for the train:

Por entre las calles de maíz cosechado ya, desfilan grupos de *babies* y *misses* negras, *del color de la tierra, sucias* y mal pergeñadas, *alargando hacia el tren el grueso y sensual hocico*, y en pos de éste, todo el indolente rostro encuadrado por las alas enormes de sus cofias de percal. (29; emphasis added)<sup>18</sup>

Throughout much of his journey, in fact, Sierra finds occasion to deride black people. For example, after recording a favorable first impression of the nation's capital—"ciudad casi sola, agradable, correcta, amplia"—he quickly remarks that the city, its cleanliness notwithstanding, is unsalutary: "Enferma . . . enferma de viruela negra" (Sierra 1948, 111). The disease, however, is not caused by a microorganism but by the presence of so many African Americans. "Washington," Sierra laments wryly, "es una de las capitales de la nación negra y eso la carga de sombra" (Sierra 1948, 112).<sup>19</sup>

Although at least one scholar has expressed surprise at Sierra's racist comments (Dumas 1986, 1: 362), an understanding of nineteenth-century Mexican history may explain his attitude. It is noteworthy, for example, that during the decade prior to Sierra's journey (i.e., 1885–1895) there was already manifest in Mexico a strong sentiment against possible immigration of blacks on the grounds that they were inferior to white Europeans, the preferred immigrant group (González Navarro 1957, 173, 174). Also, the outbreak of smallpox ("viruela") that occurred there during a failed colonization effort by African Americans—precisely in 1895—probably

18. Significantly, for psychiatrist and anticolonial critic Frantz Fanon (1991, 42), such representations characterize Manicheist colonialism, which "dehumanizes the native, or to speak plainly, it turns him into an animal. In fact, the terms the settler uses when he mentions the native are zoological terms."

19. Sierra's ironic association of "sombra" (shadow) with black people parallels Pike's observation that "Americans, predominantly, have associated the shadow, the negative identity, and the id with nature, and therefore with wickedness" (87). Similarly, European artists, writers, and physicians have long associated black skin color and female body shape with disease and beasts, as Sander Gilman (1988, 223–261) shows.

reinforced the linkages between blackness and pathology, thereby exacerbating and justifying racial prejudices.<sup>20</sup> In any event, Sierra, who was a friend of Martí (Dumas 1986, 1: 358), evidently did not share the Cuban intellectual's magnanimous spirit. As a citizen of a country that had lost a large portion of its territory to the United States, he seems to have turned repressed anger against those—i.e., blacks—whom white North America itself commonly scorned, thereby elevating, perhaps, in the eyes of others, his own unstable identity and insecure status.<sup>21</sup> In short, it would appear that Sierra's "flexible" approach to Positivism, unlike Camacho Roldán's eclectic stance, did not necessarily exempt him from embracing some of its more reprehensible, racist aspects.

It is important to remember too that Sierra, like many—if not most—of his fellow privileged countrymen, viewed Mexico as a mestizo nation, formed essentially of indigenous and Spanish groups (Sierra 1955, 118). Moreover, unlike Martí and Camacho Roldán, whose nations exhibited an unmistakable and acknowledged African presence, Sierra could overlook Mexico's relatively small, diluted and isolated communities of African descent, which after independence were largely invisible on the national stage. Consequently, for him, black people, especially those who came from the neighboring United States (e.g., ex-slaves) and other parts of Anglo-America (e.g., Jamaica), constituted an undesirable and alien element that could only harm Mexico's gradually emerging biracial character and developing sense of mestizo identity. Evidently, his journey to the United States at forty-seven years of age solidified his pessimistic views.

The year 1898, when Sierra published his book, also witnessed the Spanish American War, which brought an end to Spain's empire and marked the emergence of the United States as imperial power. In the ensuing decades the United States undertook a series of military incursions, interventions, and occupations in various Spanish American nations (e.g., Colombia-Panama [1902, 1903], Mexico [1914; 1916], Nicaragua [1912–1933], the Dominican Republic [1916–1924]), which spread alarm and fueled anti-Yankee sentiments throughout the hemisphere. At the same time several Latin American intellectuals, such as Argentina's Carlos O. Bunge, Bolivia's Alcides Arguedas, and Peru's Francisco García Calderón, using imported

20. See Logan (1965, 144–145). For a full discussion of the colonization attempt, see J. Fred Rippy (1921, 66–73).

21. On one occasion Sierra and his fellow Mexican travelers avoided being arrested by a traffic policeman only because a friendly passerby ("amable truchimán") convinced the officer that the men were Spaniards ("españoles") (Sierra 1948, 44). Referring to an earlier conflict involving displaced Mexicans, Cornell and Hartmann (1998, 176) offer an explanation of racist behavior that seems applicable to Sierra: "Some members . . . embittered by their own losses of land, status, and power, turned their anger against . . . [other groups]. They did so in part because they hoped to establish their own superiority, but also because . . . they were caught up in the particular discourse of the times."

race-related theories of society to explain their nations' social, political and economic woes, condemned indigenous, African-descended, and certain mixed-race populations as weak, indolent, and unfit for participation in democratic governance, and ascribed to them much of the blame for the region's lack of progress and failure to achieve modernity. As García Calderón asserted, "el problema de las razas . . . explica el progreso de algunos pueblos y la decadencia de otros. . ." (2000, 357). About "los negros" in particular he declared:

Conforman una población analfabeta que ejerce una influencia deprimente sobre la imaginación y el carácter de los americanos. Aumentan la intensidad voluptuosa del temperamento tropical, lo debilitan y dejan en la sangre de los criollos elementos de imprevisión, de ociosidad y de servilismo, a la larga inextirpables." (García Calderón 2000, 361)

Meanwhile, in the United States, white social scientists claimed that African Americans, whose political and social condition had worsened, and Chinese, who in 1882 were legally barred from entering the country, were similarly inferior. Their "scientific" findings bolstered white supremacist ideology and upheld segregation as a means of containing black men's libido, which in turn provided justification for lynchings. And although President Wilson (who had authorized incursions into Mexico to capture revolutionary Pancho Villa) called for the U.S. entry into World War I to champion human rights ("the world must be made safe for democracy"), neither he nor other occupants of the White House during those decades did much to guarantee the rights of African American citizens. Nevertheless, for many Spanish American elites the United States had become the model of modernity and democratic order.

Not all Spanish American travelers of this period, however, subscribed to that view. In *Vistos por dentro; mis impresiones en Estados Unidos*, Guatemalan journalist and lawyer Alejandro Arenales, who visited the United States not long after World War I ended, sharply attacked lynching and criticized the nation's imperialistic treatment of its southern neighbors. His visit probably occurred shortly after the "red summer" of 1919, so called because of the numerous lynchings and race riots that took place between June and December of that year and may account in part for the two chapters ("Blancos y Negros" and "Ley de Lynch") that he devotes to race matters.<sup>22</sup> Although Arenales modestly described his book as "un simple relato de sus impresiones acerca de algunos problemas y aspectos de la vida americana, poco conocidos o mal interpretados por el gran público en Centro-América" (Arenales 1921, 1), he went beyond mere observation, gathering data to clarify and corroborate his impressions. In the aforementioned chapters he cites writings by several students of

22. For information about the "Red Summer," see Franklin and Moss (1988, 313–315); Bergman and Bergman (1969, 387); David Levering Lewis (1988, 17–20, 22–23).

the “race problem”—including prominent African American scholar and writer W. E. B. Du Bois—and also made use of the Negro press.

For Arenales, the racial question could be reduced in the final analysis to sexual concerns. He ascribed all forms of anti-black discrimination to “un sentimiento de repulsión, de aversión, que es derivado del celo sexual de la raza dominante” (Arenales 1921, 187).<sup>23</sup> Therefore, he concluded,

El negro que se atreve a sostener relaciones sexuales con una mujer blanca, aun mediando la voluntad de ésta, está seguro de una muerte violenta al ser descubierto, y el criminal que viola o intenta violar a una mujer blanca es infaliblemente quemado vivo, así como suena, quemado vivo, no sin sujetarlo antes a las más horribles torturas y mutilaciones. (Arenales 1921, 188)<sup>24</sup>

Arenales described lynching variously as “the abominable practice, peculiar to the American people,” “the national crime,” and “a sickness . . . maintained by a vicious interpretation of democratic principles” (Arenales 201, 216). Rejecting assertions of such violence as isolated incidents, he protested: “no es cosa inusitada sino de la mayor frecuencia” (188). Going further, Arenales opined that race pride and consciousness of superiority were “second nature” to the [white] Anglo-Saxon Americans who, besides marginalizing African Americans, also denigrated Latin Americans as “una raza inferior, de energía agotada, que sigue viviendo por fuerza de circunstancias históricas, pero que ya no representa o dejará muy pronto de representar un elemento apreciable en la civilización” (192).

If Arenales censures Anglo-America’s contempt for its southern neighbors, he empathizes with black Americans whose situation, he notes, paralleled that of Amerindians in his own land.<sup>25</sup> This identification is significant, especially since Guatemala, like Mexico, Peru and Bolivia, was a largely indigenous nation with a very small black population. Unlike its neighbor Mexico, however, the Central American nation had no history of African American colonization or territorial conflict with the United States. On the other hand, it did have to contend with the powerful U.S.-backed

23. Pike, quoting from L. Leon Prather, Sr (1984, 7), notes: “Fear of the sexually overcharged barbarians ‘provided the most explosive fuel’ for interracial hatred and lynching” (185).

24. Arenales’ discussion anticipates a similar explanation by Fanon (1967, 170) decades later: “The white man is convinced that the Negro is a beast; if it is not the length of the penis, then it is the sexual potency that impresses him. Face to face with this man who is “different from himself,” he needs to defend himself.”

25. According to Thompson (1976, 257), “no South American traveler compared the Negro and the Indian of his own country with those of the South.” It is worthwhile noting, however, that Arenales, who, of course, was not South American in the strictest sense, deemed the exploitative conditions of black labor comparable to those of indigenous people in Central America (see Arenales 1921, 182). Evidently, Thompson was not familiar with the Guatemalan’s text.

United Fruit Company, which dominated its economy and dictated much of its political life. Thus, rather than encouraging identification with white America and creating or reinforcing animosity toward black peoples, Arenales' travel experience in the United States seems to have enhanced a prior awareness of correlations between economic exploitation and racial oppression, inspiring him to expose and denounce the contradictions of American democracy and to censure the wanton assaults on the dignity and person of its African American citizens.

Such was not the case, however, with Diómedes de Pereyra (1897–1976) of Bolivia, who as a youth had abandoned South America in 1916 to study in the United States and who later gained fame as a novelist and intellectual. In *Hojas al viento: Las dos caras de Norte América* (1935), a book based on a diary he had written between 1916 and 1920 (the year he left for Europe) and published fifteen years later, Pereyra describes his student experiences and offers commentary on “la gran República del Norte.” His intentionally literary narrative depicts a self-assured and determined Creole or mestizo individual for whom the United States States is

la Universidad Contemporánea a la que imprescindiblemente deberemos acudir más y más en el futuro para, saliendo de nuestra legada anarquía y ya tradicional estulticia, ajustar a moldes lógicos nuestra tan presumida como falseada civilización por escarmentados. (Pereyra 1935, 12)

Admiring the United States and probably familiar with *Pueblo enfermo* (1979; first published in 1909)—Arguedas's pessimistic diagnosis of Bolivian society—student-turned-author Pereyra finds little fault with the rampant racism in his host country. Unwilling or unable to admit the incongruity of racism with democratic ideals, he minimized the Ku Klux Klan as an example of the extreme idealism of North Americans, eager to change everything they consider bad into good. His description of the organization as “un ejército de Quijotes” and a “legión de fanáticos” (200) confirms a striking ambivalence. Nevertheless, he did advise all sensible citizens to avoid any involvement with “aquellos energúmenos” and to accept only the security of the legitimately established authorities.

With this statement, Pereyra appears to reject vigilante justice and lynch law. However, in the following chapter of his book, which begins, “El Asia y el Africa constituyen desde el punto de vista racial, graves problemas para los Estados Unidos” (Pereyra 1935, 203), Pereyra seems to offer an apology for racial violence. Here and in the ensuing sentence, the metonymic use of the aforementioned toponyms to describe the Asian immigrant population and the descendants of enslaved Africans artfully serves to distinguish them as foreign elements and not authentic Americans. Similarly, his use of the unflattering color appellations “amarillos” and “negros” for the two respective groups, and his employment of words denoting invasion, large size or number, and reproduction, convey and contribute to the widespread idea that Asians and African Americans

posed a serious and alarming—and, by implication, sexual—threat to U.S. (white) society: “Las *incursiones* de los amarillos y el *desarrollo gigantesco* de los negros, *han procreado* hasta dificultades económicas de gran envergadura y repercusión en todo el país . . .” (Pereyra 1935, 203; emphasis added). Anticipating a possible objection by those who might detect a hint of bias in his assertions or racial prejudice in whites, Pereyra immediately counters: “y nadie que sepa esto puede hablar de intolerancia racial de parte del culto ciudadano norteamericano, a menos que sea él mismo negro o amarillo” (203). By disregarding white “intolerance” and discrediting African American or Asian arguments to the contrary, Pereyra, in effect, defends racial discrimination and censures its victims.

Not unmindful of the mob violence directed against blacks and others, the Bolivian wisely acknowledges the occurrence of “dolorosos ejemplos de brutalidad populachera en sitios aislados desprovistos de la adecuada administración policial” (Pereyra 1935, 203). Although Martí noted and history shows that lynch mobs included at times officers of the law, Pereyra alleges that the sole perpetrators of these crimes have been “multitudes irresponsables que sistemáticamente burlan la vigilancia de la ley” (204). The implication that such incidents emanate from the undisciplined and unrefined riffraff (“populachera”) and not from educated, respectable persons (“culto ciudadano”), and that they occur in isolated areas bereft of adequate policing, characterizes and dismisses such behavior as aberrant and hardly representative of the average American community or of U.S. life in general. Indeed, Pereyra insists, “Estos casos . . . [son] muy raros y esporádicos . . .” (Pereyra 1935, 204), which puts him at odds with Arenales’ impressions.<sup>26</sup>

Citing an unspecified source, Pereyra also submits that lynching incidents have their origin in the “admisible pero *mal comprendido* y con frecuencia torpemente aplicado postulado norteamericano de que ‘las razas deben ante todo preservarse de mezclas de envilecedores efectos’” (204; emphasis added). Ostensibly interested in presenting a fair and open discussion of the underlying causes of such violence against the aforementioned minorities, and careful to avoid giving the impression of upholding or identifying fully with the notion of racial superiority, Pereyra reproduces for his readers “los argumentos más frecuentemente repetidos—precisamente por los exaltados linchadores—en apoyo de esta tesis” (Pereyra 1935, 204). Quoting, presumably, from a document by the adherents of racial purity—which, incidentally, corroborates Arenales’ assessment—Pereyra translates,

26. In reality, racial violence against blacks and other minorities, and vigilante justice perpetrated by persons of different races, occurred in major cities and towns as well as in smaller urban and rural municipalities. It should also be noted that although the number of actual lynchings might have decreased during Pereyra’s years in the United States, anti-Negro riots in October of 1919 alone resulted in the killing of hundreds of African Americans (Bergman and Bergman 1969, 390.)

¿Puede haber alguien entre nosotros que sea capaz de entregar sus hijas a individuos de grupo tan dispar como es el de aquéllos, conociendo además su repugnante bestialidad, su exótica naturaleza? ¿Hay blanca capaz de mecer sin horror entre sus brazos un vástago suyo híbrido, lelo, simiesco, y así, intelectual y físicamente degenerado? ¡No; no puede haber!, y si lo hay, ¡ahí está el África, y también el Asia para esconder su relajación! (Pereyra 1935, 204)

The implicit disclaimer notwithstanding, Pereyra's remarks are disingenuous, concealing under a cloak of supposedly objective or impartial reporting both his own prejudices and an approbation of the unfair treatment accorded to people of color.<sup>27</sup>

Without more definitive information,<sup>28</sup> one can only speculate about why Pereyra and Arenales—who were both from nations with disadvantaged Indian majorities and whose visits possibly overlapped—differed so much in their attitudes toward racism and racial violence directed at blacks and other racial minorities. Pereyra's book, whose contents he purportedly published "tal como fueron escritos entre 1916 . . . a 1920" (Pereyra 1935, 11), certainly reflects the reductive representations of African American and Asian men as savage fiends and brutes circulated in contemporary popular texts, including, respectively, the film "Birth of Nation" (1915) and motion pictures that exploited the "yellow peril." Nevertheless, his disparagement of Asians and Africans also echoes (if not anticipates) the racist judgments of two influential essays of the 1920s: *La raza cósmica* (1925), by Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos, and *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (1928), by Peruvian socialist José Carlos Mariátegui, whose authors negated any significant contribution by the two minorities to Ibero-America's projected population configuration or Peru's national formation.<sup>29</sup>

It is also interesting to note that while Arenales cited statistics and both white and black scholars of race to support his views, Pereyra relied on patently biased statements by apologists and perpetrators of racism and violence. Ultimately, their differences of opinion may reflect the degree to which each writer had absorbed or resisted Euro-North American discourses of racial inferiority—not merely about Africans, Asians, and American Indians in the United States, but also about Spanish Americans whose populations included those groups—that had permeated academic institutions and intellectual circles throughout the hemisphere. While the young, grateful, and perhaps impressionable Pereyra seems to

27. Pereyra's comments apparently did not hurt his career, for he later became co-director of the Publications Division of the Office of the Coordinator of International Affairs, headed by Nelson Rockefeller, and also worked with the United Nations. For information on Pereyra, see Pedro Shimrose (1982, 333).

28. Little secondary information—including span of life and place of birth—on Arenales is available; data on Pereyra appears to be limited to encyclopedias and other general sources.

29. See José Vasconcelos (1979, 61, 72), and José Carlos Mariátegui (1972, 340–342, 344).

have accepted less critically the racial status quo, the older and apparently more experienced Arenales astutely discerned the paradox of Spanish Americans' attempts to improve their societies by means of foreign and racist theories that demeaned them.

The two and a half decades (1921–1946) that followed the visits of Arenales and Pereyra saw significant events and changes that would impact the United States, Latin America, and their relations. While segregation remained the law of the land and discrimination and violence against African Americans continued, black culture became more widely popular and imitated as African Americans, in the wake of service and sacrifice in World War I, grew more assertive and creative in literature, the arts, and politics, as the Harlem Renaissance and civil rights activities attest. And while Latin American economies still depended on U.S. trade, especially after the 1929 stock market crash and the subsequent Depression, President Roosevelt's Good Neighbor policy did much to improve political and cultural relations. Promoting hemispheric cooperation and needing raw materials before and during World War II, the United States, through its State Department, educational institutions and private enterprise, invited Latin American journalists, academics, and intellectuals to observe and report on diverse aspects of its democracy, and to teach—formally and informally—about Latin American life and culture.<sup>30</sup> For the most part, these visitors, like those discussed above, were white or fair-skinned members of the middle and upper classes who generally had few financial worries and did not suffer the humiliation of the color line.

A notable exception to this profile was the young Colombian medical student and aspiring writer Manuel Zapata Olivella (1920–2004), a mixed-race man of discernible African descent and humble origins. Hired by a Mexican magazine to write articles about migrant farm workers but more interested in pursuing “la posibilidad de confundirme en la variada vida del hombre norteamericano” (1953, 8), Zapata Olivella entered the United States in 1946 with barely the minimum required sum, but armed with an increasingly perceptive social and racial consciousness born of readings and experiences in Colombia, Central America, and Mexico. As a student in Bogotá he had confronted racial discrimination, and with others had organized the “Día del negro,” a demonstration expressing support of democratic freedoms, solidarity with the African American struggle, and faith in the eventual decolonization and independence of Africa (Zapata Olivella 1990, 187–90).<sup>31</sup> Traversing Central American republics in 1944, he observed the effects of U.S.-imposed employment discrimination, encountered class prejudice and self-loathing among privileged Latin American xenophiles, and witnessed dictatorship,

30. See, for example, Molina (1940) and Hernández (1945).

31. It is noteworthy that the participants had a radio station play songs by Marian Anderson and Paul Robeson.

economic exploitation and the misery of peasants and workers, all of which he recounted in *Pasión vagabunda* (1949), a narrative of his restless roving, perilous adventures, and growing social awareness (Zapata Olivella 2000, 108–109, 112–113, 128–131). *He visto la noche*, which begins where the earlier book ends, offers an equally interesting and revealing account of his travels, encounters, and precarious existence in “la tierra del dólar” (Zapata Olivella 1953, 16).

During his approximately one-year stay in the United States, Zapata Olivella crossed the country, largely by bus, starting from El Paso, Texas, to Los Angeles, California, where, among various jobs, he worked as an orderly in a hospital and as a home attendant. Moving from the west coast to Chicago, he endured there unemployment, hunger and homelessness, received “baptism” in a tent-covered house of worship, and was befriended by jobless black veterans, with whom he later rode to New York. Here he occasionally relieved his hunger frequenting Father Divine’s Palace or working odd jobs secured by fellow Spanish American down-and-outs. While in the metropolis he became friends with African American poet and writer Langston Hughes<sup>32</sup> and Peruvian novelist Ciro Alegría (who would write the prologue for Zapata Olivella’s first novel), danced at the Savoy, umpired a game of stickball in Harlem, and, for lack of two dollars, suffered the bitter disappointment of not being able to attend a concert by internationally renowned contralto Marian Anderson, who represented for him “la voz de rebeldía de todos los negros oprimidos de Norteamérica” (Zapata Olivella 1953, 100).

Fulfilling an oath he took on that occasion to dedicate his life to fighting injustice, and disregarding warnings about the risks he faced as both a “mulato” and “hispano” in the segregated states (Zapata Olivella 1953, 104), Zapata Olivella undertook his return to Mexico via the South. Traveling by Greyhound bus he soon found himself denied food and lodging in the nation’s capital (Zapata Olivella 1953, 105–106). Later, while headed for North Carolina, he was asked to move to the back section of the bus marked by “un pedazo de cuero enrejado que guindaba del techo, detrás del espaldar de los últimos asientos individuales.” Unaware at first of the implication, he soon realized “la humillación de aquel pedazo de cuero que parecía reírse de mí con sus huecos” and for the first time saw the color line literally materialized (Zapata Olivella 1953, 108).

Venturing further south brought him face to face with the more blatant, quotidian realities of racial segregation. For example, in Atlanta he observed black passengers paying their fare at the front of the city bus but obliged to enter through the rear. “Por vez primera,” he tells the reader, “supe lo que era viajar en vehículos en donde campeará el más rígido

32. Zapata Olivella had read Hughes’ autobiography, *The Big Sea*, and some of his poems, including “I, Too.” See Captain-Hidalgo (1985, 26–32). He also used lines from Hughes poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” as the epigraph to *He visto la noche*.

jimcroismo" (Zapata Olivella 1953, 116). A visit to a city hospital that bore the sign "Para negros" confirmed for him the fallacy of the "separate but equal" doctrine and the hypocrisy of North American democracy:

A los negros, pues, se les señalaban un hospital, desprovisto de suficiente personal científico y sin medicinas. Por el contrario, dotaban a los enfermos blancos de todo lo que por principio anti-humano y anticientífico negaban a los de color. (Zapata Olivella 1953, 119)

In the face of these potentially demoralizing experiences, it should be noted, Zapata Olivella never erased or attempted to conceal his identity as a person of African descent. Neither, unlike other, more privileged visitors from below the Río Bravo, did he use his Latin American identity to evade or gain immunity from the discriminatory treatment accorded to people of color. Rather, as a person fully aware of his mixed racial parentage,<sup>33</sup> he chose to embrace his blackness by identifying with those who were the victims of segregation and whom he called "mis hermanos de raza" (Zapata Olivella 1953, 56, 112). Indeed, his travels throughout the United States allowed him to gain a better understanding of his own racial and national self and of the subtle ways in which African-descended and indigenous peoples were inferiorized and excluded from the national imaginary of their own homelands. By immersing himself in the African American experience he succeeded in honing his own ethnic consciousness and commitment to social justice.<sup>34</sup> A final confrontation with discrimination in Texas illustrates his resolve. When denied service at a bus station restaurant as both a black and a Latino, with righteous indignation he retorted, "Algún día los negros y los latinos le enseñarán a usted la decencia humana" (Zapata Olivella 1953, 125).

The foregoing discussion of travel texts by Spanish American visitors to the United States during the segregation years has shown that aspects of colonialist thinking—especially those pertaining to identity, representation, and the roles of racial groups in the Americas—remained firmly and ideologically embedded in the nations' cultural matrix, to be reinforced subsequently by new theories of race emanating from Europe or North America. Privileging Hispanic culture and whiteness and reinscribing the

33. According to Zapata Olivella, (1990, 71, 51), his father was mulatto and his mother, mestiza. A recent study of Zapata Olivella's writings mistakenly classifies his travel texts as "novels" and, misreading an incident recounted in *¡Levántate mulato!*, incorrectly implies that the future writer reluctantly accepted or appreciated "his blackness." See Tillis (2004, 6, 97–98).

34. Critic Andrew Smith (2004, 245) may have grasped the full import of Zapata Olivella's travel experiences and writings when he writes, "By becoming mobile and by making narratives out of this mobility, people escape the control of states and national borders and the limited, linear ways of understanding themselves which states promote in their citizens." Upon returning to Colombia, Zapata Olivella published several newspaper

colonialist disdain for colonized subalterns, Spanish American intellectuals and travelers became complicit in the marginalization and discrimination of their own populations. The values, prejudices and beliefs that travelers carried with them also influenced their perceptions and appraisals of the peoples and cultures they encountered in other lands.

Ranging from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century and coming from countries whose populations of African and indigenous descent were concentrated in the lower socioeconomic strata, the six Spanish American travelers discussed here no doubt had been exposed to racist thought and class prejudice prior to their journeys. As members of societies that for the most part lacked rigid color lines and racist hate groups, and that recognized—albeit ambivalently—their multiracial and mixed-race character, most were genuinely dismayed by the unfamiliar segregation and brutal violence. Thus they not only took note of the enforced separation of blacks and whites and the frequent racial violence, but also reacted—in diverse ways—to those realities, recording for their readers various impressions of customs, attitudes and behaviors that reflected and maintained a racially divided America. Their reactions varied, however, mediated by several complex and interrelated factors, including national identity (e.g., history, racial composition and imaginary of the traveler's homeland and its relations with other nations); cultural values and prior experiences (e.g., open-mindedness, relationships with racial Others, readings); travel circumstances (e.g., purpose, itinerary, mode of travel, finances, current events); racial identity (i.e., how and with whom the individual identified himself and how others viewed him); and experiences in the United States that confirmed or contested previously held ideas (e.g., real or vicarious interactions with African Americans). For example, Colombians Zapata Olivella and Camacho Roldán, despite their many differences (age, class, race), shared a liberal ideology and a national ethos that stressed—even though superficially—their homeland's mixed-race character and acknowledged its African component. For the disadvantaged yet resourceful Zapata Olivella, however, the blackness and *mestizaje* that Camacho Roldán recognized and others condemned were not mere academic concepts, but rather a legacy and identity that he and his family personified.

While our twenty-first-century vantage point provides an informed perspective and a critical vision of the past that most of the travelers noted here did not have, it is useful to remember that each of them desired and knowingly exercised his ability to publish his impressions, ideas, and beliefs for audiences that presumably would be receptive to

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articles based on his experiences and observations in the United States, some of which would become part of his travel books. For a brief discussion of a few of these articles, see Prescott (2001, 229–239).

them. This factor and the others noted above could and did encourage some travelers to acknowledge and defend the equality and humanity of persons unjustly degraded because of their different racial, national, or socio-economic condition. At the same time, they also disposed others to deny—often disingenuously—that same humanity and, in doing so, to feel, like their technologically and economically advanced white North American neighbors, a sense of well-being born of a belief in innate cultural, moral, and intellectual superiority over the despised and marginalized Other. It is precisely, however, this broad diversity of experience, response, and opinion that makes these Spanish American travelers' writings informative and compelling reading not only about the United States during important periods in its history, but also about the writers themselves, the nations and cultures from which they came, and the dynamics of inter-American relations.

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