

**Authentic Assertions, Commercial Concessions:
Race, Nation, and Popular Culture in Cuban New York City and Miami, 1940-1960**

by

Christina D. Abreu

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Doctoral Committee:

**Associate Professor Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof
Associate Professor Richard Turits
Associate Professor Yeidy Rivero
Associate Professor Anthony P. Mora**

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For my parents.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This dissertation examines the relationship between popular black and white Cuban entertainers and the relatively small but significant Cuban communities and broader Latino/a, especially Puerto Rican, publics of New York City and Miami in the 1940s and 1950s. It uses the stories told by some of the key Cuban participants in the Latin music scene of this period as well as the public discourse produced in some of the most widely-disseminated Spanish-language newspapers in New York City and Miami as a window into a broader experience of Cuban ethnic identity. In New York City, Cuban migrants and musicians settled nearby and among much larger Puerto Rican and African-American communities, and it was within these contexts – sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile – that black and white musicians engaged with ideas about their music, race, and national identity. In Miami, Cuban migrants and musicians lived and worked in the context of a tourism industry and political climate that encouraged and facilitated a massive back-and-forth movement between the United States and Cuba. Here, Cuban communities and Cuban ethnic identity took shape in relation to the racial boundaries of a Jim Crow city, increasingly-dominant ideologies of Panamericanism, and island politics characterized by a seemingly constant cycle of reform and revolution. In both cities and, indeed, in the broader realm of popular culture, black and white Cuban musicians and entertainers played key roles in shaping Cuban ethnic identity for other Cuban migrants.

Through their participation in music and cultural festivals, nightclubs, social clubs, and television and film productions and with the Spanish-language press acting as an important intermediary, these performers also engaged in the construction of discourses of Hispano and Latino/a identity and community.

Between 1940 and 1960, the Cuban population in New York grew from just over 7,000 to more than 40,000. In Florida during the same period, the Cuban population increased to nearly 50,000 rising from little more than 11,000. Among those migrants leaving Cuba to start new lives in the United States were numerous musicians and entertainers, some of whom would emerge as well-known neighborhood celebrities and international stars. At social clubs, dancehalls, and nightclubs in the South Bronx, East Harlem, and Southwest section of Miami as well as in the hotels, ballrooms, and nightclubs of Broadway, Miami Beach, and the Hollywood big screen, black and white Cuban musicians and entertainers participated in the construction of multiple and contested representations of Cubanness, Afro-Cubanness, and Latinness. These Cubans and the representations they produced encountered Cuban, Puerto Rican, African-American, and white North American audiences who brought their own sets of racial and cultural expectations to the dance floor. Some of the key Cuban participants in the Latin music of scene of this period were black musicians Mario Bauzá, Machito, Arsenio Rodríguez, and Miguelito Valdés and white entertainers Xavier Cugat, Desi Arnaz, Marco Rizo, and Perucho Irigoyen. Their stories and perspectives as well as those of other black and white Cuban musicians and entertainers reveal both shared understandings and significant differences in their migration experiences, participation in the professional entertainment industries, and ideas on musical authenticity and race and

ethnicity. In addition to oral histories, the Spanish-language newspapers of New York City and Miami, especially journalists for *La Prensa* and the columns of *Diario de Nueva York*'s Babby Quintero and *Diario de las Américas*' German Negroni, serve as a major source of these stories and perspectives. It was within the pages of these newspapers that Cuban and Latino/a musicians and migrants expressed and debated ideas and practices related to musical and cultural authenticity and commercialism, race and ethnicity, and Cuban nationalism and Hispano and Latino/a identity.

In demonstrating the role black and white Cuban musicians and entertainers played in the construction of discourses of Cuban and Hispano and Latino/a identity and community, this dissertation focuses on three major dynamics. First, I examine the differences in experience between black and white musicians, specifically in terms of their – sometimes quite distinct, sometimes shared – engagement with nationalist discourses about Afro-Cubanidad, race, and different modes of racialization practiced in the United States and Cuba. Cuban musicians sometimes held fast to their perspectives on their music, race, and culture that circulated in Cuba, but they also frequently rethought the significance of their music, race, and culture in terms of their migration. Second, I look at the differences between the music produced for and consumed by Cuban, Puerto Rican, and broader Latino/a audiences and in transnational circuits and music produced for popular consumption by white North American audiences. The boundaries between these two publics are, of course, fluid given that in Cuba (and in Miami) the music industry was connected to international tourism and that musicians and musical styles oftentimes overlapped these multiple audiences. A notion of musical authenticity emerged, especially among Cuban musicians of color, which emphasized

innovation over popularization and referenced the relationship between musician and audience, nationalism and rhythm, and blackness and Africanness. Third, I focus on ideas and constructions of Cubanidad and Hispanidad or Latinidad, arguing that during this period and, particularly, in the realm of popular music Cubanness played a central role in the developing conceptions of Hispano and Latino/a identity and culture. With Cuban music and musicians at the center, a relationship developed between national origin communities and nationalist cultural representations and an emerging public, oftentimes referred to as *la colonia hispana*, *la colonia latina*, and *los nuestros*, that was defined by shared language, hemispheric and interamerican solidarity, and transnational culture.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, black and white Cuban musicians encountered complicated worlds of local celebrity and international fame shaped by the different and inconsistent tastes and preferences of Cuban, broader Latino/a, and white North American audiences. Cuban musicians and the popular culture they produced encountered a vast audience of Latinos/as in New York City, a city that was both an urban center of cosmopolitanism and a place of racial segregation and ethnic divisiveness. In Miami, a city that belonged as much to Jim Crow South as it did to the tourist boosters and business officials touting a formal, though racially ambivalent, agenda of Panamericanism, Cuban musicians performed for tens of thousands of Cuban, Latin American, and white North American tourists as well as a stable and growing community of Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Latin American residents. Thousands of Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Spanish migrants as well as smaller numbers of African Americans, Jewish Americans, and other ethnic whites crowded into nightclubs, ballrooms, and

ethnic social clubs, forming publics that both embraced and rejected the cultural representations of Cubanness, Afro-Cubanness, and Latinness produced at these venues. This project not only examines these publics but also the ways in which these various representations helped set the racial, ethnic, and political terms by which Cuban migrants came to define themselves during this period. Through the use of oral history interviews and reports in Spanish- and English-language newspapers and magazines as well as the meeting minutes, publications, and social calendars of Cuban social clubs in New York City and Miami, this project shows that many of the popular black and white Cuban performers of the 1940s and 1950s participated in the production of public discourses and private debates that were central to ideas and broader experiences of Cuban ethnic identity. Through their cooperation with institutions such as newspapers, festivals, nightclubs, and social clubs, this project also demonstrates the role of Cuban entertainers and migrants in the construction of discourses of Hispano and Latino/a identity and community.

Historical and sociological studies on the migration and settlement of Cubans in the United States can be fairly characterized as temporally disconnected and geographically polarized. Most studies on Cuban migration to the United States have focused on two seemingly disjointed and unrelated time periods: the relatively small migrations of Cubans that took place in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and the more recent and massive waves of exiles who left the island following the triumph of Fidel Castro's Cuban Revolution of 1959. Many of these studies have limited their examinations to four major areas of settlement: first, New York City and Tampa

and, later, Miami and Union City, New Jersey. Few of these studies, particularly those focused on the earlier period of migration and settlement of Cubans in the United States, have offered comparative analysis of the experiences of Cuban migrants in more than one of these areas of settlement. In fact, the dearth of scholarship on the earlier period oftentimes relegates the interested reader to a handful of titles and cursory summaries in articles and chapters focused on the post-1959 exiles.¹

Since Fidel Castro's march into Havana in early January 1959, hundreds of thousands of Cubans have come to the United States by plane or boat in search of political freedom, socioeconomic opportunity, or simply to be reunited with family and friends. Many of the historical and sociological studies on post-1959 Cuban migration have focused on processes of settlement and adaptation, the impact of exile visits and remittances on the homeland, and examinations of Cuban exile politics, mostly in terms of Miami's development as an ethnic enclave and its role in U.S. national electoral politics as well as U.S. foreign policy towards Castro and an eventual post-Castro Cuba.²

¹ For studies that focus specifically on nineteenth and early twentieth-century migration and settlement, see, for example, Gary R. Mormino and George E. Pozzeta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Gerald E. Poyo, *With All and for the Good of All: The Emergence of Popular Nationalism in the Cuban Communities of the United States, 1848-1898* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989); Gabriel Haslip-Viera, "The Evolution of the Latino Community in New York City: Early Nineteenth Century to the Present," in *Latinos in New York: Communities in Transition*, eds. Gabriel Haslip-Viera and Sherrie L. Baver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996); Brent Richards Weisman, *Soldiers and Patriots: Buffalo Soldiers and Afro-Cubans in Tampa, 1898* (Tampa: University of South Florida, 1999); Susan D. Greenbaum, *More than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002).

Not yet published at the time of writing, this author suspects that the forthcoming work of Lisandro Pérez will offer tremendous contributions to our understanding of nineteenth-century Cuban migrants in New York City. See, Lisandro Pérez, *Cubans in Gotham: Immigrants, Exiles, and Revolution in Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: New York University Press, forthcoming).

² Félix Masud-Piloto, *From Welcomed Exiles to Illegal Immigrants: Cuban Migration to the U.S., 1959-1994* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996); María Cristina García, *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959-1994* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Kevin E. McHugh, Ines M. Miyares, and Emily H. Skop, "The Magnetism of Miami: Segmented Paths in Cuban Migration," *Geographical Review* 87, no. 4 (Oct. 1997): 504-519; María Cristina García,

Historians and other scholars have typically argued that Cuban migrants, many of whom settled in south Florida or northeastern New Jersey, arrived in this country during three distinct periods or waves. Just over 248,000 Cubans, mostly whites of the middle and upper classes, left the island immediately following the rise of Castro's revolutionary government between January 1, 1959 and October 22, 1962. Between 1965 and 1973, nearly 300,000 Cubans arrived in the United States as part of the U.S.-Cuba-coordinated "freedom flights." In this second wave, more than half of the exiles were of the working class. Women and the elderly outnumbered men of working age, and many Chinese and Jewish Cubans also left the island during this period. The third wave, known as the Mariel Boatlift, witnessed the mass exodus of approximately 125,000 Cubans between April and October 1980. Cubans of the Mariel differed from the Cubans who had left the island in the 1960s and 1970s in terms of demographics, and so, too, did U.S. government and popular responses to these newcomers. The *Marielitos* were about ten years younger in age, and many more blacks, mulattoes, and men (nearly seventy percent) left during this wave. The U.S. government granted "refugee" status to Cubans of the earlier waves, but the Carter administration gave the Cubans of the Mariel "entrant" status, which historian María Cristina García describes as "a political compromise, a resolution that allowed the U.S. to symbolically uphold its open door policy while appearing to take a

"Hardliners v. 'Dialogueros': Cuban Exile Political Groups and United States-Cuba Policy," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 17, no. 4 (Summer 1998): 3-28; Susan Eckstein and Lorena Barberia, "Grounding Immigrant Generations in History: Cuban Americans and Their Transnational Ties," *International Migration Review* 46, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 799-837; Alejandro Portes, "The Cuban American Political Machine: Reflections on its Origins and Perpetuation," in *Changes in Cuban Society Since the Nineties*, ed. Joseph Tulchin, Lilian Bobea, Espina Prieto, and Rafael Hernández (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2005); Silvia Pedraza, *Political Disaffection in Cuba's Revolution and Exodus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Susan Eckstein, *The Immigrant Divide: How Cuban Americans Changed the U.S. and Their Homeland* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Yolanda Prieto, *The Cubans of Union City: Immigrants and Exiles in a New Jersey Community* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009).

harsher stand against illegal immigration.” Reports that Castro used the boatlift to rid the island of political dissidents, violent criminals, and homosexuals combined with racial and ethnic prejudices and fears concerning job competition and housing shortages, especially among local residents in south Florida, all contributed to the negative public perceptions of the *Marielitos*.³

More recently, a fourth wave of migration, the *balseros* of the mid-1990s, has drawn the attention of scholars. Over 50,000 Cubans left for the United States on makeshift rafts and inner tubes in 1994 and 1995, and historians, sociologists, and other scholars interested in migration and adaptation are rushing to investigate this wave’s impact within the Cuban exile community and Miami writ large.⁴ Separate attention has

³ María Cristina García, *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959-1994* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996): 1, 13, 43, 46, 68-70.

For more on the economic and political causes of the Mariel crisis within Cuba, demographic differences between the *Marielitos* and earlier waves of exiles, the reception of *Marielitos* within the Cuban exile community in Miami specifically and the United States generally, and the implications of the Mariel crisis on U.S.-Cuban affairs, see Jose Szapocznik and Raquel E. Cohen, *Coping with Adolescent Refugees: The Mariel Boatlift* (New York: Praeger, 1985); Alejandro Portes and Alex Stepick, *City on the Edge: The Transformation of Miami* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Félix Masud-Piloto, *From Welcomed Exiles to Illegal Immigrants: Cuban Migration to the U.S., 1959-1995* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996); Silvia Pedraza, “Cuba’s Refugees: Manifold Migrations,” in *Origins and Destinies: Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in America*, eds. Silvia Pedraza and Ruben Rumbaut (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1996): 263-279; David Wells Engstrom, *Presidential Decision Making Adrift: The Carter Administration and the Mariel Boatlift* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997); Emily H. Skop, “Race and Place in the Adaptation of Mariel Exiles,” *International Migration Review* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 449-471; Joe Morris Doss, *Let the Bastards Go: From Cuba to Freedom on God’s Mercy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003); Susan Eckstein, “The Transformation of Diaspora and the Transformation of Cuba,” in *Changes in Cuban Society Since the Nineties*, ed. Joseph Tulchin et al. (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, 2005): 219, 224; Mirta A. Ojito, *Finding Mañana: A Memoir of a Cuban Exodus* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005); Julio Capo, Jr., “Queering Mariel: Mediating Cold War Foreign Policy and U.S. Citizenship among Cuba’s Homosexual Exile Community, 1978-1994,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 29, no. 4 (Summer 2010): 78-106.

⁴ María Cristina García, *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959-1994* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996): ix, x.

Félix Masud-Piloto published *From Welcomed Exiles to Illegal Immigrants: Cuban Immigration to the U.S., 1959-1995* (1995), a new edition of his earlier work *With Open Arms: Cuban Migration to the United States* (1988), to include a brief overview and analysis of the *balseros* crisis of 1994 and Cuban immigration policy under the Bush and Clinton administrations.

See, also, Holly Ackerman and Juan M. Clark, *The Cuban Balseros: Voyage of Uncertainty* (Miami: Policy Center of the Cuban American National Council, 1995); Larry Nackerud, Alyson Springer, Christopher Larrison, and Alicia Issac, “The End of the Cuban Contradiction in U.S. Refugee Policy,”

also been given to Operation Pedro Pan, the covert migration of approximately 14,000 unaccompanied Cuban children to the United States between December 1960 and October 1962. Many middle- and upper-class Cuban parents feared and disapproved of the social, political, and economic changes taking place on the island, especially the communist teachings that began to infiltrate Cuban schools after Castro's rise to power. Led by Catholic priest Bryan O. Walsh in coordination with the Catholic Welfare Bureau in Miami, underground volunteers in Cuba, and hundreds of volunteers, orphanages, and foster families across the United States, Cuban parents sent their children north in hopes of reuniting with them as soon as they could secure the visas necessary for their own travel. Rising political tensions and souring diplomatic relations between the Cuban and U.S. governments, as a result of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion and the Cuban Missile Crisis, turned what most organizers, parents, and children thought would be a parting of just a few short weeks into many long months and, in some extreme cases, several years of anxiety and separation.⁵

There are some notable exceptions to the typical periodization and Miami's geographic monopoly of the field of Cuban-American history. Historian Louis A. Pérez, Jr. has written extensively on the economic, political, and social "ties of singular

International Migration Review 33, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 176-192; Kelly M. Greenhill, *Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion, and Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

⁵ Bryan O. Walsh, "Cuban Refugee Children," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 13, no. 3/4 (July-Oct. 1971): 378-415; Yvonne M. Conde, *Operation Pedro Pan: The Untold Exodus of 14,048 Cuban Children* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Victor Andrés Triay, *Operation Pedro Pan and the Cuban Children's Program* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999); María de los Angeles Torres, *The Lost Apple: Operation Pedro Pan, Cuban Children in the U.S., and the Promise of a Better Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004).

Several of the Operation Pedro Pan children have recently published memoirs about their experiences. Many of these memoirs reveal feelings of anxiety, resentment, and trauma as a result of parental separation as well as sentiments of immense appreciation and resilience. See, for example, Carlos Eire, *Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy* (New York: Free Press, 2004); Carlos Eire, *Learning to Die in Miami: Confessions of a Refugee Boy* (New York: Free Press, 2010).

intimacy” that have linked the United States and Cuba since the mid-nineteenth century. His influential and sweeping work *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* examines North American influences on Cuban national identity from the early 1850s to the late 1950s, influences that he describes as “less a linear or unilateral imposition than a complex process of negotiation by which many of its most central propositions were embraced by Cubans as affirmations of progress that offered the promise of a better life.” Pérez focuses on an “interrelated constellation of factors and forces” that formed and shaped Cuban encounters with North American influences in an effort to “understand the context and complexity of these linkages as a totality, as a system, and to see how connections worked together, like the strands of a web.” His research method focuses on the role of U.S. hegemony as a cultural condition and examines the ways in which Protestant missionaries, baseball and boxing, music and popular culture, and motion pictures shaped Cuban nationalism. There is as much to be gained from this approach as there is from the one Pérez rejects outright: that is, his primary interest lies in examining how Cuban and U.S. cultural practices formed a relationship within larger normative systems and not on uncovering the ways in which Cubans, particularly those who had migrated permanently to the United States, adopted, rejected, or changed U.S. culture throughout this process.⁶

My project builds on Pérez’s work by focusing on just one strand of the web, music and popular culture, set in the context of specific ideas about (self-) representation, race and ethnicity, nationality, and politics. This approach allows for closer inquiry and deeper understanding of the ways in which the Cuban migrants of the 1940s and 1950s,

⁶ Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 199): 5, 7, 10.

as individuals and as a community, not only responded to their encounters with North American culture but also how these encounters helped spur the development of a Cuban-American cultural identity long before the massive post-1959 exodus of Cubans to the United States. This project is not about the ways in which Cubans were exposed to North American ideas and values through various popular cultural forms but about the ways in which Cuban performers and migrants in New York City and Miami in the 1940s and 1950s perceived and participated in constructing and contesting ideas and social practices that defined what it meant to be “Cuban,” “Afro-Cuban,” and “Latin” in the United States during this period.⁷

In an effort to recover what she calls a “lost chapter in the Cuban American experience,” anthropologist Susan Greenbaum examines the Afro-Cuban community of Ybor City since its formation in the late-nineteenth century in her ethnography *More than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa*. Her work challenges the traditional invisibility of blacks within the Cuban-American experience as well as the popular beliefs that Cubans came to the United States only after 1959 and that they were always white and economically advantaged. She examines how Afro-Cubans in Tampa “defined and negotiated both blackness and Cubanness,” concluding that these nineteenth- and early twentieth-century migrants were “black when with Cubans, and Cubans when with blacks.” The several thousand cigar workers who arrived in Tampa from Key West beginning in the 1880s after a series of strikes forced cigar manufacturer Vicente Martínez Ybor to move his cigar factories faced a difficult situation, explains Greenbaum. Though they supported the same cause of Cuban independence and initially joined and served as leaders in the same revolutionary clubs and organizations, black and white Cubans would soon be

⁷ Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*, 5, 7, 10.

divided along racial lines. In general, white Floridians treated Afro-Cubans just as they did other blacks in the Jim Crow South, and eventually white Cubans began to distance themselves from their compatriots, especially after the 1896 U.S. Supreme Court decision *Plessy v. Ferguson* and the War for Cuban Independence. Cubans of color, for their part, wanted to maintain a collective cultural identity as Cubans and largely avoided association with African Americans, emphasizing instead their ethnic origins.

Greenbaum argues that Afro-Cuban identity in Tampa centered on the Union Martí y Maceo, a mutual aid society established in 1904 by what she describes as working-class and politically-radical black Cubans in Tampa. Members of the Union Martí y Maceo insisted on their claims of Cubanness and racial equality even as formal segregation and divisiveness between black and white Cubans intensified. With the collapse of the cigar industry in the 1930s, many Afro-Cubans moved north from Tampa to New York City, and those who remained forged tighter bonds with African Americans and the larger black community of Tampa, especially after the Second World War, due mostly to an increase in intermarriage, education levels, Urban Renewal, and participation in the civil rights movements of the 1940s and 1950s, especially voting rights and equal pay campaigns. For Greenbaum, the symbolic end of the Afro-Cuban community of Tampa came in 1965 when Urban Renewal destroyed the original building of the Union Martí y Maceo, though remaining members later bought a one-story building where the club continues hosting fundraisers and other community events.

This dissertation also aims to recover the presence and contributions of Cubans of color within the Cuban-American experience, embarking on a trail mapped out but not pursued in Greenbaum's work. That is, this project follows the thousands of Cubans who

made their way from Tampa to New York City in the 1940s and 1950s and settled alongside newly-arriving Cuban migrants, Puerto Ricans, and African Americans. It also begins to identify a pattern of migration that saw Cubans leave Tampa for Miami to continue working in the cigar industry or pursue opportunities in other developing industries. By examining the experiences of these migrants in New York City together with the experiences of Cubans in Miami, this dissertation recovers and deepens our understanding of a Cuban-American experience that not only spans the entirety of the twentieth century but also as one not exclusive to or confined by a single geographic area of the United States. As are the cities of Havana and Santiago de Cuba, Tampa remains ever-present in this story not solely as a place of origin but as one of many sources of symbolic and material influences on race relations between black and white Cubans as well as among Cubans, Puerto Ricans, African Americans, whites, and other groups who lived alongside one another in New York City and Miami in the 1940s and 1950s.⁸

Using the experiences of Cuban entertainers and migrants in New York City and Miami in the 1940s and 1950s, this project bridges the gap between studies of Cuban migrants in nineteenth-century New York City and Tampa and narratives that define the Cuban Revolution of 1959 as *the* moment of origin for Cuban migration to the United States. Most historians have long characterized the 1940s and 1950s as a time of fertile Cuban cultural production but little Cuban settlement in the United States. In many instances, much more is known about the development of rumba, mambo, and cha-cha-chá as musical styles than about the very Cuban singers, musicians, dancers, and audiences who created, performed, and enjoyed those rhythms on nightclub dance floors

⁸ Susan D. Greenbaum, *More than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002): 12, 155, 260, 261, 266.

and in cramped apartments all across these two major urban centers.⁹ By 1960 there were nearly ninety-thousand Cubans in New York and Florida, and the majority of those migrants settled in New York City and Miami. In drawing attention to the links between cultural production and the growing Cuban communities of New York City and Miami, this project refocuses the way historians have periodized Cuban-American history, challenging the idea of a radical discontinuity in the migration of Cubans to the United States.

Though not always positioned within a comparative framework, Cuban migration to the United States parallels other Latin American and Caribbean migrations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Historical and sociological studies on international migration from Latin America to the United States, particularly within the context of U.S. imperialism, have contributed to a rich and extensive field of research. Push-pull models typically reduce migration to sets of conditions within receiving and sending countries that act independently of one another. Placing migration within the context of empire, however, complicates these models by emphasizing structural factors and interdependence. One notable example is the work of historians Gilbert González and Raul A. Fernández who argue that the economic and political subordination of Mexico to the United States in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, rather than the

⁹ For more on Latin musical styles and genres, see, for example, John Storm Roberts, *The Latin Tinge: The Impact of Latin American Music on the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Isabelle Leymarie, *Cuban Fire: The Story of Salsa and Latin Jazz* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002); Vernon W. Boggs, *Salsiology: Afro-Cuban Music and the Evolution of Salsa in New York City* (New York: Excelsior Music Publishing Co., 1992); Raul A. Fernández, "The Course of U.S. Cuban Music: Margin and Mainstream," *Cuban Studies* 24 (1994); Peter Manuel, "Latin Music in the United States: Salsa and the Mass Media," *Journal of Communication* 41 (1991); Raul A. Fernández, *From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Peter Manuel, ed. *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009).

conquest of 1848, stimulated continuous migration and forged the Chicano minority population. Migration, they argue, signified a Mexican national crisis brought on by the expansion of foreign-controlled railroads, technological modernization, and peasant displacement. Migrations from Central America and Cuba, particularly the massive migrations to the United States since 1960, have also been understood in the context of empire. Twentieth-century revolutionary movements, like those in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Cuba, for example, directly challenged local elites and sought improvements to local conditions, but indirectly protested against U.S. imperial forces that established and maintained conditions of “underdevelopment.” Historian Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, however, has noted “the deep irony of the relationship between imperialism and migration.” Dominicans migrated to the United States after 1965 despite this being “a country deeply implicated in the sustenance of an oppressive [RafaelTrujillo] regime.” In many ways, U.S. imperialism has generated ambivalence among migrants as well as among those remaining in the home country. On the one hand, migrants are hostile to the United States for encouraging and ignoring corruption and helping facilitate the unequal distribution of wealth and resources. On the other hand, migrants are lured to the United States by the prospect of economic mobility and the symbolic and cultural ties created by the consumption of U.S. goods. Of course, there are risks to understanding migration strictly in the context of structural forces and imperial contexts in that this approach tends to obscure human agency and reduces migration to seemingly coordinated activities between nations. This framework is, nonetheless, key to understanding the Cuban migration of the 1940s and 1950s and drawing the necessary links between the earlier and later periods of migration.¹⁰

¹⁰ For more on the relationship between migration, revolutionary movements, and colonialism, see

The massive exodus of Cubans to the United States since 1959 overshadows the much longer process of migration as an element of a colonial relationship that began in earnest in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century and continued throughout the twentieth century. In the Cuban case, this relationship has played itself out crucially in the terrain of popular culture. Cuban migrants to New York City and Miami in the 1940s and 1950s brought with them tastes and expectations shaped by decades of U.S. neocolonial rule on the island. Cuban familiarity with U.S. culture and, conversely, U.S. familiarity with Cuban culture stretches back into this earlier period before 1959, and it is this reciprocity that underscores the complex and dynamic relationship between Cuban entertainers and Cuban, Latino/a, and white North American audiences in New York City and Miami, the entertainment industry, and local, national, and international politics. For Cuban musicians and entertainers, the Broadway stage and the Hollywood screen beckoned and “all who imagined making it – really making it – were obliged to contemplate emigration.” But dreams of traveling north were not limited to those hoping to achieve stardom or celebrity. Rather, as Pérez shows, not only had Cubans been migrating north to the United States since the nineteenth century but doing so had, in fact, by the twentieth century become both Cuban ritual and family tradition. He explains, “The emigration experience in all of its forms reached deeply into what became Cuban, an

Walter Lefebvre, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993); Thomas Paterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Juan González, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America* (New York: Viking, 2000); Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (London: Harper Perennial Press, 2001); Gilbert González and Raul A. Fernández, “Empire and the Origins of Twentieth-Century Migration from Mexico to the United States,” *The Pacific Historical Review* 71, no. 1 (February 2002): 19-57; María Cristina García, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Alan McPherson, *Yankee No!: Anti-Americanism in U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York after 1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007): 94.

experience that replicated itself over generations and evolved into a condition by which vast numbers subsequently defined themselves and developed their children.”¹¹

Yet, it would be a mistake to argue that U.S. racial discourses, made familiar through direct encounters with colonial officials, U.S. businesses and employers, and tourists or through mediated encounters vis-à-vis popular culture, met with empty vessels. As shown by numerous historical studies that focus on Cuba’s nineteenth-century struggle for independence from Spain, most notable among them being historian Ada Ferrer’s *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898*, Cubans knew about and practiced racial discrimination long before U.S. intervention on the island. In the early 1890s, black and white Cuban revolutionary leaders and intellectuals forged a definition of Cuban nationhood and citizenship that envisioned an independent Cuba as a racially egalitarian society, a definition that directly challenged popular biological and cultural beliefs that people of color were inferior to whites. What U.S. occupation did to this vision shortly after the War for Cuban Independence was accelerate the growing tendency among white Cuban leaders to define civilization as “refinement, civility, and whiteness.”¹² Beginning with the signing of the Platt Amendment and continuing throughout the first (1902-1933) and second (1933-1958) Cuban republics, the political and economic interests of the United States continued to prompt interference and involvement in the domestic affairs of the island. Emphasizing the role that state policies

¹¹ Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*, 411-415.

¹² Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999): 191-192, 197.

See, also, Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba between Reform and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

and social actors played in the development of Cuban race relations, historian Alejandro de la Fuente admits that “in the context of Cuba’s imperial subordination, a modicum of independence could be maintained only at the expense of social justice.”¹³ Two points, therefore, deserve special attention. First, migrants from Cuba arrived in the United States with their own racial knowledge and sets of constructed and contested categories of racial identification; their everyday experiences on the island, everyday experiences that included both the practice of and subjection to implicit and explicit forms of racial discrimination, shaped their mode of thinking. Second, for Cuban migrants, familiarity with the U.S. racial system prior to migration did not necessitate acquiescence to or rejection of either system in its entirety. Once in New York City or Miami, the black and white Cuban migrants of the 1940s and 1950s found ways to accept, reject, and modify the racialized discourses and practices that marked them, at various times and in various places, as “Cuban,” “Black/Negro,” “Latin,” “Afro-Cuban,” and “Hispanoamericano.” As we will see, music played a critical role in this process. It was one of the central fields of discourse in which both nationalism and race were articulated, in intimate dialogue with the imperial gaze, in Cuba beginning in the 1920s and 1930s. Time and again, Cuban migrants and musicians reworked these familiar articulations to suit new contexts, at times shifting seamlessly between critical and oppositional stories of race to discourses of musical nationalism and racial harmony.

For decades, Latino/a Studies scholars have debated the use and usefulness of the terms “Hispanic,” “Latino/a,” “Afro-Cuban,” and “Latin.” This dissertation is an

¹³ Alejandro De la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001): 10-11.

attempt to understand what it meant to be characterized in this way on the stages, dance floors, television screens, and crowded streets of New York City and Miami in the 1940s and 1950s. In tracing the ways that these terms circulated in the Spanish-language press as well as the ways that Cuban musicians and migrants used these terms and made sense of them, I emphasize the contested and socially-constructed nature of these terms during this period. Though my role as narrator oftentimes requires that I identify race, nationality, and ethnicity, my goal has not been to lay claim to or defend specific vocabulary. Rather, my aim has been to understand what it meant to be “Cuban,” “Afro-Cuban,” “Hispanic,” and “Latin” within the Cuban ethnic community and broader Puerto Rican and Latino/a communities of New York City and Miami in this period.

Scholarly debates are further complicated when these terms are used to describe certain genres of popular culture or marketing strategies employed by national and multinational businesses and corporations. Some critics charge that the ethnic label “Hispanic” “homogenizes the varied social and political experiences” of millions of people of “different races, classes, languages, national origins, genders, and religions” and fails to account for differences between self-identification and government-imposed terminology. Latino/a Studies scholar Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez, for example, prefers the term “Latino/a” to account for gender differences and because it “functions as a stratagem of/for political intervention, solidarity, and coalition.” Still, there are critics of the ethnic label “Latino/a.” Latino/a Studies scholar Juan Flores argues that while a pan-ethnic concept like “Latino/a” might offer “some significant strategic advantages to their deployment in political movements for change,” it “only holds up when qualified by the national-group angle or optic from which it is uttered... Thus, what presents itself as a

category of inclusion and compatibility functions as a tool of exclusion and internal ‘othering.’” Sociologist Gabriel Haslip-Viera seemingly sidesteps these debates entirely and uses the terms “Hispanic” and “Latino/a” interchangeably. For him, both terms simply “refer to all persons living in the United States whose origins can be traced to Spain and the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Included in this category are all U.S. immigrants who have come from these countries and their descendants who live in the United States, whether they are Spanish-speaking or not.”¹⁴

More recently, the term “Afro-Latino/a” has emerged “as a way to signal racial, cultural, and socioeconomic contradictions within the overly vague idea of ‘Latino/a.’” The term, according to Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores, editors of the critical volume *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States*, recognizes the presence of anti-black racism within the various Latino/a communities of the United States, New York City and Miami included. Jiménez Román and Flores argue that the term “Afro-Latino/a” articulates an understanding of “the transnational discourse or identity field linking Black Latin Americans and Latin@s across national and regional

¹⁴Agustín Laó-Montes, “Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York City,” in *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York*, eds. Agustín Laó-Montes and Arlene Dávila (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001): 15; Suzanne Oboler, *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (Re)Presentation in the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995): 2-3; Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez, José, *Can You See? Latinos On and Off Broadway* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999): 12; Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000): 7-8; Gabriel Haslip-Viera, “The Evolution of the Latino Community in New York City: Early Nineteenth Century to the Present,” in *Latinos in New York: Communities in Transition*, eds. Gabriel Haslip-Viera and Sherrie L. Baver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996): 23.

For more a more detailed historiographical survey of these debates, see, for example, Félix M. Padilla, *Latino Ethnic Consciousness* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985); Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinster/Aunt Lute Books, 1987); Silvio Torres-Saillant, “Inventing the Race: Latinos and the Ethnoracial Pentagon,” *Latino Studies* 1, no. 1 (March 2003): 123-167; Arlene Dávila, *Latino Spin: Public Image and the Whitewashing of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

lines.”¹⁵ Several of the essays in their volume focus on the experiences of some of the very black Cuban musicians and social actors examined in this dissertation, including Afro-Cuban performers Graciela Pérez-Grillo, Arsenio Rodríguez, and Mario Bauzá as well as Melba Alvarado, leader of El Club Cubano Inter-Americano, an Afro-Cuban social club in the Bronx. To be sure, among scholars working on Cuba, “Afro-Cuban” as a racial designation remains problematic. In Cuba (and, indeed, among the Cuban musicians and migrants examined in this dissertation), “Afro-Cuban” had a specific cultural connotation which most active black intellectuals and politicians did not see as their own. More than a reference to skin color, Afro-Cubanness recognized and, in some instances, celebrated African influences in Cuban music, dance, and culture and claimed these as symbols of Cuban national identity.¹⁶

An equally complicated and contested term is “Latin,” particularly when applied to the variety of musical genres musicians and bandleaders produced for Cuban, Latino/a, and North American audiences in the 1940s and 1950s. Many black and white Cuban musicians opposed descriptions of their music as “Latin,” though it was the term most often used within the tourism and professional entertainment industries. Instead, they preferred the national and cultural terms “Cuban” and “Afro-Cuban.” As it was during this period, “Latin” continues to be used most commonly by the mainstream entertainment industries in the United States as a cultural marker and racial stereotype. As Sandoval-Sánchez explains, “Being ‘Latin’ means to come from a Spanish-speaking

¹⁵ Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores, “Introduction,” in *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States*, eds. Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores (Durham: Duke University Press: 2010): 11.

¹⁶ Robin Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness: Afrocubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997).

country, to be an immigrant whose identity as ‘Latin foreign other’ is marked by, and anchored in, a Spanish accent and exotic looks. Such conceptions of the ‘foreign other’ are perpetuated by ready-made stereotypes: the Latin bombshell, the Latin lover, Latin music, Latin rhythm, Latin dance, Latin type, Latin temper, Latin time.” Pérez offers a more specific definition of “Latin,” one centered on a popular culture landscape dominated by the rhythms of the rumba, conga, mambo, and cha-cha-chá. Though he argues that “Latin” generally meant “Cuban,” he points out that Cubanness was neither static nor immune to change, explaining that “commercial success on this scale, of course, could not have been achieved without substantial adaptation of authentic rhythms and original phrasings.”¹⁷

As a cultural history, this dissertation reconnects the methods of thick description, discourse analysis, and the examination of identity categories not only with the lived realities and central problematics of race and class but also in relation to public imagination.¹⁸ Each chapter offers, to varying extents, comparative analysis of the U.S. and Cuban racial systems and contends that Cuban entertainers held multiple subject positions as celebrities, laborers, migrants, and racial and ethnic pioneers. I incorporate close readings of historical evidence from a wide range of primary source materials with theories of race and ethnicity, nationalism, identity, and popular culture. My project draws from major Spanish-language, U.S., and African-American newspapers and magazines as well as archival materials housed in the Schomburg Center for Research in

¹⁷ Sandoval-Sánchez, *José, Can You See?*, 14; Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*, 214.

¹⁸ James W. Cook, Lawrence Glickman, and Michael O’Malley, eds. *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present, Future* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009): 49-50.

Black Culture (Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers), the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts (Marco Rizo Papers), the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños (Carlos Ortiz Collection), and the Bronx County Historical Society (David Carp Collection), just to name a few of the primary source depositories consulted for this project.

One of the most significant contributions of this project is the recovery of documents and oral history interviews deposited at the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños and the Bronx County Historical Society that have only recently been made available to researchers. These collections contain lengthy interviews with well-known and not-so-well-known black and white Cuban performers, including Machito, Mario Bauzá, Marco Rizo, Arturo “Chico” O’Farrill, Armando Sánchez, Armando Peraza, and Alberto Socarrás. Their perspectives on race and ethnicity, nation, and popular culture, considered simultaneously and in dialogue with one another, are critical to a richer understanding of the relationship between cultural production, (self-) representation, and audience reception. This project also relies on oral history interviews that I conducted with Cuban and Puerto Rican entertainers and migrants, U.S. census and immigration records, and cultural texts, specifically song lyrics, musical performances, films, and episodes from the six seasons of the popular television show *I Love Lucy*. Using this rich body of sources, this dissertation contends that the great boom in transnational Cuban and Cuban-American cultural production in the 1940s and 1950s was inseparable from the smaller migrant stream that preceded the Cuban Revolution of 1959 by several decades.

Chapter One examines the musical and cultural contributions that black trumpet-player Mario Bauzá, white Cuban pianist Marco Rizo, and many other black and white

Cuban musicians made to the Cuban-American cultural landscape developing in New York City during the 1940s and 1940s. Though many regard Xavier Cugat as the archetypal “Latin” bandleader of the period, this chapter offers a look at how Bauzá, Rizo, and other Cuban musicians’ understandings of the intersections of race, nationalism, and popular culture disrupt “Latin” and “Cuban” as static or singular identity categories. In doing so, I pay close attention to the role of race and class in shaping the discourses expressed by these musicians about their migration, their participation in the entertainment industries in New York City, and their sense of racial and ethnic identity.

Chapter Two centers on the discursive elements of what can best be described as the “Cuban New York” experience prior to the massive exodus of Cubans to the United States after 1959 and in relation to the vast number of Puerto Ricans also living in the city. Two of the more active and well-organized Cuban social clubs and cultural organizations in New York City during the 1940s and 1950s were El Club Cubano Inter-Americano and the Ateneo Cubano de Nueva York. Whereas most Cuban social clubs like the Ateneo Cubano denied membership to Cubans of color, El Club Cubano opened its doors and extended memberships not only to Cubans of color but also to Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Jamaicans, Haitians, and African Americans. I focus specifically on many of the popular Cuban musicians and performers affiliated with and hired to perform at events sponsored by these social clubs, including Alberto Socarrás, Marcelino Guerra, and Arsenio Rodríguez, as well as more broadly on the events themselves, particularly those marked as Cuban patriotic celebrations. My aim has been to present moments of both cross-racial and intra-ethnic collaboration and tension, the irony of

black exclusion within the context of Afro-Cuban celebration, and instances of musicians navigating their professional careers in cultural *and* commercial contexts.

Chapter Three examines the musical popularity contests and fundraising musical showcases sponsored by *La Prensa*, New York City's largest and longest-running Spanish-language daily newspaper, between 1941 and 1959. Black and white Cuban singers, musicians and dancers figured prominently in the contests and festivals, and this chapter analyzes that presence as a critical component of Hispanic identity and community during this period. In particular, I argue that these contests and festivals serve as early examples of the role that Cuban musicians and Cuban ethnic identity played in the development and broadcasting of a pan-Latino/a identity that was both local and hemispheric.

Chapter Four considers the ways in which the lived realities of Cuban migrants and musicians intersected with symbolic, mass-mediated representations of Cubanness and Latinness. Millions of viewers across the United States gathered around their television sets in the 1950s to watch Ricky Ricardo, their favorite Cuban bandleader on the popular CBS show *I Love Lucy*. This chapter juxtaposes the lived experiences of Cuban musicians and Latino/a audiences at popular New York City nightclubs with the fictionalized narratives presented by Desi Arnaz in *I Love Lucy*. In doing so, I provide a comparison of the professional experiences of well-known black and white Cuban performers such as Machito, Miguelito Valdés, and Perucho Irigoyen with those of Desi Arnaz and the semi-autobiographical character he played on television, Ricky Ricardo. Chapter Five moves the narrative to Miami. The city's newly-established nightclubs and hotels drew tourists from across the United States and Latin America, including

thousands of Cuban visitors, but not everyone saw Miami as a temporary destination or vacationer's tropical paradise. This chapter discusses the role of Cubans and Cuban popular culture in the city long before it became a refuge for the hundreds of thousands of Cuban exiles who fled the island after the Cuban Revolution of 1959. Cubans in Miami in the 1940s and 1950s formed social clubs like the *Círculo Cubano* and the *Juventud Cubana* and attended dances, musical performances, and other social events at hotels and nightclubs like the *Tropicana* and *Barra Guys and Dolls*. What follows is an examination of this early emergence of a "Cuban Miami" in the context of the ideology and racialized practices of Panamericanism and in relation to Cuban politics on and off the island as well as the presence of a large number of Puerto Ricans in the city.

Chapter 2

“Be a good musician, be like Mozart:” Race, Class, and the Roots/Routes Traced by “Latin” Musicians

At first glance, Mario Bauzá and Marco Rizo share many things in common. Both musicians came from wealthy, well-connected families, both received musical training in some of the best conservatories in Cuba, and both left their homeland for New York City determined to “make it” as professional musicians. Once in the city of their hopes and dreams, the two musicians soon made significant contributions to what was considered “Latin” music during the 1940s and 1950s, Bauzá as a trumpet player and arranger for Machito y sus Afro-Cubans and Rizo as pianist and arranger for the Desi Arnaz Orchestra and the hit television show *I Love Lucy*. A more dubious distinction also finds these two musicians sharing common ground. Throughout their professional careers, both Bauzá and Rizo achieved less celebrity than their more popular and widely-recognized musical collaborators. Bauzá remained largely in the shadows of his more charismatic brother-in-law Machito, and Rizo never saw anywhere near the same level of stardom as his more business-savvy childhood friend Desi Arnaz.

A closer look at the personal experiences and professional careers of these two Cuban musicians suggests that, for the most part, the similarities end here. Soon after their arrival in New York City, their racial experiences and alliances, musical preferences, and personal friendships took them in quite different directions. Bauzá was an Afro-Cuban from Havana. He left Cuba in 1930, moving to Harlem where he used his

formal training and ear for music to emerge as a top trumpet player in African-American jazz circles, playing alongside the likes of Dizzy Gillespie and Chick Webb. Later, he and Machito formed one of the most popular Afro-Cuban/Latin-Jazz bands of the 1940s and 1950s, Machito y sus Afro-Cubans. Rizo was a white Cuban from Santiago. He came to New York City in 1940 and moved into his aunt's midtown Manhattan apartment while he attended the Juilliard School. After a brief stint in the U.S. Army during the Second World War, Rizo agreed to work as the pianist and principal arranger for Desi Arnaz's new band. Within a few years, Rizo moved to Hollywood where he continued in this position during *I Love Lucy*'s six-season run as one of television's most popular situational comedies between 1951 and 1957.

This chapter recovers the musical and cultural contributions that Bauzá, Rizo, and other black and white Cuban musicians made to the Cuban-American cultural landscape developing in New York City during the 1940s and 1950s. I treat Bauzá and Rizo as two members of a remarkably large and diverse cohort of Cuban musicians who lived, worked, and performed in New York City during this period, relying on their multiple perspectives and varying experiences to better understand critical moments of racial negotiation, ethnic identity formation, and musical development within the city's *colonia cubana* and *colonia hispana*. Self-narration is the key text analyzed in this chapter. I use the stories told by well-known and not-so-well-known black and white Cuban musicians and entertainers to examine the differences produced as a result of the color of their skin. In particular, this chapter explores these differences as expressed by these musicians and entertainers through their experiences in Cuba, their stories of migration, their insertion into the music scene in New York City (and Hollywood), and the production of racialized

discourses and practices. Skin color alone did not dictate the trajectory of the professional careers of the many Cuban performers who migrated to New York City. Social networks, inter- and intra-racial and ethnic tensions and alliances, and the mass culture industries also played key roles in shaping competing representations of Cubanness and Latinness in the 1940s and 1950s.¹

Like the chapters that follow, this chapter is concerned with understanding the ways that race, nationalism, and popular culture intersected in the everyday lives and social imaginaries of the tens of thousands of migrants and musicians leaving Cuba for New York City at mid-century. To achieve this objective, I examine how debates about musical innovation, authenticity, and commercialism disrupted “Cuban” and “Latin” as static or singular identity categories. This chapter also looks closely at how racial ideas and practices as well as cultural traditions and expectations prompted individual and collective desires for professional advancement and racial equality, especially among Cuban musicians and entertainers. I argue that the longstanding cultural hierarchy dividing classical music and highbrow tastes from popular music and lowbrow tastes not

¹ This chapter draws heavily from oral history interviews conducted primarily by historian Ruth Glasser and radio programmer, producer, music journalist, and librarian David Carp in the late 1980s and early 1990s (exceptions have been noted in the corresponding footnote and in the bibliography). One of the most significant contributions of this project is the recovery of these oral history interviews deposited at the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños and the Bronx County Historical Society that have only recently been made available to researchers. These collections contain lengthy audio recordings and transcriptions of interviews with notable Cuban and Puerto Rican performers who have long since died and whose perspectives on race, nation, and popular culture have long been overlooked by historians interested in the relationship between cultural production and audience response. These interviews have proven invaluable to the recovery of the personal and professional experiences and varying perspectives of these Cuban musicians. I transcribed Ruth Glasser’s interviews with Mario Bauzá, but audio recordings of the interviews conducted by David Carp were unavailable at the time of my visit to the archive in June 2010. Instead, I was given access to thousands of pages of transcribed oral interviews. Direct quotes from the interviews used in this dissertation reflect the exact spelling, grammar, and punctuation presented in the transcriptions. For more on the history and significance of the David Carp Collection of Latin Jazz, see also, Heather Haddon, “Bronx Jazz Scene Back in Swing at Historical Society,” *Norwood News*, 14 December 2010.

only reflected the social and racial divides of Cuban society before 1960 but also played a direct role in pushing musicians and entertainers, both black and white, to migrate to the United States in search of performance opportunities, artistic growth, and a secure livelihood. Historian Raul A. Fernández has argued that “as musicians traveled and sometimes settled outside of Cuba, they established ‘bases’ of Cuban music outside the island, even ‘colonized’ extensive territories.” New York City became one of these “bases” of Cuban music, and it was in the downtown hotels and ballrooms before mostly white audiences and in the uptown nightclubs and neighborhood joints before mostly Afro-Cuban, Puerto Rican, African-American, and Jewish audiences that the lines between “popular” and “serious” music became less and less well-defined as creative processes of innovation, borrowing, and cooptation produced musical styles coined “Latin,” “Afro-Cuban,” and “Cuban.”²

The boundaries of social class and racial ideologies affected the cultural production and profitability of both black and white Cuban musicians throughout the first half of the twentieth century. As rumba rhythms and colorful conga lines gained international fandom, opportunities to perform and profit increased for musicians. But this was the era dominated by Xavier Cugat, and “Latin” musicians, especially those who wanted to get paid, played “Latin” music, not jazz and certainly not classical music. A formally-trained violinist born in Barcelona, Spain in 1900 but raised in Havana until he left for the United States in the late 1920s, Cugat failed to make a name for himself on the concert stage with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. He found work instead as a

² Raul A. Fernández, *From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006): 53.

cartoonist for newspapers and magazines in San Francisco and Los Angeles, but eventually returned to music in 1928 at the height of the jazz era. “No jazzman, Cugat realized that he could not compete with Afro-Saxons on their own ground. So,” a report in *Time* explained, “he bravely cultivated a little Afro-Latin plot of his own.” Cugat abandoned his initial preference for the violin and classical music for what he saw as the more financially lucrative opportunity to perform Afro-Cuban popular music. By 1942, the bandleader earned an estimated \$500,000 a year performing Afro-Cuban music such as rumba and mambo and other Latin rhythms such as tango for mostly white, middle- and upper-class North American audiences. Four years later, his income from records, radio, film, and nightclub performances had nearly doubled to a million dollars.³

Cugat frequently reflected on what he considered to be a demotion from classical to popular forms of music. He emphasized his role as a creative and innovative marketer and admitted to focusing on performance and excitement rather than technique and precision: “I knew that the American people was polite to an artist but crazy for a personality, so I decided to become a personality,” he told a reporter for *Time* in 1946, concluding, “I’d rather play Chiquita Banana tonight and have my swimming pool than play Bach and starve.”⁴ That the Chiquita Banana act, which featured deliberate mispronunciations and two sidemen dressed in banana costumes, might seem foolish

³ “Music: Personality,” *Time*, 26 July 1946; Joseph J. Ryan, “Good-Will Set to Music,” *New York Times*, 20 July 1941, p. X8; Fausto, “La Gran Vía Blanca,” *La Prensa*, 8 June 1943, p. 5; “En Broadway,” *La Prensa*, 24 May 1951, p. 6; “Nice People Suddenly Get the Urge to Become Vulgar,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, 14 June 1941, p. 1; “Music: Eet Ees Deesgosting!,” *Time*, 28 December 1942. For more on Xavier Cugat, see, for example, John Storm Roberts, *The Latin Tinge: The Impact of Latin American Music on the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979, 1999): 86-87; Helio Orovio, *Cuban Music from A to Z*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

⁴ “Music: Personality,” *Time*, 26 July 1946.

mattered little to Cugat because the novelty made him money, he reasoned.⁵ A reviewer for *Billboard Magazine* characterized Cugat's role in popularizing Latin music similarly: "Take three parts showmanship, add two parts imaginative arrangements and one part good (but still second nature) instrumentalists, shake well to a rumba beat."⁶ His many interviews in the popular press indicate that he resolved whatever ambivalence he may have felt about his performance as Latin, especially given his self-concept as a classical virtuoso, by counting the dollars in his bank account. In the process, however, he created a performance of Latin which shaped ethnic experience and musical opportunity for others.

At the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City, Cugat first appeared as the Latin relief band, but by 1942, his eleventh season at the luxury hotel, he was "now the main band, and the Latin name band of the nation." Reports in newspapers and magazines noted that Cugat was the top performer of Latin music in the United States, focusing on the appeal and spectacle of his "tropicalized" performances. Cugat's success rested "not so much in the importing as in the processing of his hip-cajoling products," and that "processing" included dressing his band in "lustrous Cuban silks and colored lights" and producing numbers with "just enough subtle tropical pounding and gourd rattling to give it pith, not enough to ruffle the polite suavity of an expensive hot spot."⁷ Nicknamed the "The King of Rhumba," Cugat presented audiences with the "fast and furious" rhythms of rumba, mambo and tango as the front man for a band he "dressed in colorful garb of the South

⁵ *Billboard Magazine*, 19 April 1947, p. 42; *Billboard Magazine*, 22 November 1947, p. 40.

⁶ *Billboard Magazine*, 15 March 1947, p. 32.

⁷ "Music: Eet Ees Deesgosting!," *Time*, 28 December 1942.

Americas.”⁸ During the Second World War, Cugat’s records like “Mexico” and “Viva Roosevelt!” carried messages laden with “good neighborly incentives,” and this patriotic positioning also played a role in popularizing his music among North American audiences familiar with the rhetoric and practices of “good neighborliness” and “hemispheric solidarity.”⁹ A review of the Cugat Orchestra in *Billboard Magazine* summarized the band’s widespread appeal: “And the band dishes out a please-everybody variety of show tunes, standards, pops, waltzes, tangos, rumbas and sambas. Cugat, too, makes sure his Latin rhythms are easy-for-dancing, without permitting them to lose that air of authenticity.”¹⁰

For these Latin rhythms to triumph on Broadway, in Hollywood, and elsewhere in the United States, especially in the early 1940s among white audiences, the personality had to be nonblack. Sociologist Vernon Boggs explained the process by which Cugat and other light-skinned performers like him were racialized as nonblack, arguing that “Cugat wasn’t seen as black. Both Carmen Miranda and Desi Arnaz, well-known Hispanic musical performers of the time, were known to be Hispanic, but their antics on stage made the public tolerate their ethnic affiliation.” Afro-Cuban musicians like Arsenio Rodríguez and Alberto Socarrás, however, “did not please the racial sensitivities

⁸ Hazel Lamarre, “All the World’s a Stage,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 24 June 1952, p. B2; *Billboard Magazine*, 14 October 1944, p. 19.

⁹ *Billboard Magazine*, 17 June 1944, p. 65; See, Julio Capo, “Cuban Culture in New York City: American Labor Unions and the Changing Face of Entertainment, 1939-1945” (paper presented at annual meeting of the Florida Conference of Historians, Florida Gulf Coast University, Fort Myers, Florida, 27-28 February 2009).

¹⁰ Paul Denis, “Night Club Review,” *Billboard Magazine*, 25 July 1942, p. 14; *Billboard Magazine*, 22 April 1942, p. 13; *Billboard Magazine*, 3 October 1942, p. 22.

of the time.”¹¹ Fernández has argued similarly: “During the 1930s and 1940s, some musicians faced not only the travails of the poor but the obstacles set down by a society where the local racial codes separated people not so much into blood-based ‘white’ and ‘nonwhite’ categories as into perceived ‘nonblack’ and ‘black’ skin pigmentation.”¹²

Though focused on Latino baseball players in the United States throughout the twentieth century, historian Adrian Burgos, Jr. offers an important model for understanding how migrants from the Spanish-speaking Americas experienced race in the United States. What Burgos argues for Latino baseball players, I argue is also the case for the Cuban musicians examined in this dissertation: like Latino baseball players, these Cuban musicians “did not enter the U.S. playing field as simply black or white. Rather, most occupied a position between the poles of white (inclusion) and black (exclusion).” Lighter skin, European physical features, class status, and education in U.S. schools helped well-known Cuban musicians like Cugat and Arnaz, and, as this chapter will show, lesser known performers like Marco Rizo, Arturo “Chico” O’Farrill, and Horacio Riambau gain entry into nightclubs, hotels, and ballrooms that initially excluded their darker-skinned compatriots. These practices were not entirely unknown to these Cuban musicians, as Burgos has argued, because “by Cuban tradition, social class and wealth combined to effectively lighten how others perceived an individual’s skin color and racial

¹¹ Vernon Boggs, “Salsa Music: The Latent Function of Slavery and Racialism,” in *Salsiology: Afro-Cuban Music and the Evolution of Salsa in New York City*, Vernon Boggs, ed. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992): 355.

¹² Fernández, *From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz*, 43.

status.” Inclusion, however, did not mean that musicians like Cugat and Rizo were accepted as fellow whites nor did it guarantee equality.¹³

This process of racialization is, perhaps, made more complicated when seen also in a broader Cuban context and from the perspective of these Cuban performers. Throughout the early part of the twentieth century, Afro-Cuban popular culture, in the form of *comparsas*, *sones*, and *rumbas*, gradually achieved acceptance among whites in Cuba and became central symbols of Cuban national identity. Ethnomusicologist Robin Moore has argued that whites and middle-class blacks in Cuba initially tried to limit and repress black popular expression. The increasing popularity of Afro-Cuban popular music abroad and among North American tourists in the hotels and clubs of Havana, however, allowed these forms to move from the cultural margins to become the central symbols of authentic Cuban nationalism. This “nationalized blackness” suggests that the point is not simply that white and black musicians received different treatment.¹⁴ Rather, they conceived of themselves as playing black music and received different treatment while doing it. Among Anglo audiences in the United States, it was Cugat’s nonwhiteness that lent him authenticity as he performed Afro-Cubanness. What was once considered vulgar, sinful, and degrading by polite, white society in Cuba and United States, now thanks to Cugat and novelties like Chiquita Banana, rumba sleeves, and the exaggerated conga drum took top billing at “ultra-swank places” like the Rainbow Room and the Waldorf-Astoria.

¹³ Adrian Burgos, Jr., *Playing America’s Game: Baseball, Latinos, and the Color Line* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007): 4, 85-87, 96, 242; See, also, Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁴ Robin Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness: Afrocubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997).

African-American writers and artists noticed the disparity between the performance of black music and the number of black musicians given the opportunity to perform on stage. With band members from Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines, Cugat told a reporter for the *Chicago Defender* that “under the American standards my band would be considered a mixed ork for the members therein vary in complexions” and admitted that “a large percentage of my materials are Negro composed and arranged.” He promised that he would “include at least one colored performer in his appearance in theatres throughout the country” in hopes of convincing Broadway producers to present “mixed” productions. He even stated that “given an opportunity to present themselves before the entertainment public Negro artists, in many instances, excel white artists.”¹⁵ One writer for the *Baltimore Afro-American* complained, however, that Cugat and other nonblack musicians made a “fabulous salary” because of this “cold-blooded exploitation,” while “the black man can’t follow his stuff and collect the gravy.”¹⁶ Here was an early mention of the contrast perceived between innovation and popularization as a matter of racial difference.

Cugat’s popularity, as a result of his effective marketing, was related in many ways to his Cubanness. Described variously by both Spanish- and English-language newspapers in New York City as Cuban, American, Catalán, and Catalán-Cuban, the Spanish-born Cugat, or “Coogie” as he was sometimes called, did little to clarify his national origin. Instead, he often spoke of his passion for Cuba noting that he “loved the

¹⁵ “Xavier Cugat Praises Duke Ellington, Lena Horne and Others at Press Party,” *Chicago Defender*, 14 June 1947, p. 19.

¹⁶ “Nice People Suddenly Get the Urge to Become Vulgar,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, 14 June 1941, p. 1.

land of sugar, tobacco, rum, and above all else, land of rumba” for it was there that he learned “that musical style, that energizing and elegant rhythms that have given him so many triumphs.”¹⁷ On his first visit to New York City in 1942, Cuban President Fulgencio Batista “made three specific requests: To visit the Empire State Building, Rockefeller Plaza and hear Cugat’s music.”¹⁸ So much so did the Cuban government appreciate Cugat’s efforts that in 1942 it awarded the “salesman” and “ambassador of culture” the title of Commander in the Order of Honor and Merit of the Cuban Red Cross.¹⁹

Writers for *La Prensa* also took notice and credited “the popular musical director” for what they described as “the big boom of tropical rhythms in the United States.”²⁰ Within the *colonia hispana*, reports suggest that Cugat enjoyed an admiring public throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Past the prime of his professional career, in 1957, Cugat performed at the *Domingo de Pascuas* festival at the Manhattan Center not only “at the request of the hispanic public of New York” but as an “idol of our hispanic publics.” The event also featured performances from Tito Rodríguez and Conjunto Cibao with one report explaining, “Few times in the history of nuestra colonia has a group of true interpreters of nuestra música hispana been brought together.”²¹ As anticipation for the event increased within the pages of *La Prensa* and, presumably, the *colonia hispana*

¹⁷ “En Broadway,” *La Prensa*, 24 May 1951, p. 6. The various newspapers and magazines to which I refer include the *New York Times*, *La Prensa*, *Ecos de Nueva York*, *Time*, and *Billboard Magazine*.

¹⁸ Jerry Lesser, “Radio Talent New York,” *Billboard Magazine*, 12 December 1942, p. 6.

¹⁹ “Music: Personality,” *Time*, 26 July 1946; Joseph J. Ryan, “Good-Will Set to Music,” *New York Times*, 20 July 1941, p. X8; “Music: Eet Ees Deesgosting!,” *Time*, 28 December 1942.

²⁰ “Xavier Cugat el domingo en el Manhattan Center,” *La Prensa*, 17 April 1957, p. 5.

²¹ “Xavier Cugat y su Orquesta tocará el día 21 en el Manhattan Center,” *La Prensa*, 8 April 1957, p. 4.

as well, readers and potential attendees learned that Cugat would perform a “vast repertoire of tropical music heard few times in this city” thanks to the “warm reception that el público hispano has been giving him.”²² A year later, a reporter declared that “Xavier Cugat is an ‘institution’ in the popular music camp in the United States” and reminded readers that the “Catalán” had “once abandoned Cuba to conquer the world with Cuban music.”²³

In a column written for the Spanish-language newspaper *Pueblos Hispanos* as a response to a young man upset that he had been called a “spic” and a “greaser,” Puerto Rican writer and community activist Jesús Colón noted the various ways that Latin bandleaders Xavier Cugat, Enric Madriguera, Juanito Sanabria, Alberto Iznaga, and Noro Morales, among others, had contributed to the dissemination of Latin American culture in the United States. Colón reasoned that these *orquestas hispanas* “have taken hispanic popular music from the most refined cabaret to the little house in Long Way,” and for that the young man should be proud.²⁴ What stands out in addition to Colón’s use of popular cultural expression as a marker of progress and defense of racial prejudice, a move that stands as evidence of the significance of cultural citizenship as a sort of substitute for political citizenship, is that this dark-skinned, working-class migrant gave as examples mostly Spanish and light-skinned Cuban and Puerto Rican musicians. At one level, his examples suggest that only certain types of “Latin” bandleaders could secure the type of social mobility he described. On another, Colón seems to be deploying a notion of a unified Latino/a race that downplays the significant differences of

²² “En Manhattan Center Cugat tocará mañana,” *La Prensa*, 20 April 1957, p. 5.

²³ Francisco V. Portela, “Recordando con Xavier Cugat,” *La Prensa*, 23 March 1958, p. 5.

²⁴ Jesús Colón, “Lo Que el Pueblo Me Dice,” *Pueblos Hispanos*, 20 March 1943, p. 3.

experience based on color within Latino/a communities and in the United States at large.²⁵

Many Cuban musicians, such as Mario Bauzá, Marco Rizo, Alberto Socarrás, Nilo Curbelo, Machito, Desi Arnaz, and Miguelito Valdés, among many others, acknowledged that without Cugat “the American people would have been deaf to Latin music.”²⁶ Complaints about his musical abilities failed to stop musicians like Bauzá, Machito, and Valdés from performing alongside Cugat early in their professional careers. In fact, Bauzá claimed that he had helped promote Cugat within the *colonia hispana* of New York City, explaining, “I’m the guy that brought Cugat to play for the Latins up there in the Hunts Point Palace.” Here, Bauzá likely referred to the *Latin American Fiesta*, a dance held in 1943 at Hunts Point Palace, located at 153rd Street and Southern Boulevard in the Bronx, that featured both Cugat “The Rumba King” and Machito y sus Afro-Cubans. In anticipation of the event, one announcement reasoned that “without a doubt this is one of the most attractive festivals presented in New York, because it features in it two of the hispanic orchestras considered the most popular and artists with the most fame in nuestra colonia.”²⁷

Although they respected his role in popularizing Latin music among North American audiences, many Cuban musicians and Latino/a fans saw Cugat’s performance as inauthentic. Bauzá charged that Cugat didn’t play *música típica* and that his music

²⁵ Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in Twentieth-Century New York City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

²⁶ Nilo Curbelo, 3 October 1993, David Carp Collection; Vernon W. Boggs, “Al Santiago: Alegre Superstar,” in Boggs, *Salsiology*, p. 219; Desi Arnaz, *A Book* (New York: Morrow, 1976): 50-51.

²⁷ Mario Bauzá, 8 April 1991, David Carp Collection; “Cugat y Machito en el Hunts P. Palace el próximo domingo,” *La Prensa*, 19 March 1943, p. 5.

was not “de sabor cubana cubana,” but reasoned that what he did play he played well.²⁸ The concept of *sabor* has been discussed at length by scholars and musicologists interested in questions of national identity and Cuban popular music, particularly salsa. Meaning “flavor” or “taste,” Fernández succinctly argues that it is “the sine qua non of Cuban musicianship: a musician who does not play with *sabor* cannot play Cuban music well.”²⁹ A poll conducted by *Revista Teatral* in 1947 revealed that Latino/a audiences believed that non-Cuban musicians, Spaniards such as Cugat and Enric Madriguera lacked *sabor*: these musicians “miss[ed] the real feel of this music...that only Cuban musicians are able to get.”³⁰ Afro-Cuban flute player Alberto Socarrás applauded Cugat’s business skills but complained, probably unfairly given his formal musical training, that “he could not read music and much less conduct.” But his criticisms of Cugat went beyond his musicianship. In an interview with music critic Max Salazar, Socarrás supported the claims made by *Downbeat Magazine*, that Cugat’s popularity in the United States outraged Cubans on the island who believed that he passed off his music as authentic.³¹ Yet, when Cugat returned from Havana where he performed with his orchestra in 1951, he told a reporter for *La Prensa* only of the warm reception that greeted him throughout his visit: “In truth, I was more than well-received. The Cuban people are a serious thing. I’ve returned overjoyed.”³² This contradictory evidence suggests not simply the possibility of Cugat’s misguided self-concept or Socarrás’

²⁸ Mario Bauzá, 19 April 1989, Ruth Glasser/ Puerto Rican Musicians Collection.

²⁹ Fernández, *From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz*, 42.

³⁰ William Gottlieb, “What Makes Rhumba,” in Boggs, ed., *Salsiology*, 25.

³¹ Alberto Socarrás with Max Salazar, 16 January 1983, David Carp Collection.

³² “En Broadway,” *La Prensa*, 24 May 1951, p. 6.

personal disdain towards the front man, but, rather, a general ambivalence towards Cugat generated by his marketing savvy, on the one hand, and his lack of *sabor*, on the other.

By the late 1940s and early 1950s, perhaps as a result of the space Cugat had opened for other musicians, musicians perceived to have more *sabor*, critics and reviewers began to portray Cugat's formula as antiquated. One reviewer wrote that Cugat had "long since fallen out of favor with the real rhumba bugs... Compared to more authentic efforts, there's not much beat... in fact, it's more like dinner music." Another reviewer noted that "musically, the band is tailored for Yankee tastes. But, of course, Cugat is playing for a well-defined audience and his version of Latin-American music has a sound, commercial basis," especially among those "who aren't finicky about authenticity."³³ This shift in preferences signaled not only the emergence of new artists, but also demographic changes within the *colonia hispana de Nueva York* with more and more migrants from Cuba and Puerto Rico arriving on a daily basis. These new migrants became an audience for a different style of "Latin" music pioneered by Mario Bauzá and Machito y sus Afro-Cubans. Not an "overnight" development as some have argued, the merging of Afro-Cuban music and jazz in the mid-to-late 1940s was best described by Puerto Rican saxophonist Ray Santos as "two revolutions going on at the same time, one in the Afro-Cuban music and one going on in jazz, and they both like met head on and absorbed each other."³⁴ Cuban trumpet-player Arturo "Chico" O'Farrill described the 1940s as the era of Latin musicians like Xavier Cugat and Enric Madriguera. Eventually,

³³ *Billboard Magazine*, 24 December 1949, p. 36; *Billboard Magazine*, 27 May 1950, p. 47; *Billboard Magazine*, 8 July 1950, p. 40.

³⁴ Ray Santos, 5 August 1991, David Carp Collection; Boggs, "Founding Fathers and Changes in Cuban Music called Salsa," in Boggs, ed. *Salsiology*, 99; Fernández, *From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz*, 61.

he explained, “people became hipper because they heard Machito, they heard some of the other bands that were not so commercially oriented and there was a change of mind in that sense.”³⁵ In other words, this shift in preferences produced a complex set of discourses of authenticity that also suggested notions of progress and modernity.

Another white Cuban musician followed a professional trajectory quite similar to that of Cugat. Born in Santiago de Cuba, Marco Rizo Ayala started his musical training at an early age thanks, in part, to his father’s post as conductor of the city’s symphony orchestra. Rizo recalled “a good, nice living” in Santiago and positioned his family as middle class, noting that “we weren’t rich people, of course, not either very poor.”³⁶ Cross-racial interactions, according to Rizo, were very common in Santiago despite what he described as the “very unjust” prejudices of “the high people,” suggesting a nuanced understanding that differences in social class shaped notions and practices of racial inclusion and exclusion. When pressed for more details on the interactions of Cubans across class and racial lines, however, he clarified that the only time he saw white Cubans “mix with the blacks and the mulattoes and Chinese and so on, that was in carnival time.” Only during carnival time in Santiago, he explained, did “they all get together and at the time they forget about the racial barrier, you know, that ‘You are white, I am black,’ all that stuff.” Rizo attributed racial mixture during carnival to the island’s proximity to

³⁵ Arturo “Chico” O’Farrill, 31 July 1991, David Carp Collection.

³⁶ My research has uncovered conflicting dates of birth for Marco Rizo. In an oral history interview with David Carp on July 22, 1993, Rizo stated that he was born November 30, 1920, and various materials distributed by his South American Music Project (SAMPI) also list 1920 as his date of birth. However, his World War II honorable discharge certificate indicates that he was born on March 30, 1915, while other U.S. government documents list November 15, 1915 and November 15, 1916 as his date of birth.

Haiti, both in terms of musical influences like the *tumba francesa* and the presence of a large black population.³⁷

This understanding of the relationship between race and class reflects the colonial legacies of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century struggles for Cuban independence and racial equality. During the war for independence against Spain, Cuban revolutionary leader José Martí put forth a nationalist ideology “that proclaimed all Cubans to be equal.” As historian Alejandro de la Fuente summarized, “The existence of ‘races’ was seen as a social reality, but within an encompassing notion of Cubanness that was supposed to subsume, and eventually erase, racial identities.” Though universal male suffrage guaranteed by the Constitutional Convention of 1901 stood as evidence of Cuba’s commitment to racial equality, participation in electoral politics did not mean representation for Afro-Cubans in government, despite the efforts of the Afro-Cuban organization, the *Partido Independiente de Color*. Tensions came to a head during the much-debated “Race War” of 1912 when Afro-Cubans in Oriente burned and plundered foreign-owned cane fields, sugar mills, *bodegas*, stores, and other properties. What began as a political protest against the Morúa law, which banned political parties based on race and class, had numerous other causes and sources as well as major implications for the role race would play in Cuban society. Historian Louis A. Pérez, Jr. has argued that the events of 1912 should be understood as an uprising by peasants, farmers, and rural workers, not just Afro-Cubans, frustrated by the loss of land to foreign companies. He argued that Cuban elites constructed the events as a race war because it divided the peasantry along racial lines, a strategy that unified whites and facilitated repression

³⁷ Marco Rizo, 22 July 1993, David Carp Collection, Bronx County Historical Society; Luis Miranda, 16 April 1994, David Carp Collection; Armando Peraza, 21 May 1993, David Carp Collection.

against Afro-Cubans. On the contrary, historian Aline Helg has insisted that the uprising came about because “race still dominated many aspects of the political and socioeconomic relations in Cuba” after independence. Cuban elites constructed stereotypes that portrayed Afro-Cubans as a threat to whites and the Cuban nation, and this ideology of white supremacy “justified the collective and individual repression of Afro-Cubans by whites.”³⁸

Deemed un-Cuban, opportunities for racially-based mobilization became scarce. Since the 1880s, however, key Afro-Cuban thinkers had looked to education as a means of climbing the social ladder. With access to a desegregated public school system, Afro-Cubans saw formal schooling “as a prerequisite to social advancement.” According to De la Fuente, “The result was the formation of a sizeable group of black and mulatto professionals who, given the precariousness of their recently acquired status, sought to distance themselves, socially and culturally, from the masses of black manual workers.”³⁹ Afro-Cuban percussionist Armando Peraza, who together with Mongo Santamaría formed the duo Los Diamantes Negros, confirmed the social distancing efforts made by the Afro-Cuban middle-class: “You find a black person with good intellectual capacity and good economic capacity, he no wanna socialize with a poor black man from the ghetto.” Afro-Cuban conguero Luis Miranda, who grew up in the barrios of Havana, countered that among the lower classes, racial prejudice mattered little: “I mean the poor

³⁸ Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001): 12-13; Louis A. Pérez, Jr., “Peasants, Politics, and People of Color: The 1912 ‘Race War’ in Cuba Reconsidered,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 66 (August 1986): 510, 516, 531, 536; Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995): 2-3, 16-19; See also, Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Alejandra Bronfman, *Measures of Equality: Social Science, Citizenship, and Race in Cuba, 1902-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

³⁹ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 14.

people don't have that much prejudice – because you have nothing, the other guy has nothing either, that's it.”⁴⁰ What these contradictory statements confirm is the centrality of race and class to ideas about Cuban nationhood and identity, and in the 1920s and 1930s the ideology of *Afrocubanismo*, which “proudly proclaimed miscegenation to be the very essence of the nation – a mulatto ‘Cuban race,’” gained momentum. That is, as De la Fuente explains, “Cuba was definitely not white – but was only one step short of claiming that there was no racial problem in the island, merely an economic one. Racial inequality was thus increasingly perceived [by Afro-Cuban intellectuals] as a by-product of class inequities.”⁴¹

Returning now to the contrasting remarks made by Rizo about cross-racial interactions and prejudice at the start of this section, the point is made clearer: race was a social reality. The perspectives offered by Rizo, Peraza, and Miranda illustrate that race had distinct modes of operation in different cities (Havana and Santiago), especially at different social strata. Significant discourses of racial equality and harmony as well as black civilization operated at the national level and were reproduced locally, including in the stories told by black and white Cuban musicians. These discourses were not consistent, reflecting both a gap between expressions of racial unity and practices of exclusion as well as the inconsistency of racial exclusion and separation.

After studying at the Conservatory of Santiago, Rizo soon left for Havana “looking for bigger horizons in music.” That musical quest took him to the Havana Philharmonic Orchestra, where he occupied the post of official pianist for three years

⁴⁰ Armando Peraza, 21 May 1993, David Carp Collection; Luis Miranda, 16 April 1994, David Carp Collection.

⁴¹ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 15.

between 1937 and 1940. His musical education in Cuba included private lessons with Tomás Planas, Cesar Pérez Sentenat, and Pedro San Juan and performances alongside Ernesto Lecuona, probably the most famous composer of the time and a key white participant in the Afro-Cubanist movement. While in Havana, Rizo also met and performed for jazz musicians and classical artists from the United States, and it was during these cultural encounters that his anxiousness to leave Cuba reached its peak. His motivation to migrate to the United States developed as a dual mission of cultural and personal significance: “to expose what [I] had to offer this country [and] to improve also my musicianship...I going [sic] to be long enough here in Havana to do what I have to do to make the jump to New York.”⁴² His account reveals that he lived in a world in which there existed a generalized assumption that going to New York City was a key step in becoming a top musician. Here, Rizo makes a rhetorical leap as well, suggesting that his musical style, defined in national terms, would contribute to U.S. culture and society.

Rizo had first experimented with jazz as teenager. He formed his first jazz band in Santiago, explaining that “...my father told me, said ‘You would like to be a pianist of a jazz band, orchestra, so we can play dances, you know, parties and things like that?’” To that question, the answer was a resounding “yes.” With his father, uncles, and other family and friends recruited as band members and his aunt, Caridad Ayala, in New York City sending him sheet music and the latest records, Rizo began making arrangements for the Jazz Band Rizo-Ayala. The band featured three saxophones, two trumpets, piano, bass, *timbales*, maracas, conga, *tumbadora*, *güiro*, and vocals. The band’s musical

⁴² Box 1, Folder 10, Honorable Discharge Certificate, Marco Rizo Papers, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; Marco Rizo, 22 July 1993, David Carp Collection; Private collection of Vilma Rizo, Program from Marco Rizo’s memorial service “Celebrating the Life of Marco Rizo.”

repertoire included *son*, *danzones*, *pasodobles*, polkas, fox trot, and ballads for a dancing public: Cuban and American music, according to the young pianist.⁴³

That Rizo's family not only supported but participated in his experimentation with popular music stands quite contrary to the response Arturo "Chico" O'Farrill got from his family when he first told them he wanted to pursue a musical career. O'Farrill's father worked as a lawyer for the Cuban government, and his family sent him to study at Riverside Military Academy in Gainesville, Georgia, expecting that he would train for a professional career in architecture or law. He returned to Havana in 1940 and enrolled in the Universidad de La Habana to study law, but, after some "fooling around" at a jazz club in the city, he decided his real passion was for music. His family "flipped," he recalled: "In those days in Cuba to be a musician in popular music was one of the lowest forms of employment that you can have, was almost similar to servants... So they were scandalized that I was gonna become a musician." With race and class defining who should study and perform particular genres of music, his family's objection referred specifically to his preference for Afro-Cuban popular music and jazz instead of classical music. In particular, O'Farrill's grandmother offered him the following condition: "If you're gonna become a musician, remember, be a good musician, be like Mozart." He didn't quite listen to her advice. Though he did receive formal training in classical music, he continued to perform with local bands at various social events, hoping that the "society people" in the audience wouldn't notice him. When he arrived in New York

⁴³ Marco Rizo, 22 July 1993, David Carp Collection; Interview by Author with Vilma Rizo. 29 September 2009; Ancestry.com. *New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957* [database online]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010.

According to New York Passenger Lists, Caridad Ayala sailed from the port of Santiago de Cuba on the Santa Marta on July 23, 1931 at the age of 37. Her status is listed as single and her occupation is listed as *modiste*, or, rather, a designer of women's dresses, hats, and other fashions.

City in 1948, he spent the three hundred dollars he had saved for the journey hanging out at nightclubs listening to Dizzy Gillespie and Machito y sus Afro-Cubans.⁴⁴ It seems that he saw becoming a musician as an attraction to the Afro-Cuban.

For blacks and mulattoes in Cuba being a musician was generally considered a relatively high status position. O’Farrill’s grandmother’s aversion to his choice of a career in black popular music likely suggests that there was a racial component to this rejection expressed as class. But there might be more to it than this. A career in music was unpredictable, and even the families of black Cubans expressed a degree of skepticism. Bauzá’s white godparents had initial misgivings about his choice to pursue a career in popular music, and it is well known that the father of Afro-Cuban singer Celia Cruz also rejected her secret foray into performing on the radio in Havana.⁴⁵ Machito’s father had hoped that his son would eventually lose interest in music, going so far as buying him a restaurant “to take music out of my head.” At his father’s insistence, he agreed to work in the family business in exchange for a new radio set, which he used to catch live broadcasts from hotels in Havana and stations along the east coast of the United States. He hoped to one day meet Duke Ellington, Fletcher Henderson, and the

⁴⁴ Chico O’Farrill, 31 July 1999, David Carp Collection.

⁴⁵ Gender also played a role in shaping Cuban perceptions of popular musicians and performers. See, for example, Alexandra T. Vázquez, “Instrumental Migrations: The Transnational Movements of Cuban Music” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2006); Vernon Boggs, *Salsiology: Afro-Cuban Music and the Evolution of Salsa in New York City* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992); Frances R. Aparicio, “‘Asi Son:’ Salsa Music, Female Narratives, and Gender (De)Construction in Puerto Rico,” in *Daughters of Caliban: Caribbean Women in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Consuelo Lopez Springfield (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Frances R. Aparicio, “The Blackness of Sugar: Celia Cruz and the Performance of (Trans)Nationalism,” *Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2: 223-236; Frances R. Aparicio, “La Lupe, La India, and Celia: Toward a Feminist Genealogy of Salsa Music,” in *Disciplines on the Line: Feminist Research on Spanish, Latin American, and U.S. Latina Women*, eds. Anne J. Cruz, Rosilie Hernández-Pecoraro, and Joyce Tolliver (Delaware: Juan de la Cuesta-Hispanic Monographs, 2003); Christina D. Abreu, “Celebrity, ‘Crossover,’ and Cubanidad: Celia Cruz as ‘La Reina de Salsa,’” *Latin American Music Review* 28, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2007); Alicia Castro, *Queens of Havana: The Amazing Adventures of Anacaona, Cuba’s Legendary All-Girl Dance Band* (New York: Grove Press, 2007).

other jazz musicians he listened to on the radio. Then, in 1937, he and Bauzá exchanged letters and agreed that Machito would join him in New York City so that the two could put together a new band, one more successful than the two they had previously formed in Cuba.⁴⁶ Machito offered another explanation for his family's skepticism when he discussed his reason for visiting Cuba during a break in his touring schedule in 1946: "I wasn't imported here. I came here with my money and wasn't announced to anybody. So it is very hard to have the respect of the people you are talking with, that you have been a professional over there."⁴⁷ Like the other black and white Cuban musicians discussed in this chapter, Machito chose to make it on his own when he left for New York City in 1937, to leave for the United States without already having a contract with a U.S. record company. It was not until he returned to Havana as an established musician with his band mates that he was able to prove his success and legitimize his career choice. The contrast between being an "imported" celebrity and a self-made one suggests that the discourses produced by these musicians are not only about race but also about the entertainment industries in Cuba and the United States.

Though Rizo's professional ambitions centered on establishing himself as a classical musician, he explained that "while I was in Havana also I start playing jazz, because of the proximity of Miami and the radio station." Soon, "after three years in Havana, in [July] 1940 I came to the United States...and my aim here was to become a

⁴⁶ Isabelle Ortiz, "Machito A Living Legend," *Canales*, January 1979, Carlos Ortiz Collection; Box 1, Folder Festival WKCI, Machito interview, Carlos Ortiz Collection.

⁴⁷ Box 1, Folder "Festival WRCI," Interview with Machito, Carlos Ortiz Collection, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, New York.

classical pianist.”⁴⁸ Once in New York City, he enrolled in the Juilliard School under the tutelage of Josef and Rosina Lhevinne, and on September 27, 1940, the “Cuban pianist-composer” made his public debut at Town Hall in midtown Manhattan playing classical pieces as well as “Cuban music by composers such as [Ignacio Cervantes] and Lecuona, Amadeo Roldán, all those wonderful composers from Cuba.”⁴⁹ Rizo’s professional ambitions were soon put on hold by the onset of World War II and his decision to enlist in the U.S. Army, a decision which he framed in both legalistic and nationalist terms: “I could have refused because I wasn’t a citizen at the time. But since my aim was to stay here, I was already a resident, you know, legally here in this country, so I went to the Army.” He completed his basic training at Fort Bragg in North Carolina and transferred to the Second Army headquarters in Memphis, Tennessee to perform with and arrange for the jazz band at the base. Rizo played the glockenspiel and cymbals in the marching band but returned to the piano when the jazz band traveled to perform at benefits, hospitals and other sites across the United States and overseas in Europe with the USO. After his honorable discharge from the Army on October 18, 1945, Rizo returned to New York City to pursue his professional career as a classical musician.⁵⁰

Upon his return to civilian life, Rizo worked as a pianist for Voice of America playing what he described as “music of the Americas,” compositions from Argentine composer Alberto Ginastera, Brazilian composer Heitor Villa Lobos, and Mexican

⁴⁸ Marco Rizo, 22 July 1993, David Carp Collection; Marco Rizo, 6 August 1993, David Carp Collection; Luis Miranda, 16 April 1994, David Carp Collection.

⁴⁹ “Music Notes,” *New York Times*, 27 September 1940, p. 31; Marco Rizo, 22 July 1993, David Carp Collection. Rizo recalled the year of his debut as 1941, not 1940; Marco Rizo, 6 August 1993, David Carp Collection.

⁵⁰ Marco Rizo, 22 July 1993, David Carp Collection; Box 1, Folder 10, Honorable discharge certificate, Marco Rizo Papers.

composers Silvestre Revueltas and Carlos Chávez. The radio program also featured him as a soloist performing classical pieces by Lecuona.⁵¹ Then, at three o'clock in the morning, one night late in 1945, Rizo received a phone call from his long-time friend, Desi Arnaz. Arnaz planned to start his own band, and he wanted Rizo to join him for an upcoming engagement at *Ciro's* in Hollywood. As one columnist for a Spanish-language newspaper reported, Rizo "accepted the call from Hollywood made by his countryman and schoolmate" and joined the Orquesta de Desi Arnaz as it "toured the United States with success." By accepting the invitation, the columnist reasoned that, like Arnaz, Rizo hoped to burst into the "artistic environment of the nation, occupying a place among the 'quotables' in popular art."⁵²

Rizo missed the first engagement at *Ciro's* but met up with the band for a nearly four-month stand at the Copacabana Club, located at Ten East Sixtieth Street in New York City, assuming the roles of pianist, arranger, and musical director. The band moved on from the Copacabana, described by one Spanish-language newspaper as "an aristocratic place in New York," for a coast-to-coast tour of one-nighters with stops at

⁵¹ Marco Rizo, 22 July 1993, David Carp Collection; Marco Rizo, 8 August 1993, David Carp Collection.

⁵² Marco Rizo, 22 July 1993, David Carp Collection; Box 2, Folder 9, "Otro Músico Cubano Que se Abre Camino," A.R. Rodríguez, "Carta Neoyorkina," no date, no year, no location, Marco Rizo Papers; Box 5, Folder 6, Recording Script from Marco Rizo, page 5, Marco Rizo Papers. What I cite formally in the footnotes as "Recording Script from Marco Rizo" are excerpts from Marco Rizo's unpublished biography of Desi Arnaz, titled "The Desi I Knew" by Marco Rizo, "The Music Man Behind the Desi Arnaz Legend for Over 50 Years" as told to C. David Younger, 1991.

Permission to photocopy from the lengthy unpublished biography can only be granted by Vilma Rizo. When I met with her in 2009 for a formal oral history interview, Vilma explained that she would allow me to read the entire manuscript at my leisure in her apartment but that she could not permit me or anyone else, for that matter, to make any photocopies. She reasoned that she still hoped to publish the book on her brother's behalf. She said that various publishers had initially expressed interest in the biography and had offered Marco "a lot of money" for it, particularly because Marco had such a close relationship with and uncensored access to Desi Arnaz. She explained, however, that once they read the manuscript, publishers disappointedly asked Marco, "Where's the dirt?" Apparently, publishers felt that the manuscript was too sanitized, watered down, and lacked the "juicy" details and stories that would make readers want to purchase a copy of the book.

some of the most popular nightclubs, theaters, and radio stations in cities scattered across the United States, from Los Angeles, Omaha, and Milwaukee to Chicago, Columbus, and Cleveland. One reviewer of the band's performance at the Avadon Ballroom in Los Angeles praised "the duo piano work of René Touzet and Marco Rizo," noting that "whether ivory pilots are flying solo on a Latin standard such as Malagueña or backing up the ork [sic] with a rocking beat, they are much in evidence thruout sessions." Another reviewer from a Spanish-language newspaper framed the band's performance and extensive touring schedule as a sort of cross-cultural encounter with diplomatic significance, arguing that "this magnificent orchestra was introducing our genuine rhythms and melodies in all of the United States."⁵³ As we have seen, the discourse of introduction, whether from Jesús Colón, Mario Bauzá, or the white musicians themselves, is typically the role assigned to white performers. Not viewed as innovators, these white performers are credited for packaging Afro-Cuban music and performances in ways that accommodate and appeal to Anglo audiences.

Back in New York City in the late 1940s, the Arnaz band performed at the Paramount Theater, Roxy Theater, Capitol Theater, and Strand Theater. The "attraction" featured jugglers, acrobats, dancers, and Arnaz's popular rendition of "Babalú" (a song in the new Afro-Cuban style, representing Afro-Cuban spiritual practice but drawing on stage traditions including *son* and minstrel performance) which ended with a conga line

⁵³ Marco Rizo, 22 July 1993, David Carp Collection; *Billboard Magazine*, 29 March 1947; Box 2, Folder 9, "Otro Músico Cubano Que se Abre Camino," A.R. Rodríguez, "Carta Neoyorkina," no date, no year, no location, Marco Rizo Papers; Box 2, Folder 9, no publication title, no date, no year, no location, Marco Rizo Papers; Box 5, Folder 6, Recording Script from Marco Rizo, page 1, Marco Rizo Papers; Marco Rizo, 6 August 1993, David Carp Collection.

parading throughout the nightclub.⁵⁴ By 1949, Rizo was settled in the city living with his family when Arnaz called on his musical expertise yet again. This time, he asked Rizo to move to Hollywood permanently to work as his musical director on *I Love Lucy*. Rizo couldn't resist the opportunity, and once in California he enrolled at the University of California, Los Angeles where he studied with Igor Stravinsky and Mario Tedesco-Castelnuovo, earning a Master of Arts in 1953.⁵⁵ This formal musical training and association with "good quality musicians" on the show helped Rizo accept that he never quite got the "promotion and the credit that [he] deserved" for his musical contributions to the *I Love Lucy* show, particularly his composition of the show's theme song. As a member of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) since 1952, Rizo received his share of the royalties for the songs he composed as musical director of the show but never attained the celebrity status or public acclaim he felt he had earned. Rizo reasoned that executives at CBS had made Arnaz retain their already contracted staff musician. Arnaz had been forced to compromise with executives, Rizo explained, but guaranteed him that only he would be in charge of the "Cuban percussion."⁵⁶

After the show's run ended in 1957, Rizo stayed on to work as a staff musician for CBS Television and emphasized that because of his technique and versatility as a

⁵⁴ Marco Rizo, 22 July 1993, David Carp Collection; *Billboard Magazine*, 29 March 1947; Box 2, Folder 9, "Otro Músico Cubano Que se Abre Camino," A.R. Rodríguez, "Carta Neoyorkina," no date, no year, no location, Marco Rizo Papers; Box 2, Folder 9, no publication title, no date, no year, no location, Marco Rizo Papers; Box 5, Folder 6, Recording Script from Marco Rizo, page 1, Marco Rizo Papers; Marco Rizo, 6 August 1993, David Carp Collection.

⁵⁵ *Billboard Magazine*, 29 March 1947; Marco Rizo, 22 July 1993, David Carp Collection; Private collection of Vilma Rizo, Program from Marco Rizo's memorial service "Celebrating the Life of Marco Rizo."

⁵⁶ Marco Rizo, 6 August 1993, David Carp Collection.

musician, but despite being categorized as Latin, he still managed to secure work in the radio, television, and film industries: “So in that way I don’t think I was discriminated in a way, you know, by being just Latin, you know what I mean? I did a lot of Latin assignments, yes, I did. But also they were very impressed by my sight-reading.”⁵⁷ As a relatively wealthy, light-skinned Cuban, it is not entirely surprising that this remark stands as Rizo’s only discussion of the possibility that he might have been discriminated against because he was “Latin.” Rizo’s light skin, class, and musical style afforded him opportunities for social mobility not extended to many of the musicians and performers of color of this era.

Rizo’s privileged experiences were not entirely unique, but rather characteristic of the generalized process by which white Cubans became Afro-Cuban performers in the United States. The experiences of rumba dancer and mambo instructor Horacio Rimbau offer a case in point. Born to a German mother and French father in Havana on December 26, 1927, Rimbau was raised by a woman whom he affectionately called *abuela*, a former slave on his grandfather’s sugar plantation. She spoke a mixture of Spanish and Carabalí and, according to writer Josephine Powell, exposed Rimbau to African rituals, ceremonies, and dances taking place at the many *solares* scattered throughout Havana. In New York City, he and his various dance partners performed at downtown clubs and theaters, reportedly earning up to \$350 a week to perform at the Havana-Madrid, located at Fifty-first Street and Broadway, in the early 1940s. Rimbau also gave dance lessons at the Arthur Murray Studio in New York City and danced in musical film shorts with Puerto Rican bandleader Noro Morales and Cuban bandleader José Curbelo. As the light-skinned, fair-haired son of a plantation owner, Rimbau’s

⁵⁷ Marco Rizo, 6 August 1993, David Carp Collection.

contention that in Cuba “we don’t have no race” is not entirely surprising. He explained that only when he arrived in the United States did he “feel this thing about the races,” arguing that racial consciousness among Cubans of color living in the United States developed because of formal segregation and public protests against racial discrimination. This perspective suggests that the threat of political mobilization based on race had largely been diffused since 1912 and that the *Afrocubanismo* movement of the 1920s and 1930s which touted the ideology of *mestizaje* had helped realize the ideal of a racially egalitarian Cuban nation. But racial discrimination had not ended and calls for racial equality had not been silenced in Cuba, especially among the members of the black working-class and from within the ranks of the Communist Party. For Riambau, however, it was the migration experience, exposure to rigid racial codes and race-based organizing in New York City, that prompted Afro-Cubans to question the island’s posturing as a racial paradise and develop a racial consciousness that was distinct though not entirely separate from their Cubanness.⁵⁸

It is useful to note how easily white performers like Rizo and Riambau reproduced claims of transracial unity in Cuba in contrast to less peaceful race relations in the United States. As we will see, black Cubans often preserved a different memory. Yet, it would be a mistake to see the claims of white performers as simple pretext. They did see differences between racial experience in the United States and in Cuba and, given the particularities of their position as white Cubans and near-white Latinos, it was possible for them to interpret these differences as a contrast between a society with race and one without.

⁵⁸ Horacio Riambau, 1 December 1995, David Carp Collection; Josephine Powell, *Tito Puente: When the Drums are Dreaming* (Baltimore: AuthorHouse, 2007); De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 11, 16-17.

Rizo also spoke at length about his experiences in the music business and entertainment industry. Many of his public comments and private reflections on his personal and professional relationship with Desi Arnaz suggest an uneasy ambivalence, specifically in terms of Arnaz's abilities as a technical musician, on the one hand, and his status as an international celebrity, on the other. Rizo implied on several occasions that Arnaz depended on his musical expertise and technical abilities, stating openly that "he wasn't a musician, you know." He described Arnaz as a "good businessman [but] as far as music is concerned he didn't have the background as we all know." Arnaz managed the business aspects of the music industry expertly, Rizo argued, because "he knew what he wanted" and had a clear idea of the kinds of arrangements that would be commercially successful. Those successful arrangements, however, were not always Cuban or authentic, or as Rizo put it, "our music."⁵⁹ More specifically, he revealed, "Sometimes he couldn't explain it musically, but he knew what he wanted. He asked me to tell him what the best new numbers were, because he said, 'I want to form my own new band...I have learned from [Xavier Cugat] what it takes to be commercial and at the same time to have my own sound, my own individuality.'"⁶⁰ Here, then, was the crux of the musical tradition, and by the mid-1940s it was tradition, that Rizo helped popularize: a watered-down, commercial Afro-Cuban music for American audiences of the sort popularized by Xavier Cugat.

What many of his more positive remarks emphasize, however, is a sense of gratitude towards Arnaz for exposing North American audiences to Cuban music and

⁵⁹ Marco Rizo, 22 July 1993, David Carp Collection; Marco Rizo, 8 August 1993, David Carp Collection.

⁶⁰ Box 5, Folder 6, Recording Script from Marco Rizo, page 4, Marco Rizo Papers.

culture. Rizo, for example, wholeheartedly agreed with a Cuban reporter from *Prensa Libre* in Havana when he questioned why the Cuban government had not yet honored Arnaz and his wife, Lucille Ball, with the Medalla de Carlos de Céspedes: “Has anyone calculated what it signifies that sixteen million people – more than twice the population of Cuba – listen to our music once a week by way of such prestigious ambassadors?”⁶¹ At times, Rizo even praised Arnaz’s musicianship, citing a strong connection between their musical preferences and his memories of carnival in Santiago. “Desi played very sophisticated, very typical Cuban music. The rhythms were Afro-Cuban... The intensity of Santiago’s carnival and Afro-Cuban music molded Desi’s personality,” he wrote in his unpublished biography of his long-time friend. Rizo recalled a childhood memory of carnival when he “saw two very white hands among the black ones, waving at me from the comparsa crowd in the street. It was Desi.”⁶² Rizo stood by observing the revelry in the streets before him, while Arnaz took a more active role as an engaged participant in the festivities. This hands-on experience notwithstanding, Rizo traced Arnaz’s reliance on his musical expertise back to Santiago and argued that what began as childhood experimentation evolved into a partnership that made its way into the musical worlds of New York City and Hollywood. And this partnership produced within Rizo an understanding of “our music” defined by its Afro-Cuban roots but meant to reach audiences beyond the island and its carnival traditions.⁶³

Though settled in Hollywood throughout much of the 1950s, far from his homeland in Cuba and the *colonia cubana* and *colonia hispana* of New York City, Rizo

⁶¹ Box 2, Folder 9, “Entrevista Relámpago,” *Prensa Libre*, 3 December 1953, Marco Rizo Papers.

⁶² Box 5, Folder 6, Recording Script from Marco Rizo, pages 1-2, Marco Rizo Papers.

⁶³ Box 5, Folder 6, Recording Script from Marco Rizo, page 4, Marco Rizo Papers.

hoped to stay relevant and maintain a following within Cuban circles using his association with Desi Arnaz, specifically, and as a Cuban, more broadly, to elevate his own celebrity status. On one occasion, a Spanish-language newspaper, most likely published in Havana, reported that Rizo, “the famous orchestra director,” had sent along a photograph of himself and “our compatriot” Desi Arnaz “so that our readers are convinced that these *celebridades criollas*, despite being at the pinnacle of glory, do not forget their own.”⁶⁴ As he reflected on his professional career just five years before his death, Rizo’s claims of friendship with other Cuban musicians did more than confirm a sense of camaraderie based on musical preferences and ethnic loyalties. By offering evidence of close ties – whether personal or professional – with other Cuban musicians who played more active and prominent roles in the *colonia cubana* and *colonia hispana*, Rizo aimed to establish his relevance and importance within the Cuban-American cultural landscape that developed in New York City in the 1940s and 1950s. Rizo performed with various popular Latin bands in New York City before and after his enlistment in the U.S. Army, from Machito y sus Afro-Cubans and José Curbelo to Enric Madriguera and Xavier Cugat. It was during his time as a temporary replacement for Cuban pianist René Hernández, he recalled, that he “got my relationship” with Bauzá and Machito.⁶⁵

Rizo’s personal life history and professional experiences demonstrate a pattern of social mobility not available to the majority of Cuban migrants in New York City in the late 1940s and early 1950s, particularly Cubans of color and those of lower

⁶⁴ Box 2, Folder 9, “Hollywood de Día y de Noche,” Rita Conde, no publication date, no date, no year, Marco Rizo Papers.

⁶⁵ Marco Rizo, 22 July 1993, David Carp Collection.

socioeconomic status. His return to New York City after his prolonged stay in Hollywood, however, reveals a symbolic rootedness in the city's Cuban-American cultural landscape only postponed as a lived reality until the late 1950s. For example, upon his return, Rizo became involved with El Club Cubano Inter-Americano, though the full extent of his association with the club during the 1940s and 1950s remains unclear. Still, in 1959, the mostly Afro-Cuban social club honored "the great Cuban pianist" with a banquet at its clubhouse simply because "this institution is always on alert to honor those who deserve it."⁶⁶ That same year, the club organized an event honoring Cuban concert pianist Jorge Bolet and announced that it would be donating a piano, which Rizo, Cuban singer-pianist Bola de Nieve, and Puerto Rican pianist and bandleader Charlie Palmieri had once played, to the "Fundación Fernando Ortiz."⁶⁷

Once back in New York City, Rizo seems to have developed a following among Cuban and Latino/a audiences. In 1958, he emerged as winner of the *Solistas* category in *La Prensa*'s musical popularity contest, easily defeating Puerto Rican Rafael Bartolomei and Cuban poet Eulogia Peraza. Though recognized for his individual performances within *la colonia hispana de Nueva York*, the newspaper presented Rizo as "the fine Cuban composer" who readers might "pleasantly remember" from the television show *I Love Lucy*. At *La Prensa*'s upcoming fundraising festival following the contest results, the newspaper announced that Rizo "would interpret some of his compositions of

⁶⁶ "Club Cubano Inter-Americano, Inc.," *La Prensa*, 23 November 1959, p. 17.

⁶⁷ Box 5, Folder 13, Letter unsigned and undated, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York.

After my formal interview with Vilma Rizo, she showed me a photograph featuring Marco, Desi Arnaz, Celia Cruz, and other notable Cuban musicians at an event hosted by El Club Cubano Inter-Americano in the 1980s. She also showed me a large plaque presented to Marco from El Club Cubano.

authentic Cuban and *Hispanoamericano* flavor.”⁶⁸ The following year, Rizo, along with Polly Rogers, Aida Pujol, Alberto Socarrás, and George Boreland helped direct the “Festival Antillano,” a musical revue featuring bands and performers from Cuba, Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo, Haiti, and Jamaica, sponsored by La Federacion de Sociedades Hispanas. Organizers advertised the dual objectives of the cultural event: “to help combat juvenile delinquency and [to determine which] band is the best in the city.”⁶⁹

Reviews of some of Rizo’s musical recordings from the late 1950s suggest that his musical versatility, marketing strategies, and commercial expectations stand in contrast to his eventual rejection of “Latin” as a defining category of musical (and self-) representation. Despite industry categorizations and racial constructions that marked him and his music as “Latin,” Rizo, like Mario Bauzá and many other Cuban musicians, rejected that mode of cultural representation: “I don’t know why they call it Latin jazz. What I play and what Mario plays, I am sure, it was Afro-Cuban, that’s what it is...Cuban music, man, it comes from the *son*, it comes from, that’s the roots.”⁷⁰ The “Latin” label, however, was hard to shake. In 1958, his album “That Latin Touch” received positive reviews as “a broad range of instrumental material, including many facets of Latin music – Afro-Cuban, Maríachi, cha, cha, cha, etc., as well as a touch of

⁶⁸ “Más Artistas de nota se suman a nuestro Festival,” Manuel Laverde, *La Prensa*, 16 November 1958, p. 5. In 1959, Marco placed second in the *Solistas* category, falling to Osvaldo Alen by a wide margin of votes.

⁶⁹ Box 1, Folder 14, Flyer for “Festival Antillano,” Marco Rizo Papers.

⁷⁰ Marco Rizo, 22 July 1993, David Carp Collection.

classical.”⁷¹ For nearly a decade, Rizo played what might be described as commercial, popular “Latin” music as he toured the country with the Orquesta de Desi Arnaz and performed for radio, television, and film.

Since his return to New York City in 1958, Rizo once again pursued his dreams of establishing himself as a classical musician and concert pianist. Described as “a native of Cuba” and “arranger, composer and pianist in radio, movies, and television,” Rizo performed at Carnegie Hall in 1958, offering what the *New York Times* described as “brief, unpretentious works, thoroughly pianistic and in an authentic-sounding Hispano-Cuban idiom.” He performed his own compositions in the traditions of *Afrocubanismo* and nationalist folklore, including “Rapsodia Cubana,” “Ñañigo,” “Suite Española,” and “Suite Campesina” as well as “fluent and effective transcriptions of works by Rodgers, Ravel, Scott, Lara, Bazter, Marquina, Provost and Grief.” Rizo returned to Carnegie Hall again the following year to perform what one report called Cuban compositions, “fluent works that unite a Latin American melodic idiom with a keyboard style derived from the European romantic era.”⁷²

For Rizo, popular and classical or “serious” music were two separate worlds which he approached in the same way. Throughout his career, his musical compositions drew from a folkloric Cuban musical tradition, what he described as “nothing more than two great influences, African and Spanish.” Though completely ignoring the matter of public perception and audience response within Cuban and U.S. societies, one *New York Times* columnist, writing about the formation of the Cuban-American Music Group in

⁷¹ *Billboard Magazine*, 19 May 1958, p. 23; *Billboard Magazine*, 14 April 1958.

⁷² “Marco Rizo, Pianist, Offers Own Works,” *New York Times*, 7 April 1958, p. 26; “Marco Rizo in Recital,” *New York Times*, 9 March 1959, p. 35.

1945, confirmed how Spanish and African influences had similarly contributed to both Cuban popular and classical music: “In Cuba, however, there is no fundamental difference between popular and ‘classical’ music. The ingredients of popular music [results from combining Central African Negro music with the music of Spain] produce symphonic music of good taste and strong appeal when mixed by the master hands of Cuba’s serious composers.” No matter what genre of music he played, whether *montunos* or jazz, Rizo insisted that his improvisations and technique reflected his “Cuban style.”⁷³ Rizo’s musical versatility and classical training failed to undermine or contain his Cubanness, and he consistently presented himself as “authentic:” “I am so proud to be Cuban and I am so proud to be able to expose all my life...you know, that’s what I’ve been doing, playing our music. I love classical music, of course, but first my music, my roots, what I am, what I am.”⁷⁴ Rizo articulates here what Fernández has described as “the *criollo* attitude towards music making...in which musicians, in every moment of their construction of a people’s musicalia, are at the same time performing their *cubania* (Cubanness).”⁷⁵

Sitting three floors above the very apartment on Thirty-eighth Street and Lexington Avenue in New York City where Rizo lived and composed music until his death on September 8, 1998, Vilma Rizo, the pianist’s younger sister, revealed a dual sense of camaraderie and competition within Cuban musical circles. As trustee of her brother’s musical legacy, Vilma constructed a narrative that positioned Marco’s musical

⁷³ Marco Rizo, 6 August 1993, David Carp Collection; Henry Cowell, “Serious Composers of Cuba,” *New York Times*, 29 April 1945, p. X4.

⁷⁴ Marco Rizo, 22 July 1993, David Carp Collection.

⁷⁵ Fernández, *From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz*, 46.

innovations as intellectually parallel though geographically isolated from developments that have been more commonly attributed to Bauzá and other Afro-Cuban musicians and performers. Vilma described Bauzá as “the brain behind the fame” and credited him for developing Latin-jazz on Broadway in New York City. As we will see later in this chapter, Bauzá was often considered the key innovator in Afro-Cuban music, a characteristic that is different from being marked as authentic raw material. Vilma countered, however, that back in Cuba Marco had simultaneously made similar innovations in Santiago with the Jazz Band Rizo-Ayala thanks to North American musical recordings sent to him in Cuba by his aunt Caridad Ayala, who had been living in New York City since 1931. For Vilma, “these were two separate worlds,” a framing that not only helps her construct a narrative that elevates her brother’s role in the development of Afro-Cuban/Latin-Jazz but also reflects the much longer process of development and gradual emergence of this musical genre in line with Fernández’s contention that “to be sure, the histories of Cuban and American music, while parallel and separate, intersected much earlier.”⁷⁶

Mario Bauzá grew up during “the cosmopolitan 1920s in Havana,” raised by wealthy Spanish godparents, a godmother he described as white and godfather he described as *criollo*, who provided him with an excellent musical education after his father, a cigar manufacturer, and mother died when he was five years old. That Bauzá was raised by white godparents and Riambau by a black woman shows the inconsistency

⁷⁶ Interview by author with Vilma Rizo. 29 September 2009; Ancestry.com. *New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957* [database online]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010; Fernández, *From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz*, 61.

of racial boundaries compared with the United States, though not the absence of racism. Bauzá studied at the Municipal Academy of Cuba and played clarinet for the Havana Philharmonic Orchestra by the time he was nine years old. Not surprisingly, his godparents hoped he would remain a classical musician, but life in Havana offered him the opportunity to perform and experiment with popular dance bands and exposed him to American jazz music via shortwave radio and recordings that made their way onto the island. On his first visit to the United States in 1927 to record with Antonio María Romeu's *charanga* orchestra, he stayed in Harlem for a trip that lasted no more than fifteen days. But the impact of that short trip radically altered Bauzá's perspective: "I fell in love with [Harlem], I say, 'I gotta come back to live in this country, because I can live here, don't worry about what color my skin [is]. I'm a black, I gon' be right along with these other black, we all black.'" He also heard Frankie Trumbauer of the Paul Whiteman orchestra perform at the Paramount Theater during that trip, and that inspiration prompted him to drop the clarinet and classical music for the saxophone and popular music.⁷⁷

Not only had Bauzá fallen in love with Harlem and jazz, but he also reasoned that as "a colored man, and from Cuba, in symphony music, and clarinet, too," his chance for success "all over the world" seemed unlikely.⁷⁸ But not every Afro-Cuban musician held this pessimistic outlook. Afro-Cuban percussionist Armando Peraza, for example, offered a less racially-defined or ethnic-specific understanding of musical innovation by

⁷⁷ Jairo Moreno, "Bauzá-Gillespie-Latin/Jazz: Difference, Modernity, and the Black Caribbean," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, no. 1 (2004): 84; Mario Bauzá, 8 February 1989, David Carp Collection; Mario Bauzá, 19 April 1989, Ruth Glasser/Puerto Rican Musicians Collection; Mario Bauzá, 18 April 1991, David Carp Collection.

⁷⁸ Moreno, "Bauzá-Gillespie-Latin/Jazz," 84; Mario Bauzá, 8 February 1989, David Carp Collection; Mario Bauzá, 19 April 1989, Ruth Glasser/Puerto Rican Musicians Collection; Mario Bauzá, 18 April 1991, David Carp Collection.

juxtaposing popular music and classical music as beyond racial barriers: “Music is music, music is no, have no color...It’s like, you wanna tell a black man ‘You can’t play no violin.’ He can play the violin, see, he going to Jap -, see, he going to Vienna or into any conservatory. You understand what I mean, it’s a culture....This no have to be nothing with a pigmentation of your skin.”⁷⁹ Though not a description of social conditions, Peraza’s philosophy, nonetheless, offers an alternative mode of understanding racial prejudice and the possibility of racial mobility within the world of music.

Despite his formal education and privileged upbringing as a young boy in Havana, Bauzá recalled being denied membership into the Centro Asturiano, a whites-only social club, because he was black. All across the island, informal racial segregation restricted Cubans of color from entering designated areas of public parks and certain barbershops, for example, and limited membership and prohibited participation in the same social clubs and fraternal organizations as whites. Afro-Cuban conguero Luis Miranda explained, “Well, at that time the black go to the black dance and the white was going to the white dance...some white people they were raised together with the black people and those guys could get in, in the black dance...but a black guy could not get into one of those white dances.”⁸⁰ Bauzá argued that black and white Cubans created for themselves separate *ambientes*, and this social distancing prohibited a sense of fraternity from developing among the races. The fraternity to which he refers harkens back to the notions of Cuban nationhood presented by Cuban independence leaders in the 1890s and

⁷⁹ Armando Peraza, 21 May 1993, David Carp Collection.

⁸⁰ Mario Bauzá, 19 April 1989, Ruth Glasser/Puerto Rican Musicians Collection; Mario Bauzá, 2 June 1989, Ruth Glasser/Puerto Rican Musicians collection; Mario Bauzá, 8 April 1991, David Carp Collecton; Luis Miranda, 16 April 1994, David Carp Collection.

contemporary black Cuban organizations whereby, as historian Ada Ferrer has explained, “racial transcendence and national unity were forged in manly union during war.”⁸¹

Bauzá’s memory of race in Cuba centered on his belief that “that country is no different than Mississippi.” After a performance at a club in the upscale neighborhood of Maríano, he recalled that he was falsely accused of raping a woman and only escaped charges because the chief of police was also a man of color, perhaps revealing that Cuba was also very different from Mississippi. His remarks indicate that stereotypes of black men raping white women also contributed to a fear of Afro-Cuban sexuality. He blamed racial mixture, in general, and women, in particular, for the racial problems he experienced on the island: “But the trouble with my country is so much mixture of people. Because, after all, how the Cuban race was produced? By Spaniard with African womens. And the mulatto, it was a mulatto race. But then, if the Spaniard had a mulatto daughter, he don’t want that daughter to be with a black man, he had to be another white man, so there was lighter the race.”⁸² This critique of Cuban race relations, from the perspective of a black man, who even while positing that there was no difference between Cuba and Mississippi, highlighted two fundamental differences in the kind, if not the degree, of racism practiced on the island: the existence of black and brown police and of intermediate racial categories between black and white.

⁸¹ Mario Bauzá, 19 April 1989, Ruth Glasser/Puerto Rican Musicians Collection; Mario Bauzá, 2 June 1989, Ruth Glasser/Puerto Rican Musicians collection; Mario Bauzá, 8 April 1991, David Carp Collection; Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 126.

⁸² Mario Bauzá, 8 April 1991, David Carp Collection; Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 16-19; For more on the relationship between race, marriage, class, and sexual values in nineteenth-century Cuba, see Verena Stolcke, *Marriage, Class, and Color in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes and Social Values in a Slave Society* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974); Lourdes Martínez-Echazábal, “Mestizaje and the Discourse of National/Cultural Identity in Latin America, 1845-1959,” *Latin American Perspectives* 25, no. 3 (May 1998): 21-42.

It is helpful to compare Bauzá's account with that of Chico O'Farrill, who grew up in Vedado, an upper-, middle-class neighborhood in Havana in the 1920s and 1930s. Though he admitted that some public areas and institutions were off limits to black Cubans, he described segregation in Cuba as "more subtle" than the lynchings and "horrible things" that happened in the United States. Formal segregation was unnecessary in Cuba, he explained, because blacks and whites "knew their place [and] nobody trespassed on each other's territory." Just as Bauzá's argument that Cuba was no different from Mississippi was in some ways qualified by his own account of his experience in Cuba, so too was O'Farrill's notion that Cuban segregation was somehow less violent left open the question of how Cubans came to "know their place" and what happened to them if they did not. Not only do these somewhat contradictory remarks illustrate the different ways that light- and dark-skinned Cubans experienced cross-racial interactions, but they also confirm De la Fuente's contention that "neither unqualified racial integration nor linear exclusion characterizes the history of Cuba as an independent nation...Ambiguity is what best defines the evolution of race relations in twentieth-century Cuba." And it was this ambiguity that Cuban migrants would use to make sense of the new social order they encountered on the stage and in the streets of New York City.⁸³

Bauzá's account is fascinating as much for its unusual vision of Harlem as for its depiction of Cuba. Just before he made the permanent move from Havana to New York City in 1930, he explained to his godfather, who thought he was crazy for making the move during such poor economic times, the reasons for his decision: "I want to be where

⁸³ Chico O'Farrill, 31 July 1991, David Carp Collection; Burgos, *Playing America's Game*, 6, 39; De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 11.

the people is like me. I want to know what it is to be a black man in a black country. There is my roots. It has to be there. Let me find them. Because here I have no identity.”⁸⁴ Among other blacks in Harlem, Bauzá believed that he could create for himself a national cultural identity defined by his racial identity, a position that falls in line with cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall’s contention that “identity is not in the past to be found, but in the future to be constructed.”⁸⁵ Musicologist Jairo Moreno has focused specifically on Bauzá’s musical partnerships with African-American musicians, his mobility within the jazz community of Harlem, and his black racial identity. Moreno contends that “evaluation of Bauzá’s agency in the articulation of Latin/Jazz needs to consider his negotiation between material conditions (sociomusical and economic factors) and ideal processes (subjective poetics of self-construction).” Moreno follows this argument with an analysis of Bauzá’s “rhetoric of homeland” and understanding of this negotiation as romance or marriage.⁸⁶ My project departs from this study by widening the lens of historical inquiry to include the perspectives of Cuban and Latino/a audiences and positioning Bauzá not simply as a musician of color finding relief from intra-ethnic racial discrimination among fellow black artists in Harlem but, rather, as an individual, ordinary migrant, and musician negotiating the double bind of his race and ethnicity without ever losing hold of *both* his Cubanness and blackness. The objective here is not to substitute or reject one mode of identification for another or to position race or ethnicity as exclusively more meaningful than the other, but to understand the set of

⁸⁴ Mario Bauzá, 19 April 1989, Ruth Glasser/Puerto Rican Musicians Collection, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, New York.

⁸⁵ Stuart Hall, “Negotiating Caribbean Identities,” *New Left Review* 209 (January-February 1995): 14.

⁸⁶ Moreno, “Bauzá-Gillespie-Latin/Jazz,” 87; See, also, Nathan Brad Miller, “Mario Bauzá: Swing Era Novelty and Afro-Cuban Authenticity,” M.A. Thesis. University of Missouri-Columbia, 2007.

circumstances that contributed to the ways in which racial and ethnic identities, tensions, and alliances were negotiated at particular historical moments and for particular gains.

Once in New York City, Bauzá met up with Antonio Machin, a black Cuban singer fronting one of the key white Cuban bands of the 1930s, the Orquesta de Don Azpiazu, who had coincidentally been on the same boat that had brought him from Havana to the United States. The band's trumpet player had suddenly left and returned to Cuba, and, according to Bauzá, "he couldn't find no Latin that played that stuff on the trumpet like he wanted." Bauzá listened in on a few of the band's rehearsals and reasoned that "if you buy me a trumpet I think I can do that job." He "fell in love with the trumpet" and, after a successful stint with Cab Calloway's band, reasoned, "I gotta get me a Latin band with the same sound, the same idea as this big jazz orchestra." Bauzá "started fooling around with putting together the two music [Afro-Cuban and jazz] and prove to the world it could be done...what they calling today Latin Jazz."⁸⁷ This historical reconstruction, of course, recalls the development of Afro-Cuban/Latin jazz as an "overnight," uninterrupted process which scholars like Fernández have long dismissed as too simple.⁸⁸ Artists' narratives oftentimes emphasized this kind of sudden inspiration and novelty, but, of course, musical contact and mixture were longstanding.

Beginning with his arrival in New York City in the 1930s, Bauzá worked solely as a professional musician while many of the other Cuban musicians around him, especially those without formal training, had to piece together a living by working as wage laborers in construction, factories, restaurants, barbershops, *bodegas*, and other

⁸⁷ Mario Bauzá, 8 February 1989, David Carp Collection; Mario Bauzá, 19 April 1989, Ruth Glasser/Puerto Rican Musicians Collection.

⁸⁸ Fernández, *From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz*, 61.

industries.⁸⁹ Afro-Cuban bass player Cresencio Gutierrez of Oriental Cubana, for example, earned a more steady paycheck as a typographer for *Diario de Nueva York*. Afro-Cuban percussionist Luis Miranda worked as both a musician and dock worker throughout the 1940s and 1950s. He had returned to New York City in the late 1940s specifically to work with his father as a longshoreman. He attended school in the evenings hoping to learn English and eventually pursue a career in law. His father, however, had been friends with Machito back in Cuba and because of this association, shortly after his arrival in the city, Miranda decided to drop his books, but not his job on the docks, in favor of the conga drum.⁹⁰

According to Bauzá, very few Cubans, mostly cigar makers, lived in New York City throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Though not explicit, his reference to Cuban cigar makers likely suggests that those choosing to live in Harlem rather than in El Barrio were Afro-Cubans. Like him, many Afro-Cubans chose to live in Harlem, north of 110th Street, among African Americans rather than in El Barrio or Spanish Harlem, between 110th and 96th Streets, among Puerto Ricans.⁹¹ Bauzá recalled that he preferred living among blacks in Harlem because he felt free to do whatever he wanted in that world.

⁸⁹ Mario Bauzá, 19 April 1989, Ruth Glasser/Puerto Rican Musicians Collection; Armando Sánchez, 19 September 1995, David Carp Collection; Fernández, *From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz*, 43-44.

⁹⁰ “Mellizas del Campo en el Festival de Mayo,” *La Prensa*, 28 April 1957, p. 1; Luis Miranda, 16 April 1994, David Carp Collection.

⁹¹ Mario Bauzá, 19 April 1989, Ruth Glasser/Puerto Rican Musicians Collection. Bauzá reported that in the early 1930s he lived on 129th Street between Lenox and Fifth Avenue and, later, 166th Street and Seventh Avenue. He returned to Cuba in 1936 to marry his wife, Elena, also one of Machito’s sisters. The newlyweds moved to 144th Street between Lenox and Seventh Avenue. For more on the geographic and demographic distinctions between Harlem and El Barrio, see Salazar, *Mambo Kingdom*, 1; Gabriel Haslip-Viera, “The Evolution of the Latino Community in New York City: Early Nineteenth Century to the Present,” in *Latinos in New York: Communities in Transition*, eds. Gabriel Haslip-Viera and Sherrie L. Baver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996): 7; Ruth Glasser, *My Music is My Flag: Puerto Rican Musicians and Their New York Communities 1917-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995): 95-96.

There, he said, he could distance himself from what he called the inferiority complexes of other Latinos/as and the racism he had seen develop in Cuba.⁹²

Not the lone Afro-Cuban musician living in Harlem, Bauzá could count Alberto Iznaga, Alberto Socarrás, Generoso Montesinos, and others among his mostly black neighbors.⁹³ For example, percussionist Armando Sánchez left Cuba in 1945 to volunteer in the U.S. Army with a group of friends from the Universidad de La Habana. Born into what he described as a middle-class family in Cuba, Sánchez grew up around music and dance: his mother, of Spanish origins, and father, “mulatto and mixed, from Indian, black, and white,” met as performers in Europe in the early 1920s. Once in New York City, Sánchez failed to convince landlords in East Harlem, the supposed “refuge beyond the ghettos of the Lower East Side, Washington Heights, Brooklyn, and the South Bronx,” to rent him a room. His sister, who was already performing at the Teatro Hispano, advised him to meet up with some of their old friends from Cuba at the Arte Renovación barbershop on 116th Street and Fifth Avenue. The owner of the barbershop, he recalled, played trombone in Marcelino Guerra’s orchestra. As he moved deeper and deeper into Harlem, the surroundings shocked him, “I never saw so many black people together. I say, ‘God, this is Harlem and it must not be here.’” But he was in the right place, and it was in Harlem where he finally managed to rent a room on 120th Street and Madison Avenue for three dollars a week.⁹⁴ When Afro-Cuban flute player Alberto Socarrás first stepped off the Seventh Avenue subway onto 125th Street on his way to

⁹² Mario Bauzá, 19 April 1989, Ruth Glasser/Puerto Rican Musicians Collection; Mario Bauzá, 2 June 1989, Ruth Glasser/Puerto Rican Musicians Collection.

⁹³ Salazar, *Mambo Kingdom*, 1.

⁹⁴ Armando Sánchez, 19 September 1995, David Carp Collection; Armando Sánchez, 2 September 1992, David Carp Collection; Salazar, *Mambo Kingdom*, 1.

meet up with Puerto Rican bandleader Augusto Coen, the shock of so many black faces moving around him led him to think he had accidentally stumbled upon a “festival by negroes.” Socarrás left Cuba to escape from racial discrimination, not because he saw the United States as a racial paradise. In fact, he reasoned that his privileged position as an in-demand professional musician limited his exposure to practices of racial exclusion: “That’s why in United States I never saw any racism here, and I believe because I was a musician. I play with white musician, with black, with every kind of musician.”⁹⁵ When Armando Peraza arrived in New York City in 1948, he soon met up with Machito at the Palladium, and he immediately invited him, like he did for “any newcomer comin’ from Cuba,” to perform with the band. Peraza had left Cuba because he, too, shared in the idea that the United States “was the dreamland for everybody,” but unable to find a room in El Barrio he rented one in Harlem on 135th Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues.⁹⁶ The case can be made that many of these Afro-Cuban musicians experienced the best of both worlds, the freedom to operate a private life in an all-black setting free of white racism but also a public and professional life where Latinness shielded them somewhat from anti-black racism. As we will see in this and later chapters, however, this mobility did not mean that these musicians did not also experience the same racial discrimination outside of Harlem as African Americans who lived beside them nor did it prevent them from having to contend with the particular racial biases of their white Cuban compatriots and other Latinos/as.

What many of the Cuban musicians who left the island knew of life in the United States, thanks to encounters with American tourists as well as radio, music recordings,

⁹⁵ Alberto Socarrás with Max Salazar, 16 January 1983, David Carp Collection.

⁹⁶ Armando Peraza, 21 May 1993, David Carp Collection.

and film, hardly prepared them for what surrounded them on the streets of New York City. The realities of life in New York City brushed up against the idealized and romantic notions held by many black Cuban musicians, Bauzá included among them. Initial reactions to Harlem, for example, reveal that many Cuban musicians knew very little about the existence of the mostly black neighborhood or how to maneuver within the racial segregation and racial politics of the city. It is important, of course, not to essentialize Harlem's black community, but, rather to recognize that native-born African Americans, including hundreds of thousands who migrated north from the southern United States both before and after the Second World War, and tens of thousands of Caribbean migrants from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the West Indies settled in the neighborhood throughout this period. Blacks in New York City faced discrimination in housing, employment, and places of leisure and recreation as well as police brutality, limited political representation, inadequate schools and other public services. Historian Martha Biondi argues that "black labor became a dynamic source of social struggle, race leadership, and democratic ideas," and this was also true for most Afro-Cuban musicians who, racialized as nonwhite, were prohibited from performing in certain venues and were offered lower pay than their lighter-skinned compatriots.⁹⁷

Bauzá described a complex racial negotiation taking place among the Latinos/as living in New York City in the 1930s and 1940s: light-skinned Latinos/as rarely interacted with or wanted any association with darker-skinned Latinos/as and African

⁹⁷ Irma Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900-1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (London and New York: Verso Press, 1998); Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006): 17; Fernández, *From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz*, 43; Burgos, *Playing America's Game*.

Americans.⁹⁸ Not only did the city's racial codes dictate where you lived, socialized, and worked, but for Afro-Cuban musicians like Bauzá much of the racism they encountered also occurred within the *colonia hispana*. Tensions between Puerto Ricans and Cubans in New York City intensified in the mid-1930s due to "competition for housing, employment, and political identity." Migration laws, too, worked to stress relations between both ethnic groups. Many Cubans grew resentful towards Puerto Ricans who as U.S. citizens could travel freely between the island and the mainland, while Cubans who remained in the U.S. for more than twenty-nine days without a visa risked arrest and deportation.⁹⁹ Before he formed Machito y sus Afro-Cubans, Bauzá recalled that both African-American and Puerto Rican musicians often ridiculed Cuban music, referring to the sound as "hillbilly," while still others judged his particular abilities based on his ethnic background, making distinctions that charged, "You play jazz, yeah, but you don't play jazz like a Negro musician play."¹⁰⁰ That Afro-Cuban musicians often partnered with African-American musicians and found work within jazz musical circles does not mean that these relationships were without their own sets of tensions and negotiations.

Noting that in the late 1930s and 1940s "the Latin colony here was very small," Bauzá recalled that "whole lot of Puerto Rican people reject my music," mainly because of his use of the bongo, an instrument that symbolized ñañigo music and Africa.¹⁰¹

Boggs reasoned that "Afro-Cuban music not only suffered from the disdain held for it by Puerto Ricans and the popularity of the Tango, but the omnipresence of racialism in New

⁹⁸ Mario Bauzá, 2 June 1989, Ruth Glasser/Puerto Rican Musicians Collection.

⁹⁹ Salazar, *Mambo Kingdom*, 5, 55-56; Mary Lynn Conejo, Interview by author, 9 April 2010.

¹⁰⁰ Mario Bauzá, 8 April 1991, David Carp Collection; Mario Bauzá, 8 February 1989, David Carp Collection.

¹⁰¹ Mario Bauzá, 8 April 1991, David Carp Collection.

York City... In spite of the fact that racist ideology had prevented Afro-Cuban musicians from gaining credence as serious practitioners of music, racism, it appears, frequently made it necessary for them to join Afro-American bands to earn a living.”¹⁰² Boggs’ argument seems to simplify Puerto Rican rejection of Afro-Cuban music as exclusively a matter of racial prejudice. This is not entirely unfounded in that he uses tango as a counterpoint, a popular genre that offered a white, modern, urban expression of Latinness as opposed to one that was “African,” on the one hand, or “tropicalized,” on the other, by the likes of Xavier Cugat, Carmen Miranda, Desi Arnaz, and Marco Rizo. Historian Ruth Glasser’s study of Puerto Rican musicians in New York City demonstrates that Puerto Rican rejection of African influences, however, was not unique to Afro-Cuban music. In fact, Puerto Ricans on the island and in New York City “argued about whether the *plena*, of black ‘lowlife’ origins, was a fitting national music.” Puerto Rican attitudes about race were shaped by past experiences on the island and new experiences with North American bi-racial classifications, and both factors contributed to practices of racial exclusion within Puerto Rican communities in New York City. Glasser contends as well that “the production of Puerto Rican music in New York was inextricably bound up with *boricuas*’ desire to maintain cultural boundaries where social and political ones were ambiguous.” Puerto Rican musicians, she argues, incorporated some aspects of Cuban music while rejecting others, as when composers such as “Rafael Hernandez and Pedro Flores grafted intensely nationalistic Puerto Ricans words onto commercially acceptable Cuban forms.” Initial Puerto Rican rejection of Afro-Cuban music, therefore, had as much to do with

¹⁰² Boggs, *Salsiology*, 355.

race and race relations as it did with a contrast between Puerto Rican and Cuban nationalism and ethnic identity.¹⁰³

Bauzá relied on metaphor to explain not only how he developed his own sound and style as a jazz musician but also how he overcame these criticisms to forge relationships between jazz and Afro-Cuban music as well as among African-American, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Filipino, and Anglo musicians. He used language as a metaphor, positioning himself as both a cultural mediator and racial pioneer, negotiating difference not in terms of national or ethnic identity but as a mode of accent and phrasing. A fellow trumpet and saxophone player, Benny Carter offered him some important advice: “You, all you gotta do, adapt yourself to some of this language of jazz. It’s a different language, you know. When you really find out or learn the language of our music, I don’t think you have no problem.” For Bauzá, the “language of our music” was not English or Spanish or even Cuban or American; rather, it was *African*. He constructed Africa as the source of both jazz and Cuban music, and he insisted that his new band would carry the “Afro-Cuban” modifier: “This here name of the band, gon’ use it, otherwise I don’t want to have no band, period. Why, I say why, because my music, the Cuban music from Africa, man, and my race is African. So I’m representing my music and my race, that’s all.”¹⁰⁴ Ray Santos, who played saxophone for the Afro-Cubans between 1956 and 1960, revealed that among Bauzá, Machito, and featured singer Graciela “there was a, always

¹⁰³ Ruth Glasser, *My Music is My Flag: Puerto Rican Musicians and Their New York Communities, 1917-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995): 9, 73, 199.

¹⁰⁴ Mario Bauzá, 8 April 1991, David Carp Collection; Mario Bauzá, 8 February 1989, David Carp Collection; Loza, *Tito Puente and the Making of Latin Music*, 222.

like ‘race talk’ going on,” an indication that race and discussions of race relations were central to the band’s identity.¹⁰⁵

Naming the band “Afro-Cuban,” however, was hardly an innovation in the way that U.S. musicologists and even Bauzá and Machito liked to pretend. *Afroubanismo* was already a major artistic and intellectual movement in Cuba during this period, and this act constituted a reclaiming more so than an invention. Light-skinned Cuban bandleader José Curbelo, who left Cuba for the United States in 1939 and eventually became the second band at La Conga thanks to a recommendation from Bauzá, expressed a notion of Afro-Cubanness that was very much in vogue Cuba in the 1930s. He defined Cuban music as Afro-Cuban music “because the negro slaves that came from Cuba, they brought the rhythm. And in Cuba they put the voicings out, the melody and the harmony, et cetera. But that was – still is, the real Cuban music should be called not salsa – Afro-Cuban music.”¹⁰⁶ Bauzá’s reading of race through Africanness seems to enable a diasporic musical collaboration, albeit in strategically essentialist ways, but it also must have reflected and used as resources notions of Africanness that were very popular in Cuba at the time.

These criticisms notwithstanding, Bauzá’s role as a music pioneer and anti-racist remain largely uncontested. According to Salazar, when Bauzá’s “rumba, jazz, and classical sound started demolishing ethnic barriers in 1939, it was the beginning of his tacit war against racial discrimination.” With Xavier Cugat as the most notable exception, in the early 1940s, most Latin bands performed within the *colonia hispana* in nightclubs and ballrooms in Spanish Harlem like the Park Palace, El Obrero Español, the

¹⁰⁵ Ray Santos, 8 August 1995, David Carp Collection.

¹⁰⁶ José Curbelo, 3 October 1993, David Carp Collection.

Odd Fellows Temple (a black Cuban club dating back to the 1870s), Club Tampa, Borinquen Hall, Club Ponceño, Laurel Gardens, Carlton Hall, American Legion Hall, and El Cubanacan as well as Hunts Point Place in the South Bronx.¹⁰⁷ But racial exclusion did not stop Bauzá and his newly-formed band, Machito y sus Afro-Cubans, from working below the Ninety-sixth Street color line in nightclubs and venues where other dark and light-skinned Latinos/as initially questioned their potential for sustained success. Bauzá credited the support of Jewish audiences who made the trek uptown to dance at the Park Plaza on 110th Street and Fifth Avenue for bringing Machito y sus Afro-Cubans to the attention of the owners of downtown clubs like the Havana-Madrid and La Conga on Fifty-first Street and Broadway. The band first worked as a replacement band for the Anselmo Sacasas Orchestra at La Conga, but Bauzá soon convinced the owner to make Machito y sus Afro-Cubans the nightclub's headliner. The band worked as the house band at La Conga for just over three years between 1942 and 1945, an achievement that marked the first time that a Latin band held the featured position in a "swanky" downtown nightclub or hotel.

The term "Latin," though fluid and negotiable, in many ways also carried a heavy burden, for it worked to describe light-skinned musicians like Xavier Cugat, Desi Arnaz, and Marco Rizo as well as Cubans of color like Bauzá, Machito, and Alberto Socarrás. The point is well-made by Burgos when he argued that Latino baseball players – and here I make a similar case for Latino/a musicians – "learned that others perceived Latinos as people of color (nonwhite) yet differentiated them from African Americans primarily due

¹⁰⁷ Salazar, *Mambo Kingdom*, 5-8.

to their different cultural practices.”¹⁰⁸ For as much as the “Afro” modifier referenced Bauzá’s African roots, the “Cubanos” portion of the name, as subject, served to temper what might have been perceived as an aggressively racialized and unmarketable musical product. Indeed, what was called Cuban or Latin was easily recognized back home as a version, however watered down, of Afro-Cuban.¹⁰⁹

Bauzá relished his role as a racial pioneer because of a past episode with other Latino/a musicians in New York City. He attended a meeting organized by Latino/a musicians upset by the fact that Latin bands were only hired as relief bands and those that were hired for downtown clubs had to be white or very light-skinned. What frustrated and annoyed Bauzá was not the discrimination experienced by those at the meeting, but his realization that he was the only dark-skinned musician invited to attend. He reasoned that these musicians included him in the meeting only because of his successes as a professional musician, initiated by his early connections with African-American musicians such as Cab Calloway, Dizzy Gillespie, and Chick Webb, and the hope that he might hire some of them to perform with his new band. Of this particular incident, Glasser explains, “the bandleaders had failed to organize themselves along cultural lines. The net result, according to Bauzá, was a weakening of both their musical and their economic bargaining positions.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Burgos, *Playing America’s Game*, 112.

¹⁰⁹ Mario Bauzá, 19 April 1989, Ruth Glasser/Puerto Rican Musicians Collection; Mario Bauzá, 2 June 1989, Ruth Glasser/Puerto Rican Musicians Collection; Mario Bauzá, 8 February 1989, David Carp Collection.

¹¹⁰ Mario Bauzá, 19 April 1989, Ruth Glasser/Puerto Rican Musicians Collection; Mario Bauzá, 2 June 1989, Ruth Glasser/Puerto Rican Musicians Collection; Mario Bauzá, 8 February 1989, David Carp Collection; Glasser, *My Music is My Flag*, 78.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, performance reviews listed Bauzá as a trumpet player and arranger and consistently linked him to his associations with popular jazz musicians Chick Web, Dizzy Gillespie, and Stan Kenton, a relational framing that positioned him as a sort of cultural mediator between Cuban and African-American musical circles. A review of Machito y sus Afro-Cubans at the Palladium Ballroom published in *Billboard Magazine* credited “the expert musicianship of Mario Bauzá” for the band’s sound and polish. That public acknowledgement, however, cautioned that “this specialized musical excitement...ain’t too good from a commercial viewpoint.”¹¹¹ In this case, commercial success seemed to be measured in terms of the band’s projected inability to cross over and appeal to Anglo audiences.

Most news reports offered little more than casual mention of Bauzá as the musical director of the Afro-Cubans, though Machito, the band’s front man, was black, too. That changed in 1951 when a debate on the origins of mambo erupted within the pages of *La Prensa*, a debate fueled largely by Afro-Cuban tres-player Arsenio Rodríguez’s contention that “Mambo King” Pérez Prado, also a Cuban of color, should be considered an interpreter, not the creator, of the mambo. Bauzá emerged as an expert figure, whose authorial voice derived from the newspaper’s assertion that within the *colonia hispana* “he is considered one of the best musicians in all senses.” Asked to give perspective on the debate, Bauzá concluded that “the true creator of the mambo is none other than Arsenio Rodríguez,” and, with that final declaration the newspaper, too, ended its discussion on the matter.¹¹² Yet, when Machito y sus Afro-Cubans won *La Prensa*’s

¹¹¹ *Billboard Magazine*, 22 November 1947, p. 26; *Billboard Magazine*, 8 January 1949, p. 35.

¹¹² “Escuelas y organizaciones cívicas celebran el ‘Día de las Américas,’” *La Prensa*, 12 April 1951, p. 6; “Arsenio Rodríguez dará a conocer el capetillo y el son montuno aquí,” *La Prensa*, 13 April

musical popularity contest in 1952, the newspaper presented contrasting images of Bauzá and Machito, relying on exaggerated stereotypes to describe the latter. Bauzá earned praise as a “genius Cuban musician,” and the newspaper presented him “as a serious man, quiet” while it portrayed Machito as “the real Cuban, happy, *cumbanchero*, noisy.”¹¹³ Though here being a “real Cuban” is an ambivalent compliment, it nonetheless reveals contemporary expectations of Cubanness.

Experiences with racial exclusion as a young man in Cuba and within the *colonia hispana* as a professional musician likely influenced what might be described as Bauzá’s restrained Cubanness. He generally rejected the appropriation of his musical accomplishments as symbolic or representative of Cuban national identity, arguing instead that his hard work and persistence defined him more so than his national or ethnic identity: “I don’t embrace myself with my flag. My flag is my dignity. I made my flag.”¹¹⁴ That Bauzá rejected the notion that his individual accomplishments should be coopted by or deemed symbolic of Cuban nationhood also pushes back against Fernández’s contention that Cuban musicians “in every moment of their construction of a people’s musicalia, are at the same time performing their *cubania* (Cubanness).”¹¹⁵ This is not to say that Bauzá denied or rejected his Cubanness, but rather that for him his musical innovations reflected his role as a social agent moving within conditions that often marginalized and excluded him and other musicians of color as full members of

1951, p. 5; “En Broadway,” *La Prensa*, 16 April 1951, p. 5; “El Festival Artístico pro Fondo de Caridad fue un éxito extraordinario,” *La Prensa*, 22 May 1951, p. 1.

¹¹³ “Amenizaran el baile del Festival de ‘La Prensa’ la Orq. de Machito,” *La Prensa*, 4 May 1952, p. 3.

¹¹⁴ Mario Bauzá, 19 April 1989, Ruth Glasser/Puerto Rican Musicians Collection.

¹¹⁵ Fernández, *From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz*, 43

both the Cuban nation and the *colonia hispana*. Glasser argued that for Puerto Ricans in New York City music not only helped in the construction of an ethnic identity but that, especially in the 1930s, their music took on patriotic and political significance. Music became a site of contestation for Cuban musicians as well, but Bauzá believed that it was not the musical product itself that mattered so much as the actual laboring for the production of that musical product.¹¹⁶ Based on Bauzá's anti-racist positioning, his reclaiming of the music which nationalism had laid claims to relies mostly on the role of the individual musician as innovator rather than the notion that music arises out of or reflects national spirit.

The migration stories and musical contributions of the Cuban musicians and performers discussed in this chapter illustrate the various ways that professional musicians negotiated the demands of the U.S. entertainment industry alongside their own personal, intellectual, and cultural understandings of music genres that categorized their mode of cultural expression variously as "Latin," "Afro-Cuban," and "Cuban." For Moreno, "Latin," "Afro-Cuban," and "Cuban" "are integrated in the jazz tradition, but only marginally, within a decidedly modernist cognitive and psychic ambivalence that black North American musicians experienced as they contemplated a black Other."¹¹⁷ What I have done in this chapter is begin to examine these categories, not solely as terms imposed by outsiders, generally, or the entertainment industry, specifically, but also as terms black and white Cuban musicians used variously to negotiate and navigate their

¹¹⁶ Glasser, *My Music is My Flag*, 9, 162-163.

¹¹⁷ Moreno, "Bauzá-Gillespie-Latin/Jazz," 83.

way through their new personal and professional lives in New York City (and Hollywood) in the 1940s and 1950s.

The popularity of Machito y sus Afro-Cubans within the *colonia hispana* of New York City initially surprised Bauzá, mainly because of criticisms from Puerto Ricans. That initial rejection or skepticism, perhaps, helps explain Bauzá's rejection of the term Latin jazz: "Because it's Afro-Cuban rhythm in the bottom with jazz in the top, it's nothing else... When you say Latin, how about the other 21 republics, they supposed to, they got their own music, they got their own rhythm." He explained, "Because we are a mixture of Spaniards and African, with a little Indian, there was a black and white thing. It's a mulatto music." Here, Bauzá adopts a national perspective on rhythm: "Rhythm is a folklore, a rhythm is like a ground in any country... The notes don't belong to us, so therefore melodies ain't got no nationality if you want to talk about, but rhythm do."¹¹⁸ He explained, "What they talking about, what's Latin to begin with? 21 republic, and each one of them got a different rhythm, different expression. And what I play, there's no similarity to that kind of stuff. So please – respect my, the name I give to my daughter when I baptize her – Afro-Cuban jazz."¹¹⁹ That Bauzá is able to ascribe nationality to rhythm, though he resisted the general notion of music as national expression, suggests not simply that he brought specificity to the debate or that he was, perhaps, hypocritical, but that, at times, making nationalist claims served a purpose. The purpose here was to reject Latinness, marking Cuban innovations, especially those contributions made by

¹¹⁸ Mario Bauzá, 8 February 1989, David Carp Collection; Mario Bauzá, 19 April 1989, Ruth Glasser/Puerto Rican Musicians Collection; Fernández, *From Afro-Cuban Rhythm to Latin Jazz*, 46.

¹¹⁹ Mario Bauzá, 8 April 1991, David Carp Collection.

Cubans of color, as unique and distinct from the musical contributions of other Latino/a musicians.

This chapter began with a comparison of the personal life histories and professional trajectories of Marco Rizo and Mario Bauzá, and it seems only fair to return to this analytic framing at closing for it reminds us, as Fernández has argued, that “the compensation and recognition received by the majority of Cuban professional popular musicians for most of the twentieth century seems inversely related to their contribution to the Cuban musicalia.”¹²⁰ Not only has this chapter served to examine particularly meaningful episodes from the lives of the many Cuban musicians living, working, and socializing in New York City in the 1940s and 1950s, but it has revealed the multiple perspectives expressed by black and white Cuban musicians about the ways skin color and race shaped their migration experiences and musical careers. Rizo and Bauzá prove exemplary in this regard, because as musicians in the shadows of Desi Arnaz and Machito, respectively, they help frame the production of racialized discourses and musical practices within the context of the broader demands of the U.S. entertainment industry. In subtle and not-so-subtle ways, Rizo seemed to have realized that he shared the shadow with Bauzá. And, for Rizo, that shadow followed him since childhood: Arnaz “knew a few chords on the guitar and he used to go to my home and he used to say ‘Marco, play that,’ you know. And he tried to catch up with me.” Of Bauzá and Machito

¹²⁰ Fernández, *From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz*, 54.

and y sus Afro-Cubans, Rizo said, “That was Mario’s band...Machito was the personality, the front man...But Mario was the musician.”¹²¹

¹²¹ Marco Rizo, 22 July 1993, David Carp Collection; Marco Rizo, 6 August 1993, David Carp Collection.

Chapter 3

A Club to Call Home: Music, Race, and Patriotism in New York City's *Colonia Cubana*

One evening in mid-September 1941, Machito y sus Afro-Cubans took the stage for a performance at the Audubon Ballroom, located at the edge of Harlem on the corner of 165th Street and Broadway. The popular band had been hired by Victor Alonso, president of the Hispano-American Club. Outside of the ballroom, a reporter for the *Amsterdam Star-News* explained, “two prominent young white women, an African prince of great culture and a young colored girl” sought entry into the “public dance” for which they had purchased tickets. It had likely been Louise Crane, the daughter of a former governor of Massachusetts and one of the white women in the group, who suggested they attend the event as she was known to be “intensely interested in swing music and Negro musicians.” The man at the door, however, reportedly told the “mixed group” that “negra gente” could not be admitted into the ballroom. Crane told the newspaper that the man at the door insisted that this “was a ‘private’ dance and that the club reserved the right to choose its own guests.” The group left after receiving a refund and spent the night at the Famous Door, a “swank Swing Street night spot,” where they had “absolutely no trouble.” Morris Spencer, owner of the Audubon Ballroom, argued that if he had been present he “would have taken a stand in the matter,” given his “policy of discrimination to no one because of race, creed or color.” Writers for the newspaper attempted to

contact Alonso for an explanation, even going so far as to visit one of the businesses he reportedly managed near 114th Street and Madison Avenue, but to no avail.¹

The reception that this “mixed group” received as they tried to enter an event sponsored by a Hispanic social club was not at all uncommon within the *colonia hispana* and *colonia cubana* of New York City in the 1940s and 1950s. Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and other Latinos/as of color were also refused admittance into social events, including into dances and celebrations, such as this one, headlined by Cuban musicians of color performing Afro-Cuban music. One of the main goals of this chapter, therefore, is to examine the role of race in shaping the discourses expressed and practices sanctioned by the various Cuban social clubs and pan-ethnic institutions of New York City during this period. Whether the “negra gente” in question were denied entry to the dance because they were not of the Spanish-speaking world or simply because of the color of their skin is not entirely clear. It is evident, however, that racial and ethnic boundaries existed, and that these boundaries often came to be tested, reinforced, and crossed at social events and cultural activities that, somewhat ironically, featured Afro-Cuban popular music and musicians.

The objective of this chapter is *not* to provide an extensive and elaborate history of all or even the most prominent Cuban social clubs and ethnic organizations active in New York City in the 1940s and 1940s. Rather, the goal is to examine the discursive elements and processes of racial and ethnic negotiation that characterized the “Cuban New York” experience prior to the massive exodus of Cubans to the United States after 1959. This chapter details the Cuban-American cultural landscape that took shape in

¹ “Mixed Group Refused Admittance to Public Dance at Hall near Harlem,” *Amsterdam Star-News*, 13 September 1941, p. 20.

New York City in relation to the relatively small but significant number of Cubans living and working in the city at mid-century. It offers close readings of many of the key social and cultural events organized by the city's *colonia cubana* and places particular emphasis on the interconnectedness of migration, popular culture, (pan-) ethnic identity, and local and international politics. I focus specifically on the popular Afro-Cuban musicians and performers affiliated with and hired to perform at club events as well as more broadly on the events themselves, particularly those presented as Cuban patriotic celebrations. This chapter uses the social, cultural, and (a)political agendas of the various Cuban social clubs and cultural organizations of New York City, specifically failed plans to erect a Monumento Martí-Maceo, marketing strategies and advertising campaigns, and responses to increased migration due to political turmoil on the island, to reveal critical moments of cooperation and tension within the *colonia cubana* and *colonia hispana* and between New York City, Cuban, and diplomatic government officials.

Two of the more active and well-organized Cuban social clubs in New York City during the 1940s and 1950s were El Club Cubano Inter-Americano and the Ateneo Cubano de Nueva York. Most historians agree that El Club Cubano emerged in New York City in September 1945 when a group of Afro-Cubans, many of whom had migrated north from Tampa in the late 1930s and early 1940s, planned a centennial celebration in honor of Antonio Maceo, the beloved Afro-Cuban general whose leadership contributed to the success of the nineteenth-century Cuban War for Independence. The event netted a profit of two-hundred dollars, which organizers used to form the new club. Anthropologist Susan Greenbaum, however, explains that the

impetus for the celebration and, by extension, the formation of the new club, came from the mayor of Havana, who contacted former members of the Mella Club, a political social club for both black and white Cubans in New York City that disbanded before 1933, to commemorate Maceo's birthday. This origin story makes sense given the seemingly close relationship the club would maintain with Cuban government officials in the years that followed. Though not founded on the basis of race or color, Greenbaum reasoned that the El Club Cubano "became black by default and 'inter-American' by necessity." That is, existing and recently formed Cuban clubs like the Círculo Cubano and the Ateneo Cubano denied membership to Cubans of color, an act of racial exclusion that forced Afro-Cubans to create for themselves what Melba Alvarado, longtime club member and president between 1957 and 1958, called a "safe space for 'la gente negra'" within the *colonia cubana*. Cubans of color found refuge at El Club Cubano on Prospect Avenue in the Bronx, and leaders opened clubhouse doors and extended membership to Puerto Ricans, African Americans, Dominicans, Jamaicans, and Haitians. Most club members, skilled men and women from middle-class and working-class backgrounds, lived in the Bronx within walking distance to the clubhouse, but some also rode the subway from East Harlem and other parts of Manhattan to attend club meetings and social and cultural events.²

Apart from the rich variety of information on social activities and cultural events gathered from newspaper and magazine sources, the historical record offers scant details

² Susan Greenbaum, *More than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002): 236-238; Nancy Raquel Mirabal, "Melba Alvarado, El Club Cubano Inter-Americano, and the Creation of Afro-Cubanidades in New York City," in *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States*, eds. Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 121-122; David F. García, "Contesting that Damned Mambo: Arsenio Rodríguez and the People of El Barrio and the Bronx in the 1950s," *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States*, eds. Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 193.

about the origins and development of the Ateneo Cubano de Nueva York. In fact, much of what I have uncovered about the membership and policies of the Ateneo Cubano comes from comparisons and oppositional references made to the club by Afro-Cuban musicians and members of El Club Cubano. From these piecemeal historical reconstructions, the Ateneo Cubano stands as a much less racially-inclusive and much more closed organization. Though willing to hire and promote Afro-Cuban musicians like Arsenio Rodríguez and Afro-Cuban poets like Eusebia Cosme to perform at club events, the Ateneo Cubano seems to have denied ordinary Cubans of color admittance into its social spaces.

Founded in 1941 and open to both men and women, the Ateneo Cubano routinely excluded Cubans of color from participating in club affairs, sometimes through direct confrontation upon entry to an event as well as through “misinformation and deliberate silences.” Though the club welcomed white non-members at its events, including those held at its clubhouse on Broadway between 109th and 110th Streets in Manhattan, Alvarado recalled that Cubans of color seeking entry were met with the racially marked phrase, “We reserve the right to admission.” She also remembered that oftentimes she and other members of El Club Cubano would only learn that a white Cuban social club like the Ateneo Cubano had organized an event after the fact. Afro-Cuban singer and vocalist for Machito y sus Afro-Cubans, Graciela also charged that the Ateneo Cubano denied entry to Cubans of color and that the club’s members did not attend the band’s performances. “We have no reason to be grateful to the [white] Cubans,” she reasoned.³

³ Greenbaum, *More than Black*, 236-238; Mirabal, “Melba Alvarado,” 121-122; Graciela, “¡Eso era Tremendo! An Afro-Cuban Musician Remembers,” in *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States*, eds. Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 150-151.

For the most part, the black and white Cuban social clubs of New York City maintained independent memberships and hosted separate events and activities, a coexistence that racially divided the Cuban-American cultural landscape. That El Club Cubano, the Ateneo Cubano, and other Cuban social clubs offered black and white Cuban New Yorkers separate physical and discursive spaces to come together as members of the *colonia cubana* does not mean that moments of collaboration and cross-racial unity did not also take place throughout the 1940s and 1950s. It is the goal of this chapter to examine these moments of integration as well as those moments when racial differences threatened to fracture the community, and to do so with particular focus on the role that Afro-Cuban popular music and musicians played in these contexts. This chapter, therefore, pays specific attention to musical performances hosted in the “private” spaces of the Cuban social clubs and ethnic institutions of New York City as well as performances held at more “public” commercial venues, dancehalls, and nightclubs, treating *both* as literal and symbolic spaces where the *colonia hispana* and *colonia cubana* came together. In addition to focusing on how professional Cuban musicians navigated and negotiated their performance schedules in private *and* commercial contexts, this chapter also considers the role that interamerican and diplomatic interests played in shaping the cultural expressions offered by club leaders and the musicians they hired.⁴

⁴ For more on this methodological framing, see Roberta L. Singer and Elena Martínez, “A South Bronx Latin Music Tale,” *CENTRO Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 176-201; García, “Contesting that Damned Mambo,” 187.

Throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Cuban migration to the United States remained small but constant with historian Louis A. Pérez, Jr. plainly surmising that “Cubans went precisely because they had always done so.”⁵ During the revolutionary nation-building wars of the late-nineteenth century, some Cubans traveled north across the Florida Straits to escape political insurrection, while others came to secure employment in Tampa’s booming cigar industry. The first half of the twentieth century witnessed wealthy Cubans send their children north to attend prestigious schools and universities, and professionals who worked for U.S. corporations often traveled abroad for advanced training and instruction. By the late 1920s, thousands of black and white Cuban migrants from all socioeconomic backgrounds had formed mutual aid societies in Tampa, such as El Círculo Cubano and La Union Martí-Maceo, and built theaters and dance halls that offered black and white Cubans separate spaces for leisure and recreation. The Great Depression of the 1930s, however, devastated the cigar industry that had employed many of the Cubans living in Tampa and forced these workers to look elsewhere for employment. Many of these older Cubans and their

⁵ Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999): 411.

For more on migration from Latin America and the Caribbean in the context of U.S. imperialism, see Walter Lefebvre, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993); Thomas Paterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Peter Kvisto, “Theorizing Transnational Immigration: A Critical Review of Current Efforts,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24, no. 4 (2001): 549-577; Gilbert González and Raul Fernández, “Empire and the Origins of Twentieth-Century Migration from Mexico to the United States,” *The Pacific Historical Review* 71, no. 1 (February 2002): 19-57; Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003); Eric Love, *Race over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); María Cristina García, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York after 1950* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2007).

families chose to retire and stay in Tampa. As we will see later in this dissertation, some simply relocated a few hours south to Miami where an expanding tourist industry offered jobs and other opportunities. Of the younger generation some chose to return to Cuba, while many others looked north to New York City as a refuge from the racism of the Jim Crow South and as place with more economic advantages.⁶

The steadily growing presence of Cubans in New York City throughout the 1940s and 1950s resulted both from international migration from Cuba as well as from this domestic migration from Tampa and other parts of Florida, allowing for a small but significant *colonia cubana* to develop during this period. Records from the 1940 U.S. census indicate that 7,410 Cubans (defined as foreign-born or having a mother or father born in Cuba) lived in the state of New York, and of those born in Cuba, just over five thousand were racially classified as “white” compared to only six hundred designated as

⁶ According to U.S. census records, between 1900 and 1920 the number of Cubans (defined as born in Cuba or mother or father born in Cuba) living in the state of New York hovered between five and six thousand. In 1930, the number of Cubans in New York more than doubled to just over 13,000.

Steven Ruggles, Matthew Sobek, Trent Alexander, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, Patricia Kelly Hall, Miriam King, and Chad Ronnander. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 4.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2008.

For more on the migration and settlement of Cubans in the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see, for example, Gary R. Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Gerald E. Poyo, *With All and For the Good of All: The Emergence of Popular Nationalism in the Cuban Communities of the United States, 1848-1898* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989); Singer and Martínez, “A South Bronx Latin Music Tale,” 198; Félix Masud-Piloto, *From Welcomed Exiles to Illegal Immigrants* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996): 7-18; Gabriel Haslip-Viera, “The Evolution of the Latino Community in New York City: Early Nineteenth Century to the Present,” in *Latinos in New York: Communities in Transition*, eds. Gabriel Haslip-Viera and Sherrie L. Bayer (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996): 3-29; Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 1998); Brent Richards Weisman, *Soldiers and Patriots: Buffalo Soldiers and Afro-Cubans in Tampa, 1898* (Tampa: University of South Florida, 1999); Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*; Juan González, *A History of Latinos in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000): 110; Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, “The Migrations of Arturo Schomburg: On Being Antillano, Negro, and Puerto Rican in New York, 1891-1938,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, no .1 (2001): 3-49; Greenbaum, *More than Black*; Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores, eds. *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

“black.” Historian Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof has noted that before 1960, U.S. census takers ascribed color and racial identification to the individuals they surveyed “based on the physical appearance of the individual but probably also influenced by other factors such as dress, speech, family members, and neighborhood.” Hoffnung-Garskof explains, “Rather than recording the color and racial identities of these early settlers as they perceived themselves, census enumeration reflected shifting national ideas about race, codified by the color categories that Congress included in the forms: White, Black, and mulatto.”⁷ By 1950, the Cuban population in the state of New York had more than doubled. That is, the 1950 U.S. census reported that 16,895 Cubans resided in the state with 12,272 of the Cuban-born individuals in the state given a “white” racial classification and 1,291 categorized as “black.” Economic uncertainty and political instability escalated in Cuba throughout the 1950s, and many more Cubans migrated to the United States during this decade. The 1960 U.S. census indicated that 41,262 Cubans lived in New York, though it remains unclear exactly how many of those Cubans arrived in the state immediately following the Cuban Revolution in January 1959. According to one report, however, only 3,000 Cubans left the island for the United States in 1959, and many of those early émigrés chose to remain in Miami, expecting Fidel Castro’s regime to be short-lived, rather than travel further north to New York City. This evidence suggests that the majority of Cubans living in New York, as reported in the 1960 U.S. census, had migrated prior to the Cuban Revolution. Of the 41,262 Cubans in New York

⁷ Steven Ruggles, Matthew Sobek, Trent Alexander, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, Patricia Kelly Hall, Miriam King, and Chad Ronnander. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 4.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2008.

Hoffnung-Garskof, “The Migrations of Arturo Schomburg;” See, also, Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Clara Rodríguez, *Puerto Ricans: Born in the U.S.A.* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991).

by 1960, an estimated 28,000 were born in Cuba, and records indicate that more than 25,000 of them were racially classified as “white” while nearly 3,000 were classified as “black.”⁸

Though a relatively smaller number of migrants compared to the hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans in New York City or Mexicans in the southwestern part of the United States, these numbers do not reflect the presence of temporary Cuban visitors and tourists to New York City. Nor do they account for those who overstayed their visa permits and settled permanently in the city, contributing, in their own ways, to the totality of the mid-century “Cuban New York” experience. For example, during my oral history interview with Mary Lynn Conejo, the U.S.-born daughter of a white Cuban man and black Cuban woman revealed that her father had come to the United States in 1949 on a V-29 visa and that he over-stayed his tourist permit just as “lots of people from that era did.” Ethnomusicologist David F. García estimates that the Cuban population of New York City increased by eighty-four percent, growing from nearly 23,124 in 1940 to 42,694 in 1960. More dramatically, the Puerto Rican population increased nearly six-hundred percent in the same period, from 61,500 to 612,574. García concludes,

⁸ Steven Ruggles, Matthew Sobek, Trent Alexander, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, Patricia Kelly Hall, Miriam King, and Chad Ronnander. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 4.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2008; Juan M. Clark, “The Exodus from Revolutionary Cuba (1959-1974): A Sociological Analysis” (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 1975): 75-78.

For more on the major political events, economic changes, and social happenings in Cuba between 1930 and 1959, particularly in the context of U.S. imperialism, see, for example, Hugh Thomas, *Cuba or The Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998, 1971); Morris Morley, “The U.S. Imperial State in Cuba, 1952-1958: Policymaking and Capitalist Interest,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 14, no. 1 (May 1982): 143-170; Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Masud-Piloto, *From Welcomed Exiles to Illegal Immigrants*, 7-18; Haslip-Viera, “The Evolution of the Latino Community in New York City;” Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*; Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for all: Race, Inequality, and Politics in 20th-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Frank Argote-Freyre, *Fulgencio Batista: From Revolutionary to Strongman* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006).

therefore, that “Cubans in New York did not form an identifiable core of settlement. Instead, they resided primarily in Puerto Rican sections, although class and race dictated in which neighborhood Cubans settled.” The conclusion that, because of their small numbers, Cubans “did not form an identifiable core of settlement” too easily obscures the significance of Cubans living in New York City during this period and constitutes a hierarchy of importance based solely on population size. What I argue in this chapter and throughout this dissertation is that Cuban migrants did, in fact, create for themselves an identifiable *colonia cubana* and became an undeniable presence in New York City in the 1940s and 1950s, particularly in the realm of popular culture. As a result, this project not only destabilizes hierarchies of significance relative to population that seem to dominate the field of Latino/a Studies but also contributes to the field’s growing commitment to the recovery of Latinos/as in “new” or “unexpected” places and time periods.⁹

On Sunday, November 11, 1945, Generoso Pedroso, Narciso Saavedra, Julio Cardenal, Mario Alfonso, and José J. León gave final approval to the mission statement that would come to define the ideals and principles of El Club Cubano Inter-Americano.¹⁰

⁹ Mary Lynn Conejo, Interview by author, 9 April 2010; Conejo’s father eventually became a U.S. citizen in 1955. García, “Contesting that Damned Mambo,” 191; Natalia Molina, Adrian Burgos, Jr., Daniel Ramírez, and Pablo Mitchell, “Where is the Latino Past in the Future?: Trends in Latino/a History and Historiography” (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Latina/o Studies Silver Symposium, October 30, 2009).

For a brief overview of Puerto Rican and Mexican migration to the United States before 1960, see González, *A Harvest of Empire*; Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in Twentieth-Century New York City* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010): 275fn3.

¹⁰ Barbershop operator Generoso Pedroso served as the first president of El Club Cubano Inter-Americano in 1945 and 1946. Narciso Saavedra took his turn as club president in 1950 and 1951 followed by José J. León in 1952. Other club presidents from the 1940s and 1950s include Marcos Llerena (1947, 1962), Pablo Soublet (1948), Pedro Millet (1949, 1965), Joaquin Maldonado (1953), Francisco Cardenal (1954, 1955), Aurelio O’Reilly (1956), Melba Alvarado (1957, 1958), and Pedro Guibert (1959).

That mission statement revealed a social and cultural club that aimed to “maintain the fraternity that should exist within the *colonia cubana* and the other Latin American countries...separating itself from any association with partisan politics or religion.” These early club leaders established *fraternidad* as a primary goal of this new social institution, a choice of words that suggests not simply a borrowing of language but also of ideology from the nineteenth-century Cuban revolutionary struggles for independence from Spain. Historian Ada Ferrer has shown that Cuban patriot-intellectuals offered black slaves and free persons of color, whom they hoped to recruit to the insurgent cause, the promise of a free Cuban nation based on equal rights, liberty, and brotherhood. Rebel leaders like José Martí extended to Cubans of color citizenship into a Cuban nation constructed as “transracial.” Renewed calls for fraternity within the *colonia cubana* by Afro-Cubans often denied entry into white Cuban social clubs in New York City and all too familiar with acts of formal and informal racial exclusion in Cuba and the United States confirms that these nineteenth-century promises remained unfulfilled in the 1940s and 1950s. By drawing on this legacy of (unfulfilled) Cuban brotherhood and community based on equality and freedom from racial divisiveness, these early club leaders positioned El Club Cubano as a proponent of racial change and progress, at least on the cultural front.¹¹

Loose-leaf page attached to a roll book with membership attendance and meeting information from 1962 to 1974, Box 1, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York; Greenbaum, *More than Black*, 237.

¹¹ Article 1, Reglamento, Box 1, Folder 1, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Article 3, Reglamento, Box 1, Folder 1, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999): 38-39; 121-127.

This founding mission statement defined El Club Cubano as an organization that would serve first and foremost to “disseminate culture in all its forms, for the purposes of which it will celebrate conferences, talks, art exhibitions, inter-American commemorations, [and] it will promote social acts, etc., etc.”¹² With popular Afro-Cuban bandleaders Generoso Montesino, Alberto Socarrás, and Marcelino Guerra listed as founding members of the club, organizers did not have to look very far to find the talent and celebrity needed to execute crowd-pleasing musical and dance events.¹³ One club leader even argued that “people won’t show up to dance to records but they will come to dance to live music,” demonstrating El Club Cubano’s belief that live musical attractions would increase the success and profitability of its social and cultural events.¹⁴ El Club Cubano eventually counted Arsenio Rodríguez as an active member and Machito, Miguelito Valdés, and nearly a dozen other Cuban bands and solo performers as frequent supporters of and participants in club events. One might suspect, however, that many of the professional musicians that formally joined or informally allied with El Club Cubano did so not entirely out of a commitment to the mission of the organization but also to increase their odds of being hired to perform at the club’s social and cultural events.

¹² Article 1, Reglamento, Box 1, Folder 1, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Article 3, Reglamento, Box 1, Folder 1, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

For more on the founding of El Club Cubano and the scope of its social activities, see Greenbaum, *More than Black*, 237-238; Singer and Martínez, “A South Bronx Latin Music Tale,” 198; Mirabal, “Melba Alvarado,” 120-126; García, “Contesting that Damned Mambo,” 193.

¹³ Relación de Socios Fundadores, Box 1, Folder 8/Founders and Members, February 22, 1946, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers. This list also provided addresses for each founding member. For Generoso Montesino the address provided was 764 Tinton Avenue, Bronx; for Alberto Socarrás the address provided was 250 West Forty-seventh Street, New York City; and for Marcelino Guerra the address provided was 1786 Madison Avenue, New York City.

¹⁴ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 31 March 1949, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

Music stands out as a major element of the social and cultural events sponsored not only by El Club Cubano but also the many other Cuban social and cultural clubs of New York City active throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Cuban patriotic celebrations and national holidays were not the only events that brought together the Cuban migrants and musicians of New York City, and rarely did musicians turn down an opportunity to perform out of a sense of duty or loyalty to particular social clubs or entertainment venues. As we will see, Cuban musicians crossed ethnic lines routinely and purposefully throughout this period motivated by economic need and familial obligations as well as dreams of celebrity fame and fortune and, at the very least, an understanding of, if not genuine appreciation for, the profitability and pragmatism of developing a pan-ethnic and Panamerican musical repertoire and reputation.

Afro-Cuban percussionist Generoso Montesino joined El Club Cubano as one of its founding members in 1946. His membership in the club came towards the latter portion of a professional musical career marked by pan-ethnic and Panamerican sensibilities, and the club's interamerican mission and marketing likely appealed to the aging musician. Popular within the *colonia hispana* as well as among white ethnic audiences, Montesino's early membership in El Club Cubano demonstrates the centrality of Afro-Cuban musicians to the construction of a "transracial" pan-Latino/a identity. Montesino was just one of a cohort of Afro-Cuban musicians who joined and participated in social and cultural events sponsored by El Club Cubano. In doing so, these Afro-Cuban musicians not only helped confirm the club's commitment to racial and ethnic openness but also revealed the extent to which the construction of a "transracial" pan-Latino/a identity took place by way of popular culture, generally, and vis-à-vis the

Cuban-American cultural landscape that developed in New York City throughout the 1940s and 1950s, specifically.

Montesino formed one of the first and most popular Latin bands in New York City in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Montesino and Los Happy Boys played at social and cultural events organized by the numerous Hispanic societies and organizations of Spanish Harlem and the Bronx. One of the first bands to attract Jewish and Italian teenagers to venture into Spanish Harlem to attend social and cultural events, Los Happy Boys appealed early on to white audiences. Machito credited Los Happy Boys for helping to integrate nightclubs and ballrooms across the city or, as he put it, “start[ing] the whole thing” at the Park Palace on 110th and Fifth Avenue. Described as one of many “local neighborhood orchestras,” Los Happy Boys performed along with Casino de Ponce and Casino Dominicano at a 1940 St. Patrick’s Day celebration organized by El Habana Social Club at the Grand Plaza in the Bronx.¹⁵ The following year, the band’s popularity seemed on the rise. As “one of the orchestras most in demand by our social clubs,” reports concluded that Montesino’s band “count[ed] on a great deal of popularity within the Hispanic-New Yorker element.”¹⁶

Billed throughout this period as both Los Happy Boys and El Conjunto del Ritmo, Montesino’s band performed at the annual fundraising gala sponsored by *La Prensa* in 1941 and returned as winner of the newspaper’s annual musical popularity contest in 1942. Montesino’s band used both the more English-friendly name Los Happy Boys as

¹⁵ Box 1, Interview with Federico Pagani, Carlos Ortiz Collection; Box 1, Interview with Machito at his home, Carlos Ortiz Collection; Ray Santos, 3 August 1992, David Carp Collection, Bronx County Historical Society; “Dará Gran Festival El Habana Social Club el Sábado 16,” *La Prensa*, 3 March 1940, p. 8; “El Habana Social Club da su Baile de Temporada Hoy,” *La Prensa*, 16 March 1940, p. 8.

¹⁶ “Dos espléndidas orquestas para el baile final,” *La Prensa*, 28 March 1941, p. 3; “Montesino es un verdadero maestro Cubano ‘del ritmo,’” *La Prensa*, 11 April 1942, p. 3.

well as the more “barrio-centric” name El Conjunto del Ritmo. With both Los Happy Boys and El Conjunto del Ritmo earning votes in *La Prensa*’s musical popularity contest, even fans within the *colonia hispana* and *colonia cubana* seemed confused as to the band’s official name. Whether the racial or ethnic makeup of the band changed significantly as a result of the billing or venue is unclear, though I have found no evidence to suggest that this was ever the case. The band’s name may have changed, but its leader remained Montesino, a Cuban of color. What can be suggested from this naming strategy/irregularity is that public recognition as Los Happy Boys would undoubtedly have helped Montesino and, by extension, social and cultural event promoters, more easily attract and develop a following among non-Spanish-speaking audiences in the 1940s.

“A real Cuban and Habanero to the core,” Montesino left Cuba in 1925 without formal musical training or ambition but soon decided to make music his profession in light of his view of the “popularity that creole music was gaining among the Hispanic and North American elements.” It was that very pan-ethnic and crossover popularity that allowed Montesino to succeed as a musician in New York City. For example, he performed at a dance organized in honor of the founding of the Club 21 Repúblicas Americanas at the Audubon Ballroom on 165th Street and Broadway in 1941 as well as at a dance hosted by the Comité Latino Americano, “a group that actively worked to reelect President Roosevelt and that counts on general sympathies in Hispanic circles,” at Hunts Points Palace at 153rd Street and Southern Boulevard in 1945.¹⁷ In 1946, Montesino y su

¹⁷ “Dos esplendidas orquestas para el baile final,” *La Prensa*, 28 March 1941, p. 3; “Montecino [sic] es un verdadero maestro cubano ‘del ritmo,’” *La Prensa*, 11 April 1942, p. 3; “Baile del Club 21 Repúblicas Americanas,” *La Prensa*, 1 October 1941, p. 8; “Baile del Comité Latino Americano el Sábado Próximo,” *La Prensa*, 29 March 1945, p. 8.

Conjunto del Ritmo and José Budet y sus Tropicales performed at the *Primera Soirée Bailable en Conmemoración del Día de la Raza* held at the Embassy Ballroom, located at 421 East 161st Street in the Bronx. Organized by numerous social clubs and cultural organizations in the city, including El Club Cubano and the Ateneo Cubano, the *colonia hispana de Nueva York* came together each October to celebrate *Día de la Raza* with a dance and parade in direct contrast to American celebrations of Columbus Day.¹⁸ Montesino's participation in this inaugural pan-ethnic and political celebration suggests just one of the means by which Afro-Cubanness became central to the construction *la raza hispana* in the 1940s and 1950s.

Alberto Socarrás also joined El Club Cubano in 1946 as a founding member.

Born in Manzanillo, Cuba on September 18, 1908, the Afro-Cuban, classically-trained flutist was a man of many firsts, working as the arranger for and traveling throughout Europe and the Caribbean with the Cuban all-women band Anacaona in the 1930s.¹⁹

¹⁸ Souvenir Journal, Box 5, Folder 1, Correspondence 1945-1947, 12 October 1946, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Box 5, Folder 12, "Circular, Acuerdos y Noticias," 23 July 1945, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

In 1951, El Club Cubano organized the event with help from Mario Bauzá who suggested that the dance celebration be held at the National Armory in the Bronx. Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 12 April 1951, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 14 May 1951. See also, Monthly newsletter, Box 15, Folder 11, Club Cubano Inter-Americano, 1946-1948, May 1947, Jesús Colón Papers, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños. According to a report in *Ecos de Nueva York*, in 1954 and 1955, Sociedades Hispanas, Inc. organized a parade in honor of *Día de la Raza* that started at the plaza on Fifty-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue and ended at the statue of Christopher Columbus in Central Park on Sixty-sixth Street. The Ateneo Cubano was listed as one of the societies participating in the event. "Día de la Raza," *Ecos de Nueva York*, 23 October 1955, p. 47.

An undated flyer created and distributed by La Vanguardia Puertorriqueña announced that "El Comité Organizador del Congreso de Unificación Hispana, and supported by La Vanguardia Puertorriqueña, Inc. has organized a great parade of solidarity that will march through the streets of Harlem. Everyone march on Día de la Raza! Let's demonstrate the solidarity of all the Hispanic people with the United Nations." Box 17, Folder 13, "Hispano América en Marcha el Día de La Raza," Jesús Colón Papers, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños.

¹⁹ Alicia Castro, *Queens of Havana: The Amazing Adventures of Anacaona, Cuba's Legendary All-Girl Dance Band* (New York: Grove Press, 2007).

Socarrás later recounted to an oral historian that he faced racial discrimination at the outset of his musical training in Havana. After his white flute teacher refused to get up from a nap to meet him, Socarrás said that he had no choice but to find himself a black flute teacher, resolving to be a great flutist, all before he was seven years old. Indeed, he recalled, racial discrimination within the blossoming music and entertainment industries of Havana was part of the impetus for his move to New York City. Noticing that U.S.-owned nightclubs and hotels in Cuba hired only light-skinned or white musicians, he reasoned, “Well, I have to get out of here. This is my country, I was born here, and I don’t want to be discriminated here. If I’m discriminated in the United States, that means I’m no [sic] American. I’m no [sic] American, but in my own country to be discriminated because I was black, I don’t want to get into that.” Socarrás believed that migration to New York City simply made him Cuban, and whatever discrimination he might face would be based on his foreignness rather than on the color of his skin. Many Afro-Cuban migrants faced the difficult task of negotiating what historian Adrian Burgos, Jr. has described as “the double bind of cultural difference and racial standing in the United States.” Yet, Socarrás seemed much more concerned about avoiding exposure to the racial prejudices and exclusionary practices of white Cubans. Once in New York in 1928, his status as a professional musician allowed him to limit his contact with white Cubans and create partnerships with the many African Americans he met while working in the city’s jazz circles. In fact, he claimed to never have experienced racial discrimination in the United States.²⁰

²⁰ Alberto Socarrás, 16 January 1983, David Carp Collection, Bronx County Historical Society; Adrian Burgos, Jr., *Playing America’s Game: Baseball, Latinos, and the Color Line* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007): 204.

Still wary of most white Cubans, Socarrás set out to form a new band not restricted by the barriers of race, ethnicity, or musical genre. He wanted his band to be both skilled musically but also remain friendly to white North American audiences: “But I don’t want all Cubans...because I see many Puerto Ricans here, and they are Latin. So I want to organize a GOOD band here playing Cuban music, because the American likes Cuban music very much.” But, his band played what can best be described as *one* of many variations of Cuban music popping up across New York City in the 1930s and 1940s. He explained: “So what I did, I took American music, jazz, and put it Cuban rhythms [sic]...Make jazz, American jazz, with Cuban rhythm. So I was the first one to bring bongo and the, all those things to American music.” Here, we see again a black musician claiming the role of musical innovator. Socarrás played at the Cotton Club on Sixty-sixth Street and Broadway and worked as the house band at the Cubanacan at 114th Street and Lenox Avenue for nearly four years, prompting many other Afro-Cuban musicians to recognize his band as one of the few “playing authentic Latin music both up and downtown.”²¹

Though busy performing at commercial venues across the city, Socarrás often returned to the Spanish Harlem neighborhood he first lived in when he migrated to New York City in 1928. Throughout the 1950s, Socarrás performed at the *Gran Festival Pro*

For more on race and racism in Cuba, racial knowledge, and the racialization of Latinos/as in the United States, see Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*; Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*; De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*; Greenbaum, *More than Black*; Mirabal, “Melba Alvarado,” 122-123.

²¹ Alberto Socarrás, 16 January 1983, David Carp Collection, Bronx County Historical Society; Box 1, Folder Narration – English, Carlos Ortiz Collection, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños; Mario Bauzá interview with Ruth Glasser, 2 June 1989, Tape 1, Ruth Glasser Oral History Collection, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños; Graciela Pérez interview with René Lopez and Raul A. Fernández, Disc 1, 19 September 1998.

Estudiantes Pobres held at Benjamin Franklin High School on 116th Street and Pleasant Avenue. Organized by Cuban journalist Babby Quintero and sponsored by *El Diario de Nueva York*, this annual community event aimed to raise funds for poor students in the area and featured several other notable Cuban performers, such as musicians Fausto Curbelo, Miguelito Valdés, Machito and Graciela, Juanito Sanabria, and Arsenio Rodríguez as well as poets Eusebia Cosme and Eulogio Peraza and entertainers Perucho Irigoyen and Willie Chevalier. Participation in this event, which *La Prensa* described as having “extraordinary importance for the *población hispana de Nueva York*,” reflected a commitment to the local community without regard for national origins or ethnic and racial divisiveness.²²

Though not particularly active in club activities, Socarrás was popular, and his professional achievements earned him a place of prestige among club members. The year 1952 marked the fiftieth anniversary of Cuban independence, and celebrations associated with this historic date also revealed a deep appreciation of Cuban musicians and their role in disseminating Cuban culture abroad. In February 1952, for example, El Club Cubano received a letter from a club member suggesting that the club organize a “café” at its clubhouse on Prospect Avenue in the Bronx in honor of Socarrás, describing him as a “notable Cuban musician who has recently earned various honors.” Club leaders agreed to consider the recommendation. The musical popularity contest and fundraising gala

²² “Gran desfile de artistas en el Festival Pro Estudiantes el 5,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 28 March 1950, p. 1; “Gavilán y Robinson en festival de la B.F.H.S., mañana domingo,” *La Prensa*, 26 April 1952, p. 2; “Extraordinario programa artístico el domingo en la Benjamin Franklin,” *La Prensa*, 11 March 1953, p. 5. The festival in 1952 also featured a mambo dance contest between Kid Gavilán and Sugar Ray Robinson, and one report determined that “the cocky Cuban, without a doubt, would beat the indomitable Robinson.”

organized by *La Prensa* that same year featured many popular Cuban performers, including “the doctor in music” Alberto Socarrás.²³

Another member of this cohort of Cuban musicians, Marcelino Guerra joined El Club Cubano as a founding member in 1946, and he participated frequently in the social and cultural events sponsored by the club.²⁴ His unique positioning as a club member and professional musician led to negotiations over club dues and performance fees that benefitted both him and the club. In 1949, for example, Guerra agreed to waive his fifty dollar fee and perform at no cost at an upcoming club event. Meeting minutes indicate that Guerra donated his talents because the club had received complaints from many of the *excursionistas*, or visitors from the island, who attended a dance held in their honor at the Hotel Diplomat in midtown between Broadway and Avenue of the Americas.²⁵ It

²³ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 14 February 1952, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 31 March 1952, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; “España y la América Hispana estarán representadas en el festival,” *La Prensa*, 27 April 1952, p. 3.

²⁴ My research has not yet uncovered the date of Guerra’s migration to the United States from Cuba. However, U.S. Naturalization Records indicate that he was born in Cuba on April 26, 1914. New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1975 show that Guerra listed 11 East Sixteenth Street, New York as his address and “musician” as his occupation in September 1948. On November 14, 1950, U.S. Naturalization Records show that Guerra resided at 111-62 179th Street, St. Albans, Queens. According to music scholar John Storm Roberts, Guerra was brought to the United States as an arranger by Robbins Music.

Ancestry.com. *U.S. Naturalization Records Indexes, 1794-1995* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2007; Ancestry.com. *New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010; John Storm Roberts, *The Latin Tinge: The Impact of Latin American Music on the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 123.

²⁵ Diplomatic exchanges between Cubans living in New York City and visitors from the island took place throughout the 1940s and 1950s, and many of these exchanges involved musical performances by some of the most popular Cuban entertainers of the period. El Club Cubano welcomed visitors from the island, or *excursionistas*, and hosted musical events and dances in their honor. In 1947, one club newsletter explained that its visitors were welcomed with a “magnificent dance reception” aimed “to strengthen the ties between Latin American residents in this city and visitors.” In 1949, El Club Cubano organized a dance for its Cuban visitors for which it agreed to hire the orchestra of Alberto Iznaga at the rate of three hundred dollars. El Club Cubano also organized trips for the *excursionistas* to other parts of the United States, including Washington, D.C. and Bridgeport, Connecticut, and even to Niagara Falls in Canada.

Monthly newsletter, Box 5, Folder 11, Boletín Oficial, August 1947, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Monthly newsletter, Box 5, Folder 11, Boletín Oficial, September 1959, Club Cubano

remains unclear if his band had performed at the disappointing event, prompting him to waive his fee to offset an arguably lackluster performance, or if he was simply being generous to improve the club's reputation as a source of quality entertainment. The latter scenario seems more likely based on the singer's reputation. On a personal level, Guerra was well-liked among his peers, with one musician explaining that the singer was more friendly and popular than Machito. On a professional level, leaders of El Club Cubano repeatedly discussed the possibility of hiring Guerra and his orchestra to perform at club events to ensure that all those in attendance remained entertained and satisfied. Long-time membership and participation in club events proved advantageous to Guerra when, in 1958, club leaders unanimously agreed to forgive the musician's debts and accept his late dues.²⁶

Guerra caught what was arguably the biggest break of his musical career thanks, in many ways, to Machito and Mario Bauzá. As a result of their hectic performance schedule and, later, Machito's departure from the band to serve in the U.S. Army during the Second World War, Bauzá organized the "Second Afro-Cubans" with Guerra as singer and Luis Varona as bandleader. Machito and Guerra often performed on the same billing, and though some in the listening public suspected that a rivalry had developed

Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 30 June 1952, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Monthly newsletter, Box 5, Folder 11, Boletín Oficial, August 1947, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 6 June 1949, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Post card, Box 5, Folder 2, 1951, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; In 1956, the Logia Isla de Cuba No. 173 organized its own bus trip to Niagara Falls. "Excursión de la Logia Isla de Cuba No. 173," *La Prensa*, 8 September 1956, p. 6.

²⁶ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 14 March 1949, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Armando Sánchez, 19 September 1995, David Carp Collection, Bronx County Historical Society; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 13 July 1950, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 5 March 1951, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 7, Libro de Actos 1957-1958, 25 November 1958, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

between the singers, a rumor likely encouraged by savvy concert promoters, in reality “a strong camaraderie” and “strong friendship” existed between the two bandleaders. In 1950, Machito and Guerra performed with their bands at a spring dance at the Manhattan Center. Advertised for weeks as a sort of battle of the bands, the event reportedly “produced a great deal of enthusiasm among the hispanic youth.”²⁷

Guerra’s membership in the club did not restrict his performance schedule or limit his ability to perform at events sponsored by other Hispanic social clubs, organizations, or commercial venues.²⁸ Throughout the 1940s, Marcelino and his Afro-Cubans performed at the Hunts Point Palace, and one musician recalled that he was “a favorite band of that era, excellent Cuban singer with a real strong, true, projecting type voice.”²⁹ In 1946, Club Continental hired him to play at a dance held at the Hotel Diplomat, and in 1947, Guerra’s orchestra and Machito y sus Afro-Cubans performed at a dance sponsored by La Juventud Panamericana in honor of *Día Panamericano*. This organization decorated the main ballroom of the Hotel Diplomat with flags of the twenty-one republics

²⁷ Graciela Pérez, 19 May 1985, David Carp Collection, Bronx County Historical Society; Ray Santos, 2 August 1993, David Carp Collection, Bronx County Historical Society; “Dos Grandes Bailes en el Manhattan Center,” *La Prensa*, 15 March 1950, p. 5; “Dos Próximos Bailes en el Manhattan Center,” *La Prensa*, 23 March 1950, p. 5; 25 March 1950, *Diario de Nueva York*, p. 5; “En Broadway,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 31 March 1950, p. 5; “Baile hoy en el Manhattan Center con las orquestas de Machito y M. Guerra,” *La Prensa*, 1 April 1950, p. 3.

²⁸ Just a few examples from the late 1940s demonstrate Guerra’s ability to secure performances in various venues across the city. In 1948, El Club Social San Moritz organized a dance at the Hotel Diplomat in honor of Guerra. Called *Una Noche en la Habana*, the event featured performances by Guerra’s orchestra as well as his debut as a trumpet player. “El Club Social San Moritz celebra un baile hoy,” *La Prensa*, 21 August 1948, p. 8. Club Social San Moritz hired Guerra and his orchestra for another dance at the Hotel Diplomat the following month. “El Club Social San Moritz prepara un baile,” *La Prensa*, 15 September 1948, p. 8.

Also in 1948, Guerra and his band played at the Terrace on Tremont Avenue, and in 1949 El Trocadero Ballroom on 555 East Tremont Avenue in the Bronx “proudly” presented audiences with performances by Guerra and his sixteen piece rumba and mambo band. One report explained, “The Cuban troubadour, who has reached so much popularity in this city with his orchestra of fourteen musicians, remains very active and much in demand.” 18 September 1948, *Diario de Nueva York*, p. 5; 23 April 1949, *Diario de Nueva York*, p. 5.

²⁹ Ray Santos, 2 August 1993, David Carp Collection, Bronx County Historical Society.

of the Americas and invited what one reporter described as “diplomatic *hispanos*” to attend the festival.³⁰ A few years later, in 1950, the Manhattan Center hosted a “grand Carnaval Antillano” that featured performances by three orchestras: Esy Morales representing Puerto Rico, Marcelino Guerra with Gilberto Ayala at the piano defending “the ‘colores ritmicos’ of beautiful little Cuba,” and Josecito Roman’s Orquesta Quisqueya representing the Dominican Republic.³¹ That many of the events featuring Guerra were organized as pan-ethnic celebrations again suggests one of the ways that Afro-Cubanness figured as a core element of *hispanidad*.

Guerra’s professional career reached a high point in 1954, when his band won that year’s *La Prensa* musical popularity contest. With reports describing the band as “a grouping of rhythm and creole music justly applauded and in demand,” the newspaper contracted Guerra to perform at that year’s fundraising gala and professed no doubt that “dance lovers would receive the news with enthusiasm.” The “famous director’s” band returned the following year in 1955 to perform once again at the newspaper’s festival, earning praise as “distinguished exporters of mambo and creole music” and “one of the most popular in the colonia.” This evidence confirms that Guerra’s career extended well into the 1950s, though some scholars have argued otherwise. Music scholar John Storm Roberts, for example, argued that Guerra left the music scene in 1947, after joining the Merchant Marine. Music historian and journalist Max Salazar, for his part, explained that Guerra retired from music in 1954, because he could no longer tolerate “his sidemen’s

³⁰ “El Club Continental da un baile hoy,” *La Prensa*, 2 March 1946, p. 8; “La Juventud Panamericana celebra ‘Día Panamericano,’” *La Prensa*, 12 April 1947, p. 3.

³¹ “Baile de Año Nuevo en el Manhattan Center,” *La Prensa*, 24 December 1948, p. 8; 25 February 1950, *Diario de Nueva York*, p. 3.

problems with drugs and alcohol and the racism of some midtown club owners who thought his sidemen were ‘too black.’” Whatever the timing of and reasoning for his retirement from music, an unfinished song penned by the bandleader reveals a profound attachment to New York City, a city where his relationship with El Club Cubano and the commercial music industry undoubtedly shaped his life experiences: “New York, New York/ City where I was so happy/ New York, on your ground I did also suffer/ Someday I will die/ And I hope it is here/ Beloved New York.”³²

Perhaps no professional musician benefited from his affiliation with and membership in El Club Cubano more than blind Afro-Cuban tres-player Arsenio Rodríguez. Born in Matanzas in 1911, Rodríguez lost his eyesight when he was a young boy, the result of being kicked in the head by a mule. Of black working-class origins, Rodríguez’s musical repertoire drew on his early exposure to the African-derived spiritual practices of Palo Monte and Santería as well as to African-derived musical instruments such as the *marímbula*, *botija*, and the *tres* (a three-stringed instrument very similar to the guitar). By 1940, Rodríguez had developed his own *son montuno* style, recording and performing at popular cabarets and nightclubs in Havana as leader and composer of his band, Arsenio Rodríguez y Su Conjunto. Rodríguez made frequent trips to New York City between 1947 and 1952, but it was not until the latter date, motivated by his brother Kiki’s criminal history, the promise of better pay for musicians, and the deteriorating political situation in Cuba, that his stay became permanent. According to

³² “Contratada la Orquesta de Marcelino Guerra para el Baile del Festival,” *La Prensa*, 24 April 1954, p. 1; “Otro memorable acontecimiento fue el Festival de La Prensa de 1954,” *La Prensa*, 4 May 1954, p. 1; “Las Hermanas Marquez y la orquesta de Marcelino Guerra en el festival,” *La Prensa*, 23 April 1955, p. 1; “Mercedes y Albano el Festival pro Caridad de La Prensa el domingo,” *La Prensa*, 29 April 1955, p. 1; Roberts, *The Latin Tinge*, 123; Max Salazar, *Mambo Kingdom: Latin Music in New York* (New York: Schirmer Trade Books, 2002): 67-68.

García, once in New York City, Rodríguez consistently and immediately asserted that he alone was the creator of the mambo, specifically “claiming authorship of the underlying rhythmic approach that linked the otherwise idiomatic styles of [Tito] Puento, Pérez Prado, Machito, and others.”³³

The date of Rodríguez’s initial membership in El Club Cubano remains unclear, but he was apparently reinstated as a member on March 14, 1957, likely as a result of failing to pay club dues or being away from New York City for an extended period of time.³⁴ The club hired him to perform at many of its social and cultural events throughout the 1950s, ranging from small cocktail events held at the clubhouse to larger events like a costume party held in honor of Cuban heavyweight boxer Nino Valdez.³⁵ Authenticity mattered to El Club Cubano and seems to have helped increase attendance at club events, including those organized in honor of annual distinguished visitors from Cuba. In 1951, for instance, Arsenio y su Conjunto de Estrellas performed at a dance held in honor of the *excursionistas* in the grand ballroom of the Hotel Diplomat in midtown Manhattan.³⁶ Later, in 1959, a club newsletter advertising its latest dance for

³³ David F. García, *Arsenio Rodríguez and the Transnational Flows of Latin Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006): 14-18, 35, 68.

³⁴ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 7, Libro de Actos 1957-1958, 14 March 1957, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

³⁵ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 7, Libro de Actos 1957-1958, 14 May 1957, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 25 January 1951, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 30 August 1951, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; “Cóctel del Club Cubano Inter-Americano,” *La Prensa*, 4 April 1953, p. 6; “Club Cubano Inter-Amer.,” *La Prensa*, 13 March 1954, p. 6; “Club Cubano Inter-Amer.,” *La Prensa*, 19 March 1954, p. 5; “Baile del Club Cubano,” *La Prensa*, 5 November 1955, p. 4; “En el Club Cubano Inter-Americano,” *La Prensa*, 30 March 1957, p. 4; See, also, García “Contesting that Damned Mambo,” 193-194.

³⁶ Postcard, Box 1, Folder 2, 11 August 1951, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 29 July 1951, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

Board of Director meeting minutes from July 29, 1951 indicate that Tito Rodríguez promised to perform at this event on two conditions: first, that his name not be mentioned in any promotional materials;

the *excursionistas* at the Statler Hotel described Arsenio y su Conjunto de Estrellas as “the only *conjunto* that has the real and true Cuban *sabor*. Arsenio’s music is authentic.”³⁷ What this characterization suggests is that, among Cubans on the island, Cuban New Yorkers and others in the *colonia hispana*, Rodríguez’s style “engendered at once a sense of nostalgia for their respective homelands and cultural resistance to ‘modern’ or Americanized Latin music styles,” to borrow again from García’s positioning.³⁸

Rodríguez’s style offered less showmanship and spectacle than other Cuban mambo performers, which limited his crossover appeal among white North American and international audiences. His style, however, seems to have been exactly what solidified his popularity among Cuban and Latino/a audiences in New York City throughout the 1950s. But his stiff performance style was just one reason why Rodríguez failed to achieve international stardom on par with his Afro-Cuban contemporaries like Pérez Prado, Machito, and Miguelito Valdés. With a repertoire of songs that engaged Africanness and the realities of racial inequality, the perils of colonialism and imperialism, Cuban patriotism, and life in El Barrio and the Bronx, Rodríguez’s style evoked a sense of “musical blackness and masculinity,” which likely resonated with members of El Club Cubano despite the club’s official position that it avoided politics. Though these themes alienated him from white audiences who preferred the “showtime”

and, second, that he would only perform at the event after he had finished his set at the Palladium. The event also featured the introduction of a new dance called El Pinguino.

³⁷ Boletín Oficial, Box 5, Folder 11, July 1959, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Boletín Oficial, Box 5, Folder 11, September 1959, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers. See, also, “Data about Discs,” Harold L. Keith, *Pittsburgh Courier*, 5 October 1957, p. A24.

³⁸ García, *Arsenio Rodríguez*, 5.

exhibitionism of Pérez Prado, they simultaneously endeared him to the Afro-Cuban audiences of his generation, specifically, and the *colonia hispana*, generally.³⁹

If leaders and members of El Club Cubano had affection for Rodríguez and vice versa, then it should come as no surprise that meeting minutes reveal this sense of mutual, if at times over-extended, cooperation. In 1950, for example, El Club Cubano honored Rodríguez and his musical talents by presenting him and film star Cesar Romero with honorary diplomas at a ceremony held in their clubhouse.⁴⁰ El Club Cubano counted on Rodríguez's musical appeal among its constituents, and, in 1951, club leaders agreed to move the date of its dance in honor of Cuban independence only after consulting with the bandleader, whose lone request was that the club not schedule the dance for the nineteenth of May, the date of José Martí's death.⁴¹ Later that year, Rodríguez performed at El Club Cubano's *Ritmo de Otoños* festival at Audubon Hall, having agreed to split either the losses or profits from the event with the club, an incredibly risky business decision that suggests both poor management skills and a confident spirit of generosity.⁴²

By 1952, however, it seemed as though Rodríguez's lack of business savvy had taken its toll on relations with club leaders. In March, club president José Leon commissioned Dr. Saavedra and Mr. P. Soubllette [sic] to investigate and seek repayment

³⁹ García, *Arsenio Rodríguez*, 28, 57-60, 75-77, 112.

⁴⁰ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 15 March 1950, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 29 June 1950, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

⁴¹ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 5 March 1951, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

⁴² Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 13 September 1951, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

for a debt of \$200 that Rodríguez owed to the club. It remains unclear whether this debt came as the result of the contract he had made with the club to perform at the *Ritmo de Otoños* festival but subsequent investigation suggests at least some connection. The special commission met with Rodríguez in June to discuss the debt in question and reported to the Board of Directors that the bandleader believed his debt to be only \$120 and that he had agreed to split that amount evenly with the club. Club leaders approved of this arrangement and closed the case, satisfied that they had resolved the matter.⁴³

Poor marketing, the fact that he acted as his own agent in negotiations with record producers, and generational taste differences precipitated not only by population changes but also by the emergence of the salsa music industry, all share part of the blame for Rodríguez's inability to secure lucrative earnings. Still, Mario Bauzá cautioned one oral historian against reproducing the myth that the tres-player died "poor and forgotten." Bauzá insisted that Rodríguez did not die in poverty, receiving sufficient royalties from his compositions to "live well."⁴⁴

In the midst of the 1952 debt drama, club leaders found yet another reason to be upset with Rodríguez. The club frequently allowed him to use the clubhouse for rehearsals but found cause to reprimand him for leaving the space dirty and disorderly on more than one occasion.⁴⁵ For the most part, however, Rodríguez and El Club Cubano enjoyed a strong and mutually beneficial relationship. At a general meeting that he

⁴³ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 14 March 1952, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 31 March 1952, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 30 June 1952, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

⁴⁴ García, *Arsenio Rodríguez*, 94, 112, 114-115.

⁴⁵ Bound Book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 14 April 1952, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

attended in July 1953, a report of club finances revealed less than positive projections for the club's future. Not only did Rodríguez offer words of encouragement, but he also volunteered his musical services in support of the club. He immediately suggested that the club organize a dance to raise money for the treasury and offered his *conjunto* at no cost, explaining that "this is the only Cuban organization and it shouldn't be allowed to fold."⁴⁶ The meaningfulness of Rodríguez's remark should not go unnoticed. Within the context of the Cuban-American cultural landscape developing in New York City, that he positioned El Club Cubano as "the only Cuban organization" signifies the club's unique policy of racial and ethnic inclusiveness. More broadly, the club's openness to and embrace of Cubans and *hispanos* of color also stood as one of the lone manifestations of the ideal of the Cuban nation as "transracial."

Rodríguez also performed for social events organized by other Cuban social clubs and successfully managed to book engagements at commercial venues across the city. He was a fixture within the local, neighborhood music scene vis-à-vis events sponsored by Cuban social clubs and cultural organizations as well as many of the prominent Latin dance halls in New York City like the Manhattan Center, Palladium, and Hunts Point Palace.⁴⁷ Not limited by his membership in El Club Cubano, Rodríguez also performed at events sponsored by the Ateneo Cubano throughout the mid-1950s. In 1954, for

⁴⁶ Loose-leaf photocopies, Box 1, Folder 11, General Meeting, 1 July 1953, Club Cubano Inter-American Papers.

⁴⁷ Ray Santos, 8 August 1995, David Carp Collection; *Billboard Magazine*, 19 February 1949, p. 110; *Billboard Magazine* reported that the "coarse-textured Cuban group's appeal here is limited to Latin neighborhood."

In 1950, "El Rey del Tres Arsenio Rodríguez y su Conjunto" performed at the Teatro Triboro on 125th Street and Third Avenue alongside Mexican film star Elsa Aguirre. That same year, he performed at a *Baile de Pascua* organized by Victor Alonso – presumably the same Victor Alonso named by the *Amsterdam Star-News* at the beginning of this chapter – at the Manhattan Center in honor of the sixth anniversary of the *Revista Teatral*. The event also featured performances by Machito, Esy Morales, and Manolin Ochoa. Along with Noro Morales' band and Sexteto de la Playa, Arsenio performed at the Saint Nicholas Ballroom in 1951 for an event organized by Club San Moritz.

instance, the Ateneo Cubano invited Gilberto Valdés and many of the other musicians performing in the Mambo Concert at Carnegie Hall to an informal gathering at their clubhouse. Among those invited to the clubhouse, a space normally off-limits to persons of color, were Rodríguez, José Curbelo, Tito Puento, and Noro Morales.⁴⁸ With its members reportedly “overjoyed,” the Ateneo Cubano once again hired Rodríguez, “who was so well-liked,” to perform at an upcoming dance, a rather unexpected announcement given the club’s reputation as less than friendly to and inclusive of Cubans of color. Yet, the decision to hire him is not so surprising given that his style and the tastes of those in attendance were “better suited for social and not exhibition dancing.” As García has argued, Rodríguez represented a *típico cubano* style preferred by Cuban audiences and, as we have seen, it was not uncommon for social clubs with racially-exclusive policies to enjoy Afro-Cuban popular music, especially given that in these contexts it was likely framed as “Cuban” rather than “Afro-Cuban.”⁴⁹

But Rodríguez’s popularity was not limited to the *colonia cubana*, as he performed at events that targeted Puerto Rican, pan-Latino/a, and black audiences. In 1954, for example, Rodríguez and Vicentico Valdés, among other musicians and

Advertisement, *La Prensa*, 23 February 1950, p. 5; Ad, *Diario de Nueva York*, 25 February 1950, p. 5; *Billboard Magazine*, 25 March 1950, p. 50; “Baile de Pascua, mañana, en el Manhattan Center,” *La Prensa*, 8 April 1950, p. 3; “Baile del club San Moritz con Orq. de Noro Morales,” *La Prensa*, 3 March 1951, p. 5; Advertisement, *Diario de Nueva York*, 3 March 1951, p. 6; See, also, García, *Arsenio Rodríguez*; García, “Contesting that Damned Mambo.”

⁴⁸ “Homenaje Artístico del Ateneo de N.Y.,” *La Prensa*, 7 March 1954, p. 5.

⁴⁹ “En Broadway,” *La Prensa*, 4 April 1956, p. 5; “Actos del Ateneo Cubano,” *La Prensa*, 19 April 1956, p. 5; García, *Arsenio Rodríguez*, 75, 84; Robin Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness: Afro-Cubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997).

For more on exclusion and the racial practices of the Ateneo Cubano and the other Cuban social clubs of New York City in the 1940s and 1950s, see Greenbaum, *More than Black*; Mirabal, “Melba Alvarado,” 120-126; Graciela, “¡Eso era Tremendo!” 150-156; García, “Contesting that Damned Mambo,” 192-193.

orchestras, performed for El Morel Campos Social Club at their annual *Concurso de Simpatía/Reina de Puerto Rico* event held at the Manhattan Center. In 1957, the Pan American Merchants Benevolent Association hired Rodríguez to perform at its annual banquet held at the Hotel St. George. The organization reportedly hired his band so that “guests are satisfied with the dance,” confidently concluding that “all of *nuestra comunidad* admires it.”⁵⁰ Rodríguez also performed at the Palladium Ballroom almost exclusively on Sundays, the day of the week on which “more of a black crowd” typically patronized the dancehall. Whether because there was more room to dance or the result of cheaper admission costs, Sundays at the Palladium drew a decidedly more working-class and African-American, Afro-Cuban, and Afro-Puerto Rican clientele.⁵¹ In March 1952, Rodríguez performed at the Palladium at an event called *Una Noche en la Habana* that also featured Tito Puente, Tito Rodríguez, and “a parade of comparsas de diablitos.” He also performed at the Palladium’s *Carnaval de Oro*, a dance contest that generated much anticipation among *bailadores hispanos* of merengue, mambo, and cha-cha-chá. One reporter alerted dancing patrons that “to the rhythm of Rodríguez’s band you will be able to dance the *sabrosos mambos* and *merengues* as well as *guarachas* and *guantanameras* at pure rhythm.”⁵²

Whatever his financial misfortunes and limited commercial appeal among white North American and international audiences, the Afro-Cuban composer enjoyed the

⁵⁰ 23 May 1954, *Ecos de Nueva York*, p. 21; “Banquete-baile,” *La Prensa*, 16 May 1958, p. 5.

⁵¹ Vernon Boggs, eds., *Salsiology: Afro-Cuban Music and the Evolution of Salsa in New York City* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992): 129, 147.

⁵² Advertisement, *Diario de Nueva York*, 1 April 1950, p. 5; “En Broadway,” *La Prensa*, 28 March 1952, p. 5; “En Broadway,” *La Prensa*, 11 April 1952, p. 5; “El Palladium regalará el domingo un ‘set’ de televisión,” *La Prensa*, 12 April 1952, p. 5; “Gran Programas de variedades el domingo 27,” *La Prensa*, 12 April 1952, p. 5; “Pupi Campo en el Palladium este Sábado,” *La Prensa*, 22 September 1955, p. 5; “Llega el carnaval a Broadway en gran fiesta el domingo 4 en el Palladium,” *La Prensa*, 2 March 1956, p. 5.

respect and support of his fellow musicians. In 1947, a group of Rodríguez's fellow musicians and friends organized a festival in his honor at the Hotel Diplomat in midtown Manhattan. The event featured performances by many popular entertainers, described by one advertisement as "8 Bombazos Atómicos," including Machito, Marcelino Guerra, Bobby Capó, Miguelito Valdés, Noro Morales, Olga Guillot, and Sexteto Puerto Rico. Rodríguez also performed at the event, treating audiences to some of his most in demand compositions, such as "Bruca Maniguá," "Camaguey," "Creo en Ti," and "En Tampa."⁵³ Ten years later, Puerto Rican event promoter and fellow El Club Cubano member Federico Pagani organized what one reporter described as "one of the most affectionate manifestations of love offered to a musician," a birthday celebration for Rodríguez at the Club Las Tres Antillas attended by more than seven-hundred people. Pagani's membership in El Club Cubano suggests as well that membership and affiliation in the club had some advantages in the entertainment world, including access to popular Cuban musicians and an already targeted network of potential consumers.⁵⁴

Like Socarrás, Rodríguez also performed at the "fourth annual festival for poor Puerto Rican students" held in the auditorium of Benjamin Franklin High School in 1951. According to a report in *La Prensa*, the fundraising event featured "some of our most well-known artists of the radio, movies, and theater presently in New York."

⁵³ Ray Santos, 8 August 1995, David Carp Collection, Bronx County Historical Society; "Arsenio Rodríguez será festejado aquí," *La Prensa*, 10 July 1947, p. 4; Advertisement, *La Prensa*, 12 July, 1947, p. 5; "Un baile-homenaje hoy a Arsenio Rodríguez," *La Prensa*, 12 July 1947, p. 8.

In 1950, Saint Nicholas Arena played host to a "grand dance" in honor of "famous Cuban composer Arsenio Rodríguez." Advertisement, *Diario de Nueva York*, 8 March 1950, p. 5; Advertisement, *Diario de Nueva York*, 11 March 1950, p. 5.

⁵⁴ "Torre de Babel," Antonio Riva, *La Prensa*, 8 September 1957, p. 4.

According to El Club Cubano Board of Director meeting minutes, Federico Arsenio Pagani Santiago sought and was approved for membership in the club in December 1950. Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 12 December 1950, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

Rodríguez's participation in this event initiated commentary that not only established him as a musician respected among his peers but also credited him as both an authentic and pioneering figure in the creation of Cuban music. One report in *La Prensa* noted that "Arsenio Rodríguez, whom Cuban musicians consider the true originator of mambo, will be seen and heard with his tres, giving the public a true demonstration of what is today called mambo, but was earlier known as *capetillo* and then *son montuno*."⁵⁵ A few days later, "the well-known authority on folkloric Cuban music" spoke at length about the origins of mambo, tracing its history back to early 1940s Cuba and Afro-Cuban religious traditions. Though he conceded that Cuban bandleaders should, in fact, appreciate Pérez Prado for "facilitating for the American musician the interpretation in a certain way of Cuban music," Rodríguez countered that Prado (also a Cuban of color but with much lighter skin) had played no role in its creation. He framed his remarks as a matter of public record: "I make these clarifications with profound sentiment, because I don't like criticizing my fellow artists, especially my compatriots. But, I think this is the right time to do it, so that the public recognizes how history is written."⁵⁶ And, for the most part, Cuban musicians like Mario Bauzá, Alberto Socarrás, Graciela Pérez, and percussionist Armando Sánchez have agreed with Rodríguez's history lesson, acknowledging and valuing his innovations to Cuban music over the more widespread popularity and commercial successes of other more processed and packaged performers, even if those

⁵⁵ "Arsenio Rodríguez dará a conocer el capetillo y el son montuno aquí," *La Prensa*, 13 April 1951, p. 5; "Resultó muy lucido el festival de la Benjamin Franklin High School," *La Prensa*, 18 April 1951, p. 3.

⁵⁶ "En Broadway," *La Prensa*, 16 April 1951, p. 5.

performers also happened to be black.⁵⁷ Yet the rivalry continued. The following year, Rodríguez and Pérez Prado squared off at the Saint Nicholas Ballroom for an event billed as “one of the best musical battles of the year,” an event that pitted “the creator of the mambo,” Rodríguez, against its “most faithful exporter,” Pérez Prado.⁵⁸

With the thousands of Cubans living in New York City during the 1940s and 1950s coming together at various points throughout the year to observe Cuban national holidays and honor their national heroes, the Cuban-American cultural landscape flourished as a space of patriotic symbolism and celebration. Social clubs and cultural organizations across the city offered their members numerous opportunities to attend poetry readings, lectures, conferences, musical performances and dance events commemorating important dates and figures in Cuba’s national history. From celebrations in honor of José Martí’s birthday to commemorations of El Grito de Baire, El Grito de Yara, and Cuban independence, these events allowed Cuban New Yorkers to reconnect with the island *and* with each other vis-à-vis cultural practices marked, in many ways, by an essentialized and sanitized Cuban past. That is not to say that the boundaries of politics, race, and class that facilitated, in part, the development of so many disparate Cuban social and cultural clubs, fell to the wayside on these dates. Whether in the form of a solemn remembrance or festive dance party, the social and cultural events organized

⁵⁷ “En Broadway,” *La Prensa*, 16 April 1951, p. 5; Alberto Socarrás, 16 January 1983, David Carp Collection; Armando Sánchez, 2 September 1992, David Carp Collection; Armando Sánchez, 19 September 1995, David Carp Collection; Graciela Pérez, 19 May 1985, David Carp Collection.

⁵⁸ *Diario de Nueva York*, 16 January 1952, p. 7; Advertisement, *Diario de Nueva York*, 24 January 1952, p. 15; Advertisement, *Diario de Nueva York*, 25 January 1952, p. 7; Advertisement, *New York Amsterdam News*, 19 January 1952, p. 12.

For more on comparisons between Arsenio Rodríguez and Pérez Prado, specifically, and debates over “empirical distinctions between an ‘inauthentic’ and ‘authentic’ mambo style,” see García, “Contesting that Damned Mambo,” 187-198; García, *Arsenio Rodríguez*, 75-92.

to celebrate these historic dates reflected not only the rich and varied presence of Cuban migrants and culture in New York City but also pointed towards a Cubanness framed by a transnational reality. Though now settled and, in many cases, flourishing in New York City, black and white Cuban participation in these patriotic celebrations suggests a process of historical (mis)remembering that allowed these migrants to look back nostalgically at the departed homeland, reflect critically on the island's struggles against Spanish colonialism, and demonstrate a sort of ambivalence toward the closeness of U.S.-Cuba political, economic, social, and cultural relations.

On or about the twenty-eighth of January each year, Cuban social clubs such as El Club Cubano and the Ateneo Cubano invited members, family, and friends to join them in remembering the birth of José Martí. Historians interested in Cuban national identity have long focused on the political leadership and national symbolism of José Martí during and after Cuba's nineteenth-century struggle for independence, focusing in particular on the anticolonial writer's declarations on slavery, race, and interamericanism.⁵⁹ Not only did El Club Cubano host service-oriented events like the annual *Cena Martiana* that offered guests a festive dinner priced affordably at two dollars

⁵⁹ "El Ateneo Cubano Conmemorará el 'Grito de Baire' y Celebró un Acto Patriótico," *La Prensa*, 1 February 1945, p. 3; Souvenir del Comité Gestor del Club Cubano Inter-Americano en el Aniversario del Natalicio del Apostol José Martí, Box 5, Folder 1, Correspondence 1945-1947, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; "Velada Conmemorativa Esta Noche en el Ateneo Cubano," *Diario de Nueva York*, 28 January 1949, p. 7; "El Club Cubano Interamericano Conmemora el Natalicio de Martí," *Diario de Nueva York*, 28 January 1949, p. 7. The author described El Club Cubano as a "polished Cuban entity." "Elecciones del Club Cubano Interamericano," *La Prensa*, 12 January 1956, p. 5.

For more on Martí's role in the construction of a Cuban national identity, see also Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*; Jeffrey Belnap, Raul Fernández, and Donald E. Pease, eds. *José Martí's "Our America": From Nation to Hemispheric Cultural Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Julio Rodríguez-Luis, *Re-Reading José Martí: One Hundred Years Later* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999); De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*; Lillian Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Mauricio Font and Alfonso Quiroz, eds. *The Cuban Republic and José Martí: Reception and Use of a National Symbol* (New York: Lexington Books, 2005); Alfred J. Lopez, *José Martí and the Future of Cuban Nationalisms* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006); Laura Lomas, *Translating Empire: José Martí, Migrant Latino Subjects, and American Modernities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

for each plate of food, but it also organized other commemorative events that gestured more towards symbolism and metaphor. In 1951, for example, members of the club visited the Cuban consulate in downtown New York City for the purpose of placing a single white rose at the entrance of the building, an obvious reference to Martí's "Cultivo Una Rosa Blanca," one of the writer's most famous poems in which a white rose symbolizes friendship in both good and bad times. By performing the main action of the poem outside of the embassy, club members signified the close, albeit not always positive, ties between Cuba and the United States, generally, and El Club Cubano and consular and diplomatic officials, more specifically.⁶⁰

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the Cuban social clubs of New York City, alongside officials from the Cuban consulate, continued to celebrate the Grito de Yara on or about October 10 to commemorate the start of the Ten Years' War in 1868. Led by sugar planter, slaveholder, poet, and lawyer Carlos Manuel de Céspedes in Manzanillo in the eastern part of the island, the Grito de Yara was an armed insurrection that touched off the first war for Cuban independence from Spanish rule. Quite significantly, Céspedes freed the slaves on his sugar mill at the outset of the rebellion and, according to historian Ada Ferrer, "invited them to help 'conquer liberty and independence' for Cuba."⁶¹ In 1946, for example, the Consul General de la República de Cuba and his wife

⁶⁰ Bound book, Box 1, 5 January 1950, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, 25 January 1951, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, 28 August 1952, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

For more on Martí's poetry, see Rodríguez-Luis, *Re-Reading José Martí*. An English translation of this short verse reads: "I have a white rose to tend/ In July as in January;/ I give it to the true friend/ Who offers his frank hand to me./ And to the cruel one whose blows/ Break the heart by which I live,/ Thistle nor thorn do I give:/ For him, too, I have a white rose." José Martí, *Versos sencillos/Simple Verses*, trans. by Manuel A. Tellechea (Texas: Arte Público Press, 1997).

⁶¹ Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 15.

invited members of El Club Cubano to join them for a celebration of the anniversary of the Grito de Yara in Studio 8-H at NBC 30 Rockefeller Plaza. The event featured musical compositions by Emma Otero, Ernesto Lecuona, Zoraida Marrero, Luis A. Bas Molina, and Ángel Reyes.⁶² That the consul targeted members of El Club Cubano for this event makes sense given its significance, but it leaves open the possibility that the showcasing of music in the European classical tradition, rather than Afro-Cuban popular music, served to whiten and, by extension, elevate the proceedings.

Nineteen forty eight marked the eightieth anniversary of the Grito de Yara, and the Cuban social clubs of the city made sure to commemorate appropriately the “patriotic date that the *colonia cubana* of this country celebrates with great animation.” Afro-Cuban popular music stood at the core of their celebrations. With “great enthusiasm spreading among the Cuban families and those of other *colonias* of this city,” El Club Cubano invited guests to what one reporter for *Diario de Nueva York* described as “an elegant soiree” at the Embassy Ballroom. Club leaders decorated the ballroom with the flags of the United States and Cuba, and the event featured the “happy música típica” of Frank García’s orchestra and the “pimentosa” Conjunto Puerto Rico.⁶³ Club Social Cuba hosted a dance in its social hall that featured live music from the orchestra of Roberto Pérez, “offering an atmosphere of sincere cordiality for the prosperity of the Cuban

For more on the Ten Years’ War and varied reasons for its failure, see also Karen Robert, “Slavery and Freedom in the Ten Years’ War, Cuba, 1868-1878,” *Slavery & Abolition* 13 (December 1992): 181-200; Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 121, 125.

⁶² Invitation, Box 5, Folder 1, Correspondence 1945-1947, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

⁶³ “Soirée bailable del Club Cubano Interamericano,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 7 October 1948, p. 7; “Continúan los preparativos para la soirée del Club Cubano,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 1 October 1948, p. 5; “Fiesta Social del Club C. Interamericano,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 9 October 1948, p. 7.

republic.”⁶⁴ Members and friends of El Ateneo Cubano, described as a “refined Cuban entity” always attentive to its mission of presenting events of “sincere patriotism,” hosted one of the “better social events” of the weekend with a patriotic dance at the Hotel Taft that promised “an atmosphere of fraternity and diversion of authentic Cubanidad.” Guests enjoyed the “Antillean rhythms” provided by Orquesta Renovación and paused briefly at midnight to observe the playing of both the United States and Cuban national anthems.⁶⁵

Year after year, the Cuban social clubs of New York City also commemorated the Grito de Baire on or about February 24 in honor of the start of the War of Independence in 1895 with musical and dance events. Organized by Martí’s Cuban Revolutionary Party, the Grito de Baire was the first time that rebels took up arms for the cause of Cuban independence in both eastern and western provinces.⁶⁶ Since its founding in 1933, El Círculo Cubano, “the oldest Cuban society of this city,” celebrated El Grito de Baire as it did in 1940 with a dance at its club headquarters.⁶⁷ In 1945, the Cuban society Maceo y Martí hosted a dance at the Grand Plaza in the Bronx featuring the “most creole rhythms” of Machito and Graciela, Casino Tropical, and Toñito and his Conjunto

⁶⁴ “Celebró el ‘Grito de Yara’ el Club Social Cubano,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 12 October 1948, p. 8.

⁶⁵ “Celebró Bien Baile el Ateneo Cubano,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 12 October 1948, p. 8; “Celebrarán el Grito de Yara,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 1 October 1948, p. 5; “Baile Patriótico del Ateneo Cubano,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 9 October 1948, p. 7; “Entre Nosotros,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 9 October 1948, p. 7.

⁶⁶ “El Ateneo Cubano da un baile esta noche,” *La Prensa*, 24 February, 1945, p. 8; “Lucida Velada Bailable Celebró el Ateneo Cubano,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 14 February, 1949, p. 5; “Ecos de Sociedad,” *Ecos de Nueva York*, 16 March 1952, p. 26; “Baile del Ateneo Cubano,” *La Prensa*, 25 February 1956, p. 6; “Club Cubano Inter-Amer.,” *La Prensa*, 25 February 1956, p. 6.

Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 141; See, also, Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*; Helg, *Our Rightful Share*.

⁶⁷ “El Círculo Cubano Celebra su Fiesta Patriótica Hoy,” *La Prensa*, 24 February 1940, p. 8. See also Greenbaum, *More than Black*, 238.

Cubanacan.⁶⁸ In 1947, El Club Cubano invited members of the “colonia cubana and others of our language” to an evening event at the New York City Center in honor of the Consul General of Cuba, Dr. Reinaldo Fernández Rebull, and in commemoration of the Grito de Baire. Open to the entire *colonia hispana*, the event also marked the club’s first attempt to raise funds for the Monumento Martí-Maceo.⁶⁹ In 1950 and 1951, El Club Cubano hosted “brilliant” dances celebrating both the Grito de Baire and Washington and Lincoln Day. The joint celebration of Cuban and U.S. national holidays suggests not only the transnational loyalties, Panamerican sensibilities, and interamerican interests of club leaders and members, particularly with Cuban Consul Mario León as guest of honor, but also the beginnings of a Cuban-American identity.⁷⁰

Described as a “progressive society, integrated by the Cuban individuals of this metropolis,” the Ateneo Cubano celebrated the Grito de Baire in 1950 with a dance featuring the Tropical Knights. That same year, Club Social Cuba, referred to as “the club of Amsterdam Avenue,” hosted its own dance featuring the music of Orquesta Renovación and attended by “a large representation of the Cuban and Hispano-American

⁶⁸ “‘El Grito de Baire’ esta noche en el Grand Plaza,” *La Prensa*, 24 February 1945, p. 8. My research uncovered mention of the Cuban society Maceo y Martí only a handful of times throughout 1945. Based on my newspaper research and existing historical scholarship on Cuban social clubs (which do not mention La Sociedad Maceo y Martí), I can find no connection between this society and La Union Martí-Maceo in Tampa or El Club Cubano Inter-Americano in the Bronx.

⁶⁹ “Velada del Club Cubano Interamericano el día 24,” *La Prensa*, 17 February 1947, p. 4.

⁷⁰ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 9 February 1950, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 15 February 1951, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; “Velada del Club Cubano Interamericano,” *La Prensa*, 23 February 1950, p. 5; “Club Cubano Interamericano,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 26 February 1950, p. 5.

According to *La Prensa*, the dance in 1950 featured the music of Grupo Cuba-Rico, though reports in *Diario de Nueva York* stated that the “el conjunto de Funy” supplied the music.

On February 24, 1945, the Club Social San Moritz hosted a dance at the Hotel Diplomat featuring the orchestras of José Curbelo and Luis Varona in honor of Washington’s Day. “Baile de Carnaval del Club Social San Moritz,” *La Prensa*, 24 February 1945, p. 8.

sector of this neighborhood.”⁷¹ These characterizations suggest that some Cuban social clubs like the Ateneo Cubano drew in Cubans and other guests from all across New York City whereas other societies like Club Social Cuba had a more limited, neighborhood-based appeal. That advertisements and news reports positioned the Ateneo Cubano as “refined” and as hosting some of the “better social events” organized in the *colonia hispana* is not entirely surprising given the club’s reputation of excluding Cubans and other persons of color from its membership and club spaces. More puzzling, particularly when compared to the more racially and ethnically inclusive practices of El Club Cubano, for example, is that advertisements and news reports also framed the Ateneo Cubano as “progressive” and as creating “an atmosphere of fraternity.” There is little evidence to suggest that the Ateneo Cubano acted as an agent of racial progress or fraternity, especially in terms of the ideology of the nineteenth-century Cuban independence movement. What these (self-) descriptions might suggest, however, is that the very practice of racial exclusion served to allow the Ateneo Cubano to claim a “refined” and “progressive” identity, an identity that relied on a sort of ritualized whitening of its Cubanness.

More so than any other Cuban national holiday, the twentieth of May seemed to generate the greatest amount of interest among the Cubans living in New York City in the 1940s and 1950s. Cuba achieved its independence from Spain in 1898, but U.S. intervention and the signing of the Platt Amendment meant, according to one historian, that “Cubans had achieved self-government without self-determination and independence without sovereignty...Foreigners again ruled Cuba, again in the name of Cubans, but, as

⁷¹ “Ateneo Cubano,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 27 February 1950, p. 5; “Club Social Cuba,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 27 February 1950, p. 5.

before, for their own ends.” It was on May 20, 1902 that U.S. military occupation of the island ended, and Tomás Estrada Palma became the republic’s first elected president.⁷²

The Cuban social clubs of the city hosted some of their grandest events of the year to commemorate this date, offering club members, family, and friends a wide array of social and cultural events ranging from presentations by some of the most distinguished Cuban and Latin American intellectuals and poets of the city to performances by some of the most popular Cuban and Latin singers and orchestras of the period.

Since its founding in 1941, the Ateneo Cubano hosted a variety of events in honor of Cuban independence.⁷³ The year after the club’s inauguration, the Ateneo Cubano celebrated the anniversary of Cuban independence with two international events broadcasted via shortwave radio by NBC and attended by the Cuban consuls in New York City: the first, a concert featuring the singing of the Cuban and U.S. national anthems and recitations by Afro-Cuban poet Eusebia Cosme; and, the second, a dance

⁷² Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 192. For more on the War for Independence and U.S. military occupation and intervention in Cuba in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see also Pérez, *The War of 1898*; Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*; Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*.

⁷³ For its 1944 celebration of Cuban independence day, the Ateneo Cubano hosted a dance at the Essex House with music provided by the Isla de Cuba orchestra. “Hernández Travieso Dio Conferencia en el Ateneo Cubano,” *La Prensa*, 2 May 1944, p. 8; “El 20 de Mayo en el Ateneo Cubano,” *Pueblos Hispanos*, 20 May 1944, p. 3; To celebrate 20 de Mayo in 1948, the Ateneo Cubano hosted a dance featuring Orquesta Renovación at the Hotel Taft and an artistic conference on the life of Cuban patriot, Marta Abreu, at its clubhouse. “En el Ateneo Cubano,” *La Prensa*, 15 May 1948, p. 3; “Actividades de la Colonia,” *Mundo Latino*, 15 May 1948, p. 5; In 1950, the Ateneo Cubano hosted a dance that prompted “great enthusiasm among the Hispanic-American sector of the city” in its clubhouse featuring Tropical Knights and various members of the Cuban consulate. “Ateneo Cubano,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 16 May 1950, p. 6; In 1952, the Ateneo Cubano hosted a formal dance at the Hotel Biltmore featuring the music of Tropical Knights. “Baile del Ateneo Cubano,” *La Prensa*, 10 May 1952, p. 4; In 1954, the Ateneo Cubano held a dance at its clubhouse featuring the music of Tropical Knights. “Fiesta conmemorativa en el Ateneo Cubano,” *La Prensa*, 19 May 1954, p. 6; In 1955, the Ateneo Cubano organized an evening gathering at its clubhouse as well as a dance with music by Tropical Knights. “Actos del Ateneo Cubano,” *La Prensa*, 13 May 1955, p. 5; “En Broadway,” *La Prensa*, 12 May 1955, p. 5; “En el Ateneo Cubano,” *La Prensa*, 21 May 1955, p. 5; In 1956, the Ateneo Cubano hosted an evening gathering with Dr. Emilio Nuñez Portuondo, Ambassador of the Republic of Cuba to the United States. “En el Ateneo Cubano,” *La Prensa*, 17 May 1956, p. 6. The Ateneo Cubano, described as a “prestigious entity,” celebrated the historic date in 1958 with a cultural and artistic evening at its club house. The guest speaker for the evening was Francisco Jorge Cardona, director of *La Prensa*. “Celebra Ateneo Cubano fecha histórica,” *La Prensa*, 17 May 1958, p. 5.

held at the Hotel Vanderbilt featuring the music of José Curbelo.⁷⁴ Interestingly, here we see consular officials attending events sponsored by a white Cuban social club that featured both Afro-Cuban performers and Afro-Cuban popular music; it seems that in certain contexts expressions of black popular culture could be rendered “Cuban” rather than “Afro-Cuban.” Again in 1946, the Ateneo Cubano organized a dance at the Hotel Park Lane attended by “a select group of Cubans and those from other Hispanic nationalities.” Juanito Sanabria’s orchestra played dance music and performed the U.S. and Cuban national anthems as well as the Borinqueña. Cuban consul Luis Bas Molina, Inspector de Consulados Ramón San Román, and a representative from Argentina attended what one report deemed as this club’s “best event yet.”⁷⁵ Reviews of the Ateneo Cubano’s 1947 Cuban independence celebration described the event as a “formal” and “elegant” dance accompanied by the orchestra of Enrique Navarro at the Hotel Biltmore in midtown and noted that “a select group of Cuban residents enjoyed hours of exquisite dancing.”⁷⁶

What descriptions and (self-) representations like “select” and “elegant” indicate is that the Ateneo Cubano had and hoped to maintain its reputation as club of and patronized by white and light-skinned members of the *colonia cubana* and *colonia hispana*, a characterization further supported by evidence of the club’s practices of racial exclusion and discrimination. “Select” and “elegant” should be understood as coded

⁷⁴ “El Ateneo Cubano Festeja el Aniv. De la República de Cuba,” *La Prensa*, 20 May 1943, p. 6; “El Ateneo Cubano celebra elegante baile social hoy,” *La Prensa*, 22 May 1943, p. 8.

⁷⁵ “El Ateneo Cubano celebró una esplendida velada,” *La Prensa*, 21 May 1946, p. 8; “El Ateneo Cubano dará un baile el día 18 de mayo,” *La Prensa*, 18 April 1946, p. 8; “Mirándolos Pasar,” *Seminario Hispano*, 25 May 1946, p. 10.

⁷⁶ “El Ateneo Cubano tiene un baile de gala hoy,” *La Prensa*, 17 May 1947, p. 3; “Festivales patrióticos del Ateneo Cubano,” *La Prensa*, 19 May 1947, p. 3.

words reflective of the club's racial and class biases. That the Ateneo Cubano hired Afro-Cuban performers like Eusebia Cosme and Arsenio Rodríguez, for example, does little to counter these realities. It does, however, confirm elements of the historical processes by which upper-class whites appropriate and, eventually, repackage black popular culture for middle-class consumption.⁷⁷

In 1951, the Ateneo Cubano hosted a patriotic gala at the Hotel Biltmore featuring live music from Tropical Knights and guests from among “the distinguished Cuban and Hispanic-American families” of the city. At this event, “characterized by its spirit of happiness and cordiality,” Dr. José Miguel Ribas, member of the Cuban delegation to the United Nations, presented to the Ateneo Cubano the Medalla de Mérito from the Sociedad Colombista Panamericana of Cuba.⁷⁸ In 1957, the Ateneo Cubano commemorated the fifty-fifth anniversary of Cuban independence with a dance at its clubhouse located at 2824 Broadway featuring that year's winner of the *La Prensa* musical popularity contest, the “famous” orchestra Oriental Cubana led by Cresencio Gutierrez and lead singer Hector “Bolo” Sánchez. A few days after this grand social affair, members of the Ateneo Cubano gathered again at their clubhouse to continue their patriotic celebrations. At this event, “distinguished” guest speaker Ángel Artola Valdés,

⁷⁷ For more on the theoretical concept and social practice of appropriation, see Roger Chartier, “Texts, Printing, Readings,” in *The New Cultural History: Essays*, eds. Aletta Biersack and Lynn Avery Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Stuart Hall, “What is this ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?,” *Social Justice* 20, no. 1-2 (Spring-Summer 1993): 104-115; Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness*; George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Yeidy M. Rivero, *Tuning Out Blackness: Race and Nation in the History of Puerto Rican Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); James W. Cook, “The Return of the Culture Industry,” in *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present, Future*, eds. James W. Cook, Lawrence B. Glickman, and Michael O'Malley (Chicago: University Press, 2009).

⁷⁸ “Ateneo Cubano,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 5 May 1951, p. 5; “Ateneo Cubano,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 22 May 1951, p. 5; “Velada y baile del Ateneo Cubano,” *La Prensa*, 16 May 1951, p. 5.

journalist for the Havana newspaper *Excelsior*, presented the club with a very special gift: a bust of José Martí donated by the children of La Casa de Beneficia y Maternidad of Havana. Members of the club responded by creating a special place in the clubhouse for the statue that they aptly named *Rincón Martiano*, or Martí's Corner.⁷⁹

El Club Cubano inaugurated its social hall and held its first public social event on May 20, 1946.⁸⁰ Not only would celebrations held on this date serve to commemorate the anniversary of Cuban independence, but they would also mark the anniversary of the founding of the club, merging in the imaginary of club members and Cubans across the city a date of dual significance.⁸¹ The club organized a variety of joint celebrations throughout the 1940s and 1950s. In 1947, for example, El Club Cubano hosted an “artistic-cultural program” that featured poetry, speeches, music, and a buffet dinner, and in 1950, club members and bandleaders Marcelino Guerra and Arsenio Rodríguez played for the festive dance hosted by the club at the Park Garden.⁸² During its anniversary and

⁷⁹ “Baile de la Independencia del Ateneo Cubano,” *La Prensa*, 16 May 1957, p. 3; “Baile del Ateneo Cubano,” *La Prensa*, 18 May 1957, p. 6; “Se descubre busto de Martí en Ateneo Cubano de N. York,” *La Prensa*, 23 May 1957, p. 2; “Mellizas del Campo en el Festival de Mayo,” *La Prensa*, 28 April 1957, p. 1.

⁸⁰ “Velada de Club Cubano Interamericano del Bronx,” *La Prensa*, 18 May 1946, p. 8; “Mirándolos Pasar,” *Seminario Hispano*, 25 May 1946, p. 10.

⁸¹ In 1954, El Club Cubano hosted a dance commemorating its ninth anniversary as well as the anniversary of the Republic of Cuba featuring live music by Arsenio Rodríguez and Conjunto Luis Cruz. “Baile del Club Cubano Inter-Americano,” *La Prensa*, 22 May 1954, p. 6. In 1955, El Club Cubano organized a dance, again at the Embassy Ballroom, with musical performances by Marcelino Guerra and Conjunto Cibaño. “Club Cubano Inter-Amer.,” *La Prensa*, 21 May 1955, p. 5; “En Broadway,” *La Prensa*, 12 May 1955, p. 5.

⁸² “Velada del Club Cubano Interamericano el día 20,” *La Prensa*, 16 May 1947, p. 3; “Cuba celebra aniversario de su Independencia,” *La Prensa*, 20 May 1947, p. 1; “Velada del Club Cubano Inter-Americano,” *La Prensa*, 24 May 1947, p. 8.

Meeting minutes reveal that Arsenio would receive \$250 for his performance, and at least one club leader worried that the high costs of putting on this the event would likely bring losses to the club treasury. Mr. León estimated that the putting on this event would cost the club at least \$1150.00.

Concerns over club finances reached a boiling point during the planning of the twentieth of May celebration in 1951. During the Board of Directors meeting held on the fifth of March, a member of the

20 de Mayo celebration in 1957, El Club Cubano presented Cuban performers Panchito Riset, Machito, and Vicentico Valdés with honorary diplomas. The event also featured poetry by Eusebia Cosme and the debut of Arsenio Rodríguez's most famous patriotic song, "Adórenla como Martí." Recalling many of the most important fighters for Cuban independence, leaders like Roberto Bermudez Lopez, Ignacio Agramonte, Quintin Bandera, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, Francisco Vicente Aguilera, Guillermo Moncada, Antonio Maceo, and José Martí, the song, explains García, "appeals to all Cubans to resolve their differences in peace and love and to unite the country so that the sacrifices of the Cuban independence patriots would not have been in vain."⁸³ The following year, El Club Cubano again presented honorary diplomas to "distinguished exponents of creole music," musicians who had "disseminated Cuban music in this country." The "very crowded" event, held at the club's headquarters, honored Puerto Rican bandleader Noro Morales and Afro-Cuban composers, bandleaders, and musicians Gilberto Valdés, Mario Bauzá, Arsenio Rodríguez, and Alberto Socarrás.⁸⁴ Interestingly, in this context, Afro-

Comisión de Auxilio argued that the club was risking its financial stability by organizing so many dance events. The president of the Comisión responded that "there is no other way for this commission to raise funds other than by organizing parties" and suggested that this member no longer participate in the committee. Club leaders agreed, however, that they would now start charging thirty-five cents for beer at dances.

Boletín Mensual Febrero y Marzo de 1950, Box 5, Folder 11, Boletín Oficial 1947, 1950, 1959, 1998, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 9 February 1950, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 20 March 1950, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; "Velada del Club Cubano Interamericano," *La Prensa*, 13 May 1950, p. 3; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 5 March 1951, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 12 April 1951, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

⁸³ García, *Arsenio Rodríguez*, 27-28.

⁸⁴ Club Cubano Inter-Americano Journal, Box 5, Folder 13, August 1958, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; "Celebración de independencia," *La Prensa*, 20 May 1958, p. 5; "Club Cubano Interamericano," *La Prensa*, 22 May 1958, p. 2.

Cuban musicians are, in fact, credited for popularizing Cuban music among audiences in the United States.

That the Cuban social clubs and cultural organizations of New York City hosted and advertised separate events does not mean that members of the *colonia cubana* and *colonia hispana* did not also come together to commemorate Cuban patriotic holidays. Since the mid-1940s, celebrations in honor of Cuban independence had brought together the various ethnic social clubs and organizations of the city as well as yet-to-be-affiliated Cuban New Yorkers. For example, in 1945, the Agrupación Social Cubana, Club Continental, and the Centro Social Puertorriqueño co-hosted a dance at the Hotel Diplomat featuring the orchestras of Puerto Rican bandleader Noro Morales and Cuban bandleader Luis Varona. Reports boasted that the parade of artists on stage would represent Cuba, Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo, and Mexico, a marketing strategy on the part of organizers that marked this event as both Cuban and pan-Latino/a.⁸⁵ Independent celebrations also took place. In 1946, several Cuban families in New York City, led by Cuban journalist José M. de Poo, met for the purposes of forming a “society that represents Cuba abroad,” and one of their first goals was to organize an event celebrating the founding of the Cuban republic. A few days after that initial planning session, this “select group of Cuban families” met once again at Restaurant El Fundador to commemorate Cuban independence and strategize further about establishing this new society.⁸⁶ In another part of the city, passers-by likely noticed the Cuban flags adorning

⁸⁵ “Baile para celebrar la Independencia de Cuba,” *La Prensa*, 14 May 1945.

⁸⁶ “Proyectarse formar una nueva Sociedad Cubana,” *La Prensa*, 13 May 1946, p. 6; “Grupo de Cubanos festejó con cena la fecha patria,” *La Prensa*, 25 May 1946, p. 8.

Restaurante Rinconcito Criollo where Cuban families also gathered more informally to commemorate the holiday.⁸⁷

Patriotic commemorations oftentimes merged with celebrations of commercial popularity and achievement. That is, patriotic celebrations not only generated the participation of well-known and sought-after Cuban musicians and entertainers, but also secured endorsement from some of the most popular Latin nightclubs of New York City. The Cuban society Maceo y Martí hosted a dance at Audubon Ballroom in 1945 not only in honor of Cuban independence day, but also to congratulate Machito and his orchestra for completing their third successful year as the house band at La Conga. The event featured performances by Machito, Luis Varona, Marcelino Guerra, and Carlos Varela.⁸⁸ The following year, La Conga hosted its own celebration in honor of Cuban independence day, featuring Miguelito Valdés and “a group of Cuban and Hispanic-American personalities from North American and Hispanic-American theater, screen, radio, and press.”⁸⁹ Nationalist sentiments, intra- and cross-ethnic cooperation, and popular entertainment intersected in meaningful ways during many of the 20 de Mayo celebrations organized throughout the 1950s. In 1951, promoters at the Palladium Ballroom organized a dance dedicated to Cuban independence featuring the bands of Marcelino Guerra, Arsenio Rodríguez, Tito Puente, and Tito Rodríguez, “four popular

⁸⁷ “Mirándolos Pasar,” *Seminario Hispano*, 25 May 1946, p. 10.

⁸⁸ “La Sociedad Maceo y Martí prepara un baile,” *La Prensa*, 6 April 1945, p. 3; “Da un baile la Sociedad Maceo y Martí,” *La Prensa*, 8 May 1945, p. 8.

⁸⁹ “La independencia cubana, celebrada en ‘La Conga,’” *La Prensa*, 20 May 1946, p. 6; “Mirándolos Pasar,” *Seminario Hispano*, 25 May 1946, p. 10.

orchestras specializing in Antillean and Hispanic-American rhythms.”⁹⁰ The following year was the fiftieth anniversary of Cuban independence, and the Palladium played host once again to an event that was both an authentic patriotic celebration and a commercial “grand festival.” “A review of twenty-five Cuban artists of the theater, movie screen, and television in this metropolis,” led by Miguelito Valdés, Arsenio Rodríguez, Mario Bauzá, and Machito and featuring Facundo Rivera y su Conjunto Septeto de La Playa, Feol Bergaza, Juan Bruno Tarraza, and Trio Oriental, offered those in attendance hours of live music and dancing as well as the opportunity to express their *cubanidad* in a setting that extended beyond the social clubs.⁹¹

Many of the events and activities sponsored by the various Cuban clubs of New York City demonstrate that politics, religion, and race could not be disentangled from the social and cultural landscape of “Cuban New York.” On March 11, 1946, more than two months before its first official meeting, El Club Cubano joined together with five other Cuban social clubs, organizations, and associations in the city to offer words of support and encouragement for Cuban president Ramón Grau San Martín, who had led the Cuban government for 100 days in 1933 and once again held the nation’s top post from 1944 to

⁹⁰ “Baile dedicado a Cuba en el Palladium Ballroom,” *La Prensa*, 19 May 1951, p. 6; “Fiesta en honor a Cuba en el ‘Palladium-Ballroom,’” *Diario de Nueva York*, 19 May 1951, p. 5.

⁹¹ “Fiesta Cubana en el Palladium,” *La Prensa*, 17 May 1952, p. 6; In 1955, the Palladium Ballroom again hosted three days of festivities in honor of Cuban independence. “En Broadway,” *La Prensa*, 12 May 1955, p. 5.

In 1954, Club Crisol hosted a Cuban independence dance at Carlton Terrace on Broadway between 100th and 101st Street, and in 1956, Club Embassy hosted a dance in honor of Cuban patriot José Martí at the Taft Hotel in Times Square featuring José Budet and Tropical Knights. In 1957, Club Social Coronet organized an invite-only dance in honor of Cuban independence at the Hotel Taft with music by “the well-known orchestra of Juanucho Lopez, specializing in mambos, and the orchestra of José Quijano, famous for their cha cha cha interpretations.”

“Ecos de Broadway,” *Ecos de Nueva York*, 23 May 1954, p. 20; “Baile del Club Embassy,” *La Prensa*, 17 May 1956, p. 6; “El Club Social Coronet dará baile en honor de Cuba,” *La Prensa*, 18 May 1957, p. 6.

1948. Grau San Martín had been elected in 1944 on a platform of continued constitutional reforms, though these promises gave way by the end of his term to government corruption, mismanagement, and public disillusionment. Signed by Generoso Pedroso of El Club Cubano and Francisco de Peña of the Ateneo Cubano as well as the presidents of the Centro Artesanos Cubano, Club Social Cuba, Logia Isla de Cuba, and Club Habana, this joint letter suggests the potential for cross-class and inter-racial Cuban unity vis-à-vis engagement with island politics. That one of its earliest acts as a social and cultural club was, in effect, a political endorsement seemed lost on the leadership and members of El Club Cubano who consistently argued that the club lacked any and all political interests. Though historians have emphasized that the racial legacies of Spanish colonialism limited interactions between white Cubans and Cubans of color and led Afro-Cubans to associate more often with African Americans, at critical moments throughout the 1940s and 1950s, a collective sense of *cubanidad* trumped racial divisions and class biases.⁹²

⁹² Letter, Box 5, Folder 1, Correspondence 1945-1947, March 11, 1946, Club Cubano Inter-American Papers. The letter indicated that each of the presidents signed the letter in their name on behalf of each of the members of their clubs. The letter provides important information about the less well-known Cuban clubs and presidents based in the city: Blas González Martín, President of Centro Artesanos Cubano, 241 East 121st Street, Apartment 14, New York City; Tomás Lopez, President of Club Social Cuba, 2018 Amsterdam Avenue, New York City; Francisco Soler, President of Logia Isla de Cuba, 2018 Amsterdam Avenue, New York City; Señora Eulalia Parodi of Club Habana, 850 East 161st Street, Apt. 2D, Bronx.

For more on Ramón Grau San Martín's reforms and presidency, see Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 283-288. See, also, Charles D. Ameringer, *The Cuban Democratic Experience: The Auténtico Years, 1944-1952* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000).

For more on exclusion and racial prejudice among the Cuban social clubs of New York City in the 1940s and 1950s, see Mirabal, "Melba Alvarado," 120-126; Graciela, "¡Eso era Tremendo!" 150-156; García, "Contesting that Damned Mambo," 192-193.

For more on Afro-Cuban interactions with African Americans and other migrants of color from the Caribbean, see James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*; Lisa Brock and Digna Castañeda, eds., *Between Race and Empire: African-Americans and Cubans before the Cuban Revolution* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); Jeffrey Belknap and Raul A. Fernández, eds. *José Martí's "Our America: From National to Hemispheric Cultural Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Frank A. Guridy, "From Solidarity to Cross-Fertilization: Afro-Cuban/African-American Interaction during the 1930s and 1940s," *Radical History Review* 87 (Fall 2003): 19-48; Burgos, *Playing America's Game*; Román and Flores, eds. *The Afro-Latin@ Reader*; Frank A. Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and*

Cubans living and working in New York City had, in fact, already proven their ability to come together back in 1944 in an effort to help raise money for the island which had recently been devastated by a category three hurricane that made landfall in the Pinar del Rio region before heading west towards Havana. In November 1944, the Comité Pro Ayuda a Cuba, backed by the Consul de Cuba and the Ateneo Cubano, organized an event at the Essex House, decorated with the flags of Cuba, the United States, and the Red Cross, that promised performances by Miguelito Valdés and other Broadway artists and a dance with music by Alberto Iznaga's La Siboney and Isla de Cuba de Montes de Oca. Not only did the "colonia hispana respond generously" to this fundraising campaign, but so too did diplomatic officials and members of the *colonia hispana* of Washington, D.C. who traveled to New York City to attend the event. The following month, the Comité Pro Ayuda a Cuba organized another fundraising event, marked by "popular character," at the Manhattan Center, featuring "Cuban artists of well-deserved fame in the variety program" and music by "two good hispanic orchestras of the city," Isla de Cuba and Los Segundo Afro Cubanos de Varona.⁹³

With small- and large-scale activities and events sponsored by the various Cuban social clubs of the city, one can certainly make the case that Cuban New Yorkers created for themselves rich and vibrant social and cultural lives. In the early 1940s, El Círculo Cubano and El Habana Social Club sponsored dances and other social events like in November 1940 when the latter hosted a dance at the Broadway Casino featuring "creole

African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

⁹³"Elegante Baile Social se Celebrará el Sábado, Ayuda a Damnificados de Cuba," *La Prensa*, 6 November 1944, p. 3; "Comité de Ayuda a Cuba Activa su Baile de Sábado," *La Prensa*, 26 December 1944, p. 8; "Hay Gran Animación Para el Beneficio Cubano del Sábado," *La Prensa*, 28 December 1944, p. 8.

music.”⁹⁴ Founded in 1945, and sharing its club space with Club Social Cuba, Logia Isla de Cuba No. 173 de la I.O.O.F. organized dances, theatrical events, and other activities that reportedly generated “a great deal of enthusiasm within the colonia cubana.” For many of its dances and other social events, including a picnic held on the grounds of the International Park in the Bronx, the club hired Cuban-led bands, such as Orquesta de Montecarlo, Orquesta Renovación, José Budet, Sonora Antilla, and Orquesta Tropical Knights. The Logia Rebekah Isla de Cuba also hosted dances and musical events throughout the 1950s, such as the one the club hosted at the Hotel Empire featuring music by Tropical Knights.⁹⁵ On its second anniversary in 1954, Acción Civica Cubano hosted “A Cuban Evening” at the Hotel Whitehall featuring Orquesta Renovación. Organized by Cuban entertainer Perucho Irigoyen, the event received support from various Hispanic societies and featured performances by local and foreign artists.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ “Círculo Cubano de N.Y. tiene baile mañana,” *La Prensa*, 13 January 1940, p. 8; “Círculo Cubano celebra un baile mañana,” *La Prensa*, 20 January 1940, p. 8; “Círculo Cubano en N. York,” *La Prensa*, 3 February 1940, p. 8; 16 November 1940, *La Prensa*, p. 8.

⁹⁵ “Circulan las invitaciones del Club Social Cuba,” *La Prensa*, 8 March 1946, p. 6; “Logia isla de Cuba,” *La Prensa*, 9 March 1946, p. 8; “Baile en la Logia Isla de Cuba 173,” *La Prensa*, 22 April 1946, p. 6; “Baile del Comité de la Logia Isla de Cuba,” *La Prensa*, 27 April 1946, p. 8; “Club Social Cuba,” *La Prensa*, 1 April 1948, p. 5; “Club Isla de Cuba,” *La Prensa*, 21 April 1948, p. 5; “La Logia Isla de Cuba da Baile Hoy,” *La Prensa*, 25 April 1953, p. 4; “La Logia Isla de Cuba 173 da baile aniversario,” *La Prensa*, 2 March 1955, p. 6; “El baile aniversario de la Logia Isla de Cuba,” *La Prensa*, 9 March 1955, p. 6; “La Logia Isla de Cuba da picnic el domingo,” *La Prensa*, 1 June 1955, p. 6; “La Logia Rebekah Isla de Cuba da un baile,” *La Prensa*, 20 May 1954, p. 6.

According to the Souvenir Journal of the Nineteenth Anniversary Reception and Ball of the Faro de las Antillas Lodge, No. 1182, Grand United Order of Odd Fellows, held at the Hunts Point Palace, Orquesta Monte Carlo was under the direction of Prof. George Rolón and had Rafaelito as lead singer. Advertisement, Box 17, Folder 2, March 1, 1947, Jesús Colón Papers.

For more on the history and role of Masonic lodges in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Hoffnung-Garskof, “The Migrations of Arturo Schomburg.” See, also, Singer and Martínez, “A South Bronx Latin Music Tale.” My research has uncovered very little additional information on these lesser known social clubs, cultural organizations, and lodges.

⁹⁶ “La Acción Civica Cubana da un baile el domingo,” *La Prensa*, 21 April 1954, p. 6; “Acción Civica Cubana,” *La Prensa*, 24 April 1954, p. 6.

Despite these moments of cross-racial and intra-ethnic collaboration, maintaining these alliances, even just within the *colonia cubana*, remained a difficult task. A few days after its first official club event, founders of El Club Cubano explained that they had organized the club “to promote the coming together of the social life of all the Cuban residents in this city, who for diverse reasons remain inexplicably distant from one another.” Hinting at ethnic, racial, and political divisions within the *colonia cubana* and *colonias hispanas* of the city, the founding members of the club aimed to establish harmonious relationships with “all of our brothers that form part of the diverse *colonias hispanas* of this metropolis.”⁹⁷

This desire to come together, especially across national borders, proved common to the 1940s and 1950s. Motivated by the spirit of good neighborliness and ideologies of Panamericanism that marked this period, local politicians and Cuban diplomats in New York City often helped commemorate Cuban independence and reflect positively on the history of U.S.-Cuba relations. The year 1950 marked the one hundredth anniversary of the flying of the Cuban flag from the top of The Sun Building in downtown Manhattan, and this historic date prompted New York City mayor William O’Dwyer to send a telegram to Cuban president Carlos Prío Socarrás offering congratulations to the people of Cuba: “The ties that have existed between our two countries have always been very close, but because the flag of your republic was first raised in this city we New Yorkers consider it a privilege to unite ourselves with you in these celebrations.”⁹⁸ With the

⁹⁷ “La Nueva Casa-Club,” “Circular, Acuerdos y Noticias,” Box 5, Folder 12, May 30, 1946, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

⁹⁸ “La Bandera de Cuba será izada otra vez en el Ayuntamiento,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 10 May 1950, p. 1; “Dramatizaron hoy en La Habana por radio la gesta del Gral. Narciso Lopez,” *La Prensa*, 19 May 1950, p. 4.

nineteenth of May declared *Día de la Bandera Cubana*, Cuban flags flew all across the city in 1950 in honor of Cuban independence. One reporter found Cuban flags hoisted atop city landmarks, hotels, and the homes of distinguished New York businessmen, and a flag and enormous billboard with a greeting for the Cuban people stood on the corner of Thirty-fourth and Broadway, “the most walked on corner in the world.”⁹⁹ This commemoration allowed all New Yorkers, Cubans and others alike, to make claims on the legacy of U.S.-Cuba relations, a discursive move that simultaneously evoked the early-twentieth-century development of the *colonia cubana* in the city and whitewashed the less than positive results of U.S. involvement on the island. For Cuban New Yorkers of the 1940s and 1950s, in particular, what might have been regarded as part of Cuban national history could now be framed as equally relevant to and part of U.S. national history.

Prío Socarrás was president of Cuba between 1948 and 1952. Postwar prosperity on the island eventually gave way to economic stagnation and “embezzlement, graft, corruption, and malfeasance of public office...[and] violence and terror became extensions of party politics” (Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 284-286). See, also, Ameringer, *The Cuban Democratic Experience*.

O’Dwyer was mayor of New York City between 1946 and 1950. For more on his mayoral term and his relationship with the *colonia hispana*, see Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*.

Prío Socarrás continued his support of New York City mayors in 1951 when Ambassador Dr. Luis Machado presented Vincent Impelliteri (1950-1953) with the Orden de Carlos Manuel de Céspedes in recognition of his “interamerican good neighborliness and solidarity in peace and in war.” Impelliteri responded by saying, “I will be a friend of the Cubans as both the mayor of New York and as a mere citizen. Cuba has a spot in my heart.” “Embajador de Cuba impone medalla al Alcalde de N. York,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 19 May 1951, p. 1.

For more on New York City politics in the 1940s and 1950s, especially in relation to Spanish-speaking migrants, see Virginia Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City, 1917-1948* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983); Salvatore J. LaGumina, *New York at Mid-Century: The Impelliteri Years* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1992); Chris McNickle, *To Be Mayor of New York: Ethnic Politics in the City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities*.

⁹⁹ “La Bandera de Cuba será izada otra vez en el Ayuntamiento,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 10 May 1950, p. 1; “Nueva York rinde tributo a la bandera de Cuba izándola publicamente; alcalde O’Dwyer envía mensaje a Prío,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 20 May 1950, p. 3.

Cuban flags flew atop of the Empire State Building, Hotel McAlpin, and the home of the Gimbel Brothers, and Acción Bolivariana hoisted the 30-foot-long flag received from Prío Socarrás atop of the Spears Building where it had its offices.

Cuban consular officials in New York City, as we have seen, routinely attended many of the social and cultural events sponsored by the Ateneo Cubano and El Club Cubano and, several times throughout the 1950s, placed advertisements in *La Prensa* addressing the entire *colonia cubana* on the date of Cuban independence. In many ways, these advertisements served to unite the *colonia cubana* based on nationalist sentiment, reminding them, as one ad declared, of the “prosperity of our nation on this glorious date as a reaffirmation of our freedoms.”¹⁰⁰ Cuban consular officials, therefore, played an important role in shaping the social and cultural identities of Cubans living abroad, (re-)emphasizing the significance of the homeland within the diaspora.

The Liga Internacional de Acción Bolivariana also played a key role in helping to bring together the disparate Cuban social clubs of New York City. Known as The Good Neighbors Center of New York, this civic organization coordinated a meeting with “personalities representing the *colonia cubana de Nueva York* and leaders of Cuban organizations such as the Ateneo Cubano, Club Social Cuba and Club Cubano Interamericano.” The meeting resulted in a resolution to celebrate a joint act in honor of the Cuban flag at the Teatro Rivoli.¹⁰¹ Two years later, Acción Bolivariana invited leaders and members of El Club Cubano to participate in a parade in honor of Cuban Independence Day. Ángel Ramón Ruiz, president of the Acción Bolivariana, attended El

¹⁰⁰ Advertisement, *La Prensa*, 20 May 1952, p. 3; Advertisement, *La Prensa*, 20 May 1953, p. 3.

¹⁰¹ “La Bandera de Cuba será izada otra vez en el Ayuntamiento,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 10 May 1950, p. 1; “Rinden emocionado tributo a la bandera de la República de Cuba,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 16 May 1950, p. 1.

O’Dwyer seemed to have a relatively favorable relationship with the *colonias de origen hispanico*. On the occasion of New York City’s golden anniversary, O’Dwyer had “fervent desires” that “the colonia de habla Española be represented in the grand parade, in typical costumes, that will take place on June 12 along Fifth Avenue.” Various societies of the *colonia hispana* gathered at el restaurant Jai-Alai “to coordinate efforts to organize the best Puerto Rican representation possible.” “Participación de la colonia en el Jubileo de N.Y.,” *La Prensa*, 21 May 1948, p. 2.

Club Cubano's Board of Directors meeting held on the fourteenth of April to convince club leaders that this event "had no connection whatsoever with anything political or partisan, that it was solely a demonstration from the *colonia hispana de New York* to the Cuban people." Ruiz's insistence that the parade lacked political undertones suggests that the *colonia cubana* might have been at odds on political matters and that El Club Cubano had successfully publicized its apolitical mission. Club President Narciso Saavedra rebutted that "since its foundation the club has lent its cooperation at all times to the civic and social acts of the *colonia hispana*" and agreed to ask club members to participate in the parade. News reports of this event confirmed that Acción Bolivariana had indeed organized "a program of apolitical acts." For El Club Cubano, its "apolitical" agenda had very little to do with formal affiliations with U.S. or Cuban political parties and much more to do with maintaining the inclusiveness and openness, regardless of race, ethnicity, politics, and religion, that came to define the club in this period. Any sort of political association or mobilization by members of a social club and cultural organization made up mostly by Afro-Cubans could have been interpreted by others in the *colonia cubana* and *colonia hispana* as both radical and potentially threatening to the community's safety and status quo. By rejecting politics, broadly understood, members of El Club Cubano likely hoped to avoid these (mis)characterizations. In doing so, club leaders demonstrated an implicit understanding that political mobilization by Afro-Cubans, specifically, or on the basis of race, more generally, as had been the case in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Cuba, often yielded increased repression and limited social mobility.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 14 April 1952, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 15

Yet, this lack of formal political involvement in local city affairs was not entirely unique to Afro-Cubans or members of El Club Cubano. For many Cuban New Yorkers, political involvement as long-term residents of New York City and political concern for events on the island were fundamentally distinct and separate associations. One Cuban hinted that lack of interest was due to limited political representation, explaining, “In my country I was only involved and paid attention to political matters but here I’ve never been interested in it...I’d like to see more hispanics involved in politics. We have a right to it. We are a great majority among the minorities.” Another Cuban noted divisions within *la colonia hispana*, explaining, “We lack interest in affairs of nuestra colonia. This general apathy is harmful for everyone. Before anything else we need to come together, not do so much harm to one another. And above all cooperate in our affairs.”¹⁰³

As we have seen, leaders and members of El Club Cubano carefully considered collaboration with other social clubs and cultural organizations in the city. In 1951, the club received an invitation from Acción Bolivariana to participate in its annual Panamerican Day Parade. Each spring throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Acción Bolivariana took the lead in organizing a week of Panamerican celebrations in New York City culminating with a parade on the fourteenth of April. According to a reporter for *La Prensa*, Panamerican Day marked a day of celebration and “gave impetus to the ideal of interamerican solidarity that was one of the most prized objectives of the liberator Simón

May 1952, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; “Actos del cincuentenario de la República de Cuba,” *La Prensa*, 15 May 1952, p. 5.

According to Mirabal, “By banning politics and religion not only did the members believe they were avoiding controversies and disruptions but they also hoped to eliminate any racist stereotypes associated with an Afro-Cuban club, including the history and politics of cabildos, which were often invoked by White Cuban members to discredit Afro-Cuban clubs” (Mirabal, “Melba Alvarado,” 124). See, also, Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 132; De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*.

¹⁰³ “Entrevistas Brevisimas,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 2 June 1951, p. 4.

Bolivar.”¹⁰⁴ Cuban participation in Panamerican celebrations had surged in 1950 when Juanito Sanabria’s orchestra performed at a formal dance hosted by the Accion Bolivariana at the Manhattan Center, Cuban soldiers walked in file during the Panamerican Day Parade, and the Ateneo Cubano asked that all of its members who had served in the U.S. armed forces wear their military medals when they walked in the parade as representatives of the club.¹⁰⁵ The following year, in 1951, the Ateneo Cubano selected from within *la sociedad Hispanoamericana* nearly 150 young women to ride on floats and in cars during the Panamerican Day Parade and hosted a dance at its social hall featuring Orquesta Renovación and “distinguished Cuban families.”¹⁰⁶ In contrast to the eager participation of Ateneo Cubano, some members of El Club Cubano expressed less enthusiasm. Mr. Alberto Baños objected to club participation in the parade charging that Acción Bolivariana had sponsored activities in the past and not invited the club, a reference, perhaps, to the kind of silent racial exclusion described by Melba Alvarado. Despite these protests, club leaders eventually agreed to cooperate in the event.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ “Una edición especial publicará ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 12 April 1943, p. 1; “Desfile de las naciones unidas, punto culminante en la temporada del Circo,” *La Prensa*, 12 April 1943, p. 5; “Edición especial de La Prensa mañana,” *La Prensa*, 13 April 1943, p. 1.

¹⁰⁵ “Actos de Semana Panamericana darán comienzo en Nueva York el 8 de abril,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 11 March 1950, p. 3; “Baile de gala en el Manhattan Center,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 29 March 1950, p. 7; “Cadetes cubanos en desfile del 15,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 29 March 1950, p. 1; “Gran Baile Panamericano de Gala hoy Sábado,” *La Prensa*, 8 April 1950, p. 3; “Cadetes cubanos participarán en el desfile Panamericano de N. York,” *La Prensa*, 11 April 1950, p. 2; “Actividades del Ateneo Cubano,” *La Prensa*, 11 April 1950, p. 3. El Club Cubano was not mentioned specifically as one of the Hispanic organizations supporting “this grand panamerican social event.”

¹⁰⁶ “Desfile Panamericano,” *La Prensa*, 4 April 1951, p. 3; “Reunión en el Ateneo Cubano,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 5 April 1951, p. 7; “El Ateneo Cubano da baile este Sábado, día 14,” *La Prensa*, 11 April 1951, p. 3; “Baile del Ateneo Cubano,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 12 April 1951, p. 5; “Ateneo Cubano,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 14 April 1951, p. 5.

¹⁰⁷ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 29 March 1951, Club Cubano Inter-American Papers; Mirabal, “Melba Alvarado.”

There were numerous other instances of debate within El Club Cubano regarding assistance to and collaboration with other Cuban and pan-Latino/a social clubs and cultural organizations. In 1951 and 1952, the club received letters from the Union Martí-Maceo in Tampa requesting financial assistance, with the latter request specifically asking for a financial contribution towards the construction of its own clubhouse and inviting club members to an assembly in its social hall.¹⁰⁸ Records do not indicate the club's final decision on the matter, though the requests touched off significant discussion. Also, in 1952, Félix Navarro, president of the Comité Hispano Americano del Bronx, visited the Board of Directors Meeting to discuss the upcoming *Semana Hispano Americano del Bronx*. Seemingly aware of the club's public stance against politics or political affiliations, Navarro clarified that his organization was "not political even though it is usually branded that way" and complained that El Club Cubano "had never lent its sought-after cooperation." Navarro wanted club leaders to explain the reason for their distance, especially since the committee worked toward improving the social life of residents in the *colonia*, particularly those living in the Bronx. He charged that "el Club Cubano is the only institution based in this district that has not, at any time, cooperated." Club leaders responded that they had not received the organization's previous solicitations for help, but promised that they would cooperate in the future.¹⁰⁹

Members of El Club Cubano seemed aware of the club's mission to avoid political or religious expression, but found ways to negotiate, circumvent, and ignore

¹⁰⁸ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 29 March 1951, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 12 April 1951, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 15 May 1952, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

¹⁰⁹ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 30 September 1952, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

these foundational expectations throughout the 1940s and 1950s. In 1957, for example, El Club Cubano hosted a dance in honor of the women in the club named Caridad, affectionately known as “Cachitas.”¹¹⁰ A direct reference to Cuba’s patron saint and nationalist symbol La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, who also shared the “Cachita” nickname, the club’s celebration had, at the very least, veiled religious connotations. Held in September on the same date as the Catholic feast day of La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, most within the *colonia cubana* would have likely made the connection. Still, El Club Cubano seems to have wanted to prevent any direct association with Afro-Cuban religious practices that might draw criticisms from white Cubans. But, by masking the event as a simple celebration of women in the club named Caridad, club leaders also engaged in a process of erasure, disassociating La Virgen de la Caridad as the incarnation of Ochún, the goddess of love, femininity, and beauty in the Yoruba religion of Santería as well as themselves as believers in and practitioners of Afro-Cuban spiritual traditions.¹¹¹ The following year, on September 15, 1958, the Board of Directors agreed to place a statue of the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre in the club office, noting that the statue was a gift donated by Silvio Hernández. Cesar Telles, one of the members present at the meeting, cautiously agreed that the club could accept the statue of the patron saint of Cuba “so long as the rules of the rule book are met, that this Club is neither political

¹¹⁰ “Club Cubano Inter-Amer.,” *La Prensa*, 7 September 1957, p. 5.

¹¹¹ For more on the history of La Virgen de la Caridad, Afro-Cuban religious practices, and Cuban national identity, see María Elena Díaz, *The Virgin, the King, and the Royal Slaves of El Cobre: Negotiating Freedom in Colonial Cuba, 1670-1780* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*; Thomas A. Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), esp. 16-25; Olga Portuondo Zúñiga, “The Virgin of Charity of Cobre, Cuba’s Patron Saint,” in *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, eds. Aviva Chomsky, Barry Carr, and Pamela Maria Smorkaloff (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Ned Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo* (Chicago: Chicago Press Review, 2004); Michelle A. González, *Afro-Cuban Theology: Religion, Race, Culture, and Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009).

nor religious.” Telles worried that placement of the statue on club property threatened to blur the boundary between religion and politics, on the one hand, and social life and culture, on the other. By insisting that the club’s intentions in this instance were neither political nor religious, members believed that they were still operating within the rules and expectations set forth in the mission statement.¹¹²

Most of the other Cuban social and cultural clubs of New York City celebrated the feast of the patron saint of Cuba with little concern that the musical events they sponsored merged together religious and cultural expression with nationalist sentiment. Reports revealed that the *colonia cubana* demonstrated a great deal of enthusiasm for honoring its patron saint: “Día de la Virgencita prieta...In all of Cuba and everywhere that Cubans who have faith in the Virgencita del Cobre reside, this date will be celebrated, as well as in many homes in New York...The Virgen de la Caridad counts on thousands of devotees, not just Cubans but those of all nationalities.”¹¹³ That this report described the patron saint as “the little dark-skinned Virgin” suggests an awareness of the competing origin myths surrounding the figure’s appearance. The most widely accepted and familiar legend argues that the Virgin figure appeared to three fishermen, one black, one white, and one Indian, on the shores of eastern Cuba. A less well-known version of the legend, one that was first produced by Juan Moreno in El Cobre, a copper mining community of royal slaves, claims instead that the Virgin appeared to two Indian and one black fishermen. The slaves in El Cobre paid direct tribute to the Spanish crown without the oversight of overseers or masters, an uncommon mode of slavery that shared more in

¹¹² Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, September 15, 1958, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

¹¹³ “En Broadway,” *La Prensa*, 8 September 1955, p. 5.

common with the indigenous system of exploitation practiced in parts of South America than with the familiar patterns of plantation life on the rest of the island and Caribbean. Though historian María Elena Díaz has argued that for eighteenth-century royal slaves in El Cobre La Virgen del Cobre symbolized local roots and the local community, by the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries the figure and apparition story had assumed national significance. Cuban New Yorkers and others within the *colonia hispana* continued to reproduce these stories in, perhaps, modified form. By marking the “little Virgin” as “prieta” rather than “negra,” as dark-skinned and visibly non-white but not quite “black,” the description suggests a process of racialization that exchanged the blackness of Juan Moreno’s legend for a racial mixture that would include the white fisherman of the more dominant and enduring origin myth.¹¹⁴

Devotion to the Virgen de la Caridad even prompted Cubans who rarely participated in the social and cultural activities sponsored by the Cuban social and cultural clubs of the city to participate in commemorative events. For example, Mary Lynn Conejo, the daughter of Cubans who migrated to New York City in the 1940s, remembered that her family attended mass each year on the patron saint’s feast day.¹¹⁵ In 1943, the Comité Cubano organized a dance at the Palm Garden featuring musical performances by Alberto Socarrás and his orchestra and poetry recitations by Eusebia Cosme. Proceeds from this event benefitted the “hispanic” Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Milagrosa, located on 114th Street and Seventh Avenue. Cuban promoter Fernando Luis acted as master of ceremonies, and reviews of the event noted that “the flute solos of Socarrás were without a doubt the best artistic detail of the night.” The next day Cuban

¹¹⁴ Díaz, *The Virgin, the King, and the Royal Slaves of El Cobre*.

¹¹⁵ Mary Lynn Conejo, Interview by author, 9 April 2010.

priest, Father P. Manuel Mendiola, celebrated mass at La Milagrosa Catholic Church in honor of La Virgen de la Caridad, and not only was the Cuban consul Cayetano de Quesada in attendance but the celebration also featured the singing of the Cuban national anthem and a salute to the Cuban flag.¹¹⁶ In the mid-to-late 1950s, the Ateneo Cubano, which, one report claimed, “counts on a group of the most distinguished members of the comunidad cubana,” also organized dances in honor of the patron saint of Cuba.¹¹⁷ That the predominantly whites-only Ateneo Cubano also hosted events to commemorate the Virgen de la Caridad indicates as well the whitening or creation of a more *mestizo* apparition story that served to de-emphasize the blackness of the national symbol.

If the number and variety of celebrations organized in honor of Cuban independence are any indication of national symbolism and hero status, then it should

¹¹⁶ “El Comité Cubano celebra festivales en honor de la Virgen de la Caridad,” *La Prensa*, 11 September 1943, p. 8; “El Comité Cubano logró un éxito en el Festival en honor de la Caridad,” *La Prensa*, 13 September 1943, p. 8.

An early report of the event announced that Ritmo Tropical, Carlos Varela and his orchestra from Havana-Madrid, and José Budet y sus Tropicales would also be playing at the dance, but subsequently backed out of the engagement due to illness or travel obligations. The mass at Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, known informally as La Milagrosa Catholic Church, became tradition with reports confirming that La Misa de la Caridad was celebrated throughout the 1940s and 1950s. “Comité Parroquial Cubano,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 7 September 1950, p. 5; *Diario de Nueva York*, 9 September 1950, p. 6; “En Broadway,” *La Prensa*, 8 September 1955, p. 5; Socarrás, “decked out wearing a medallion of the Virgen del Cobre,” was still performing at this event in 1950. Steven Loza, *Tito Puente and the Making of Latin Music* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2).

Father Mendiola also continued to play a role in patriotic and religious celebrations throughout the 1940s and 1950s. For example, of the many “grand parties organized in New York for the celebration of Cuban independence” in 1955, *Una Noche Tropical* stood out as the only event with charitable aims and explicitly political and religious affiliations. Organized by the Consulado General de Cuba and Father Mendiola, from Holy Cross Church on 322 West Forty-third Street, all proceeds from *Una Noche Tropical* went towards supporting the parish’s youth group.

“En Broadway,” *La Prensa*, 6 May 1955, p. 5; “‘Noche Tropical’ a favor de la Banda Infantil,” *La Prensa*, 12 May 1955, p. 6; “‘Noche Tropical’ en la Escuela Holy Cross, hoy,” *La Prensa*, 20 May 1955, p. 6.

¹¹⁷ “El Ateneo Cubano dará un baile hoy,” *La Prensa*, 10 September 1955, p. 6; “Baile del Ateneo Cubano,” *La Prensa*, 8 September 1956, p. 6; “Baile a la Caridad en el Ateneo Cubano,” *La Prensa*, 7 September 1957, p. 5.

In 1956, the Ateneo Cubano hired Oriental Cubana to play at its dance. In 1957, the club prepared an altar adorned with flowers in honor of the Virgen de la Caridad.

come as no surprise that throughout the 1940s and 1950s leaders and members of El Club Cubano devoted themselves to the cause of erecting a monument in New York City in honor of both José Martí *and* Antonio Maceo. That these Afro-Cubans united in memory the significance of Martí and Maceo reveals some of the competing, albeit sometimes silent, discourses about race, nation, and identity that circulated within the *colonia cubana*. Cubans had long recognized Martí as a national hero responsible for uniting black and white Cubans to the cause of Cuban independence from Spain. In his oft-cited political essay “My Race” (1893), Martí explains, “In Cuba, there is no fear of a racial war. Men are more than whites, mulattos, or Negroes. Cubans are more than whites, mulattos, or Negroes. On the field of battle, dying for Cuba, the souls of whites and Negroes have risen together into the air.” Ferrer argues that Martí “professed the equality of all races...boldly asserting that there was no such thing as race.” This understanding of racelessness or, rather, of Cubanness over race, she explains, “was less the product of miscegenation than of masculine heroism and will,” leaving “intact racial categories like white and black” and “exclud[ing] women from the symbolic birth of the nation,” though these were not critiques openly acknowledged by Cuban New Yorkers.¹¹⁸

Known as “the Bronze Titan,” Maceo was a Cuban of color who joined the Cuban independence movement in 1868 as a foot soldier and eventually rose to the rank of general under the auspices of Máximo Gómez, the Dominican-born commander of Cuba’s revolutionary forces during the War of Independence. Maceo’s leadership won him the respect of black and white men. However, Ferrer explains that, unlike white leaders, Maceo “always accorded the questions of emancipation and racial equality the same importance as the question of political independence.” During the Ten Years’ War,

¹¹⁸ Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 4, 126-127.

rumors circulated that Maceo wanted to establish a black republic with himself as absolute ruler. He rejected these accusations and warned that the rebel cause would suffer because of “the politics of selfishness and racism,” a prediction that shared much in common with El Club Cubano’s eventual inability to secure a public memorial for the black general.¹¹⁹

That leaders and members of El Club Cubano aimed to erect a public memorial in honor of *both* Martí and Maceo confirms, in many ways, the club’s social vision of racial inclusion and openness. Discussions and debates regarding the monument, however, never made mention of Maceo’s blackness. In fact, no reference to his color ever made it into club records. But the link between Martí and Maceo can certainly be traced to the colonial legacies of Spanish and African mixture on the island. When asked what he missed most about his homeland, a Cuban journalist named Gonzalo de Palacio, now residing in New York City, noted that Cubans are “proud of the Spanish and African heritage and have a sense of justice for those who founded their nation.”¹²⁰ Not only did a statue in honor of Martí and Maceo reflect the cross-racial revolutionary movement of nineteenth-century Cuba, but for leaders and members of El Club Cubano, it also reflected contemporary and everyday concerns with racial discrimination, exclusion, and erasure.

¹¹⁹ Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 4, 84, 60.

For more on Maceo’s leadership and legacy, see Philip S. Foner, *Antonio Maceo: The “Bronze Titan” of Cuba’s Struggle for Independence* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977); José Luciano Franco, *Antonio Maceo: Apuntes para una historia de su vida* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1989); Helg, *Our Rightful Share*; De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*; Rebecca J. Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008); John Lawrence Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba, 1895-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

¹²⁰ “Dice Nuestra Comunidad,” *La Prensa*, 9 April 1955, p. 4.

With countless social and fundraising events organized to achieve this goal along with the involvement of and support from consular and local political officials in New York City and Cuba, to say that club affairs and, in many ways, club morale hinged on the successful erection of a Monumento Martí-Maceo would be no overstatement.¹²¹ Just a few months after El Club Cubano's foundation, club leaders began their efforts to secure a memorial for Martí and Maceo. An internal memorandum presented to the Board of Directors from the president of the *Sección de Asuntos Económicos* on December 6, 1946, in reference to an event organized in honor of the consul general, reveals some of the inner workings of the club's event planning agenda. The guidelines agreed upon by the committee members organizing this celebration demonstrate the interconnectedness of popular culture and the mass culture industries, Panamericanism, and symbolic nationalism within the Cuban-American cultural landscape of New York City:

Said event should be in a first-class place, preferably downtown...The artists that participate should be professionals...Two speakers with well-known influence in the Inter-American opinion should be invited...The entrance fee will go towards covering expenses and the remainder will be the initial funds for the monuments...At said event the plans for the monuments should be revealed but there should not be a special collection.¹²²

The following year, El Club Cubano organized a musical event at Audubon Hall featuring Miguelito Valdés as the master of ceremonies and performances by “well-known artists,” such as Olga Guillot, Chelo Villareal, Dima y Delina, Willie Capo, Chano Pozo, and the orchestras of Frank García, Marcelino Guerra, and Cuba-Rico. Reports

¹²¹ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 13 July 1950, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 30 August 1951, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

¹²² Memo, Box 5, Folder 1 1945-1947, 6 December 1946, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

announced that proceeds from the event would go towards the monument for Martí and Maceo and projected that “given the character of the party and the work put in by the organizers, a large crowd is expected to attend said event.” That month’s club newsletter offered appreciative remarks to “our great Babalú” and other performers as well as to Mr. Vincent Michael Lee of Theater, Inc., who “without being from our homeland” helped choreograph this fundraiser. But with that statement of thanks also came forceful admonishment: “It’s a good time to mention Mr. Lee’s gesture so that it may serve as a lesson to many Cubans mad with patriotism, but of no action...[especially] those who boast about contributing and those that wish to have their image printed in newspapers just for show.”¹²³ Here, club leaders called members to action and asked that they abandon patriotic rhetoric as means of personal gain.

Words of support and encouragement from consular officials as well as local government officials in Cuba also poured in throughout the club’s long campaign for the monument. The project of erecting the Monumento Martí-Maceo not only mattered to Cuban New Yorkers but also took on diplomatic purpose with numerous government officials in Cuba indicating their interest in the memorial. In November 1947, El Club Cubano received a letter from Consul General de Cuba Reinaldo Fernández Rebull pledging his cooperation with the club’s initial pursuit of erecting a bust of Antonio Maceo in a public place in the city.¹²⁴ El Club Cubano received letters from several

¹²³ “Velada del Club Cubano Inter-Americano,” *La Prensa*, 3 July 1947, p. 4; “Velada pro Martí y Maceo el miércoles en esta,” *La Prensa*, 7 July 1947, p. 6; Monthly bulletin, Box 15, folder 7, Club Cubano Inter-Americano, 1946-1948, July 1947, Jesús Colón Papers.

¹²⁴ Letter, Box 5, Folder 1, Correspondence 1945-1947, 15 November 1947, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers. Relations with Consul Rebull had been warm since 1945 when club president Generoso Pedro sent the consul a handwritten letter inviting him to a celebration in honor of Antonio Maceo in the social hall belonging to the Club Obrero Español located at 1490 Madison Avenue. This was

members of the Cuban Senate and House of Representatives, and each letter expressed “great interest in such a patriotic and noble desire” and echoed themes of “cooperation and affection for the [Martí-Maceo] project.”¹²⁵ Francisco Orue, mayor of Maríanao, wrote to club president Narciso Saavedra in May 1951, stating, “I pray that success meets the labor of your members and so that the monument to Martí-Maceo in that city is soon a reality, like an eternal public exhibition, of the democratic relations that unite the countries of the Americas.”¹²⁶

Diplomatic excursions to and from Cuba aimed at raising support for the monument also took place throughout the 1940s and 1950s with members of El Club Cubano leading the patriotic cause. In 1948, El Club Cubano hosted Cuban journalist Pedro Portuondo Cala during his visit to New York City where he planned to meet with mayor O’Dwyer on behalf of Havana mayor Nicolás Castellanos. He also hoped to participate in “activities related to the project of erecting a monument in this city in honor of the leaders of Cuban independence José Martí and Antonio Maceo.” The club organized a “magnificent buffet” in honor of Portuondo’s visit, and the honoree spoke

apparently the club’s first social event. Letter, Box 5, Folder 1, 1945-1947, 1 December 1945, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers. See footnote 11.

¹²⁵ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 7 March 1949, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 14 March 1949, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 31 March 1949, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

My research has not uncovered the actual letters received by El Club Cubano, nor do existing records specify which Cuban politicians wrote in with support for the Martí-Maceo project. Rather, these Board of Director meeting minutes mention the continued arrival of letters broadly characterized by club leaders in the manner described above.

¹²⁶ Letter, Box 5, Folder 2, Correspondence 1951, 1953, 3 May 1951, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

about the various activities taking place in Cuba on behalf of the memorial.¹²⁷ In April 1949, members of the Comité Pro Monumento a Martí-Maceo of New York City and Havana formed a joint commission and met at the offices of the American Embassy in Havana to discuss with the ambassador the plans and objectives of erecting the monument in “perpetual memory” of both men. Forming part of the commission were El Club Cubano member and Puerto Rican activist Francisca Cardenal and Cuban delegates Coronel Eliseo Figueroa, Captain Rosendo Campos Marquetti, Delia Vizcaino, Pablo Almeida, and Doctor Ramón Cabrera Torres. One report explained that mayor O’Dwyer, aware of this trip, “promised utmost cooperation in achieving this patriotic desire.”¹²⁸

With progress on acquiring the memorial stalled the following year, club leaders discussed the possibility of sending a delegation to Cuba to solicit a special credit from the Cuban government to cover the cost of the Martí-Maceo monument. Club member Alberto Baños objected to the idea, suggesting instead that they contact an individual close to the government to determine the best moment to approach the Cuban officials. Baños’s advice went unheeded, and the club voted to send a delegation led by Francisca Cardenal to Cuba with the costs of the trip paid for with funds for the monument.¹²⁹ News reports indicated that “during this patriotic pilgrimage” Mrs. Cardenal successfully discussed with Cuban government officials the possibility of erecting a monument in

¹²⁷ “Portuondo Cala fue homenajado por el Club Cubano Interamericano,” 13 March 1948, *Liberación*, p. 9.

¹²⁸ “Gestiones en Cuba Pro Monumento a Martí en Nueva York,” *La Prensa*, 4 April 1949, p. 3; The Comité Pro Monumento a Martí y Maceo seems to have been a separate commission dedicated to raising funds for the monument. It appears, however, that many members of El Club Cubano formed part of the committee, including Francisca Cardenal and Narciso Saavedra, in addition to many club events and activities aimed at raising money for the cause. For more on Francisca Cardenal and the role of women in El Club Cubano, see Mirabal, “Melba Alvarado,” 124-125.

¹²⁹ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 31 March 1952, Club Cubano Inter-American Papers.

honor of Martí and Maceo for the purposes “of fostering tourism between the social sectors in Cuba and New York.”¹³⁰ In June 1951, Narciso Saavedra traveled to Cuba on an official visit as president of El Club Cubano, where he visited the Senate to monitor the progress of the proposed Ley del Monumento Pro Martí-Maceo. He also used his visit to inquire about the club’s eligibility for La Orden de Carlos Manuel de Céspedes.¹³¹

Leaders and members of El Club Cubano determined to secure a public memorial in honor of Martí and Maceo as testimony to their heroism and to honor the roles both men played in the founding of the Cuban republic. Within the private space of its clubhouse, El Club Cubano managed to procure smaller, but no less loved and protected, statues of the two patriots. For example, in 1950, one club member complained that the bust of General Maceo had been placed “in a very bad spot” in the social hall, and those present at the meeting “promised to correct the mistake.”¹³² A bust of José Martí also

¹³⁰ “Club Cubano Interamericano,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 1 May 1951, p. 5.

In 1951, Ambassador Luis Machado notified club leaders that the *excursionistas* travelling to Washington, D.C. would be received with a reception at the Cuban embassy. While in Washington, D.C., the *excursionistas* visited the Capitol Building and various other federal buildings and traveled to Howard University where they placed flowers before the busts of Martí and Maceo. Later that evening, they attended a banquet hosted in their honor by members of the Club Cubano Inter-Americano of Washington, D.C. Not surprisingly, Mrs. Cardenal hoped to erect a similar landmark in New York City.

Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 30 June 1951, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers. Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 13 July 1950, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 12 July 1951, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; “Club Cubano Inter-Americano,” *La Prensa*, 19 May 1951, p. 6; “Excursion Patriótica del Club Cubano,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 22 May 1951, p. 5.

According to the *Atlanta Daily World*, “about 40 members of the Cuban-American Good-will Association” visited Washington, D.C. in 1950 “to get a close-up view of the operation of the U.S. government and to obtain first-hand knowledge of the social, economic and political life of American citizens, especially the minority groups.” During this trip, the delegation of Cubans, both black and white, participated in ceremonies at Howard, a Franciscan monastery, and various foreign embassies and “had dinner at the Club Cubano Interamericano Club house and attended the Cleveland-Washington baseball game.” The report explained that this was the fourth annual visit to this country by the Good-will Association and that it was sponsored by Pedro Portuondo Cala of the Cuban newspaper, *El País*.

¹³¹ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 30 June 1951, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

¹³² Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 9 February 1950, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

adorned the club's social hall thanks to a gift donated by Cuba's Secretary of Education in 1951.¹³³

City-wide efforts to erect a public memorial persisted throughout the 1950s with the results not entirely approved of or representative of efforts made by members of El Club Cubano. A lengthy article written by Félix Lizaso from Havana appeared in *La Prensa* on the one-hundredth anniversary of Martí's death, reflecting on the great need for a monument of the poet and political leader in New York City. Lizaso explained that the Cubans of New York have wanted a statue of Martí since 1948, but he credited the Ateneo Cubano de Nueva York rather than El Club Cubano for making this project a public cause and bringing it to the attention of Cubans on the island. He also argued that the statue would be best placed in the Plaza de las Americas at the end of the Avenue of the Americas between the already existing statues of Simón Bolívar and José de San Martín. Lizaso proposed a plan that would finally bring to New York City a much-deserved memorial in honor of Martí, suggesting that Cubans on the island provide the statue and that the United States provide not only the location of the monument but also the granite base on which it would stand.¹³⁴ To this end, the Ateneo Cubano celebrated an event at its clubhouse in honor of José Martí's birthday that not only "took the first steps towards the construction of a monument in honor of Martí in New York," but also became "a continental event" featuring representatives from Mexico, Chile, the United States, and other countries coming together to give the project "hemispheric flavor."¹³⁵

¹³³ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 13 September 1951, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

¹³⁴ "Un homenaje Americano a José Martí, en su centenario," *La Prensa*, 19 May 1951, p. 4.

¹³⁵ "Tributo a Martí en N.Y. tuvo viso continental," *Diario de Nueva York*, 29 January 1952, p. 3.

Then, in 1956, José Martí finally got his statue at the head of the Avenue of the Americas, but the announcement in *La Prensa* intimated disappointment on the part of members of El Club Cubano: “Dr. Narciso Saavedra as well as other leaders of the Club Cubano Interamericano of the Bronx...[have] patriotically put aside whatever differences may have existed in honor of the homeland and the unique figure that symbolizes it.” It is likely that the disagreement in question concerned the club’s mission to erect a monument in honor of José Martí *and* Antonio Maceo, a project more representative of the black and white leaders and soldiers of Cuba’s nineteenth-century cross-racial revolutionary movement. With few other options at hand, club leaders suggested that perhaps the New York City Art Commission could place bas-reliefs of Maceo and Máximo Gómez on the pedestal of the existing statue. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, El Club Cubano had celebrated Antonio Maceo separately from José Martí, and this homage continued into the late 1950s, perhaps as a response to Maceo’s removal from the monument.¹³⁶ These acts notwithstanding, here is perhaps the clearest example of El Club Cubano’s avoidance of direct confrontation or protest on the basis of color or racial discrimination. As in the early republic period in Cuba, when political mobilization on the basis of race came under attack as unpatriotic and “un-Cuban,” leaders of El Club

¹³⁶ “Fijan sitio para la estatua de Martí,” *La Prensa*, 30 April 1956, p. 1; When the statue was finally completed by sculptor Anna Hyatt Huntington in 1959, it was presented without dedication or dates. According to Antonio Lopez, “for ‘security reasons,’ the statue was stored in a garage until 1965, when it was presented without ceremony (no Cubans were invited to participate), and without dedication. The Batista regime paid \$100,000 for the pedestal and landscaping.” Antonio Lopez, “Chronicling Empire: José Martí on the Avenue of the Americas,” in *The Cuban Republic and José Martí: Reception and Use of a National Symbol*, eds. Mauricio A. Font and Alfonso W. Quiroz, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006).

Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 6 June 1949, Club Cubano Inter-American Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 7, Libro de Actos 1957-1958, 14 November 1957, Club Cubano Inter-American Papers. See, also, footnote 124.

Cubano became “patriotic” by acquiescing to the preferences of white Cubans and quietly abandoning their pursuit of a dual memorial representative of all Cubans.¹³⁷

Pamphlets and bulletins printed and distributed by Cuban social clubs and cultural organizations as well as advertisements and announcements published in the Spanish-language press contributed to a growing sense of *cubanidad* particular to the residents of “Cuban New York.”¹³⁸ Local businesses, government officials, and musicians commonly placed advertisements in the souvenir programs and pamphlets distributed by the sponsoring organization or club at their social and cultural events. For example, in 1946, Marcelino Guerra and his band’s pianist Gilberto Ayala placed a half-page ad in the souvenir journal of the *Primera Soirée Bailable en Conmemoración del Día de la Raza*. The plain but deliberate advertisement demonstrated support for the event, linked the two musicians to El Club Cubano, and aimed to increase business for the band: the two musicians sent greetings “to the Club Cubano Inter-Americano on its first anniversary and [we] offer the services of [our] orchestra for any type of festival.” Machito y sus Afro-Cubans placed a full-page ad in the same souvenir that stated plainly: “Greetings to the *colonia hispana*.”¹³⁹ Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, El Club Cubano published a monthly bulletin detailing club affairs and providing club members with information on

¹³⁷ Helg, *Our Rightful Share*; De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*.

¹³⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso Press, 1991). Anderson defined the nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6).

¹³⁹ Souvenir Journal, Box 5, Folder 1, Correspondence 1945-1947, 12 October 1946, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

upcoming social and club events. These monthly bulletins also featured advertisements placed by musicians and local businesses, a marketing strategy aimed at a very small but targeted audience and also suggestive of how these popular musicians and businesses regarded their relationship with the club and its members. In December 1947, for example, Machito placed an ad in the club's monthly bulletin greeting the *colonia hispana*, and in August 1958 Patricia's Record Shop, located at 353 West Forty-seventh Street on the corner of Ninth Avenue, placed a quarter-page ad in the club's monthly bulletin highlighting the availability of recordings by Benny Moré, Machito, Vicentico Valdés, Tito Puente, and Tito Rodríguez.¹⁴⁰

Leaders and members of El Club Cubano recognized the need for effective marketing, establishing a Comisión de Prensa y Propaganda and advertising many of their social and cultural events in both *La Prensa* and *Diario de Nueva York* and on the radio in New York City. Often when planning their social and cultural events throughout the 1940s and 1950s, club leaders discussed "the imperious need for double propaganda on radio and in the press."¹⁴¹ Problems and complaints with regards to advertising sometimes developed into matters of contentious debate at Board of Directors meetings. In 1949, one club member complained that the newspaper advertisement announcing an upcoming dance had appeared only the day prior to the event. Mr. De la Paz, president of the Comisión de Prensa y Propaganda, countered that the radio ad had aired for several

¹⁴⁰ Monthly newsletter, Box 5, Folder 11, Boletín Oficial December 1947, Club Cubano Inter-American Papers; Monthly newsletter, Box 5, Folder 11, Boletín Oficial August 1958, Club Cubano Inter-American Papers.

¹⁴¹ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 7, Board of Directors Meeting Minutes, 26 July 1957, Club Cubano Inter-American Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 13 September 1951, Club Cubano Inter-American Papers.

days and argued that radio ads are “more effective than newspaper ones.”¹⁴² But El Club Cubano did not rely exclusively on mass media outlets to advertise its events. The club also hung signs and posters and distributed small leaflets, or throw-aways, throughout the city to publicize upcoming activities. With posters and throw-aways printed in both Spanish and English, El Club Cubano hoped to attract attendees from within the *colonia hispana* as well as the city writ large, and that included those of the non-Spanish-speaking world. Discussions regarding publicity for the *Ritmo de Otoños* dance featuring Arsenio Rodríguez resulted in the following advertising strategy: “Make one hundred posters in English and two hundred in Spanish. And the throw-aways should be English on one side and Spanish on the other....Let’s advertise the dance in the newspapers *La Prensa* and *Diario de Nueva York* and on the radio.”¹⁴³

The Spanish-language newspapers of the city benefitted financially and by association from their relationships with Cuban social clubs like El Club Cubano and the Ateneo Cubano. For example, at a Board of Directors meeting in April 1958, leaders of El Club Cubano responded to an inquiry from *Diario de Nueva York* regarding the club’s interest in placing an advertisement in a souvenir pamphlet for an upcoming event sponsored by the newspaper. After a few minutes of discussion, club leaders decided to place a \$15 half-page advertisement in the newspaper’s souvenir *Journal de Periodistas del Diario*. Yet the relationship between the Spanish-language press and the Cuban social clubs of the city appears to have been mutually beneficial. At the very same meeting, the club ledger reveals that the club received complementary tickets from the

¹⁴² Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Directors Meeting Minutes, 7 November 1949, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

¹⁴³ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 13 September 1951, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

newspaper to its *Baile Anual de Primavera*.¹⁴⁴ The relationship between El Club Cubano and *Diario de Nueva York* was, indeed, interconnected as when the club, described as an “institution of culture and social solidarity,” placed a dual-purpose advertisement congratulating the newspaper on its second anniversary and inviting the *colonia hispana* to its clubhouse in the Bronx to celebrate its fifth anniversary.¹⁴⁵

Newspapers, however, did more than profit directly from advertisement revenues, though this too was a critical component of the relationship, as both *Diario de Nueva York* and *La Prensa* wrote to El Club Cubano to confirm that the club would be placing its annual Christmas greeting in the newspapers.¹⁴⁶ Newspapers hoped to become an informational resource for club members and potential audiences for club events and activities. For instance, in 1952, the newspaper *Ecos de Nueva York* wrote to El Club Cubano offering to put “at our disposal its pages and asking for our cooperation so that they can print on them our weekly social activities.”¹⁴⁷ The social clubs of the city advertised their upcoming events and activities not only to ensure that club members stay informed but also as a means of recruiting new members and supporters from within the *colonia cubana* and across the *colonia hispana*. In short, the Cuban social clubs and

¹⁴⁴ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 7, Libro de Actos 1957-1958, 23 April 1958, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 7, Libro de Actos 1957-1958, 27 March 1957, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

¹⁴⁵ Advertisement, *Diario de Nueva York*, 15 September 1950, p. 7.

¹⁴⁶ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Directors Meeting Minutes, 12 December 1950, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers. At the Board of Directors meeting, club leaders agreed to place the ads “as we always do” in both the *Diario de Nueva York* and *La Prensa*. Each ad cost \$21.50. Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Directors Meeting Minutes, 13 December 1951, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers. At this Board of Directors meeting, club leaders once again agreed to place their annual holiday greeting advertisements in *La Prensa* and *Diario de Nueva York* on the condition that they spend no more than \$40 for both.

¹⁴⁷ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Directors Meeting Minutes, 14 April 1952, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

Spanish-language newspapers of New York City interacted to create and document a public sphere reflective of the ways in which club members, specifically, and the *colonia cubana* and *colonia hispana*, more generally, spent their leisure time. From this vantage point, the associational life of the city emphasized entertainment and dancing, close relationships with Afro-Cuban musical performers, and the continued observance of Cuban national patriotic holidays. Advertisements in these newspapers not only indicate the rich variety of events and activities available to the *colonia hispana* but also suggest that rivalry likely existed among the various Cuban clubs of the city, with many of the clubs competing for audiences to attend events hosted on the same days and for similar purposes.

The relationship between the Spanish-language newspapers and Cuban social clubs of the city extended beyond finances and crossed over into shared involvement in social and cultural events. In 1949, *Diario de Nueva York* invited a member of El Club Cubano's leadership to be a juror for its *Reina de Simpatía* contest. Meeting minutes indicate that Mrs. De La Paz agreed to participate in the newspaper's fundraising event.¹⁴⁸ That same year, the Comité de Prensa y Propaganda organized a dinner-dance in honor of Afro-Cuban boxer Kid Gavilán and the Spanish-language newspaper press of the city. A change to Kid Gavilán's fight schedule forced club leaders to postpone the event and place announcements in "the daily press" alerting potential guests of the

¹⁴⁸ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 16 June 1949, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; See, also, Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 30 September 1952, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

cancellation. El Club Cubano, however, resolved to keep the social hall set up to receive guests and prepared to offer dancing “with the victrola.”¹⁴⁹

Other aspects of the increasing presence of the mass culture industries dominated discussions among the leadership of El Club Cubano, who recognized the growing centrality of television in the everyday lives of its club members, specifically, and in U.S. society, generally.¹⁵⁰ As a result, club leaders discussed at great lengths the purchase of a television set for the clubhouse in the spring of 1950. In fact, the process of purchasing the club’s new television set was so well-documented that the entire process undoubtedly reveals just how much access to popular culture, in all its forms, mattered to the success of the club and the satisfaction of club members. The process itself was fraught with fundraising issues and concerns over the cost of “such an expensive appliance.” For example, the Comisión de Actos Sociales organized a *Baile del Televisión* to raise money for the purchase of the television to avoid having to ask club members for direct contributions. The dance succeeded in raising a considerable amount of money, and the

¹⁴⁹ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 11 April 1949, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 25 April 1949, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; “Homenaje del Club Cubano Interamericano,” *La Prensa*, 9 May 1949, p. 5.

¹⁵⁰ For more on the role of radio and television in American society, see also, Lizabeth Cohen, “Encountering Mass Culture at the Grassroots: The Experience of Chicago Workers in the 1920s,” *American Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (March 1989): 6-33; Susan Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination from Amos ‘n’ Andy and Edward R. Murrow to Wolfman Jack and Howard Stern* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1999); Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); James L. Baughman, *Same Time, Same Station: Creating American Television, 1948-1961* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); Eric Burns, *Invasion of the Mind Snatchers: Television’s Conquest of America in the Fifties* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010).

For more on the various debates on the role of popular culture in American society, see also, Theodor Adorno, “Culture Industry Revisited,” *New German Critique* 6 (Autumn 1975): 12-19; Stuart Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing ‘the Popular,’” in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. John Storey (London: Longman, 2009); Lipsitz, *Time Passages*; Richard M. Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Verso Press, 1996); Michael Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Cook, “The Return of the Culture Industry.”

club's monthly newsletter announced that "soon we will hear everyone's happy exclamations because of the purchase of the television."¹⁵¹ Club member Alberto Baños suggested that the club purchase the television set at a store where he had been offered a twenty-percent discount. Club leaders charged a five-member committee with the task of making a recommendation to the president on which "aparato" to purchase. After its product research, the committee determined that the club should purchase a 16" Emerson brand television from La Casa Sigue [sic] at the price of \$311.50, and by the summer of 1950 club leaders had installed the set in the clubhouse.¹⁵² Eight years later, the club wanted an upgrade. Though fundraising efforts began in June 1958, the *Baile de la Televisión* held in the fall of that year failed to raise enough money and forced the club to use funds in its treasury to purchase its much-desired 27" television set.¹⁵³

The public face of El Club Cubano, as represented by formal patriotic celebrations, festive dances, and fundraising events, not only mattered in terms of helping shape club members' identities but also in terms of helping constitute the broader Cuban-

¹⁵¹ Monthly newsletter, Box 5, Folder 11, Boletín Oficial, February and March 1950, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

¹⁵² Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 26 March 1950, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 30 March 1950, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 13 July 1950, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

Casa Siegel was a well-known record and electronics store on 1393-95 Fifth Avenue near 115th Street.

¹⁵³ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 7, Libro de Actos 1957-1958, Board of Directors Meeting, 16 June 1958, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, 11 November 1958, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, 18 December 1958, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

In 1952, the Palladium Ballroom hosted a dance on Easter Sunday that featured the orchestras of Tito Rodríguez, Damirón y Chapuseaux, the "great" Arsenio Rodríguez, Josecito Román, and Pucho and promised to give away a "precious" television set valued at \$500. "El Palladium regalará el domingo un 'set' de televisión," *La Prensa*, 12 April 1952, p. 5.

Competition between radio and television intensified in the early 1950s, and performers had to be careful not to ally themselves with one medium over another. In 1951, Xavier Cugat made negative comments about radio while appearing on a television show. As a result, radio stations boycotted his records. "Proscriben los discos de Cugat en una emisora local," *Diario de Nueva York*, 7 June 1951, p. 3.

American cultural landscape of New York City. Yet, these public events and activities were also the means to the more private end of facilitating members' socialization among each other, in this case to watch television. Members of El Club Cubano likely gathered together around their newly purchased television set to watch professional boxing matches and baseball games. Not only did these televised sporting events feature the participation of a relatively large number of Cubans of color, but Afro-Cuban boxers such as Kid Gavilán and Nino Valdés often attended events held in their honor at El Club Cubano.¹⁵⁴ Socialization within the private space of the club and principally among club members mattered, and both the radio and television helped encourage this mode of engagement. For example, in 1952, club leaders also raised funds for the purchase of a Victrola for the clubhouse. At a dance held in honor of the *excursionistas*, the club managed to raise \$102, a good sum of money but not enough to purchase the radio, according to Melba Alvarado, who suggested that they pay the remainder in installments. The following month, the club organized a dance at the Tropicana Club in the Bronx with proceeds going towards the purchase of a Radiola.¹⁵⁵ In many ways, then, print media as well as radio and television, which eventually became the preferred mode of entertainment, helped forge a Spanish-speaking public.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the Spanish-language press in New York City recognized the growing Cuban presence in the region. A multi-part story appearing in *La*

¹⁵⁴ “Adviertan a los periodicos sobre la competencia que ofrece la televisión,” *La Prensa*, 22 April 1954, p. 1. This article warned that although newspaper circulation and advertising had increased in 1953, publishers worried that television might threaten that prosperity in the coming years.

¹⁵⁵ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 28 August 1952, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 30 September 1952, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

Prensa in 1943 directly discussed the “problem of Latin American minorities in the United States.” The “problem,” the story argued, concerned Cubans and natives of the West Indies in Florida, New York, and New Jersey, Central and South Americans in California, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania, and Mexicans in Arizona, California, Illinois, Michigan, New Mexico, New York, and Texas. If some foreigners enjoyed generous scholarships and other forms of support from government and private institutions thanks to the Office of the Coordinator of Interamerican Affairs, then countless others, this writer concluded, “are an isolated population...whose presence is considered a charge, a problem, a bother.” Even more to the point, the article explained that “blacks of foreign extraction...retained their status as minorities for long periods.”¹⁵⁶ The story here was not one of good neighborly relations but one of ethnic and racial exclusion and inequalities, evidence that the interamerican interests of the period had obvious limitations.

Artists, in particular, drew the attention of Cuban government officials in 1953, with one news report explaining that any individual requesting a passport and claiming to be an artist now required official certification from the Sociedad de Artistas confirming “not only his status as a member but also the status of his morals” as well as a contract approved by the society. This change came as a result of charges that “people of questionable morality have left Cuba with an artist’s identification card,” likely a veiled mode of referring to Cubans of color. Speaking about the relationship between race and changes in migration laws, Afro-Cuban percussionist Armando Sánchez explained, “At

¹⁵⁶ “Las minorías latinoamericanas en EE. UU.,” *La Prensa*, 10 June 1943, p. 4; “Las minorías latinoamericanas en EE. UU.,” *La Prensa*, 11 June 1943, p. 4.

The newspaper did not list a specific author for the report other than the Oficina de Información Obrera y Social, Union Panamericana.

that time it was very hard for black people to get a visa. You have to have more papers than a white guy would. That's the way it was, it was a reality."¹⁵⁷ Despite these types of claims, Ministro de Estado Dr. Miguel Ángel Campa explained that the change aimed to guarantee that Cuban artists abroad "receive the same treatment that Cuba offers to foreigners" and that Cuban President Fulgencio Batista "has particular interest in defending the legitimate interests of the Cuban artistic class."¹⁵⁸

What was a slow trickle in the early 1950s had by 1954 become a steady stream of permanent and temporary migration to the United States mostly due to "political uncertainty and economic contraction" on the island.¹⁵⁹ The United States had become for Cubans "the new 'land of promise,'" according to one reporter who detailed the status of fifty-eight Cubans who had recently sought exile in various foreign embassies because of political differences with the government. In 1952, nearly 3,500 Cubans obtained permanent resident visas to the United States. In 1954, that number rose to just over four thousand, a 13.4 percent increase. Over thirty-three thousand Cubans registered for temporary travel visas, which usually remained valid for two years, in 1952, and another forty thousand registered for the same type of visa the following year, a 17.5 percent

¹⁵⁷ Armando Sánchez, 19 September 1995, David Carp Collection.

¹⁵⁸ "Cuba establece regulaciones para conceder pasaporte a los artistas," *La Prensa*, 27 October 1953, p. 5.

On the U.S. side of the migration process, some artists still experienced difficulty. Most notable is the case of Celia Cruz who reportedly had problems entering the U.S. because she had been a singer with a radio station in Havana that was branded communist. To be granted access into the country, Celia had to prove to U.S. authorities, specifically the U.S. consul in Havana, that she herself had never been a member of the Communist Party. "Disco de Oro a Celia Cruz en N. York," *La Prensa*, 9 April 1957, p. 3; "Celia Cruz y Conjunto Cortijo en el festival del Sábado 20 en S. Nicholas," *La Prensa*, 12 April 1957, p. 5.

¹⁵⁹ For more on Cuban migration to the U.S. before 1959, specifically in relation to what has been called "a legacy of political exile," see Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*; Masud-Piloto, *From Welcomed Exiles to Illegal Immigrants*; Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*; María de los Angeles Torres, *In the Land of the Mirrors: Cuban Exile Politics in the United States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001); Guillermo J. Grenier and Lisandro Pérez, *The Legacy of Exile: Cubans in the United States* (Boston: Pearson Education, 2003).

increase. The reporter calculated that “during the past year daily migration to the U.S., in one form or another, stands at 121 Cubans” and reasoned that “many of the temporary migrants remain illegally in this country.”¹⁶⁰

Political debate infiltrated the social and cultural landscape of “Cuban New York” much more forcefully in the mid-to-late 1950s than it had in earlier years. In 1955, the Comité Obrero Democrático de Exilados y Emigrados Cubanos, with offices on 280 Dean Street in Brooklyn, organized an event described as “an affair of unity and reaffirmation of Cuban democracy” at the White Hall Hotel on Broadway and 100th Street. An announcement explained that the event would feature speeches by Cuban and American democrats.¹⁶¹ Members of the Movimiento 26 de Julio in New York City, a local branch of the Cuban revolutionary movement organized by Fidel Castro, gathered at the Palm Garden for an afternoon event commemorating Cuban independence, while other members traveled to Washington, D.C., marching in front of the White House to protest U.S. aid to the Batista regime.¹⁶² With revolution on the island fully underway by

¹⁶⁰ “58 cubanos han ido al exilio por oponerse políticamente al Gbno.,” *La Prensa*, 31 March 1954, p. 3.

Increased migration from Cuba to the New York-New Jersey region was not without its problems. In 1954, six Cuban men were arrested for working illegally in a chair factory in Bloomfield, New Jersey. The six Cubans were in the country as temporary visitors, and one of the accused admitted to entering the U.S. seven years earlier with a false birth certificate. Also, in 1954, two Cuban men, lodging at the White Hall Hotel, were arrested for helping ship weapons to Cuba for the purposes of bringing down the Batista government. Police reportedly found fifty antitank rifles, forty mortars, twenty-five rifles, a thousand hand grenades, three boxes of ammunition for machine guns, four boxes of missiles for antitank rifles, and twenty-four boxes of ammunition at a storefront rented by the men at 173 West Ninety-third Street. In 1956, the Department of Immigration expedited orders of arrest against 676 Cuban nationals and of those 138 were deported. “Arrestan Cubanos en Newark, N.J.,” *La Prensa*, 18 April 1954, p. 2; “Dice el fiscal que cubanos detenidos han hecho embarques de armas a Cuba,” *La Prensa*, 7 March 1954, p. 1; “138 Cubanos Deportados de los EE. UU.,” *La Prensa*, 28 April 1956, p. 2.

¹⁶¹ “Mitin cubano,” *La Prensa*, 9 March 1955, p. 5.

¹⁶² “Movimiento 26 de Julio,” *La Prensa*, 21 May 1957, p. 2.

For an overview of the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and Fidel Castro’s Movimiento 26 de Julio, see Thomas Paterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (New

1958, the Movimiento 26 de Julio hosted what was too plainly described as a “patriotic event” at its headquarters on Seventieth Street and Amsterdam Avenue.¹⁶³

Political turmoil on the island often manifested itself among Cubans living in New York City in small ways as some migrants chose to distance themselves from those who had come to New York City specifically for political reasons. Even before the triumph of the Revolution of 1959, *exile* had become a marker of difference among Cuban New Yorkers. Mary Lynn Conejo, whose mother settled in New York City in 1946 because of health problems and whose father came to New York City in 1949 after he lost his job working on trolley cars in Cuba, revealed that her parents distinguished themselves from Cubans who came to the United States because of the Revolution 1959: “They would say, ‘we didn’t come because of politics.’ It wasn’t a prejudice but a distinction. It was important for them to not be a part of that.” When asked by a reporter for *Diario de Nueva York* to explain why they migrated to the New York City in 1952, none of the Cubans surveyed mentioned political motivations. Enrique Varona revealed that he had been in New York City since 1923 with the intention of working here for just a few years but stayed on longer to make more money. Another respondent, Tomás Rodríguez, reasoned that he “descended from adventurers” and took to the sea landing in this country and finding work as a paper exporter.¹⁶⁴

York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Julia E. Sweig, *Inside the Cuban Revolution: Fidel Castro and the Urban Underground* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Anthony DePalma, *The Man Who Invented Fidel: Castro, Cuba, and Herbert L. Matthews of The New York Times* (New York: Public Affairs, 2007).

¹⁶³ “Club Cubano Interamericano,” *La Prensa*, 22 May 1958, p. 2.

¹⁶⁴ Mary Lynn Conejo, Interview by author, 9 April 2010; “Entrevistas Brevisimas,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 4 January 1952, p. 8.

With more and more Cubans arriving in New York City on a daily basis in the late 1950s, Cuban social clubs like El Club Cubano and the Ateneo Cubano saw changes to their memberships and club agendas. El Club Cubano responded to the increased Cuban presence in 1957 by organizing a Comité de Orientación “so that we can give information to those who arrive in this country.”¹⁶⁵ As much as club leaders hoped to distance themselves from the armed insurrection brewing against the U.S.-supported Batista regime, political differences among club members seemed to infiltrate club events. A disturbance broke out at a costume dance organized by the club in March 1957 that featured music by Arsenio Rodríguez, forcing club leaders to set up a commission to investigate the club members who were involved in the incident. While meeting minutes do not reveal the exact cause of the disorder, that its intensity prompted club leaders to not only hire a private police service to supervise its next dance but also to send a letter to Batista notifying him of the incident suggests that it was both violent and politically motivated. Two club members, Juan Oleno and Miguel Ángel Suarez, accepted blame for the incident and club president Melba Alvarado warned that “this matter cannot be forgotten.”¹⁶⁶ The Ateneo Cubano, for its part, welcomed a number of Cubans now residing in New York City from Puerto Padre into its club during a “mass inscription ceremony.” To this end, the club celebrated a reception in honor of Aristides Labrada,

¹⁶⁵ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 7, Libro de Actos 1957-1958, 14 November 1957, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

¹⁶⁶ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 7, Libro de Actos 1957-1958, 2 April 1957, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 1, Libro de Actos 1957-1958, 14 May 1957, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 7, Libro de Actos 1957-1958, 19 June 1957, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; “En el Club Cubano Inter-Americano,” *La Prensa*, 30 March 1957, p. 4.

who was “beloved and distinguished in the *colonia de habla española de Nueva York*, especially in *la cubana* and even more especially in the one of Puerto Padre.”¹⁶⁷

Social and cultural events sometimes, though not commonly, led to disorder and violence, and New York City officials responded by making it more difficult for social clubs to receive assembly permits. Stricter enforcement of these rules directly affected El Club Cubano in 1958, and leaders discussed the possibility of acquiring a larger club space for dances and events. Other issues surfaced in the late 1950s, including skepticism about the club’s dedication to its interamerican mission. With so many of its events and activities featuring Cuban performers and celebrating Cuban patriotic holidays, the club’s almost sudden recommitment to its interamerican roots suggests a purposeful repositioning for continued public appeal. In 1958, Melba Alvarado recommended that the club “purchase the 21 flags of the 21 republics because this club is called Club Cubano Interamericano and because of this it’s important to actually represent it.”¹⁶⁸ That same year, another club leader proposed that the club invite all of the Latin American consuls in the city to an event at the club “since the club is, after all, inter-american.”¹⁶⁹ One wonders if this renewed emphasis on the club’s interamerican roots stemmed from an interest in distancing the club from negative associations with the

¹⁶⁷ Photo, *La Prensa*, 10 February 1956, p. 2; “En Broadway,” *La Prensa*, 13 September 1956, p. 5.

¹⁶⁸ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 7, Libro de Actos 1957-1958, 30 April 1958, Club Cubano Interamericano Papers.

¹⁶⁹ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 7, Libro de Actos 1957-1958, 16 June 1958, Club Cubano Interamericano Papers.

political violence in Cuba and protest organizations like the Movimiento 26 de Julio, which by 1957 had developed a controversial presence in the city.¹⁷⁰

Towards the end of 1958 and into the first few weeks of 1959, many of the Cuban social clubs and organizations in the city suspended their activities and postponed holiday events in light of the civil unrest and violence taking place across the island. Some clubs like Casa Cuba, located on 691 Columbus Avenue between Ninety-third and Ninety-fourth Streets, explained their decision with vague but understood references to the “Cuban situation.”¹⁷¹ The Ateneo Cubano cancelled its end of the year festivities and declared that it was entering a period of mourning as a result of “the spilling of Cuban blood and the horrible tragedy that our homeland is living.” The public notice, signed by club president Diego Díaz and club secretary Fabio Valdéz, ended with a hopeful call for “peace and cordiality among all Cubans” and promised that “once peace and happiness returns to the Cuban soul so too will the happy end-of-year celebrations.”¹⁷² The “Cuban situation” did not stop leaders and members of El Club Cubano from going ahead with their customary end-of-the-year celebrations, as they welcomed in the New Year with a festive dance complete with “classic party hats” at its clubhouse on Prospect Avenue in

¹⁷⁰ In the 1940s and early 1950s, most Cubans and others in New York City had a relatively favorable impression of Batista, and social clubs like El Club Cubano often invited him to their larger social events. “En Broadway,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 11 September 1950, p. 5; “Comité Cubano-Americano Pro-Batista,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 1 January 1952; “Batististas de N. York expresan su jubileo,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 11 March 1952, p. 4. Matters changed slowly in the mid-to-late 1950s. “Buscan cooperación de los exilados cubanos,” *La Prensa*, 26 March 1957, p. 2; “Movimiento 26 de Julio,” *La Prensa*, 21 May 1957, p. 2; Photo with caption, “Acto Revolucionario Cubano en Nueva York,” *La Prensa*, 4 March 1958, p. 3; “Fidelistas de N. York protestan de alegados envios de armas a Batista,” *La Prensa*, 23 March 1958, p. 1; “Fidelistas colocan su bandera en el edificio del Empire State,” *La Prensa*, 30 March 1958, p. 1; “Movimiento 26 de Julio presentará obra teatral,” *La Prensa*, 21 May 1958, p. 5; “Mitin Politico,” *La Prensa*, 22 June 1958, p. 5; “Movimiento 26-7 hace llamamiento a los exilados,” *La Prensa*, 2 January 1959, p. 2; “Casa Cuba Celebra Fecha Martiana,” *La Prensa*, 27 January 1959, p. 5.

¹⁷¹ “Casa Cuba Celebra Fecha Martiana,” *La Prensa*, 27 January, 1959, p. 5.

¹⁷² “El Ateneo Cubano se une al dolor de la patria,” *La Prensa*, 2 January 1959, p. 2.

the Bronx. Whether the event serves as testimony to the club's apolitical agenda or implicit celebration of Castro's victory, however, remains unclear.¹⁷³

A few short but tense days after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution of 1959, the Cuban social clubs of New York City ended the moratorium on club activities. One of the first events sponsored by the Ateneo Cubano was its traditional *Cena Martiana* in honor of José Martí's birthday, and the Comité de Damas announced that it had prepared two *canastillas martianas*, which they promised to present to the first two children born on the twenty-eighth of January.¹⁷⁴ Casa Cuba also offered a *Cena Martiana* featuring recitations by declamador Eulogio Peraza and a lecture by Dr. Aristides de Llanos on the significance of libertarianism in Martí's thinking and its influence on Fidel Castro. Club member Olga Álvarez promised that members of the Movimiento 26 de Julio in the city "will cooperate in putting forth a brilliant event in honor of the Apóstol."¹⁷⁵ Just a few months after Castro's victory, the Cuban social and cultural clubs of New York City also hosted traditional celebrations in honor of Cuban independence. But, unlike years past, celebrations this year reflected more so on recent history and conditions than on the nineteenth-century legacies of José Martí. The Ateneo Cubano, for example, hosted a dance with music by Rodolfo Curbelo, noting that "this year, with more happiness than ever and with a truly independent Cuba, this will be a social event."¹⁷⁶ This remark not only signals support for the triumph of Fidel Castro's Cuban Revolution but also stands as a sharp critique of decades of U.S. involvement in and influence on Cuban affairs.

¹⁷³ 5 January 1959, *La Prensa*, p. 5.

¹⁷⁴ "Actividades del Ateneo Cubano," *La Prensa*, 7 January 1959, p. 5.

¹⁷⁵ "Casa Cuba Celebra Fecha Martiana," *La Prensa*, 27 January 1959, p. 5.

¹⁷⁶ "Ateneo Cubano celebra con baile Independencia de Cuba," *La Prensa*, 24 May 1959, p. 5.

An undeniable sign of tension and conflict existing within the Cuban community of New York City, several clubs and organizations popped up in 1959 with the intentions, at least in name, of bringing about Cuban unity. For example, Club Unidad Cubana de New York sponsored a dance at the Broadway Casino to commemorate Cuban independence and “honor a variety of personalities from the social, civic, and cultural world of the Latin American community of New York.”¹⁷⁷ The Federación Cultural de Sociedades Cubanas, of which the Ateneo Cubano was a member, hosted a “grand act” at the Community Center on Thirty-fifth Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues. In addition to music by a variety of Cuban artists, the event featured speeches by Luis A. Baral, Consul General of Cuba in New York, Dr. Manuel Birbe, Cuban Ambassador to the United Nations, and journalist José M. de Poo.¹⁷⁸ In December 1959, in what was likely a response to the political changes taking place on the island and the subsequent factionalism developing within the *colonia cubana*, the Federación Cultural de Sociedades Cubanas held a meeting at the Broadway Casino “to discuss issues of vital importance to the Cuban community of New York.”¹⁷⁹

But, perhaps, no event revealed the convergence of popular culture and the current Cuban political drama more so than the *Reina de La Prensa* contest of 1959.

¹⁷⁷ “Dio baile el Club Unidad Cubana de New York,” *La Prensa*, 21 May 1959, p. 5; “Club Unidad Cubana,” *La Prensa*, 20 May 1950, p. 5.

¹⁷⁸ “Fiesta patriótica cubana para el 20 de mayo,” *La Prensa*, 19 May 1959, p. 5.

¹⁷⁹ “Sociedades Cubanas se reunen,” *La Prensa*, 13 December 1959, p. 8.

For more on politics and contentiousness within the Cuban-American community of the post-revolutionary period, see María Cristina García, *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959-1994* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); María de los Angeles Torres, *In the Land of the Mirrors: Cuban Exile Politics in the United States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); María Cristina García, “Hardliners v. ‘Dialogueros.’ Cuban Exile Political Groups and United States-Cuba Policy,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 17, no. 4 (Summer 1998): 3-28; Silvia Pedraza, *Political Disaffection in Cuba’s Revolution and Exodus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

With social clubs, cultural organizations, and other groups across the city choosing a young woman from within their ranks as their representative in the beauty pageant, the *Reina de La Prensa* contest reportedly generated “a great deal of enthusiasm from all of New York society” throughout the late 1950s.¹⁸⁰ In 1959, the newspaper named Gladys Feijoo of the Ateneo Cubano winner of the *Reina de La Prensa* contest, and the young woman’s victory brought her more than a crown, flowers, and the admiration of her fellow club members. That is, the coronation ceremony for Gladys coincided with Fidel Castro’s first visit to New York City since the triumph of the Revolution, and the newspaper wasted no time in trying to secure his attendance at the event.¹⁸¹ Photos show Gladys presenting the bearded Cuban leader with a ticket to the coronation ceremony, held this year at the Manhattan Center and featuring musical performances by Tito Rodríguez, Arsenio Rodríguez, and Los Chavales de España. One reporter indicated that Castro would, in fact, be attending the event after he finished delivering an evening speech in Central Park. Not only would the event serve to honor Gladys, but it would also serve as a celebration of Castro’s “tremendous welcoming” and as “a manifestation of affection on the part of all the admirers that have not had the chance to be close to

¹⁸⁰ “Será Pro Fondo de Caridad de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 2 May 1958, p. 5.

¹⁸¹ During this landmark visit to the United States in April 1959, Castro came without an invitation from the U.S. government but rather as guest of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. Much of the historiography on U.S.-Cuba relations cites President Eisenhower’s refusal to meet with Castro during this visit as setting off tense relations between the two nations.

For more on the early U.S. government response to Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution, see Louis A. Pérez, Jr., “Fear and Loathing of Fidel Castro: Sources of U.S. Policy Toward Cuba,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34 (May 2002): 227-254; Lars Shoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic: The United States and the Cuban Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

For more on Castro’s relationship with the U.S. media, see William E. Ratliff, ed. *The Selling of Fidel Castro: The Media and the Cuban Revolution* (New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1987). See, also, footnote 163.

him.”¹⁸² Reports never confirmed whether or not Castro attended the event, but the ambiguity hardly soured his relationship with the newspaper. Less than a month after his visit to New York City on May 20, 1959, a photo spread showed Castro reading *La Prensa* and offering praise for the newspaper’s “editorials in favor of the Revolution and in defense of the acting Cuban government.”¹⁸³

¹⁸² “Baile de Coronación, la nota mas brillante de la temporada,” *La Prensa*, 24 April 1959, p. 5; Organized by the president of the Comisión Femenina, Ana González, El Club Cubano held a separate event at its clubhouse in 1959 in honor of its representative in the contest, Nydia I, and her court of honor. “Actividades del Club Cubano Inter-Americano,” *La Prensa*, 31 March 1959, p. 5.

¹⁸³ Photo, “Fidel Castro Sigue Leyendo ‘La Prensa’,” *La Prensa*, 20 May 1959, p. 8.

Chapter 4

And Our Winner Is...: Cuban Musicians, *Nuestra Música*, and the Politics of New York City's *Colonia Hispana*

In the early spring of 1941, the largest and longest-running Spanish-language daily newspaper in New York City announced that it would be sponsoring an annual *Concurso de Popularidad de Artistas y Orquestas Hispanos de Nueva York*, a musical popularity contest that would culminate in a *Gran Festival Pro Fondo de Caridad*, a fundraising festival aimed to raise money for those most in need within the *colonia hispana*. Though *La Prensa* had organized its first musical popularity contest in 1933, it was not until 1941 that the *Concurso de Popularidad* and *Gran Festival* reportedly “sparked such interest among the colonias de habla española” that they would become annual events. After weeks of counting votes and jostling in the polls, the newspaper announced that Consuelo Moreno, Don Arres, and Xavier Cugat had emerged as the 1941 contest winners. With the contest now over, the newspaper focused its energies on the fundraising festival, a showcase where the winners and runners-up in each of the contest’s categories would be presented with trophies and allotted time in the program to perform on stage before a packed audience. Following these presentations and

performances, which started in the early afternoon and lasted well into the evening hours, popular orchestras contracted by *La Prensa* would alternate on stage, inviting those in attendance to hit the dance floor until the wee hours of the morning. For the inaugural gala in 1941, organizers hired two Cuban-led bands, Anselmo Sacasas' Havana Royal and Generoso Montesino's Conjunto del Ritmo, to perform for the dancing public. A review of the inaugural event boasted that never before had the *colonia* been presented with a show featuring such a large group of splendid performers "on the same stage, on the same date, and at such affordable prices!"¹

Each spring between 1941 and 1957 and in the fall of 1958 and 1959, a quick glance at the newspaper's headlines would make it seem as though the entire *colonia hispana*, the entire city, even audiences across the United States and throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, stopped to take notice of the winners and participants in the musical popularity contests and fundraising festivals. Daily coverage within the pages of *La Prensa* would alert even the most casual of readers that "the best of the best performers of Spanish and Hispanoamerican art," in the spirit of "genuine disinterest,"

¹ "La Gran Función y Baile Pro Fondo de Caridad, en El Royal Windsor Mañana," *La Prensa*, 29 March 1941, p. 1; "Carmen Amaya bailará en el Festival pro Caridad," *La Prensa*, 26 March 1941, p. 1; "Consuelo Moreno, Don Arres, y Xavier Cugat, vencedores en el Certamen de Artistas," *La Prensa*, 28 February 1941, p. 1; "Más Que un Festival: Una verdadera tradición de la colonia," *La Prensa*, 8 May 1948, p. 3; "Otro memorable acontecimiento fue el Festival de La Prensa de 1954," *La Prensa*, 4 May 1954, p. 1.

In 1933, the contest winners were Consuelo Moreno (*Dama*), Ortiz Tirado (*Cabellero*), and the orchestra of Don Alberto (*Orquesta o Conjunto Musical*). Both the newspaper and the Charity Fund were founded by José Comprubí, and the first festival was held at the Manhattan Casino on 155th Street and Eighth Avenue.

In 1944, *La Prensa* changed the official name of the contest to *Concurso de Popularidad de Artistas, Orquestas, Grupos Musicales y parejas de baile hispanos de Nueva York* to reflect the addition of new categories to the ballot. Henceforth I will refer to the contest as the "*Concurso de Popularidad*," the "the musical popularity contest," the "popularity contest," or the "contest." The *Gran Festival de Pro Fondo de Caridad* was sometimes referred to as the *Festival a Beneficio del Fondo de Caridad de La Prensa* or the *Festival y Baile a Beneficio del Fondo de Caridad de La Prensa*. Henceforth I will refer to the event as the "*Gran Festival*," the "fundraising gala," the "fundraising showcase," or the "festival."

collaborated with an enthusiastic public to celebrate the contest winners and runners-up and raise money for the newspaper's Charity Fund.² Cuban singers, musicians, and performers figured prominently among the long lists of winners, runners-up, and participants in the contests and festivals throughout the 1940s and 1950s, and this chapter examines that presence as a critical component of the newspaper's notion of *hispanidad* during this period. In fact, these contests and festivals serve as early examples of the development and broadcasting of a pan-Latino/a identity that was both local and hemispheric. I am interested not so much in the determinants of local popularity or international celebrity but rather in examining these contests and festivals as events that produced a complex and sometimes contradictory set of discourses about transnationalism, local politics, and pan-*latinidad*. An examination of these discourses offers insight not only into the relationship between the imagined community hailed by the newspaper as the *colonia hispana* and print culture but also demonstrates modes of collaboration between the newspaper and the entertainment industries of the 1940s and 1950s. As we saw in the previous chapter, newspapers played an important role in helping structure the associational life of Cubans and Latinos/as in New York City. This chapter turns its attention to *La Prensa* as an ethnic institution, one that shaped ideas and practices related to Cubanness and Latinness vis-à-vis these musical popularity contests and fundraising festivals.

By the late 1950s, casual and everyday readers of *La Prensa* had likely grown accustomed to headlines promising spectacular entertainment and charitable spirit. For

² "La brillantez del Festival de Caridad 'La Prensa' sobrepasó a todo calor," *La Prensa*, 1 April 1941, p. 3; "Esplendido balance artístico del 'Festival' de 'La Prensa,'" *La Prensa*, 10 May 1949, p. 1.

months each spring dating back to 1941, *La Prensa* filled its pages with articles, editorials, and advertisements announcing its *Concurso de Popularidad* and inviting readers to attend the *Gran Festival*. But before any contest winners could be announced or any tickets to the fundraising gala sold, readers had to know *and* follow the rules. That is, alongside each write-in ballot printed within the newspaper came a long set of rules explaining to readers key elements of the voting process. In addition to more mundane rules like the dates of the voting period and the expectation that each person submit a ballot by mail or in person at the offices of *La Prensa* only once per day, the newspaper provided readers with specific information about eligibility requirements, category definitions, ticket sale locations, and the behavior expected of those attending the *Gran Festival*.

The contest rules defined an “artist” as a “singer or dancer or solo instrumentalist or *declamador* of any and all genres.” Throughout the 1940s, the contest rules simply stated that votes be cast for a Hispanic artist or orchestra. To be considered eligible to receive votes, an artist also had to be over the age of fourteen and have worked in a local Hispanic theater or cabaret or performed on the radio in New York in a professional capacity. Contest and festival organizers initially required that participating artists and musicians be residents of New York City, a clear objection to the direct importation of performers from Spain, Latin America, and the Caribbean. This rule suggests a preference for local talent, likely at the behest of local entertainment industry insiders. The same restrictions applied to orchestras and *conjuntos*, though the rules in this category allowed votes for those bands that “having been properly organized, have been

livening up the festivals of well-known hispanic societies.”³ These rules were apparently enforced. In 1941, the official committee responsible for organizing the contests and festivals, the *Comisión de Escrutinio*, disqualified Miguelito Valdés and the Sacasas Orquesta, who received 11,545 votes and 8,835 votes, respectively, for not meeting the one-year residency requirement.⁴

Some of these rules changed over time. In 1949, organizers lifted the residency requirement and expanded the rules to include artists that had performed on television in New York City. Artists, orchestras, and *conjuntos* only had to have performed in New York City or the surrounding area during the year before the start of that year’s contest. The contest evolved again in 1950 when the rules specified that eligibility was open to “any hispanic artist, or artist of hispanic origin, regardless of nationality.” The label “Hispanic,” in general, and the clause “regardless of nationality,” in particular, served to render neutral the presence within the *colonia hispana* of distinctions based on country of origin or ancestry. That same year the rules also changed to specify a “professional artist...that receives remuneration for his work.”⁵ This stipulation likely aimed to exclude those amateur performers and impromptu bands that formed to play at informal, neighborhood events like house parties and family gatherings and maintain the reputability of the contest. This exclusionary clause suggests an interest in establishing the legitimacy of contest by certifying its participants as professionals, a standard that probably mattered most to entertainment industry insiders. Still, it remains possible that

³ “Certamen de Popularidad de Artistas Hispanos de Nueva York,” *La Prensa*, 6 March 1942, p. 2.

⁴ “Votos a favor de M. Valdés, Carlos Ramírez, C. Amaya,” *La Prensa*, 1 March 1941, p. 3.

⁵ “Reglas del Certamen de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 14 March 1949, p. 2; “Reglas del Certamen de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 1 April 1950, p. 2.

some of the entertainers cared about this, too, especially those who would not achieve celebrity beyond the newspaper's readership but who had, nonetheless, worked hard to move up from amateur status and struggled to make their livelihoods as professional artists.

With a steady influx of tens of thousands of Puerto Rican migrants rapidly adding to an already substantial presence of migrants from Puerto Rico, Cuba, Spain, Mexico, and other parts of Central and South America, that tensions and divisions had started to develop within the *colonia hispana* in the late 1940s and early 1950s is not entirely surprising.⁶ Changes to the contest rules reflect the newspaper's role, though probably inadvertent at first, in defining the boundaries of this rapidly growing community. A relaxation of the residency requirements of the early contests, a move that was likely protested by "resident" artists and bands, probably came about as a result of pressure from managers, nightclub owners, recording executives, and even the "foreign" artists themselves. More than a reflection of the newspaper's perceived interest in inclusiveness or acquiescence to external pressure, the rule change reflects the demands of a professional entertainment industry that required frequent travel and touring over permanent settlement in one city and suggests that for those within the *colonia hispana* popularity did not necessitate residency. For fans and voters in the contest, some of whom were now long-term residents of New York City while others had just recently migrated to the area, the *colonia hispana* hailed by the newspaper was not bound by rigid geographic borders but defined by a mode of seeing mediated by local realities as well as longing for the homeland. That the contest now allowed for the participation of Hispanic

⁶ Gabriel Haslip-Viera, "The Evolution of the Latino Community in New York City: Early Nineteenth Century to the Present," in *Latinos in New York: Communities in Transition*, eds. Gabriel Haslip-Viera and Sherrie L. Bayer (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996): 12-16.

performers regardless of their national origins and residency status reflects that the newspaper's readership, fans, and voters in the contest had cultural preferences and musical horizons best described as transnational, caring little if their favorite act was in Havana, Mexico City, or Madrid instead of New York City for most of the year.

Anthropologist Nina Glick Schiller has argued that migrants do not automatically shift their loyalty and involvement from one country to another. Instead, they engage in long-distance nationalism, what she defines as a claim to membership in a country of origin that generates emotional attachment as well as concern over how migrant actions will influence the reputation of the home country.⁷ By lifting the residency requirements that previously limited the participation of “foreign” performers, *La Prensa* seems to have recognized that its readers voted and, by extension, bought records and attended live performances, based on “emotional attachment” rather than residency. In other words, those members of the *colonia hispana* that voted in the musical popularity contests as well as those that attended the fundraising festivals engaged in a lived transnational social practice that simultaneously fulfilled the needs of their constructed transnational social imaginary.

Within the field of Latino/a Studies, the concept of transnationalism has oftentimes been used to explain why Latino/a migrants have not fully assimilated into mainstream society in the United States. Scholars have conceptualized transnationalism, understood generally as individual, group, or community alliances spanning two or more nation-states, as a complicated response to international migration shaped by global capitalism, experiences with racism in the United States, and the nation-building

⁷ Nina Glick Schiller and Georges Eugene Fouron, *Georges Woke Up Laughing: Long-Distance Nationalism and the Search for Home* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001): 4.

endeavors of the home country. Many of these studies have examined transnationalism as social practice and symbolic social field. As social practice, transnationalism refers to activities like speaking two languages in the home, sending remittances to family or organizations in the home country, building and supporting bi-national businesses, and travelling back and forth between the sending and receiving countries. The transnational social field, however, does not necessitate physical movement. Rather, facilitated by the mass media, especially electronic media, as well as memory and the imagination, ideas and symbols foster a sense of belonging and attachment to more than one nation-state. The *Concursos de Popularidad* and especially the *Gran Festivals* stand out as unique examples of transnational traditions that constituted a lived social practice *and* symbolic reconnection to the homeland.⁸

⁸ Since the early 1990s, the concept of transnationalism has dominated the study of migration and community formation within the fields of anthropology, history, American Studies, and Latino/a Studies. Early migration history argued that migrants, usually Europeans, followed a linear trajectory from immigrant to mainstream status via settlement, assimilation, and citizenship. More recent migration history has challenged this pattern and recognized that European migrants did not cut ties with their homeland, but rather maintained those connections and adapted to life in the U.S. by creating new cultural practices and communities.

Celebratory views also point to transnationalism as an alternative to segmented assimilation, as a way of subverting the demands of labor, as a way of making claims on more than one nation-state for the purpose of achieving a desired outcome, and as a way of maintaining dignity and worth in response to becoming a racialized minority. Some have even praised the extent to which those living in the United States are considered part of and key contributors to the homeland. Others are more skeptical citing the rejection that some return-migrants face as a result of consuming U.S. goods or for losing their native language. Others reject the concept because it suggests that migrants live “neither here nor there” and emphasizes temporary status and marginality. Yet, migrants live their daily lives bound to local places, and the frequency and access to which migrants can participate in transnational social practices has often been exaggerated or uncomplicated in terms of geography, race, class, and gender.

For more studies on transnationalism and international migration, see these works by some of the major contributors in these fields: Arjun Appadurai, “Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology,” in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard G. Fox (Santa Fe: Schools of the Americas Research Press, 1991); Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, “From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (January 1995): 48-63; Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila, “‘I’m Here, but I’m There’: The Meanings of Latina Transnational Motherhood,” *Gender and Society* 11, no. 5 (October 1997): 548-571; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Michael Smith and Luis Guarnizo, eds., *Transnationalism from Below* (Transaction Publishers, 1998); Jorge Duany, “Reconstructing Racial Identity: Ethnicity, Color, and Class among Dominicans in the United States and Puerto Rico,” *Latin*

That *La Prensa* seemed aware of the transnational loyalties of its readers is not entirely surprising given that it served a predominantly immigrant population. Founded as a daily newspaper by Spanish migrant José Compubrí in 1918 to meet the needs of the rapidly growing *colonia hispana*, the newspaper provided its readers with coverage of local events relevant to the immigrant community as well as news of major events that happened in Spain and throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Hispanic literary scholar and noted publisher Nicolás Kanellos used sociologist Robert E. Park's 1922 study of the immigrant press to define and explain the role of the Hispanic immigrant press, characteristics which included "predominant use of the language of the homeland; the serving of a population united by that language, irrespective of national origin; the need to interpret events from their own particular racial or nationalist point of view, as well as the furthering of nationalism."⁹ From this functionalist perspective, contest

American Perspectives 25, no. 3 (May 1998): 147-172; Alejandro Portes, Luis Guarnizo, and Patricia Landolt, "Transnational Communities: Pitfalls and Promise of an Emergent Research Field," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22, no. 2 (1999): 217-237; Donna R. Gabaccia, "Is Everywhere Nowhere? Nomads, Nations, and the Immigrant Paradigm of United States History," *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (Dec. 1999): 1115-1134; Peter Kivisto, "Theorizing Transnational Immigration: A Critical Review of Current Efforts," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24, no. 4 (2001): 549-577; Jorge Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Silvio Torres-Saillant, "Inventing the Race: Latinos and the Ethnoracial Pentagon," *Latino Studies* 1, no. 1 (March 2003): 123-167; Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); María Cristina García, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Thomas A. Guglielmo, "Fighting for Caucasian Rights: Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and the Transnational Struggle for Civil Rights in World War II Texas," *Journal of American History* 92, no. 4 (March 2006): 1212-1237; Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York after 1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Laura Briggs, Gladys McCormick, and J.T. Way, "Transnationalism: A Category of Analysis," *American Quarterly* (September 2008).

⁹ Nicolás Kanellos, "Cronistas and Satire in Early Twentieth Century Hispanic Newspapers," *MELUS* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 3; Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in Twentieth-Century New York City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010): 26.

For more on *La Prensa* and its director, José Compubrí, see, for example, Virginia Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City, 1917-1948* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983): 71, 152, 158; Liz Ševčenko, "Making Loisaída: Placing Puertorriqueñidad in Lower Manhattan," in *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York*, eds. Agustín Laó-Montes and Arlene Dávila (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001): 293-317; Robert David Johnson, *Ernest Gruening and the American Dissenting Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,

organizers might also have modified the rule that specified that the contest was open to any Hispanic artist “regardless of nationality” to explicitly illustrate an agenda of pan-ethnic inclusiveness.

Contest organizers modified the contest in other ways throughout the 1940s and 1950s. In many ways, the categories listed on the ballots served as somewhat messy representations of rules shaped by gender, dance styles, and format, especially when performers received a substantial number of votes in more than one category. In 1941 and 1942, ballots offered readers the chance to vote for their favorite artists in three categories: *Damas*, *Caballeros*, and *Orquestas o Conjuntos Musicales*. In 1943, the contest added a category for *Pareja de Baile* which was later subdivided in 1945 to give readers the chance to vote for their favorite *Pareja de Baile Español* and *Pareja de Baile Hispanoamericano*.¹⁰ In 1944, the contest began offering separate categories for

1998); These works offer brief discussions of the role of the newspaper and its director in the *colonia*, but much more research needs to be done in this area, especially considering Comprubí’s role as founder of *La Confederación de Sociedades Puertorriqueñas*. A model for the kind of full-length study that I argue remains to be done on the Spanish-language press in New York City is Doris Meyer, *Speaking for Themselves: Neomexicano Cultural Identity and the Spanish-Language Press, 1880-1920* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996); A. Gabriel Meléndez, *Spanish Language Newspapers in New Mexico, 1834-1958* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005); Raul D. Tovaes, “*La Opinión* and Its Contribution to the Mexican Community’s Adaptation to Life in the U.S.,” *Latino Studies* 7, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 480-499.

¹⁰ Specific treatment of the winners and runners-up in the *Damas*, *Parejas de Baile Español*, and *Parejas de Baile Hispanoamericano* is beyond the scope of this chapter, specifically, and this dissertation, generally. I have deliberately chosen to focus on the male Cuban singers, orchestras, and radio and television personalities that played a central role in shaping the Cuban-American and Latino/a cultural landscape of New York City beyond *La Prensa*’s popularity contests and fundraising galas. The decision was forced largely by historical circumstance. As one of the lead vocalists for Machito y sus Afro-Cubans, Graciela was the first and only Cuban woman to win or figure prominently in the *Damas* category in the popularity contest. Her life history as well as her understanding of race receives considerable attention in this and other chapters. My goal has not been to reproduce gender hierarchies but to examine those Cuban performers recognizable to lay audiences and to recover some of those performers less well-known in both academic and lay circles.

Additionally, while the solo artists and orchestras that I examine undoubtedly catered to a dancing public and often worked in nightclubs and cabarets side-by-side with professional dancers – many of whom were Cuban – I have opted to set aside the task of examining the popular dance teams of New York City for future research/ers.

Orquestas and *Conjuntos Musicales*. By 1945, readers could vote for their favorite artists in up to six different categories.

Despite efforts to differentiate performers through increasingly rigid contest rules and categorization, several notable Cuban artists and orchestras often received votes in more than one category in the same year. In 1948, the only year in which he received enough votes to rank in the final standings, Desi Arnaz received votes in both the *Caballeros* (fifth) and *Orquestas* categories (eighth). In 1957, Perucho Irigoyen won the newly-created *Locutores* category and also placed second in the *Caballeros* category. A likely response to changes in the professional careers of these artists and orchestras, some notable performers earned votes in different categories throughout the contest's nearly two decade run. In the 1940s, Miguelito Valdés received votes in the *Caballeros* category, but in 1950, the last year in which he placed in the contest, he earned votes in the *Orquestas* category. In 1952 and 1954, voters placed Arsenio Rodríguez in the *Conjuntos Musicales* category, while in 1956 he figured in the *Orquestas* category. Marcelino Guerra earned recognition as a *Caballero* in 1944, and the following year he began showing in the *Orquestas* category which he finally won in 1954. While this voting inconsistency reflects the versatility of some of these performers, it also

For reading specific to women and the evolution of Latin music in the U.S., see, for example, Alexandra T. Vázquez, "Instrumental Migrations: The Transnational Movements of Cuban Music" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2006); Vernon W. Boggs, ed. *Salsiology: Afro-Cuban Music and the Evolution of Salsa in New York City* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992); Frances R. Aparicio, "'Asi Son:' Salsa Music, Female Narratives, and Gender (De)Construction in Puerto Rico," in *Daughters of Caliban: Caribbean Women in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Consuelo Lopez Springfield (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Frances R. Aparicio, "The Blackness of Sugar: Celia Cruz and the Performance of (Trans)Nationalism," *Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2: 223-236; Frances R. Aparicio, "La Lupe, La India, and Celia: Toward a Feminist Genealogy of Salsa Music," in *Disciplines on the Line: Feminist Research on Spanish, Latin American, and U.S. Latina Women*, eds. Anne J. Cruz, Rosalie Hernández-Pecoraro, and Joyce Tolliver (Delaware: Juan de la Cuesta-Hispanic Monographs, 2003); Christina D. Abreu, "Celebrity, 'Crossover,' and Cubanidad: Celia Cruz as 'La Reina de Salsa,'" *Latin American Music Review* 28, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2007); Alicia Castro, *Queens of Havana: The Amazing Adventures of Anacaona, Cuba's Legendary All-Girl Dance Band* (New York: Grove Press, 2007).

demonstrates that contest voters might have remained confused about category definitions.

The contest rules expanded once more in 1957 to include a seventh category for “locutores de Radio y Televisión.” Organizers reasoned that the *Damas* and *Caballeros* categories did not sufficiently allow for voters to distinguish radio or television performers and announcers from singers or theatrical performers. To assist readers and voters in understanding this change and to familiarize them with potential nominees, *La Prensa* published two lists of radio and television personalities that included radio talent from *El Programa Latino* (WHOM) and *La Voz Hispana del Aire* (WWRL) and television entertainers from Canal 13 (WATV).¹¹ Most prominent among them was Cuban performer Perucho Irigoyen, host of *The Perucho Show*, a variety program featuring Irigoyen and invited celebrities that aired in the late mornings on WATV.

Similar to the immigrant press, radio had for decades been a resource for immigrants in the United States looking for local news, entertainment, and information about their native countries, often in their own language. In the years following the end of the Second World War, however, television viewing became more common, developing into a daily and routine experience for families across the United States. Between 1948 and 1955, the television allowed spectator amusements to move from “the public space of the movie theater to the private space of the home,” and many historians and cultural studies scholars have debated both the oppressive and liberating potential of this new cultural medium. Most scholars have settled on a dialectical model that rejects a dichotomous understanding of popular culture as exclusively a propaganda tool for the

¹¹ “Manifiéstase gran interés en los locutores de radio y televisión,” *La Prensa*, 22 March 1957, p. 1; “Brillantes locutores deleitan a los televidentes hispanos de N.Y.,” *La Prensa*, 23 March 1957, p. 1.

mass culture industries, on the one hand, or an oppositional tool for those in subordinate or marginal positions, on the other. More than a reflection of the popularity of television among the *colonia de habla española de Nueva York*, the addition of the *Locutores* category demonstrates this dialectical model in practice. On the one hand, radio and television made it less necessary for Latinos/as to come together in theaters, nightclubs, and cabarets to attend live performances by their favorite solo artists and orchestras. As we saw in the previous chapter, however, Cuban social clubs often used radio listening and television viewing as a means of socializing in private among themselves. The existence of two local, Spanish-language radio stations and local, Spanish-language television programming also demonstrates that Latinos/as had found alternate ways to participate in the mass culture industries as both individual and collective producers and consumers.¹²

The newspaper explained that the addition of the *Locutores* category in 1957 reflected a “mode of cultural and artistic expression that in the past few years has been

¹² Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992): 1.

For more on radio and the rising dominance of television, see also, Lizabeth Cohen, “Encountering Mass Culture at the Grassroots: The Experience of Chicago Workers in the 1920s,” *American Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (March 1989): 6-33; Susan Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination from Amos ‘n’ Andy and Edward R. Murrow to Wolfman Jack and Howard Stern* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1999); Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); James L. Baughman, *Same Time, Same Station: Creating American Television, 1948-1961* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); Eric Burns, *Invasion of the Mind Snatchers: Television’s Conquest of America in the Fifties* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010).

For more on the various debates on the role of popular culture in American society, see also, Theodor Adorno, “Culture Industry Revisited,” *New German Critique* 6 (Autumn 1975): 12-19; Stuart Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing ‘the Popular,’” in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. John Storey (London: Longman, 2009); George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Richard M. Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Verso Press, 1996); Michael Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); James W. Cook, “The Return of the Culture Industry,” in *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present, Future*, eds. James W. Cook, Lawrence B. Glickman, and Michael O’Malley (Chicago: University Press, 2009).

gaining considerable and justified popularity.”¹³ As early as the spring of 1951, brief on-the-street testimonials conducted by *Diario de Nueva York* indicated that television was indeed growing as an industry perceived as capable of providing not only quality entertainment but also opportunity for Hispanic artists throughout the United States and Hispanoamérica. One of the respondents to the newspaper’s question about television’s potential, Luis Mesa, a married Cuban draftsman, reasoned that television would succeed for economic reasons, namely “for the simple reason that advertisers [throughout Hispanoamérica] will realize, as they do here, that advertising through that medium is good business. There is such a huge base to exploit in Spanish-speaking America that I have not the slightest doubt that it will triumph.” Another respondent, Puerto Rican composer Ramón Fontan noted that he welcomed an increase in television programming throughout Hispanoamérica: “In the last few years, artists have not had very many stages on which to perform so opening up a new front is always welcome.”¹⁴

Just as contest rules and categories evolved throughout the 1940s and 1950s, so too did the value of each ballot submitted by contest voters. Each week during the contest voting period, the newspaper presented readers with the current vote standings in each category. Between 1941 and 1943, each ballot cast counted for five votes. Organizers inflated the value of each ballot to count for ten votes starting in 1944. In 1959, the last year of the contest, one ballot counted for an astounding fifteen votes, perhaps in an attempt to make the totals seem more impressive to readers and entertainment industry observers. To say that the newspaper published the vote standings

¹³ “Manifiéstase gran interés en los locutores de radio y televisión,” *La Prensa*, 22 March 1957, p. 1.

¹⁴ “Cree que la televisión será un éxito en Hispanoamérica?,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 23 April 1951, p. 4.

exclusively to increase profit revenues from newspaper sales, though, would be unfair. Organizers allowed readers to submit handwritten copies of ballots thereby eliminating the need for them to purchase additional copies of the newspaper. In fact, the newspaper seemed especially concerned about attempts to “stuff the ballots,” explaining to readers that the *Comisión* would not count any ballots reproduced through mechanical means, a rule violation most likely committed by artist managers and record companies. As evidence of their concern, the newspaper printed a special notice in 1945 urging voters to pay close attention to the rule which mandated that each person could vote just once per day and that ballots from multiple voters received in the same envelope would not be counted.¹⁵

Yet, even if the “number of ballots a voter could cast in *La Prensa*’s poll was limited only by the number of copies of *La Prensa* he could get his hands on,” as *Time* reported in 1943, “ballot-box stuffing was general for all contestants.” With “ballot-box stuffing” dismissed as a minor concern, *Time* confirmed the legitimacy of the contest results, contending that the musical popularity contests revealed just “how Latin Americans themselves estimate the rumba and conga artists now performing in the U.S.” The magazine report left little doubt that “the poll did represent a rude cross section of New York City’s Latin American opinion.” To this end, the writer remarked that many of the contest winners were largely unknown to the U.S. public and that North American favorites Xavier Cugat and Carmen Miranda finished eighth and twentieth in their respective categories. The following year *Time* once again assessed the newspaper’s musical popularity contest in a brief review of the Cuban rumba-dancing duo Raul and

¹⁵ “Atención, votantes del Concurso de Popularidad de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 14 March 1945, p. 2.

Eva Reyes, winners of the *Parejas de Baile* category. Raul and Eva “finished far ahead of such popular [North American] favorites as Carmen Amaya, Carmen Miranda and Rosario & Antonio,” the writer noted, but “nobody [at the fundraising gala] questioned the justice of the verdict.” In that same report, *Time* described victory in the contest as “the most coveted prize in U.S. Latin American entertainment,” an indication that the contest had become rapidly assimilated by the entertainment industry and, to one degree or another, the voting public as well.¹⁶ That artist managers, nightclub owners, and record executives might engage in shady practices like “stuffing the ballots” confirms that the contest results both reflected and helped determine the preferences of fans in the *colonia hispana*. An implicit understanding that the contest results could lead to commercial rewards vis-à-vis record sales and ticket purchases to upcoming live events and concerts certainly suggests that the newspaper, by way of the contest, played a key role in shaping the relationship developing between the entertainment industries and the *colonia hispana*.

Charged with the task of establishing the sometimes troublesome contest rules and voting practices was the newspaper’s Comisión de Escrutinio, a committee made up of the presidents or designated appointees of five Hispanic societies of New York City. This committee would be solely responsible for determining the eligibility of the artists, orchestras, and *conjuntos* participating in the contest. Along with La Comisión

¹⁶ “Music: Leading Latins,” *Time*, 23 April 1943; “Music: Raul & Eva,” *Time*, 24 April 1944.

Meta-coverage of the *Concursos de Popularidad* and *Gran Festivals*, particularly in English-language periodicals, is scarce. *Time* covered the event just twice, once in 1943 and again in 1944. *Billboard Magazine* reported on the contest once in 1943. *La Prensa* reprinted a report published in *New York al Día* reviewing the event and reported that news outlets throughout Latin America and the Caribbean also covered the event, though my research has not recovered this coverage or found coverage of the event in competing Spanish-language newspapers, such as *Diario de Nueva York* and *Ecos de Nueva York*.

Organizadora, this committee also assumed the task of organizing the fundraising festival that followed the announcement of the contest winners each year, a responsibility that included selling tickets, creating the schedule of performances, decorating the ballroom, and ensuring that the event flowed in an orderly manner for the comfort of both the performers and thousands of guests in attendance.¹⁷ Throughout the years, representatives from some of “the colony’s most prestigious” social clubs, societies, and organizations participated in the Comisión de Escrutinio, including the Centro Español, Asociación de Empleados Puertorriqueños, Pan American Exporters Club, Junta Patriótica Mexicana de Nueva York, Hispano Tennis Club, Asociación de Comerciantes Hispanos, Club Centro Americano de Nueva York, Sociedad Española de Beneficiencia “La Nacional,” Junta Patriótica Puertorriqueña, Sociedad de Periodistas y Escritores Puertorriqueños, and the Ateneo Cubano de Nueva York.¹⁸ With the cooperation of these groups so integral to the success of contest, and the success of the contest so central to the liveliness of the community, most of these groups reported that they avoided scheduling their own festivals and activities on the date of this annual event. Even leaders of social clubs outside of New York City recognized the importance of supporting the event, particularly in terms of establishing relationships with the popular performers of the moment. Fernando Luis, a Cuban promoter in New York City and owner-operator of the

¹⁷ “Comisiones especiales en el festival del día 28,” *La Prensa*, 20 March 1943, p. 1; “El Comité de Escrutinio de ‘La Prensa’ examina el recuento de votos,” *La Prensa*, 21 April 1947, p. 2; “Avanzan los preparativos para el festival de caridad del día 2,” *La Prensa*, 21 April 1948, p. 2; “Verifícase hoy el festival pro Fondo de Caridad de ‘La Prensa’ en N. York,” *La Prensa*, 20 May 1951, p. 1; “Mañana domingo se celebra el Gran Festival Artístico Anual de Caridad,” *La Prensa*, 1 May 1954, p. 1.

¹⁸ “Comisiones especiales en el festival del día 28,” *La Prensa*, 20 March 1943, p. 1; “Gran interés por el Festival del Fondo de Caridad,” *La Prensa*, 5 April 1944, p. 2; “Avanzan los preparativos para el festival de caridad del día 2,” *La Prensa*, 21 April 1948, p. 2; “El programa para el festival del dos de mayo adquiere grandes proporciones,” *La Prensa*, 24 May 1948, p. 2; “Mañana se verificará el gran festival anual pro caridad,” *La Prensa*, 1 May 1948, p. 1; “Se reúne esta noche la Comisión de Escrutinio del Concurso de Artistas,” *La Prensa*, 1 May 1952, p. 1.

theater at the Centro Asturiano de Tampa, served as one of the masters of ceremonies for the 1945 *Gran Festival*, delaying his return to Florida in hopes of securing talent for his club's events.¹⁹

Tickets to the fundraising gala were sold at "various hispanic commercial establishments in various parts of the city" at sites reportedly chosen "for the convenience of our readers." The newspaper set up additional ticket sale locations throughout the 1940s and 1950s to accommodate the needs of its readers as it did in 1953 when the "well-known" bakery La Moderna at 107 Lenox between 115th and 116th Streets in Harlem started selling tickets to the *Gran Festival* based on the "request of many of the residents in that zone." By 1957, tickets to the event were sold throughout Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. Interested readers could purchase tickets at the offices of *La Prensa* at 245 Canal Street, the club headquarters of Centro Español/La Nacional at 239 West Fourteenth Street, and at businesses, restaurants, and shops scattered across the city.²⁰ Ticket sale locations suggest that event organizers aimed to secure a majority local and Latino/a audience for the *Gran Festival*. Yet, that the newspaper also established ticket sale locations outside of the zones with the highest concentration of Latinos/as reveals two underreported phenomena: first, the mobility of Latinos/as who

¹⁹ "El Festival Anual de Caridad," *La Prensa*, 2 May 1957, p. 4; "El Festival de La Prensa fue un gran éxito artístico," *La Prensa*, 1 May 1945, p. 1-2; Alberto Socarrás, 16 January 1983, David Carp Collection, Bronx County Historical Society.

²⁰ Some of the business, restaurants, and shops where readers could buy tickets include: Tipografía Colombia at 502 West 145th Street, Jai Alai at 82 Bank Street, Nuevo Mundial at 513 West 145th Street, El Mundial at 222 West 116th Street, La Mercedita at 386 East Thirteenth Street, La Giralda at 866 Longwood Avenue in the Bronx, Florería Moscoso at 791 Westchester Avenue in the Bronx, La Ideal Market at 166 Eighth Avenue, La Nueva Ideal between Roosevelt and Madison Streets, Cesar González Studio at 526 West 145th Street, Carlton Photo Shop at 280 Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn, Florería Moscoso at 139 Court Street in Brooklyn, Quincallera La Sultana at 147 East 116th Street, Colmado Las Tres T.T.T at 3919 Third Avenue in the Bronx, Farmacia Rita at 836 Westchester Avenue in the Bronx, and Colmado Tommy Rivera at 83-04 Baxter Avenue in Queens.

lived and worked beyond the confines of Spanish Harlem and the South Bronx; and, second, that *La Prensa* actively courted a non-Latino/a audience to attend its fundraising festivals.²¹

This large showcase of Cuban and Latino/a celebrities not only attracted the *colonia de habla hispana de Nueva York* but also Spanish-speaking migrants from neighboring cities, towns, and states. As early as 1943, the newspaper noted that entire families from Newark, New Jersey, for example, were travelling into midtown Manhattan to attend the *Gran Festival*. By 1945, the newspaper declared the event “traditional among the Spanish-speaking residents of the eastern United States” and, by 1946, also reported receiving telephone calls from residents outside of New York City asking where they could purchase tickets. Special excursions arrived from other parts of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut and even as far away as Ohio and central Pennsylvania, including the members of a Mexican association who traveled to the *Gran Festival* in

²¹ “El ‘Havana-Madrid’ brinda su revista para el festival pro Caridad del 26,” *La Prensa*, 16 May 1946, p. 1; “Participan José Crespo y el actor cómico Nicaso, así como A. Miguel,” *La Prensa*, 16 April 1955, p. 1; “A la venta los billetes para el colosal festival,” *La Prensa*, 20 March 1943, p. 1; “La Revista del Cuban Casino en el Festival,” *La Prensa*, 23 March 1943, p. 1; “Todos los ganadores de copa el domingo en el Manhattan Center,” *La Prensa*, 27 April 1945, p. 1; “Famosos artistas colaboran en preparar programa para el Festival Pro Caridad,” *La Prensa*, 23 April 1948, p. 1; *La Prensa*, 2 May 1953, p. 1; “La revista de ‘El Chico’ figurará en el programa del Festival de mayo 2,” *La Prensa*, 23 April 1954, p. 1; “Contratada la Orquesta de Marcelino Guerra para el Baile del Festival,” *La Prensa*, 24 April 1954, p. 1; “Mañana domingo se celebra el Gran Festival Artístico Anual de Caridad,” *La Prensa*, 1 May 1954, p. 1; *La Prensa*, 1 May 1957, p. 5.

Haslip-Viera, “The Evolution of the Latino Community in New York City,” 16-17.

For more on the *colonias hispanas* of Brooklyn, see Wendell E. Pritchett, “Race and Community in Postwar Brooklyn: The Brownsville Neighborhood Council and the Politics of Urban Renewal,” *Journal of Urban History*, 27, no. 4 (May 2001): 445-472; Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*, 25-28. For more on Spanish Harlem and the Bronx as important sites of Latino/a community development, see, for example, Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community*; Cesar Andreu Iglesias, *Memoirs of Bernardo Vega: A Contribution to the History of the Puerto Rican Community in New York* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984); Ruth Glasser, *My Music is My Flag: Puerto Rican Musicians and Their New York Communities, 1917-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Adrian Burgos, Jr., “‘The Latins from Manhattan’: Confronting Race and Building Community in Jim Crow Baseball, 1906-1950” in *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York*, eds. Agustín Laó-Montes and Arlene Dávila (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001): 57-72.

1950 by bus from Bethlehem.²² Not only did Latinos/as outside of New York City attend the fundraising gala, but they also sought to participate in the voting process. The newspaper reported that it had received votes from across the United States as well as from Spanish-speaking U.S. soldiers stationed abroad during the Second World War.²³ That *La Prensa* used the musical popularity contest and fundraising festival to extend its readership to include a Spanish-language audience beyond New York City is not surprising considering the fact that the newspaper also relaxed the contest rules to allow for the participation of Hispanic artists residing outside of the city.

The diversity of musical genres presented at the fundraising gala likely helped attract an equally broad audience, much to the delight of the newspaper, entertainment industry insiders, and even the performers themselves. In fact, at the height of the Latin craze in the United States, the contest and fundraising gala also attracted an audience beyond the Spanish-speaking world. In 1950, *La Prensa* reported that a delegation of North Americans from Plainville, Connecticut would be attending the *Gran Festival* just as they had done in previous years. By 1953, the newspaper linked its contest to the

²² “Fue un gran éxito el festival de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 29 March 1943, p. 1; “Miguel Ferriz y Matilde Palou en el programa del festival del 29,” *La Prensa*, 18 April 1945, p. 1; “El ‘Havana-Madrid’ brinda su revista para el festival Pro Caridad del 26,” *La Prensa*, 16 May 1946, p. 1; “Verifícase Mañana el Gran Festival Pro Caridad de ‘La Prensa’ en el M. Center,” *La Prensa*, 10 May 1947, p. 1; “El famoso tenor mexicano Nestor Chayres cantará en el Festival,” *La Prensa*, 26 April 1955, p. 1; “El Festival Anual de Caridad,” *La Prensa*, 2 May 1957, p. 4.

²³ “Nuestro Concurso de Popularidad de Artistas,” *La Prensa*, 5 April 1947, p. 2; “Interés internacional en el Concurso de Artistas Hispanos,” *La Prensa*, 1 April 1948, p. 2; “Mañana se verificará el Gran Festival anual Pro Caridad,” *La Prensa*, 1 May 1948; “El lunes publicaremos el Ultimo Escrutinio de nuestro Concurso,” *La Prensa*, 5 May 1950, p. 1; “Se reúne esta noche la Comisión de Escrutinio del Concurso de Artistas,” *La Prensa*, 1 May 1952, p. 1; “Vencedores del Concurso de Popularidad de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 18 March 1943, p. 1, 2.

La Prensa reported a unique voting trend during the 1943 contest. The newspaper offered the following gendered rationale to explain the greater number of votes received for male contestants: “those who would feel more inclined to vote for ‘ellas,’ naturally their admirers of the ugly sex, many of whom currently find themselves in the armed forces. Evidence of this was found in the fact that many of the votes for the different female candidates came from military bases.”

enormous popularity of Latin bands across the United States even going so far as to compare its awards ceremony to the Oscars of the dance music world.²⁴ Three years later, the newspaper boasted that “hundreds of men, women, and children, as many English-speaking as those from our hispanic community” filled the Manhattan Center for the annual fundraising gala.²⁵

With just two exceptions, each year the newspaper selected the Manhattan Center as the site of its *Gran Festival*. Located at 311 West Thirty-fourth Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues, the auditorium formerly known as the Manhattan Opera House opened its doors to thousands of members of the *colonia de habla española de Nueva York*.²⁶ Many factors likely influenced *La Prensa*’s choice of venue, not the least of

²⁴ “Nuestro concurso demuestra la gran Popularidad de orquestas hispanas,” *La Prensa*, 22 March 1953, p. 1; “Daniel Santos hoy y mañana en el Palladium con Machito y T. Puente,” *La Prensa*, 30 September 1955, p. 5. The report explained that the *Gran Concurso de Bailes Antillanos del Carnaval de Oro* would present “Dominican merengue, creole chachacha, and Cuban mambo, the three dances of ‘the craze.’”

For more on the commercial success of Latin music – from the son, conga, and rumba to mambo and cha-cha-chá – in the United States, see forthcoming note on the origins of Latin music in the United States and the debates on “authentic” versus “commercial” musical forms and performers. Put simply, as Louis A. Pérez, Jr. explains, “In the 1950s ‘Latin’ became one of the dominant genres of the U.S. recording industry” (*On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture*, 212).

²⁵ “El lunes publicaremos el último Escrutinio de nuestro Concurso,” *La Prensa*, 5 May 1950, p. 1; “Gran Éxito el Festival de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 7 May 1956, p. 1.

²⁶ In 1941 and 1943, *La Prensa* hosted the fundraising gala at the Royal Windsor located at 69 West Sixty-sixth Street on the corner of Columbus Avenue. To be clear, the newspaper never disclosed or discussed its reasons for switching over permanently to the Manhattan Center. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, reports leading up to the *Gran Festival* implied that the venue location was just another one of the event’s traditions.

Built by writer and theatrical producer and director Oscar Hammerstein in 1906, the Manhattan Opera House rivaled the Metropolitan Opera House. Hammerstein originally set out “with the intention of giving grand opera for the masses, at lower prices than those at Metropolitan.” After some difficulty in securing premier performers and encouragement from those he approached for subscriptions, he soon changed his mind: “I went all over the matter, and at the end I voted, “You are a fool.” It was either a case of giving second-class opera with second-class people or giving first-class opera with first-class people, for first-class people.” See, “Hammerstein to Bring Both De Reszkes Here,” *New York Times*, 23 February 1906, p. 3. After about four years, competition between the opera houses threatened to close them both down. See, “Merger of Operas under Negotiations,” *New York Times*, 1 January 1910, p. 1; Then, in 1911, the Shubert brothers bought the Manhattan Opera House and converted it into a “‘combination’ house,” offering both opera and vaudeville. With “one of the largest auditoriums in the city” at “some distance from

which were logistical concerns such as the maximum capacity of the ballroom and rental fees. But, place matters, and by choosing a venue in midtown Manhattan, the newspaper sent what can be viewed as mixed signals to readers, potential attendees, and performers as well as to the city writ large. An acclaimed venue for hosting community events, charitable dinners, and stage performances, the Manhattan Center offered attendees, especially Anglo attendees, a safe, reputable place to experience the “exotic” rhythms of Latin music and mingle side-by-side, albeit temporarily, with migrants from Puerto Rico, Cuba, Spain, and other parts of Latin American and the Caribbean. Accessibility for whites, however, may have also served to exclude dark-skinned members of the *colonia* from the event, particularly in the 1940s and early 1950s when racialized boundaries restricted the movements of African Americans and Latinos/as to certain parts of the city, limiting the city-wide opportunities available for housing, employment, and recreation.²⁷ It also remains possible that Latinos/as of color may have been denied entry to the event, as we saw happened when dark-skinned Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and African Americans attempted to gain admittance into events organized by certain Cuban and Hispanic social clubs in the city. At the same time, lesser known singers and performers had the opportunity each year at the fundraising gala to perform in a grand ballroom at a venue that might otherwise have denied them entry based on their race and ethnicity. It can be argued that the decision to hold the *Gran Festival* in midtown nearby other famous and well-known nightclubs, cabarets, and theaters allowed organizers to claim a space for

the main theatrical center,” the Shubert brothers opted for a “new policy” that set prices “less than those prevailing on Broadway.” See, “Shuberts to Have the Manhattan,” *New York Times*, 3 March 1911, p. 11.

²⁷ Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

Latino/a performers and audiences that extended well beyond the confines of Spanish Harlem, the Bronx, and other areas of high Latino/a concentration. Moreover, the organizers' preference for a symbolically prestigious place also seems to have reflected their own notions of how the *colonia hispana*, its leadership, and its cultural productions should be represented to wider audiences. Whatever the political motivation for the selection of the Manhattan Center, *La Prensa* successfully organized an event that drew a paying audience as well as nightclub and dancehall promoters and leaders of social clubs hoping to find bookings for their venues.²⁸

As the size and magnitude of the fundraising gala escalated, so too did the details and logistics of executing such a grand affair. Organizers designated seating on a first-come-first-served basis, and many ticket-holders lined up outside of the Manhattan Center several hours before the doors opened to secure the best seats near the stage. The maintenance of order and decorum remained a fundamental concern for the newspaper and organizing committee. So much so did the newspaper worry about the potential for disorder and, not surprisingly, the negative publicity that would follow such disruptions, that each year organizers reminded readers and attendees that local police, uniformed and undercover officers, would be present outside and inside the ballroom. Concerns about potential disruptions were not totally unfounded since fights and scuffles were known to break out at dance venues that featured Latin bands, including at places like Hunts Point Palace in the Bronx and the Palladium Ballroom on Broadway. One of the major

²⁸ For a more specific look at the relationship between race and Latino/a nightlife in New York City, see, for example, Boggs, *Salsiology*; Steven Loza, *Tito Puente and the Making of Latin Music* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Roberta L. Singer and Elena Martínez, "A South Bronx Latin Music Tale," *CENTRO Journal* 16, no. 1(Spring 2004): 177-201; Max Salazar, *Mambo Kingdom: Latin Music in New York* (New York: Schirmer Trade Books, 2002).

concerns for the Comisión de Escrutinio was crowding in the hallways, on the sidewalks outside of the ballroom, and near the entryways and box office. At times, the crowds overwhelmed organizers. For example, in 1945, organizers turned away nearly two thousand would-be-attendees when the box office sold out of tickets and the ballroom nearly exceeded its capacity. Year after year, organizers beseeched attendees not to arrive at the event before the doors were set to open, suggesting perhaps that the midtown location required that the majority Latino/a audience be confined indoors and less visible to potentially offended passers-by and residents of the area.²⁹

Despite the large crowds and the length of the program, the newspaper never reported any disturbances or incidents taking place at the *Gran Festival*. In fact, the newspaper deemed the police presence “unnecessary precautions” and praised the thousands in attendance for their “perfect order,” cooperation, and good behavior. Reports characterized the atmosphere inside the ballroom as “admirable, sincere, of contagious cordiality, of innocent and rejuvenating joy.”³⁰ Whatever the initial concerns about possible disruptions or disorder, the newspaper’s explicit narration of a “cordial” and “orderly” event suggests that, perhaps, these were not characteristics and behaviors so often used to describe events organized by the *colonia hispana*. That the newspaper

²⁹ “Celebrase Mañana el Festival de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 27 March 1943, p. 1; “La Argentinita en el Festival de mañana,” *La Prensa*, 15 April 1944, p. 1; “Mañana se verificará el gran festival anual de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 28 April 1945, p. 1; “El Festival de ‘La Prensa’ fue un gran éxito artístico,” *La Prensa*, 1 May 1945, p. 1; “Verifícase Mañana el Gran Festival Pro Caridad de ‘La Prensa’ en el M. Center,” *La Prensa*, 10 May 1947 p. 1; “Mañana se verificará el gran festival anual pro caridad,” *La Prensa*, 1 May 1948, p. 1; “Mañana domingo se celebra el Gran Festival Artístico Anual de Caridad,” *La Prensa*, 1 May 1954, p. 1; Ray Santos, 2 August 1993, David Carp Collection, Bronx County Historical Society.

³⁰ “El festival culminó en un éxito,” *La Prensa*, 17 April 1944, p. 1; “El Festival de ‘La Prensa’ fue excelente en calidad artística y en concurrencia,” *La Prensa*, 13 May 1947, p. 1; “Más que un festival: Una verdadera tradición de la colonia,” *La Prensa*, 8 May 1948, p. 3; “Hoy llevase a cabo el grandioso Festival y Baile pro Caridad,” *La Prensa*, 21 May 1950, p. 1; “Puntualidad, orden y alegría fueron la característica del Gran Festival,” *La Prensa*, 5 May 1953, p. 3; “Gran Éxito del Festival de La Prensa,” *La Prensa*, 3 May 1955, p. 1.

insisted on assuring the reading public that they had, in fact, organized a “civilized” event seems to reflect as well the organizers’ own expression of self. In other words, “cordial,” “orderly,” and “civilized” are coded words that signify the newspaper’s racial and class biases.

Though readers and performers shared a common interest in the results of the popularity contest, *La Prensa* insisted that weeks of submitting ballots and counting votes amounted to more than a list of winners and runners-up. Weeks of voting culminated in a *Gran Festival* designed to raise money for the newspaper’s Charity Fund and, some years, an additional donation to the American Red Cross. Year after year, the contest and festival met the “dual goals” of promoting celebrity and charity, offering winners and runners-up congratulatory trophies and recognition, providing attendees with over eight hours of theatrics, music, and dancing, and giving financial support to various Hispanic organizations in the city that helped members of the *colonia* most in need. The contest and festival had become an annual tradition, and the newspaper boasted that “the public is already familiar with this outstanding artistic-charity event.”³¹ The newspaper provided readers with its most explicit and direct rationale for sponsoring the *Gran Festival* in 1957:

The festival has three fundamental goals: 1) to increase the resources with which the Charity Fund helps our charitable organizations and, by extension, those in need in our community; 2) to highlight the magnificent work of popularizing the folkloric and artistic work that our artists and musicians realize throughout the

³¹ “Cantarán y bailarán pro Caridad el domingo aquí,” *La Prensa*, 28 March 1941, p. 3; “Verifícase mañana el Gran Festival Pro Caridad de *La Prensa* en el M. Center,” *La Prensa*, 10 May 1947, p.1; “Más que un Festival: Una verdadera tradición de la colonia,” *La Prensa*, 8 May 1948, p. 3; “En Broadway,” *La Prensa*, 4 April 1956, p. 5.

year; and 3) to offer the hispanic family each year the opportunity to attend a grand reunion that is both intimate and social.³²

By the late 1950s, however, repeated mention of the charitable goals of the contest and festival seemed an attempt to stall what at this point appeared to be waning interest and support for the “annual tradition” from within the *colonia hispana*.

The newspaper relied on the Sociedad Auxiliadora de San Vicente de Paul, the Corte de Honor de Lourdes, or “another institution of absolute guarantee” to determine which “hispanos in need” would benefit from the money collected from ticket sales to the *Gran Festival*. The newspaper published detailed reports of money raised from the fundraising gala between 1943 and 1945. In 1943, adult ticket sales brought in a gross net of \$3,140 and children ticket sales yielded a gross net of \$61.75. The following year’s festival resulted in an actual net of \$1,288.35 for the newspaper’s Charity Fund as well as a \$1,000 donation to the American Red Cross. This separate donation to the American Red Cross signified patriotic support of the United States during the Second World War as well as an appreciation of the services this organization provided to U.S. soldiers, including those of Latin descent, and other domestic and international war-related efforts. In 1945, the *Gran Festival* yielded a total net product of \$3,605.05.³³ Unfortunately, *La Prensa* did not publish exact budgets and profit details after 1945. Nonetheless, with yearly festival attendance holding steady between four and five thousand people, and ticket prices set at \$1.20 for adults and \$.55 for children under the age of twelve until 1948 when prices jumped to \$1.50 for adults and \$.60 for children under the age of twelve, proceeds likely ranged between three and four thousand dollars

³² “El Festival Anual de Caridad,” *La Prensa*, 2 May 1957, p. 4.

³³ In 1944 and 1945, *La Prensa* provided readers with a detailed accounting of all money received and paid related to the contest and festival. See Appendix A.

up until 1956. In 1957, ticket prices rose to \$1.80 for adults and \$.80 for children, though it remains unclear if such large crowds gathered for the final three festivals.³⁴

Not to be left out of the goodwill fostered by charitable giving, the various Hispanic nightclubs, cabarets, and theaters of New York City contributed to the appeal and success of the festival by allowing their contracted solo and group acts to perform segments of their entire revues at the festival at no cost to the newspaper. Of course, for owners and managers this apparent selflessness brought with it some noticeable perks, namely free advertising in *La Prensa* for their venues and shows as well as the opportunity to establish and build rapport with potential clientele from within the community at the festival itself. There was a great deal of competition for patrons among the nightclubs, cabarets, and theaters of the *colonia hispana*, and owners and managers that collaborated with organizers of the *Gran Festival* likely hoped that this cooperation would increase their venue's popularity. Though most performers volunteered to participate in the *Gran Festival* of their own accord, in the days leading up to the event, *La Prensa* published articles and advertisements announcing the nightclubs, cabarets, and theaters that promised to lend their performers to the showcase. Numerous venues collaborated with the newspaper consistently throughout the 1940s and 1950s, including

³⁴ "Triunfadores en 2o. Puesto del Certamen de 'La Prensa,'" *La Prensa*, 25 April 1949, p. 8; "Aristas y público colaboraron para el éxito del festival de La Prensa," *La Prensa*, 30 March 1943 p. 3; "Beneficio líquido de \$2,288.35 dio el Festival de 'La Prensa' pro Caridad," *La Prensa*, 20 April 1944, p. 2; "El Festival Pro Ayuda Fondo Social de 'La Prensa' dio un producto de \$3,605.09," *La Prensa*, 7 May 1945, p. 2.

Also, of note, in 1941 and 1942, the newspaper set ticket prices for men at one dollar, for women at fifty cents, and for children at twenty-five cents, a gendered pricing scale practiced by many of the nightclubs and cabarets of the city.

the Havana-Madrid on 1650 Broadway, El Chico, Cuban Casino, La Conga on 209 West Fifty-first Street, and Teatro Puerto Rico on 490 East 138th Street in the Bronx.³⁵

If the number and variety of celebrities set to attend the festival as winners, runners-up, and notable performers were not enough to sell tickets to the *Gran Festival*, then the altruistic goals of fundraising and charitable giving certainly did their part to attract an audience. The uniqueness of the event attracted many of those in attendance, and brief on-the-street testimonials solicited from readers demonstrate that the dual campaign for celebrity and charity pursued by organizers of the *Concurso de Popularidad* and *Gran Festival* succeeded in achieving and maintaining the support of the *colonia*. When asked what he liked most about attending the fundraising gala, Luis E. Boada responded that he attended the event “for its artists and good organization, and because the Charity Fund is for hispanos.” Mercedes Matellanes explained that since she had arrived in New York City five years ago she had not missed a *Gran Festival*, favoring the event held in 1954 for its “great variety of acts.” Pedro G. Lanza stated, “I attend the *Festival* not just for the artists but also because they are held to help hispanos in need by way of very well-known and responsible institutions.” For Frank Flores and other respondents, the event also served to elevate their opinion of the newspaper: “*La Prensa* is the only newspaper that gets involved in charitable causes without regards to

³⁵ “El Festival y Baile para el Fondo de La Prensa efectuarse Mañana,” *La Prensa*, 25 April 1942, p. 1; “La Revista del Cuban Casino en el Festival,” *La Prensa*, 23 March 1943, p. 1; “El espectáculo de ‘La Conga’ en el festival,” *La Prensa*, 24 March 1943, p. 1; “El Cabaret ‘Havana-Madrid’ brinda su revista para el festival del día 29,” *La Prensa*, 21 April 1945, p. 1; “La espléndida revista de ‘El Chico’ en el programa del Festival del día 29,” *La Prensa*, 23 April 1945, p. 1; “La Revista del ‘Cuban Casino’ en la función del domingo,” *La Prensa*, 25 April 1945, p. 1; “El ‘Havana-Madrid’ brinda su revista para el festival pro Caridad del 26,” *La Prensa*, 16 May 1946, p. 1; “La Revista de ‘El Chico’ en el Festival Hispano del 26,” *La Prensa*, 18 May 1946, p. 1; “‘La Conga’ brinda a Diosa Costello y su revista para el Grandioso Festival,” *La Prensa*, 24 May 1946, p. 1; “El ‘Puerto Rico’ brinda su función al festival del 8,” *La Prensa*, 30 April 1949, p. 1; “La Revista de ‘El Chico’ figurará en el programa del Festival de mayo 2,” *La Prensa*, 23 April 1954, p. 1.

race. I have attended all the *Festivales* and liked them all.” Frank Torres echoed these remarks, commenting that “*La Prensa* is the only newspaper that’s interested in all of the hispanos of New York.”³⁶ With specific references to *La Prensa*’s commitment to “all of the hispanos of New York,” “without regards to race,” it seems that the newspaper had successfully presented to its readers ideologies and practices of *hispanidad* that were racially- and ethnically-inclusive.

These responses also reveal a not entirely surprising incentive prompting the newspaper to hold the contest and fundraising gala each year: promotional self-interest. That is, by organizing an event that provided its readers with what it considered both high quality, lower cost entertainment and a sense of responsibility through financial support of the Charity Fund, *La Prensa* constructed an image of itself as an institution of unparalleled selflessness, of continued duty and commitment to the community. This marketing strategy yielded long-term results in the form of a loyal readership and yearly event supporters, as demonstrated by the remarks of those surveyed by the newspaper. Though at least two scholars have argued that *La Prensa* specifically targeted members of the “bourgeois Latino community” vis-à-vis certain sections of the newspaper like “Notas de Colonia,” the case can certainly be made that an event like the *Gran Festival* aimed to include a much broader audience. While participation in the fundraising festival required that those in attendance have both time for leisure activities and money to spend on popular entertainments, an entrance fee of \$1.50 was not entirely out of reach for many of the working-class members of the *colonia hispana*. During the 1940s and 1950s, social clubs like El Club Cubano Inter-Americano charged between \$1.00 and

³⁶ “Dice nuestra comunidad...,” *La Prensa*, 15 March 1957, p. 4. The exact question posed to respondents was “How many festivals have you attended in the past and which one did you like most and why?” A total of nine people responded, two women and seven men.

\$2.00 for public entry into dance events as did various nightclubs and cabarets like the Havana-Madrid and the Cuban Casino. It cost \$2.00 to get into the Palladium on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday nights, though Sundays were considerably cheaper with tickets costing \$.50 before six in the evening and \$1.00 afterwards. Whatever relationship *La Prensa* tried to cultivate with the “bourgeois Latino community” through its editorial content, the price of a ticket to the *Gran Festival* did not serve as means to exclude Latinos/as of the working-class.³⁷

The advertising potential of the *Gran Festival* not only appealed to the newspaper and nightclub, cabaret, and theater owners as well as to the performers themselves but also caught the attention of aspiring politicians and government officials. Judging by some of the notable local political figures in attendance, entertainment, charity, and increased profits were, in some ways, minor incentives to participate in this annual event. Local politics and popular culture merged at the fundraising gala, and the candidates and officials present often used the event to access and address potential supporters. Additionally, this local political presence suggests a shift towards a mutual or reciprocal interest in matters related to living and settling in New York City. The outlook seemed to be shifting from one of temporary displacement to permanent settlement. In 1948, as he had in years prior, Assistant District Attorney Louis Pagnucco attended the *Gran Festival* with his wife and daughter. Making his way through the crowd gathered in the entryway,

³⁷ Ševčenko, “Making Loisaida,” 27.

For more on ethnic marketing and ethnic entrepreneurs see, for example, Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community*, 70-71, 152; George Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993): 174; Glasser, *My Music is My Flag*; Arlene Dávila, *Latinos, Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Arlene Dávila, *Latino Spin: Public Image and the Whitewashing of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); Cohen, “Encountering Mass Culture at the Grassroots;” Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003): 318, 329-331.

he reportedly exclaimed, “They certainly make a big fuss over this affair!”³⁸ New York City Mayor Vincent R. Impelliteri attended the *Gran Festival* in 1953. In his address to the audience, he established a shared immigrant past with those Latinos/as in attendance, describing “his situation as an immigrant from Sicily, almost forty-nine years ago, when his father, a shoemaker who spoke no English, brought him, one-year-old, and his mother and siblings to live in this country.” He concluded his speech by praising *La Prensa*’s many years of “civic and patriotic” service.³⁹

Not only were those in the audience presented with a variety of performances by their favorite singers and dancers, but they also witnessed what amounted to a crude political offering, a spectacle of political choices. No two politicians put this opportunity to better use than did Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. and Municipal Court Justice Benjamin Shalleck, opposing candidates for the vacant seat in the Twentieth Congressional District of New York which included much of Manhattan’s Upper West Side during this period. Both candidates attended the *Gran Festival* in May 1949 just a few weeks after Roosevelt, Jr. split from the Democratic Party to run against Shalleck as a candidate for the Liberal and Four Freedoms Party. Roosevelt’s candidacy renewed Republican interest in the race, and in the days leading up to the *Gran Festival* it became clear that the contest had “reached the intensive fighting stage.” At such a critical moment during their campaigns, both candidates attended the fundraising festival in hopes of securing voter support, an indication that the event could, on occasion, serve an explicitly political

³⁸ “Más Que un Festival: Una verdadera tradición de la colonia,” *La Prensa*, 8 May 1948, p. 3. In 1944, the newspaper reported that “the famous Puerto Rican detective Aristides Ramos had received a special invitation to attend the fundraising gala.”

³⁹ *La Prensa*, 2 May 1953, p. 1; “Éxito sin precedente en el Festival de La Prensa; asistió Impellitteri,” *La Prensa*, 4 May 1953, p. 1; “Triunfa el Festival de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 2 May 1955, p. 1; “Enorme interés por ir al Manhattan Center,” *La Prensa*, 5 May 1957, p. 1.

function. Thanks to event organizers, political candidates like Roosevelt and Shalleck could present their platforms and make appeals to an already-assembled audience, a mostly migrant, Spanish-speaking audience seemingly elevated in significance by such targeted interest. Before presenting Doris Scotoliff with her trophy for winning the *Damas* category, Roosevelt, Jr. “gave a few brief and emotional words describing his political campaign and affirming his admiration for the Spanish-speaking people of North America.” According to reports, those in attendance applauded him “wildly.” Shalleck, for his part, presented a winner’s trophy to Perucho Irigoyen, though the newspaper made no record of whatever remarks he may or may not have made to the audience regarding his candidacy for office.⁴⁰

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the newspaper referenced those interested and involved in the *Concursos de Popularidad* and *Gran Festivals* as well as its general readership in numerous and specific ways, namely as the *colonia*, *nuestra colonia*, the *colonia de habla española*, the *colonia de habla española de Nueva York y sus alrededores*, the *colonia de habla hispana de Nueva York y ciudades y pueblos limitrofes*, and the *colonia hispanoablante*.⁴¹ The newspaper also used plural forms such as the

⁴⁰ “Democratic Split Stirs Republicans,” *New York Times*, 13 April 1949, p. 44; James A. Hagerty, “Fight Intensified for Bloom’s Seat,” *New York Times*, 7 May 1949, p. 8; “Brillante el Festival de ‘La Prensa’ en Manhattan Center,” *La Prensa*, 9 May 1949, p. 1.

For more on New York City politics in the 1940s and 1950s, especially in relation to Spanish-speaking migrants, see, for example, Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community*; Salvatore J. LaGumina, *New York at Mid-Century: The Impellitteri Years* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1992); Chris McNickle, *To Be Mayor of New York: Ethnic Politics in the City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Biondi, *To Stand and Fight*; Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities*; Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*.

⁴¹ “Cantarán y bailarán pro caridad el domingo aquí,” *La Prensa*, 28 March 1941, p. 3; “‘Machito,’ el director de orquesta que triunfa con el ritmo criollo,” *La Prensa*, 27 March 1943, p. 2; “Fue un gran éxito el festival de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 29 March 1943, p. 1; “Nuevo Teatro para películas hispanas abrirá sus puertas en Times Square,” *La Prensa*, 19 April 1943, p. 5; “Más figuras de fama para el gran festival,” *La Prensa*, 12 April 1944, p. 1; “Terminó anoche el concurso de Popularidad,” *La Prensa*,

colonias hispanas and *nuestras colonias en esta ciudad*, suggesting early on that a variety of ethnic groups came together to form a collectivity bound by a common language and shared experiences in New York City.⁴² In her study of Puerto Rican community development before the Second World War, historian Virginia Sánchez Korrol defined *colonias* as migrant neighborhoods, “geographic urban centers marked by dense settlement; they provided outlets for Puerto Rican interests, creating institutions which affirmed social identity and fostered internal activities [and] as an area where the language, customs, attitudes, interests and traditions were similar to those he or she had left in Puerto Rico.” Though Sánchez Korrol’s interest lies primarily in the development of the Puerto Rican *colonia*, *La Prensa* used the concept of *la colonia* and *la colonia hispana* primarily in a pan-ethnic effort “to build unity among Spanish-speaking New Yorkers.” This terminology, according to historian Liz Ševčenko, referenced “a group of people who shared a common regional, class, or political background but was not defined by any geographical area in the city.”⁴³ That *La Prensa* hailed an imagined community of pan-ethnic Spanish-speaking New Yorkers makes sense given that organizers had modified one of the rules of the *Concurso de Popularidad* to specify that eligibility to

20 April 1945, p. 1; “Enorme Entusiasmo por asistir mañana al Gran Festival Pro Fondo de Caridad,” *La Prensa*, 25 May 1946, p. 1; “Verifícase mañana el Gran Festival Pro Caridad de ‘La Prensa’ en el M. Center,” *La Prensa*, 10 May 1947, p. 1; “Mañana se verificará el Gran Festival anual Pro Caridad,” *La Prensa*, 1 May 1948, p. 1; “Triunfadores en 2o. Puesto del Certamen de ‘La Prensa’,” *La Prensa*, 25 April 1949, p. 8; “El lunes publicaremos el último Escrutinio de nuestro Concurso,” *La Prensa*, 5 May 1950, p. 1; “Mercedes y Albano en el Festival pro Caridad de ‘La Prensa’ el domingo,” *La Prensa*, 29 April 1955, p. 1.

⁴² “Consuelo Moreno, Don Arres y Xavier Cugat, Vencedores en el Certamen de Artistas,” *La Prensa*, 28 February 1941, p. 1; “El público quedó muy complacido del brillante festival que dio ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 18 April 1944, p. 2; “La votación del Concurso de Artistas se cierra el Sábado; el día 29 es la fiesta,” *La Prensa*, 11 April 1945, p. 2; “Esplendido balance artístico del ‘Festival’ de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 10 May 1949, p. 1.

⁴³ Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community*, 4, 52-53, 69, 77, 81; Ševčenko, “Making Loisaida,” 294.

participate was open to “any hispanic artist, or artist of hispanic origin, regardless of nationality.”

The dominance of the term *colonia* gave way in the 1950s to more varied descriptors such as the *comunidad de habla española*, the *público de habla española de Nueva York y sus cotornos*, the *población de habla española*, *nuestra comunidad*, and *nuestra comunidad hispana*.⁴⁴ The striking point here is not the less frequent use of the terms *colonia* or *la colonia hispana* to represent the entire Spanish-speaking population of New York City interested in both the contest and festival, but the increased use of these other terms to purposefully encompass a broad Spanish-speaking community not bound by geographic borders or ethnic divisions.

Only in 1941 and 1943 did the newspaper explicitly indicate that the performers and audience participating in the *Gran Festival* were bound by a shared racial past. The newspaper reported that the fundraising gala enjoyed the “participation of the most distinguished artists of *nuestra raza*.” But the more telling comments came when the newspaper described the audience in attendance: “we noticed dozens and dozens of people from other races and nationalities that eager to get to know our artists as well as our music were the most animated, applauding with as much fervor as *los nuestros*.” Obvious distinctions were made between those belonging to *nuestra raza* and outsiders, though it remains unclear what markers these observers used to arrive at their conclusions. One could speculate, however, that language-use, phenotype, and other

⁴⁴ “Verifícase hoy el festival pro Fondo de Caridad de ‘La Prensa’ en N. York,” *La Prensa*, 20 May 1951, p. 1; “Amenizará el baile del Festival de ‘La Prensa’ la Orq. de Machito,” *La Prensa*, 4 May 1952, p. 3; “Gran entusiasmo para el Festival de La Prensa en el Manhattan Center,” *La Prensa*, 3 May 1953, p. 1; “Mañana domingo se celebra el Gran Festival Artístico de Caridad,” *La Prensa*, 1 May 1954, p. 1; “Gran éxito el Festival de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 7 May 1956, p. 1; “El Festival Anual de Caridad,” *La Prensa*, 2 May 1957, p. 4.

visual cues helped these observers conclude that some of those in attendance were not of *nuestra raza*. Still, defining details about *nuestra raza* were scarce beyond what might be suggested by descriptions of *nuestra música* performed at the *Gran Festival*. Reports declared that “Hispanoamérica, Afro-Cuban, and Spanish music provided the setting for the festival,” and that “the applause was as warm for flamenco dances, gypsy dances and folk songs as they were for the melodies and dances of South America, the songs of Mexico, creole rhythms and songs, everyone mixing together happily and harmoniously.” Described variously as “the sensual harmony of gypsy and Afro-Cuban music,” “symbol of Hispano-American unity with the Spanish motherland,” and “Spanish and Hispanoamérica folklores,” *nuestra música* revealed an African, Spanish, and Hispanic past existing within the *colonia* and suggested that racial and ethnic mixture fit within the parameters of what *La Prensa* had deemed *los nuestros*, at least in the realm of popular culture.⁴⁵

From this perspective, it would seem as though the newspaper used *nuestra raza* as a pan-ethnic term synonymous with *hispanidad* to signify a “composite race that encompasses an assortment of diverse national origins, various cultural heritages, and

⁴⁵ “El festival culminó en un éxito,” *La Prensa*, 17 April 1944, p. 1; “El público quedó muy complacido del brillante festival que dio ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 18 April 1944, p. 2; “Se celebró anoche con gran entusiasmo el gran festival pro fondo de caridad,” *La Prensa*, 27 May 1946, p. 1; “Más de 4,000 personas en la fiesta de ayer,” *La Prensa*, 31 March 1941, p. 1, 2; “Artistas y público colaboran para el éxito del festival de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 30 March 1943, p. 3. “Se celebró anoche con gran entusiasmo el gran Festival pro fondo de caridad,” *La Prensa*, 27 March 1946, p. 1; “Famosos artistas colaboran en preparar programa para el festival pro caridad,” *La Prensa*, 23 April 1948, p. 1.

For more on the origins of Latin music, see, for example, John Storm Roberts, *The Latin Tinge: The Impact of Latin American Music on the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Isabelle Leymarie, *Cuban Fire: The Story of Salsa and Latin Jazz* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002); Boggs, *Salsiology*; Raul A. Fernández, “The Course of U.S. Cuban Music: Margin and Mainstream,” *Cuban Studies* 24 (1994); Peter Manuel, “Latin Music in the United States: Salsa and the Mass Media,” *Journal of Communication* 41 (1991); Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Raul A. Fernández, *From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Peter Manuel, ed. *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009).

disparate phenotypes,” a politically expedient mode of identification proposed by Latino/a Studies scholar Silvio Torres-Saillant. Though seen as a rejection of the U.S. binary racial system and a mode of racialization between whiteness and blackness, the concept of *nuestra raza* in this case also functions in much the same way as the problematic concepts of “Hispanic” and “Latino.” What Latino/a Studies scholar Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez has argued is the case for the terms “Hispanic” and “Latino,” I argue can also be said of *nuestra raza*. That is, these terms “constitute an act of racism when functioning as a fictitious homogenization of all Latin American countries into one language and one race.”⁴⁶ There is no evidence to suggest that *La Prensa* excluded dark-skinned members of the *colonia hispana* or other blacks from attending the *Gran Festival*, an event that celebrated and featured performances by numerous Afro-Cubans as well as other musicians of color. In fact, despite its use of the term *hispanidad* over *latinidad*, the newspaper did not shy away from openly discussing the meanings and inclusiveness of both terms as it did in a series of debates published in its editorial section during the fall of 1944. Still, the newspaper’s use of the concept of *nuestra raza* seems to

⁴⁶ Torres-Saillant, “Inventing the Race,” 135; Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez, *José, Can You See? Latinos On and Off Broadway* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999): 12.

For more on race and racialization, including the concept of *mestizaje*, see, for example, José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Raza/La raza cósmica* (Los Angeles: California State University, 1979, 1925); Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinster/Aunt Lute Books, 1987); Clara Rodríguez, *Puerto Ricans: Born in the U.S.A.* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991); Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Suzanne Oboler, *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (Re)Presentation in the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Lourdes Martínez-Echazabal, “Mestizaje and the Discourse of National/Cultural Identity in Latin America, 1845-1959,” *Latin American Perspectives* 25, no. 3 (May 1998): 21-42; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*; Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America* (New York: Viking, 2000); Agustín Laó-Montes, “Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York City,” in *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York*, eds. Agustín Laó-Montes and Arlene Dávila (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001): 1-53; Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White On Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Dávila, *Latino Spin*; Adrian Burgos, Jr., *Playing America’s Game: Baseball, Latinos, and the Color Line* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Anthony Macías, *Mexican American Mojo: Popular Music, Dance, and Urban Culture in Los Angeles, 1935-1968* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

have limited the possibility for dual expressions of *hispanidad*, defined by historian Lorrin Thomas as “the cultural symbols of the Spanish-speaking elite, hearkening back to Spain and the romanticized European past of Latin America,” and blackness.⁴⁷

Though the newspaper and even many of the performers themselves emphasized the pan-ethnic, multinational Hispanic identity of the contest, festival, and the *colonia* more broadly, Cuban national identity was disproportionately at the core of the performances and the meanings inferred upon them, as demonstrated in particular through descriptions of *nuestra música*. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Afro-Cuban musicians figured prominently among the long lists of contest winners and fundraising gala participants. In many ways, the concept of *nuestra raza* (and, by extension, *hispanidad*) is less interesting for whether it was a term of “resistance” or “racism” than that it helps to reveal a process by which Afro-Cuban music and Latin music were treated as synonyms in certain contexts without diminishing, as we have seen, the simultaneous conversations within Cuba and its diaspora about the relationship of music to national identity.

The emerging relationship between local politics and the increasingly populous *colonia de habla española*, by way of the contest and festival, followed years of diplomatic presence and support from Latin American and Caribbean consulate officials

⁴⁷ Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores, eds. *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 13; Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*, 53.

Dmitri Ivanovitch, “Latinoamericanos or Hispanoamericanos?,” *La Prensa*, 18 October 1944, p. 4; Dmitri Ivanovitch, “Latinoamericanos or Hispanoamericanos?,” *La Prensa*, 21 October 1944, p. 4; Julio Garzon, “Del Gentilicio ‘Hispanoamericano,’” *La Prensa*, 24 October 1944, p. 4; Julio Garzon, “Del Gentilicio ‘Hispanoamericano,’” *La Prensa*, 25 October 1944, p. 4; Rafael Belaunde, “Propósito eliminatorio del calificativo ‘Latino,’” *La Prensa*, 28 October 1944, p. 4; Rafael Belaunde, “Respondiendo a Cinco Preguntas Concretas,” *La Prensa*, 2 November 1944, p. 4.

in New York City.⁴⁸ More specifically, up until 1950, consuls from Cuba, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Peru, and Colombia attended the *Gran Festivals* to present their countrymen with their trophies, a celebratory act that effectively served to (re)claim those performers for their homelands.⁴⁹ The early participation of Cuban consulate officials reveals an active Cuban national presence in New York City and demonstrates just one of the many manifestations of the “ties of singular intimacy” that had been developing between the United States and Cuba since the mid-nineteenth century.⁵⁰ In 1943, Miguelito Valdés received his trophy from Roberto Hernández, General Consul of Cuba, and he reportedly planned to dedicate it to Cuban President Fulgencio Batista on behalf of the *colonia*. That same year Machito received his trophy from Cayetano de Quesada, Consul of Cuba, an act that left him “genuinely and visibly emotional.”⁵¹ In 1944,

⁴⁸ Much has been written on United States economic, political, military, and cultural interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean as a result of the Good Neighbor Policy and the Cold War. For some notable contributions in this area, specifically in terms of cultural “encounters,” see, Seth Fein, “Hollywood and United States-Mexico Relations in the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1996); Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine LeGrand, and Ricardo D. Salvatore, eds. *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*; Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Less is known about Latin American and Caribbean interventions in the United States during this period, specifically in terms of how Latin American and Caribbean governments vis-à-vis consular offices, for example, participated in Latino/a community development and political mobilization in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s. One notable exception is Thomas A. Guglielmo, “Fighting for Caucasian Rights: Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and the Transnational Struggle for Civil Rights in World War II Texas,” *Journal of American History* 92, no. 4 (March 2006): 1212-1237. He finds that Mexican consuls played a key role in recording and publicizing Mexican discrimination in Texas and that Mexicans and Mexican Americans worked with both the United States and Mexican governments to achieve equal rights. See, also, Nathan Connolly, “By Eminent Domain: Race and Capital in the Building of an American South Florida,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2008).

⁴⁹ “Mañana se verificará el gran festival anual de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 28 April 1945, p. 1; “El Festival de ‘La Prensa’ para entregar los trofeos artísticos, fue insuperable,” *La Prensa*, 28 May 1946, p. 2; “Hoy llevase a cabo el grandioso Festival y Baile pro Caridad,” *La Prensa*, 21 May 1950, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Borrowing from President William McKinley, historian Louis A. Pérez, Jr. used the phrase “ties of singular intimacy” to describe the historical linkages between the United States and Cuba, specifically U.S. involvement in all aspects of Cuban life – politics, society, trade and economics, and culture. For more, see Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990); Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*.

Consul Hernández presented trophies to several notable Cuban performers: Raul y Eva, winners of the *Pareja de Baile* category, and José Curbelo and Luis Varona, first and second place finishers, respectively, in the *Orquestas* category.⁵² General Consul de Quesada returned in 1945 to present Xavier Cugat and José Curbelo with their first and second place trophies, respectively, in the *Orquestas* category.⁵³ These presentations served as unique opportunities for these Cuban performers to receive national recognition especially given the likely gap in class and racial status between most of the performers and the consuls. Consul participation in the *Gran Festivals* also demonstrates an effort on the part of the Cuban government to organize and appeal to its overseas population within the *colonia hispana*. As we saw in the previous chapter, this participation serves as an example of state-led, long-distance nationalism in practice, though it seems that Cuban consulate officials, at least in regards to the *Gran Festivals*, played a less direct role in organizing community life than did the Mexican consulate in Los Angeles in the 1920s, for example.⁵⁴

Nineteen forty-three proved to be a big year for Cuban singers and orchestras. Thanks to his “meteoric career and instantaneous popularity,” Miguelito Valdés finished first in the *Caballeros* category, easily defeating runners-up Bobby Capó and Jerónimo Villarino. Shortly after the release of the contest results, Valdés announced that he would postpone an already scheduled trip to Havana in order to attend and perform at the *Gran*

⁵¹ “Artistas y público colaboran para el éxito del festival de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 30 March 1943, p. 3; “La Gran Vía Blanca,” *La Prensa*, 2 April 1943, p. 5.

⁵² “Dos Ganadores Más en el grandioso Festival del 16,” *La Prensa*, 13 April 1944, p. 1.

⁵³ “El Festival de ‘La Prensa’ fue un gran éxito artístico,” *La Prensa*, 1 May 1945, p. 1.

⁵⁴ For more on the role of the Mexican consulate in Los Angeles in organizing community life, see Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 108-125.

Festival, explaining to a reporter, “But I have to be there, I feel a tremendous desire to be there to express my gratitude to a public that has so generously given me first place in your newspaper’s Concurso de Popularidad.” Described as “the singer of ‘Babalú’ that no other singer has since equaled,” he appeared a man of the people “whose love for his own kind and customs and creole artistry is one of his main characteristics.” Reporters credited him as “the great exhibitor of Afro-Cuban song who counts on legions of admirers.” Valdés revealed that the *Gran Festival* would allow him to be reunited with “thousands of hispanos whose applause, laughter, and handshakes would have an incalculable, stimulating moral effect.” Though “anxious to return to his homeland,” he maintained that “there is a special place in his heart for New York, a place where he has made and spent a lot of money,” an interesting reference suggesting that Valdés saw New York City as a place of economic prosperity but not as a place of permanent residence. News of his victory had already reached an “overjoyed” Cuban public and generated interest within the country for the fundraising gala. With various news agencies in Cuba soliciting film of the event and special interviews with the singer, according to reports in *La Prensa*, there is evidence of the *Gran Festival*’s broad transnational appeal alongside its significance to Cubans in particular.⁵⁵

That same year Machito y sus Afro Cubans won the *Orquestas* category, easily defeating the popular orchestras of Esteban Roig, José Curbelo, Noro Morales, Juanito Sanabria, and, most notably, Xavier Cugat. Made up of Cuban, Puerto Rican, and African-American musicians, Machito’s band had an “unmistakable creole rhythm,” and several of their dance compositions “delighted lovers of the Afro-Cuban rhythm” and

⁵⁵ “Vencedores del Concurso de Popularidad de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 18 March 1943, p. 1, 2; “Miguelito Valdés demora su viaje para cantar en el festival del 28,” *La Prensa*, 24 March 1943, p. 3; “Artistas y público colaboran para el éxito del festival de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 30 March 1943, p. 3.

“cemented the affection of the *colonia*.” A lengthy follow-up article published in *La Prensa* provided readers and voters with an inside look into Machito as both an ordinary migrant and a rising star in the world of entertainment. That is, the newspaper performed an unveiling of Machito the celebrity and professional musician and presented him as Frank R. Grillo, the man who had left his “beloved Cuba” never thinking that he would one day lead one of the most popular and highest record-selling orchestras in the *colonia de habla española de Nueva York*. But that was three years ago. Eventually, he reportedly “noticed that there was a growing interest around here for creole rhythms,” a realization supported by the production and sale of nearly 25,000 copies of his record “Sopa de Pichón,” which “for a few months was the obligatory dance piece from Brooklyn to Harlem.” The newspaper described the bandleader as having “a spectacular image dressed in his short suit ‘zoot suit’ with maracas or *batuta*, singing and dancing in front of his band.” Machito, for his part, noted that his latest hit, “El Botecito,” had a “catchy melody” and recommended that “you’ve got to see Miguelito dancing to it!”⁵⁶

The successes of Valdés and Machito could certainly be framed as shocking upsets of the internationally-renown Xavier Cugat. The three performers crossed paths repeatedly throughout the 1940s. Both Machito and Valdés started their professional careers in the United States as singers in Cugat’s band, and all three entertainers performed together at La Conga nightclub in midtown Manhattan. In fact, the day following the publication of the popularity contest results, Machito and Cugat performed on the same stage, headlining the *Latin American Fiesta* at Hunts Point Palace in the

⁵⁶ “Vencedores del Concurso de Popularidad de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 18 March 1943, p. 1, 2; “‘Machito,’ el director de orquesta que triunfa con el ritmo criollo,” *La Prensa*, 27 March 1943, p. 2.

Bronx.⁵⁷ But, for the most part, Cugat's professional engagements during this period took him to venues and locations not typically frequented by the *colonia hispana*. The Waldorf-Astoria Hotel had just booked him for his eleventh season, the Paramount Theater contracted him for various other engagements, and he had a national best-selling record, "Brazil," and a featured role in the Hollywood film *You Were Never Lovelier*, starring Rita Hayworth and Fred Astaire. Neither Machito nor Valdés could really compete with Cugat, a commercial act producing Latin music for mainstream, English-speaking, North American audiences. It might seem surprising, then, that in 1943 "the most coveted prize in U.S. Latin American entertainment," as *Time* called it, fell not to world-famous Xavier Cugat but to Machito.

Shortly after *La Prensa* revealed the 1943 contest results, Machito commented on his victory to *Time*, stating plainly, "I was no [sic] surprised. Cugat, he is...commercial." Machito argued that authentic or *típico* music was correctly played by and for Latinos/as in *clave* while the commercial variation of music was hyped up and rhythmically watered down music that appealed mostly to non-Latino/a audiences.⁵⁸ Yet, the contest results

⁵⁷ "Cugat y Machito en el Hunts P. Palace el próximo domingo," *La Prensa*, 19 March 1943, p. 5; 20 March 1943, *La Prensa*, p. 5.

⁵⁸ "Music: Leading Latins," *Time*, 12 April 1943; Folder Narration-English, Box 1, Carlos Ortiz Collection, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, New York, NY; Mario Bauzá, 8 February 1989, David Carp Collection, Bronx County Historical Society.

For more on some of the debates regarding "authentic" and "commercial" strands of Latin music in the U.S., see previous notes on Latino/a nightlife in the U.S. and the origins of Latin music. My perspective on this debate falls in line with the view presented by Raul A. Fernández, when he contends, "It is misinformed to regard 'commercialism' or 'the music industry' as unmitigated evils that affect the 'authenticity' of a genre. Much of what is regarded today as 'classic' Afro-Cuban music, the 'truly authentic,' developed in the ambiance of nightclubs and casinos patronized by U.S. tourists in Havana, a testimony to the ability of popular musicians to extract meaning out of sometimes societally demeaning situations" (19). For more on Cuban representations in relation to U.S. tastes and market forces, see, Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*, esp. 198-216; See also, Robin Moore: *Nationalizing Blackness: Afrocubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997); David F. García, *Arsenio Rodríguez and the Transnational Flows of Latin Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

suggest a messier, more complicated interpretation. To say that the *colonia* rejected Cugat or denied his role in the popularization of Latin music in the United States would be to ignore that he had already won the *Orquestas* category in 1941 and returned victorious again in 1945 and 1946.⁵⁹ Voters in the *Concurso de Popularidad* and, by extension, the *colonia de habla española de Nueva York* did not consistently prefer “authentic” performers over “commercial” entertainers or vice versa. Such rigid positioning reduces what is really a continuum or matrix of never-ending negotiations, both racially and politically conscripted, between individual performers, audiences, and the entertainment industry. In fact, that Machito framed his defeat of Cugat as a victory for “authenticity” over “commercialism” demonstrates that the newspaper’s contest and festival generated public discourse on the various functions of music, particularly in relation to its reception as cultural expression, national symbol, and commercial product.

With numerous Latino musicians drafted into the U.S. Army during the Second World War, the fact that Cugat won the support of the *colonia* in 1945 and 1946 is not entirely surprising. Excluded from military service because of his age, Cugat remained in New York City as one of the few established Latino/a celebrities still able to perform regularly at nightclubs and sell records. Wartime conditions forced many local orchestras to find replacements for their musicians and prompted singers to limit their recording and performance schedules. For example, Machito’s band hired his sister, Graciela, and Polito Galíndez to take over for him on vocals while he served a stint in the U.S. Army. Cugat’s celebrity status allowed him to continue performing with the best of the

⁵⁹ “Orquesta de Xavier Cugat y La Pareja de Raul y Eva Reyes en el Gran Festival,” *La Prensa*, 16 April 1945, p. 1; “Resultado final de la votación del Concurso de Popularidad,” *La Prensa*, 14 May 1946, p. 1; “Enorme entusiasmo por asistir mañana al Gran Festival Pro Fondo de Caridad,” *La Prensa*, 25 May 1946, p. 1; “El Festival de ‘La Prensa’ para entregar los trofeos artísticos fue insuperable,” *La Prensa*, 28 May 1946, p. 2.

musicians left in the city. Additionally, some of his songs, such as his 1941 hit “Viva Roosevelt!,” demonstrated support for U.S. involvement in global affairs, urging listeners to “Make a b-line for that d-line/ ‘V’ for victory!” and boasting, “Yes, sir, we’ll follow you till victory/ With the Pan-Americonga, the conga of liberty!” This popular song illustrates an energetic support of the United States as a hemispheric and global power, specifically in the context of the Second World War and more generally in terms of policies towards Latin America and the Caribbean. Interestingly, one reviewer for *Billboard Magazine* noted that because record buyers might not “harbor a conga beat with their patriotic fervor,” the record would be most appealing “at the spots attracting a south-of-the-border patronage.” Access and availability as well as essentialist patriotism played as much, if not more, of a role in the success of a performer in the *Concurso de Popularidad* as did perceptions of authenticity or commercialism. Much like the participation of the foreign consuls in the *Gran Festivals*, Cugat’s repeated victories in the 1940s suggest that the Latino/a public in New York City was very much aware of the rising global demands for “good neighborliness.”⁶⁰

⁶⁰ *Billboard Magazine*, 31 January 1942, p. 88.

Machito, Marco Rizo, Desi Arnaz, and Alberto Iznaga are just four of the more notable Cuban performers drafted to serve in the U.S. Army during World War II. See, Julio Capo, “Cuban Culture in New York City: American Labor Unions and the Changing Face of Entertainment, 1939-1945” (paper presented at annual meeting of the Florida Conference of Historians, Florida Gulf Coast University, Fort Myers, Florida, 27-28 February 2009); Graciela Pérez, interview by René Lopez and Raul A. Fernández, 19 September 1998; “New Father Draft Expected to Cut Heavily into Agency Rosters; Sniping Suspected,” *Billboard Magazine*, 9 October 1943, p. 16; *Billboard Magazine*, 9 October 1943, p. 65; “More AA Orks in the Making,” *Billboard Magazine*, 6 November 1943, 14; John Desmond, “Making Catnip for the Hepcats,” *New York Times Magazine*, 20 June 1943, p. SM16.

For more on Latino/a labor and culture in the United States in the years shortly before, during, and after the Second World War, see, for example, Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community*; Vicki Ruiz, *Cannery Women/Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987); Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*; Matt García, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

Representations of Cubanness by way of the dominating presence of Cuban performers in the contests and festivals peaked again in 1952. Held on the twentieth of May, the *Gran Festival* of 1952 marked a special day for Cuban performers and attendees as well as Cubans everywhere, as it fell on fiftieth anniversary of the independence of the Republic of Cuba. The fundraising gala that year not only opened with patriotic remarks from Cuban journalist and master of ceremonies Babby Quintero and poetry readings by Cuban poet Eulogio Peraza but followed days of reporting that highlighted the Cuban artists slated to perform at the event. Described as “la patria de la caña, del café, el tabaco y el buen humor,” Cuba could count on representation from “Machito y su orquesta, cantando Machito y Graciela, bajo la direccion del Maestro Mario Bauzá,” Facundo Rivero y Conjunto, Juan Bruno Tarraza, Felo Bergaza, Perucho Irigoyen, and Willie Chevalier. Perhaps testimony to the relationship between performers, audiences, and national identity or simply coincidence, the year in which the contest was held on such a key date in Cuban national consciousness also found Machito winner of the *Orquestas* category and Graciela winner of the *Damas* category. Cuban performers once again took center stage at this pan-ethnic, multi-national event.⁶¹

While migrants who attended the *Gran Festivals* in New York City reconnected with their homelands in symbolic and material ways, audiences back home were transported via electronic mass media to New York City. The Coordinador de Relaciones Interamericanas transmitted portions of the *Gran Festival* throughout Latin American and

⁶¹ “Extraordinario resultado por todos conceptos el Festival de La Prensa,” *La Prensa*, 20 May 1952, p. 3; “Los Cubanos en el Gran Festival,” *La Prensa*, 18 May 1952, p. 3; “Programa Festival pro Fondo de Caridad de La Prensa,” *La Prensa*, 17 May 1952, p. 2.

the Caribbean via short wave radio in the early 1940s. The significance of this international broadcast was not missed by the newspaper which noted that “millions of Hispanoamericanos will have the opportunity to listen, simultaneously with the public of New York City, to the famous artists that are going to sing and dance at this event.” Accordingly, the newspaper reported in 1943 that La Oficina del Coordinador de Relaciones Culturales Interamericanas “has been cooperating with anything involving character hispánico being realized in the United States.”⁶²

With the contest “crossing, for many years, national borders” thanks to support from the U.S. government and other international news agencies, *La Prensa* proudly noted that it routinely received votes and inquiries from Canada, Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Colombia.⁶³ Fausto, long-time writer of the column “La Gran Vía Blanca,” declared in 1944 that this artistic event had acquired “international proportions” with numerous praiseworthy secondary effects:

[W]hile [the contest] honors our artists, it also serves to highlight the value of folkloric inspiration as a means of bringing together the people of the Western Hemisphere. Panamericanism owes a debt of gratitude to these artists, who

⁶² “Hispanoamérica escuchará el Festival de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 4 April 1942, p. 1; “Celebrase Mañana el Festival de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 27 March 1943, p. 1; “Fue un gran éxito el festival de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 29 March 1943, p. 1.

In *From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz*, Raul A. Fernández offers an important perspective on the ways in which electronic mass media shapes audience reception of musicians: “[M]odern mass communication... allows the vast majority of popular music consumers to know performers only through electronic media, recordings, and so forth, lacking the experience of the musicians’ performance in live settings. Musicians then become less than flesh-and-blood and acquire whatever characteristics the public wishes to attach to them as part of its cultural imaginary” (55-56). See also, Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005).

⁶³ “Nuestro Concurso de Popularidad de Artistas,” *La Prensa*, 5 April 1947, p. 2; “Interés internacional en el Concurso de Artistas Hispánicos,” *La Prensa*, 1 April 1948, p. 2; “Mañana se verificará el Gran Festival anual Pro Caridad,” *La Prensa*, 1 May 1948; “El lunes publicaremos el último escrutinio de nuestro Concurso,” *La Prensa*, 5 May 1950, p. 1; “Se reúne esta noche la Comisión de escrutinio del Concurso de Artistas,” *La Prensa*, 1 May 1952, p. 1.

Actual evidence of this international interest came when *La Prensa* reported on April 1, 1948 that a reader in Montreal, Canada had mailed to the newspaper his ballot along with a note, reprinted on the front page, asking for the date of the *Gran Festival*.

singing with their souls, with the language of the soul, through feelings, unite in unbreakable bonds people of different languages and cultures!⁶⁴

Participation in the fundraising gala, therefore, served yet another objective, that of supporting from *within* the *colonia hispana* a U.S. foreign policy of “neighborliness” towards the peoples and cultures of Latin America and the Caribbean. *La Prensa*’s musical popularity contests and fundraising galas of the early 1940s demonstrate the appropriation of Panamericanism and hemispheric solidarity as a cultural ideology developing from *within* the Latino/a migrant communities of New York City. In these instances, the newspaper acted as a pseudo-activist organization to protect the interests of the *colonia hispana* while also falling in line with the interamerican rhetoric that characterized the period.⁶⁵

Before any presentations or performances could take place, each *Gran Festival* began with the singing of “The Star-Spangled Banner,” a performance that reflected, in many ways, the reality that many of those in attendance faced daily pressures to shift allegiances and adapt to their new lives in this country. Yet, this was not the only patriotic gesture executed at the fundraising gala. Reaching back towards the homelands they had recently departed, organizers went to great lengths, beyond the consular presence, to offer a program with (inter)nationalist overtones. In 1946, organizers noted

⁶⁴ “La Gran Vía Blanca,” *La Prensa*, 7 April 1944, p. 5.

⁶⁵ In his dissertation, “By Eminent Domain: Race and Capital in the Building of an American South Florida,” Nathan Connolly examines the role that Panamericanism played in “the making of a new racial regime in mid-century South Florida,” arguing that “it was Pan Americanism that fueled the discursive widening of whiteness in 1940s South Florida” (164, 166). In this chapter, I offer a departure from Connolly’s focus on white elite controlled government organizations like the Miami Chamber of Commerce and the courting of tourists from Latin America. For more on Panamericanism and the Good Neighbor Policy, see Joseph B. Lockley, “The Meaning of Pan Americanism,” *The American Journal of International Law* 19, no. 1 (January 1925); James Brown Scott, “Good Neighbor Policy,” *The American Journal of International Law* 30, no. 2 (April 1936); Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

that this year's festival would include "a great quantity of regional costumes" representative of various countries. The efforts apparently paid off, leading the newspaper to report that the Manhattan Center appeared "exotic" and "transported the spectators to their respective homelands across the Hispano-American world."⁶⁶ Organizers explained that performers served as symbols of their native lands, oftentimes grouping performers and the schedule of performances based on nationality. In 1948, for example, a miscellaneous selection of performers followed two separate groupings, one Mexican, the other Spanish. The newspaper also noted that "Puerto Rico, Argentina, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and other nationalities will be represented by distinguished artists that are currently in New York," evidence again of the newspaper's awareness of the transnational loyalties of its public.⁶⁷ In fact, few artists could be listed as participants in the *Gran Festival* without specific mention of their national or ethnic identities. Organizers recognized that readers and attendees also maintained close ties to and affections for their homelands. This realization likely encouraged organizers to associate performers with their country of origin, a move that suggests that developing notions of pan-*latinidad* did not prohibit loyalties to national origins.

Brief on-the-street testimonials solicited by *La Prensa* in 1956 reveal that tensions and conflicts present within the *colonia hispana* sometimes developed as a result of these loyalties to the homeland and feelings of ethnic superiority. José García stated that to bring harmony to the community "the first thing that we need to do is forget about

⁶⁶ "Promete supercar a los anteriores el Festival 'Pro Caridad' del Domingo," *La Prensa*, 13 May 1946, p. 1; "Se celebró anoche con gran entusiasmo el gran festival Pro Fondo de Caridad," *La Prensa*, 27 May 1946, p. 1.

⁶⁷ "Famosos Artistas Colaboran en Preparar Programa para el Festival pro Caridad," *La Prensa*, 23 April 1948, p. 1.

patriotism...and stop saying that our homeland is better than the other and that the other is not worth anything.” George García declared that hispanos “should leave patriotism for the homeland behind and remember that they are all in another country and think about how they can live better where they are.” José R. Arroyo attributed the disunity to a lack of leadership within the community, specifically blaming the problem on the proliferation of so many different Hispanic organizations. He reasoned that “it would be better if there were less social clubs and less patriotism, particularly since here in the *colonia* the homeland doesn’t matter much and what does matter is language.” Lolita Gisbert offered the following explanation for the frictions: “Despite having a common language we are from different countries and we think in different ways, even to the point of thinking that one is better than the others. This is why there is disunity within *la raza*.” These responses suggest that common language and migration experiences, two of the primary characteristics that defined the *colonia*, sometimes gave way to the growing presence of factionalism.⁶⁸

As early as 1943, the newspaper suggested that the existence of tensions within the *colonia* had developed as a result of political differences. A review of the *Gran Festival* published in *New York al Día* and reprinted in *La Prensa* declared the event “miraculous,” emphasizing its ability each year to perform the “miracle of the spiritual UNION of the *colonia*, a UNION tested by everyone as real utopia or beautiful impossibility.” Popular culture, more broadly, played a role in unifying the *colonia* each year, according to the report:

Art is also very powerful, almost divine, and because of its heavenly and irresistible power, the hispanic residents of New York forget, if just for a few

⁶⁸ “Dice nuestra comunidad...,” *La Prensa*, 14 April 1956, p. 4. The exact question posed to the three female and three male respondents was “What do you think should be done to unite our community?”

hours, the political hatreds that divide and confront them, and they come together, rather than lose themselves, in the shared enthusiasm prevailing in these magnificent festivals. Art unites what politics separates and divides.⁶⁹

Just as the newspaper hoped to increase its daily readership, artist managers, record companies, and even the performers themselves aimed to secure the largest paying audiences possible. A cultural event like the *Gran Festival* that could bring together a broad, though sometimes politically- and ethnically-divided, Spanish-language audience not only made for positive public relations but also increased the odds of bringing in larger profits for both the newspaper and the entertainment industries.

Still, national representation continued throughout the 1950s when the increasing popularity of merengue from the Dominican Republic began a gradual chipping away at the dominance once held by other Latin rhythms like the rumba, mambo, and cha-cha-chá. Organizers promised that those attending the 1955 *Gran Festival* would delight in a “genuine representation *quisqueyana*” in addition to other rhythms of “our tropical countries.” Competition and rivalry among national and ethnic groups vis-à-vis musical genres could be seen developing elsewhere on the cultural landscape of New York City. *La Prensa* declared that within the United States a “great battle” was taking place between the Cuban mambo and the Dominican merengue. Other “powerful rivals” hoped to thwart the rising popularity of Dominican government-supported merengue, specifically “el ‘cha-cha-chá’ cubano y el ‘rock and roll’ de Harlem.” Musical styles stood in for national representation, and “authenticity” seemed to matter. Nothing captured this concern better than Mario Bauzá’s initial refusal to allow Machito y sus Afro-Cubans to perform merengue for dances at the Palladium. He relented only when

⁶⁹ “El Festival de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 14 April 1943, p. 14.

he found “a genuine Dominican musician with authority to ‘supervise’ the rhythms and melodies of the merengue.”⁷⁰

Not only had merengue infiltrated the programming of the *Gran Festival* but, by 1957, so too had the rhythms of calypso and rock ‘n’ roll with the participation of groups like Polly y Jimmy Rogers y su Conjunto de Merengue, Cha-Cha-Chá y Rock & Roll and Minin de la Cruz y sus Merengues.⁷¹ Brief on-the-street interviews conducted by *La Prensa* in the midst of the contest voting process revealed that rock ‘n’ roll had definitely attracted the attention of the young women of the *colonia de habla española*. Zoe Cordero appreciated rock ‘n’ roll because it represented modernity, noting: “It is a dance that responds to the present moment, not to a tradition, like the majority of the ones that we know.” Clemencia Castro also approached the question from a historical perspective, stating: “The thing is that it is a different type of music. I don’t think it causes any bad

⁷⁰“El ‘Merengue’ dominicano en el programa del Festival de mayo 1,” *La Prensa*, 9 April, 1955; “Destacados artistas actuarán en el Festival del 1ro. de mayo,” *La Prensa*, 11 April 1955, p. 1.

One of the earliest reports of merengue’s rising popularity came on December 11, 1948 when *La Prensa* advertised a *Noche Antillana* sponsored by the Damas de Artistas Dominicanos at Hunts Point Palace with performances by Noro Morales, la Orquesta Quisqueya de Josecito Román, and Miguelito Valdés. Later that year, Noro Morales, Marcelino Guerra, and la Orquesta Jaragua performed a New Year’s Eve dance at the Manhattan Center. Chapuseaux y Damirón began participating in the *Gran Festival* in 1950. In 1952, the Palladium Ballroom hosted a *Concurso de Merengue* accompanied by Tito Puente, Tito Rodríguez, and Pancho y sus Mambolandia, and the popular Chapuseaux y Damirón participated in the *Gran Festival*.

“Chapuseaux y Damirón, C. Montoya y Trio Americano en el Gran Festival,” *La Prensa*, 9 May 1950, p. 1; “Chapuseaux y Damirón en el Festival Pro Caridad de ‘La Prensa’ el día 18,” *La Prensa*, 6 May 1952, p. 1; “Gran Batalla de la Música Afroantillana,” *La Prensa*, 30 March 1955, p. 4; “En Broadway,” *La Prensa*, 8 September 1955, p. 5.

For more on merengue, Dominican popular culture, and Dominican migration to the United States, see, Paul Austerlitz, *Merengue: Dominican Music and Dominican Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997); Deborah Pacini Hernández, *Bachata: A Social History of a Dominican Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995); Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities*; Manuel, *Creolizing Contradance*.

For more recent examples on questions of authenticity, see also, Fernández, *From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz*, 17. His argument, though in the context of a discussion related to salsa, parallels Bauzá’s approach to playing merengue: “The struggle over authenticity seems to center on whether musicians who do not research the roots in traditional, earlier styles of playing should be undervalued. In this perspective, any innovation must be firmly rooted in some basic musical tradition to be authentic” (16-17).

⁷¹ “Rock ‘n’ Roll, Calypso y Merengue,” *La Prensa*, 24 April 1957, p. 1.

effects in teenagers. Just like the Charleston and Fox Trot were once popular. We are seeing that with Calypso which was once popular.” Joséfa Villalba noted the new genre’s crossover appeal: “In my opinion, it is a dance wanted by the North American just as much as the hispano for its animated and emotional rhythm.” Only one respondent, Sally Cordero, indicated a less favorable position, explaining that “we should insist on more ‘jazz’ and on a softer and melodic music.”⁷² These shifts in cultural preferences, characterized in large part by the surging popularity of rock ‘n’ roll and television in the mid-to-late 1950s, render it less surprising that the popularity of the musical popularity contests and fundraising festivals would soon be in decline as well. In just a few short years, the Latin music industry would fall into a decade-long slump that it would not emerge from until music producer Jerry Masucci and his label Fania Records repackaged it as *salsa* in the early 1970s.⁷³

After nearly two decades of sponsoring the popularity contests and fundraising galas featuring performances by the contest winners and runners-up, by 1958 the stakes

⁷² “Dice nuestra comunidad...,” *La Prensa*, 31 March 1957, p. 4; The exact question posed to seven female respondents participating in the survey was “What do you think about rock ‘n’ roll?”

⁷³ For more on the history of the development of salsa music and the rise of ethnic identity in the 1970s, see “Enter Salsa: Some Like It Hot,” *Time*, 5 May 1975, 56; Linda Bird Francke and Janet Huck, “The Hot New Sound of Salsa,” *Newsweek*, 26 May 1975, 58; Boggs, *Salsiology*; Frances Aparicio, *Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin Popular Music, and Puerto Rican Cultures* (New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1998); Loza, *Tito Puente and the Making of Latin Music*; Salazar, *Mambo Kingdom*; Haslip-Viera, “The Evolution of the Latino Community in New York City;” Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Laó-Montes, “Mambo Montage;” Leymarie, *Cuban Fire*; Raul A. Fernández, “The Course of U.S. Cuban Music: Margin and Mainstream,” *Cuban Studies* 24 (1994); Manuel, “Latin Music in the United States;” Fernández, *From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz*.

For more on rock ‘n’ roll and its influence among younger generations of Latinos/as at mid-century, see Steven Loza, *Barrio Rhythm: Mexican American Music in Los Angeles* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993); García, *A World of Its Own*; Macías, *Mexican American Mojo*.

See, also, previous note on radio and television.

had changed, and newspaper commitment and public interest faded. No longer did category winners draw between forty and eighty thousand votes as they had in the 1940s. By the mid-to-late 1950s, category winners received only between ten and forty thousand votes, a striking decline in voter interest considering the ballot inflation that took place throughout the years. But these were not the only or even most significant changes affecting the *Concursos de Popularidad* and *Gran Festivals* of 1958 and 1959. In May 1958, the newspaper announced that the contest and fundraising gala would take place not in the spring as it had for the past sixteen years but in the fall. What had been an annual tradition of the *colonia* for nearly two decades was indifferently bumped from its position of cultural importance for another contest sponsored by the newspaper, el *Reinado de La Prensa*. This new contest honored a young woman, selected by voters from a long list of nominated representatives of the *colonia*'s many social clubs, organizations, and hometowns, with a crowning festival that also donated the money raised from ticket sales to the newspaper's Charity Fund. The newspaper argued that the decision to move the *Concurso de Popularidad* to the fall would prove beneficial for two main reasons: more agreeable weather and improved quality of entertainment since the nightclubs and theaters in the city would be offering better shows.⁷⁴

If the new date did not sufficiently confuse, at best, and alienate, at worst, loyal voters and readers, then the new categories listed on the ballots confirmed that the contest and festival were forever changed. In 1958, readers could vote for their favorite artists in seven different, non-gender-based categories: *Actores*, *Bailarines*, *Locutores*, *Cantantes*, *Solistas*, *Orquestas*, and *Conjuntos Musicales*. The 1959 contest listed just six non-

⁷⁴ "Será Pro Fondo de Caridad de 'La Prensa,'" *La Prensa*, 2 May 1958, p. 5; "Se inician los preparativos del Festival Artístico de La Prensa," *La Prensa*, 3 October 1958, p. 5.

gender-based categories, offering combined categories for *Bailarines o Conjuntos de Baile* and for *Orquestas o Conjuntos Musicales* and specifying that the *Cantantes* category included solo artists as well as duos and trios. Most of the winners and runners-up in each category had never figured prominently in the final standings of previous contests, and those artists that had won their categories in the past now received far fewer votes than usual. For example, Cuban pianist Marco Rizo won the *Solistas* category in 1958 and finished second in the same category in 1959. The newspaper boasted that the “fine Cuban composer, of pleasing memory on the television program I Love Lucy,” will play some of his “compositions of authentic Cuban and Hispanoamerican flavor.”

Perucho Irigoyen won or finished second in the *Caballeros* and *Locutores* categories each year from 1950 to 1957, but in 1958 and 1959 he barely finished sixth and fourth, respectively, in the *Actores* category. The *Orquestas* and *Orquesta o Conjunto Musical* categories listed contest newcomer Ricardo Rico “El Rey del Merengue” as the winner both in 1958 and 1959, and the only other familiar orchestras and *conjuntos* to place in the final standings were Oriental Cubana, Chapuseaux y Damirón, and Vicentico Valdés. Additionally, the orchestras hired to perform at the fundraising galas, Ricardo Rico and “the great band” Tropical Knights in 1958 and Ricardo Rico and Ramiro Medina in 1959, had never before participated in the events.⁷⁵ All this is to say that the familiar favorites of past contests and festivals no longer appeared relevant, though it remains unclear if

⁷⁵ “Se añaden dos nuevas clasificaciones al certamen,” *La Prensa*, 9 August 1958, p. 5; “El Escrutinio Final del Concurso de La Prensa Reveló Grandes Sorpresas,” *La Prensa*, 6 October 1958, p. 5; “Resultado final del Concurso de Popularidad de Artistas,” *La Prensa*, 23 November 1959, p. 22; “Crece el entusiasmo del público y de los artistas por el Festival,” *La Prensa*, 13 November 1958, p. 5; *La Prensa*, 13 September 1959, p. 5; “Más artistas de nota se suman a nuestro Festival,” *La Prensa*, 16 November, 1959, p. 5; “Programa del Festival Artístico Pro Fondo de Caridad de La Prensa,” *La Prensa*, 16 November 1958, p. 1, 16; “Programa,” *La Prensa*, 6 December 1959, p. 25.

tastes and preferences of voters changed independently of the interests of the newspaper and entertainment industry.

The make-up and role of the very important Comisión de Escrutinio also changed in 1958. The presidents of three social clubs and organizations came together to form the Comisión de Escrutinios in 1958: Diego Díaz of the Ateneo Cubano de Nueva York, Francisco Arévalo of La Nacional, and Victor Lopez of the Asociación de Comerciantes Hispanos del Bronx and the Desfile Puertorriqueño. Each Saturday, the committee gathered at an event hosted by one of the social clubs in the city to count the votes received that week and announce the current standings. For example, Club Social Salinas welcomed the organizing committee to a dance it was hosting at the Palladium, featuring Tito Puente and Caco y su Combo. Club España hosted another vote count at the Hotel Diplomat where it was hosting a dance featuring Esteban Roig. The final standings were revealed at the weekly dance sponsored by the Ateneo Cubano and promised to feature many of the artists jostling for position in the contest. Organizers reasoned that “the traditional happiness that fills the dances of the Ateneo Cubano will contribute immensely to increasing the enthusiasm for the final phase of the Concurso.”⁷⁶ In some ways, the more direct and active involvement of the leaders and general memberships of the *colonia*’s social clubs confirms a relationship between the newspaper and community of mutual interest and support. But, it also hints of desperation, a more confrontational means of cajoling participation and support for the *Concurso* and *Gran Festival*.

⁷⁶ “Crece el entusiasmo por el Concurso de Popularidad,” *La Prensa*, 19 August 1958, p. 5; “Sera el Sábado en el Palladium en el baile del Club Salinas,” *La Prensa*, 4 September 1958, p. 5; “En el baile del Club España 7o. Escrutinio el Sábado,” *La Prensa*, 24 September 1958, p. 5; “Escrutinio final en el baile del Ateneo Cubano, el Sábado,” *La Prensa*, 2 October 1958, p. 5; “En Ateneo Cubano anunció final del escrutinio,” *La Prensa*, 5 October 1958, p. 5.

Despite changes in the contest dates, categories, and organizing committee, the newspaper maintained that this was still the same contest and festival that readers had anticipated and enjoyed throughout the 1940s and 1950s. And, in some ways, it was the same. For example, the newspaper reported that telephone calls and unannounced visits to its office from voters interested in the contest overwhelmed its employees so much so that some worried that there would not be enough copies of the newspaper available for those that wanted to participate. As it had in previous years, the newspaper noted that it received hundreds of letters related to the contest and festival, “a demonstration of the power that the contest has among the Hispanoamerican public and the interest in helping its favorite artists place among the six categories presented in this Concurso de Popularidad.”⁷⁷ Featuring artists from Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Spain, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and the United States, the *Gran Festival*, according to the newspaper, would again have “an international character.” Not only did the contest and festival allow the newspaper to keep in touch with its readers as both a news source and as a constructive element within the *comunidad*, but it also continued to support the Charity Fund. That “the most distinguished artists of our theatrical and cultural scene offer, like always, their most unselfish cooperation” was just one of reasons for the quality of the program. The newspaper reported that “readers and all of the community members, fans of this type of show and those desirous of helping to raise money for the charity fund” continued to enthusiastically appreciate the efforts.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ “Concurso agota ‘La Prensa’ en los expendios,” *La Prensa*, 22 August 1958, p. 5; “Crece el entusiasmo por el Concurso de Popularidad,” *La Prensa*, 19 August 1958, p. 5; “El Ateneo Cubano anuncia final de Escrutinio,” *La Prensa*, 5 October 1958, p. 5.

⁷⁸ “Danzas Españolas y Ballet en Festival de La Prensa,” *La Prensa*, 2 December 1959, p. 18; “El Festival Artístico Pro Fondo de Caridad de La Prensa,” *La Prensa*, 6 December 1959, p. 5.

Nonetheless, the gradual changes detected in the contests and festivals of mid-1950s had by 1958 and 1959 evolved into a contest and festival struggling with an identity that once pegged itself as representative of the traditional and folkloric elements of the *colonia*. The declining interest in both the *Concurso de Popularidad* and *Gran Festival* can be seen as both reflection and consequence of a rejection of the traditional, particularly by young and second-generation Latinos/as in New York City, as well as changes in media technology and popular culture preferences. In 1960, there was no *Concurso de Popularidad* or *Gran Festival*, and the prominent role that Latino/a musicians and performers had struggled to achieve on the cultural landscape of New York City in the 1940s and early-to-mid-1950s now faced a much less certain and stable future.

Chapter 5

Down at the Club and Up in El Barrio: Representations of Cubanness and Latinness on the Streets, Stage, and Screen

No Cuban entertainer was more well-known among North American audiences in the 1950s than Ricky Ricardo, the fictionalized bandleader portrayed by Desi Arnaz on the hit television comedy *I Love Lucy*. Over 40 million people tuned in to CBS on Monday evenings between 1951 and 1957 to watch the half-hour sitcom that chronicled the daily lives and misadventures of Ricky and Lucy Ricardo and their neighbor-pals, Fred and Ethel Mertz. Drawing distinctions between the real-life Arnaz and the semi-autobiographical character he played on television is not always an easy task. Both Ricky and Desi worked at nightclubs in Manhattan, both aspired to become film and television stars, both possessed savvy business skills, and both could credit their good looks and charismatic personalities for driving their careers in the entertainment industry. Desi was married to actress and comedienne Lucille Ball. Ricky was married to a parody of same woman, Ball's character on the show, Lucy Ricardo. Given the show's enormous popularity and the apparent blurriness between fiction and reality in it, the actual differences between Desi's life (and the lives of other black and white Cuban musicians) and the image of Ricky as a Cuban musician in public imagination are extremely telling. This chapter juxtaposes the stories told by Desi Arnaz, Machito, Miguelito Valdés, and Perucho Irigoyen about their lived experiences with the

imaginative realities presented in the fictionalized world of Ricky Ricardo in *I Love Lucy* as a means of understanding the meanings attributed to the development of a Cuban-American cultural landscape that, in distinct forms, took root not only in the nightclubs and dancehalls of New York City but also on television and on the Hollywood big screen.¹

Rather than offer a complete and detailed biography of Desi Arnaz, Machito, Miguelito Valdés, and Perucho Irigoyen, this chapter examines their autobiographical writings, oral history interviews, and the perspectives they expressed in interviews and reports published in Spanish- and English-language newspapers and trade magazines. It examines the narratives Cuban and Latino/a musicians and audiences in New York City created about their reality in relation to the incredible visibility of the fictionalized experience in *I Love Lucy* and other Hollywood productions. In particular, I draw from the autobiography of Desi Arnaz. Cultural studies scholar Gustavo Pérez-Firmat treats *A Book: The Outspoken Memoirs of "Ricky Ricardo" – The Man Who Loves Lucy* as both immigrant autobiography and erotic memoir, arguing that it should be understood as Arnaz's "farewell performance," one that is "far from being an innocent act of self-disclosure." While I do rely on *A Book* for the biographical information and anecdotal evidence it offers, I use it more fully as a cultural text that provides a unique window into the way in which Arnaz constructed and remembered his life story.² Throughout this chapter, I focus on similarities and differences in the migration and work experiences of

¹ Jack Gould, "Why Millions Love Lucy," *New York Times*, 1 March 1953, p. SM16. The show ranked number one in Nielsen ratings throughout its second, third, fourth, and sixth seasons.

² Pérez-Firmat offers the following clarification: "It's not that what he says is untrue – other sources confirm the veracity of his claims – but that all we are allowed is a partial portrait of the Cuban-American artist." Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997): 71, 193.

these entertainers, both real and imagined, specifically in terms of their early participation in the entertainment industry, their understanding of themselves as laborers and celebrities, the locations and settings of their musical performances, and their responses to self-representations and stereotypes that cast them variously as “Cuban,” “Afro-Cuban,” and/or “Latin.”

In classic accounts of the history of television in the United States, *I Love Lucy* is often considered principally in terms of its innovations in the genre of situational comedy and its themes of subverting gender roles and the difficulties of inter-ethnic marriage. In this chapter, it is treated as a cultural text about show business and the tensions between claims of Latinness and Cubanness and the demands of the mainstream entertainment industry.³ On television screens in living rooms across the United States, Ricky Ricardo lived in a comfortable apartment located at 623 East Sixty-eighth Street and spent his evenings headlining at the Tropicana Club, a 75-table nightclub with a visibly reserved and light-skinned audience. For the many Cuban musicians performing at both downtown and uptown nightclubs in New York City in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, a career in the entertainment industry was not so neatly packaged. Most musicians and performers had to piece together a living by accepting bookings at multiple nightclubs as well as performing for private gatherings like birthdays, weddings, and charitable events sponsored by ethnic social clubs and cultural organizations.

³ Most notably, Pérez-Firmat has described the show as “the great Cuban-American love story. Essentially a chronicle of how a Cuban man and an American woman live together, this show is as fine an example as we have of the pleasures and perils of bicultural romance” (*Life on the Hyphen*, 44, 65). For more on actor biographies, the production of *I Love Lucy*, and alternative readings of the show, see Desi Arnaz, *A Book* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1976); Warren G. Harris, *Lucy & Desi* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991); Coyne Steven Sanders and Tom Gilbert, *Desilu: The Story of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz* (New York: William Morrow, 1993); Jess Oppenheimer, *Laughs, Luck...and Lucy: How I Came to Create the Most Popular Sitcom of All Time* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999); WNYC Studio 360, *American Icons: I Love Lucy*, originally aired 8 October 2010.

Nightclubs and dancehalls in New York City provided musicians and audiences with opportunities for cultural expression at times much different and at others strikingly similar to the one presented to viewers of *I Love Lucy*. By comparing the experiences of musicians and audiences mingling at Hunts Point Palace and the Tropicana Club in the Bronx and La Conga and the Palladium in midtown Manhattan with Ricky Ricardo's downtown Tropicana Club, this chapter deepens our understanding of the opportunities for socialization and cultural expression available to the *colonia hispana* in the 1940s and 1950s. It also offers a look at the various ways in which race and ethnicity as well as local, community relationships shaped experiences in and responses to the commercial entertainment industry.

In demonstrating the role of Cuban entertainers in the construction of discourses of Hispano and Latino/a identity and community, which, as we saw in the last chapter, was often referred to as belonging to *los nuestros*, this chapter reflects on performances depicting Cubanness for spectacularly large white North American audiences. But, Cuban entertainers also played important roles in constructing Hispano and Latino/a audiences, and the content of Cubanness and discourses of authenticity they expressed, especially within the context of nightclubs and dancehalls in the Bronx and on Broadway, reflect a particular mode of fashioning Cuban and Cuban-American identity that was very much in dialogue with and rooted in New York City's *colonia hipana*. Despite its immense popularity among white North American audiences, the kind of Cubanness and Cuban Americanness presented on *I Love Lucy* and in other Hollywood productions operated almost entirely on its own terms, refashioning particular "authentic" performances for non-Spanish-speaking audiences. That said, examining and

understanding both modes of performance, in tandem, reveals how particular Cuban, Afro-Cuban, and Latin representations and material experiences worked to mark entertainers and audiences in various ways, as cultural insiders and musical innovators, as examples of “authentic” cultural expression, or as purveyors of a “watered-down” commercial sound and image.

Desi Arnaz arrived in Key West, Florida in 1934 neither in pursuit of a career as a professional musician nor to escape the racial prejudices and class biases that prompted many other black and white Cuban musicians to leave the island for the United States during this period. He left Cuba not of his own volition but as a result of an immediate political and social crisis.⁴ In 1933, led by the ABC Revolutionary Society and other opposition groups, young, mostly middle- and working-class Cubans, intellectuals, professionals, sugar workers, and students took to the streets to protest the political corruption, economic depression, and violent repression that had become characteristic of life on the island under the regime of Cuban president Gerardo Machado. Elected to the presidency in 1925, Machado initially resisted the strikes against him, but finally left his post and the island after the Cuban army opposed him to avoid direct U.S. military intervention.⁵

As the only son of the mayor of Santiago, Arnaz had lived a life of wealth, power, and privilege. He attended private school and enjoyed the luxuries of a large estate

⁴ Box 5, Folder 6, Recording Script from Marco Rizo, page 1, Marco Rizo Papers; Marco Rizo, 22 July 1993, David Carp Collection; *Time*, 26 May 1952.

⁵ Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995): 251-275; Barry Carr, “Mill Occupations and Soviets: The Mobilisation of Sugar Workers in Cuba 1917-1933,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28, no. 1 (February 1996): 129-158.

complete with cars, speedboats, fishing vessels, horses, personal servants, and a chauffeur. Many of those luxuries came as the result of the corruption associated with the Machado regime. At least that was the charge levied by Octavio Siegle, secretary-general of the Liga Patriótica Cubana, in an editorial published in *Gráfico* in 1930. Siegle attacked the majority of the mayors of Cuba, with Desi Arnaz Sr. singled out among them, as without principles, as nothing more than “scoundrels.” He complained that Arnaz, Sr. had not paid municipal employees in over six months, but his greatest indictment centered on the wealth and property that he had amassed as mayor: “he came to power in poverty,” but today owns three farms, three brand-new buildings, and had accumulated enough land to accommodate a municipal truck repair shop. So large was the plot of land that Arnaz, Sr. and a business partner approached Pan American Airways about using it as a landing strip for a fee of \$100,000. Siegle expressed outrage at what he deemed an incompatible reality: “the municipality is bankrupt, but this Machadista hasn’t lost a dime.”⁶

Much of that easy living changed for the Arnaz family after the Revolution of 1933. Word quickly spread across the island that Machado had left the country and anyone associated with his regime risked retribution or arrest. Arnaz recalled receiving a frantic phone call from his uncle, urging him and his mother to leave the house immediately because an angry mob was on its way and poised for violence. His father was in Havana (he was now a Representative in the Cuban government), and it was up to him and one of the house servants, Bombalé, to get his mother to safety. According to Arnaz, Bombalé, whom he described as a “big wonderful black man,” could not believe

⁶ Box 5, Folder 6, Recording Script from Marco Rizo, page 1, Marco Rizo Papers; Marco Rizo, 22 July 1993, David Carp Collection; *Time*, 26 May 1952; Octavio Siegle, “Los Alcaldes de Machado,” *Gráfico*, 14 June 1930, p. 4, 14.

that the mob would be coming for them because “there are blacks in that mob.” Similarly, Arnaz reasoned that “blacks had been Dad’s greatest supporters. Without them he would never have been elected mayor three times. Most of the leaders of my father’s political campaigns had been black.” Noting that one of his father’s biggest projects as mayor was a plan to pave all the streets in Santiago, “particularly where the blacks and poor people lived,” he insisted that he “never knew what racial prejudice was until I got to Florida. Instead of being prejudiced, we were proud of our black population.”⁷ As shown in previous chapters, white Cubans, especially those of the middle- and upper-classes, routinely expressed an image of Cuban society as racially integrated and harmonious, particularly in contrast to racial practices in the United States, despite the very real existence of racism and racial inequality.

Arnaz’s account of black political support for his father is more than white misconception or plain exaggeration. Just a few days after the fall of Machado and Arnaz Sr.’s subsequent arrest in Havana, African-American historian and member of President Roosevelt’s Federal Council of Negro Affairs Rayford Logan wrote in a special piece for the *Baltimore Afro-American* of “the fact that Oriente has solved the race problem with more fairness than any other region of which I know except possibly Brazil.” As evidence of the lack of discrimination in the province, he cited the existence of colored men in high posts in the government and as officers in the army, the passage of the Morúa Law in 1910, and the many teachers and professors of color in the public schools. Before advising readers to pass on stopping in Havana on their next visit to Cuba, he

⁷ Arnaz, *A Book*, 13, 21-25; Pérez, Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 251-275; See also, J.D. Phillips, “Soldiers Eject Officers: Enlisted Men Say Coup Was Aimed at Machado Followers in Regime,” *New York Times*, 6 September 1933, p. 1.

concluded that “the situation in Oriente disproves, moreover, the current conviction that the greater the proportion of Negroes in the population, the greater the discrimination. The exact opposite seems to be the case in Oriente.”⁸ With census records counting almost half of the population in Oriente as “black,” the plausibility that Arnaz Sr. relied on this constituency for political support remains convincing.

Other white politicians, most notably Machado, also reportedly relied on black support to secure their positions in government. In many ways, cross-racial alliances were typical of the Machado era: Machado declared December 7, the date of Antonio Maceo’s death, a national holiday; he barred the Ku Klux Klan from establishing a chapter in Camaguey; and, several Afro-Cuban candidates were elected to positions in the national government. In 1928, Afro-Cuban societies, whose memberships consisted mostly of black politicians and the black middle class, organized “a massive public homage” in honor of Machado to demonstrate their appreciation and support of his government.⁹ During this period as well, *son* emerged from its position as music of the black lower classes to achieve national acceptance by white middle- and upper-class Cubans thanks, in part, to support from the Machado government. From invitations to perform at semiprivate *encerrona* gatherings to a public request by the president for the Sonora Matancera to perform at his birthday party as well as official permission for hotels and other establishments to promote *son* music and dance, the Machado regime

⁸ Rayford Logan, “No Color Line Down in Cuba, Logan Finds,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, 9 September 1933, p. 1.

⁹ Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001): 92-93; Alejandra Bronfman, *Measures of Equality: Social Science, Citizenship, and Race in Cuba, 1902-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

undoubtedly helped popularize the genre in Cuba.¹⁰ By the late 1920s and early 1930s, Machado had earned a reputation as a “pro-black president,” but, as historian Alejandro de la Fuente cautions, that image had indeed been constructed as much by his opponents for their own political gain: after the fall of Machado in 1933, he argues, “it was necessary for antiblack forces to represent the anti-Machado revolution as a ‘white’ accomplishment in order to minimize Afro-Cubans’ gains in the new Cuba.”¹¹

While Arnaz, his mother, and Bombalé found refuge in Santiago, rioters ransacked and destroyed the majority of the Arnaz estate, leaving little more than Desi’s guitar untouched. The only thing he recalled salvaging from the rubble was his guitar, not clothing, money, or family pictures. His father, meanwhile, had turned himself in to authorities at La Cabaña in Havana. Arnaz and his mother eventually made their way to the capital, and six months later his father was released from prison on a writ of *habeas corpus*. During that time, yet another revolt took place, this one led by sergeants and soldiers in Cuba’s army who feared salary cuts and opposed the presidency of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes. Known as the “Sergeants Revolt,” the uprising left Fulgencio Batista, the coup’s chief organizer, in control of the Cuban government, not officially as president but by virtue of his command of the army. He personally advised Arnaz, Sr., upon his release from prison, to leave for Miami until the situation on the island stabilized.¹²

¹⁰ Robin Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness: Afrocubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997): 100, 104.

¹¹ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 93, 200-201.

¹² Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 271-275; Arnaz, *A Book*, 33; Box 5, Folder 6, Recording Script from Marco Rizo, page 3, Marco Rizo Papers; *Ecos de Nueva York*, 31 October 1954, p. 21; *Time*, 26 May 1952.

Arnaz would soon join his father in Miami. Disembarking from the S.S. Cuba, the aptly named ship that brought him from Havana to Key West, Arnaz recalled that “it might not have been a giant step for mankind, but it was a big one for me.” His father met him at the dock, and the two men boarded a bus that took them to a boarding house in the southwest part of Miami where they would share a small room for \$5 a week. His father revealed that he had no money, that he had been able to borrow only a few hundred dollars before his departure from Cuba. Soon, however, his father partnered with the former governors of Santa Clara and Camaguey, who were also exiled in Miami, to start a company to import building materials, principally roof, bathroom, and kitchen tiles. Arnaz worked as the errand boy for the new company, but the tile business was slow. The men decided to live at the warehouse, located on Third Street, S.W. in Miami, to save money on rent, and eventually started to import bananas to increase profits. Arnaz had other things keeping him busy at the time. The nineteen year old worked as a canary cage cleaner in the mornings and in the afternoons he attended St. Patrick’s High School in Miami Beach, where he was a member of the swim team.¹³

Arnaz complained that the small number of Cubans in Miami in the mid-1930s made adjusting to life in the United States especially difficult. He insisted that the only Cubans in Miami during this period were former members of the Machado regime. It was, nonetheless, a member of this small but significant cohort of Cuban exiles that gave him his start in show business, a connection between power, politics, and the commercial entertainment industry that seemed lost on Arnaz. Alberto Barreras, former president of the Cuban Senate, thought immediately of Arnaz when the bandleader of the Siboney Septet, the relief band at Roney Plaza in Miami Beach, came to him looking for a Cuban

¹³ Arnaz, *A Book*, 32, 36, 40-41; *Time*, 26 May 1952.

that could play the guitar and sing. Barreras reportedly told the bandleader that he had someone in mind, “but he didn’t know if the boy’s father would let him do it, still thinking of that old family pride. In those days, a musician came through the kitchen.” That musicians “came through the kitchen,” avoiding the public visibility of a front door entrance, suggests that their chosen mode of employment was not generally well-respected or held in high esteem. It also reveals that musicians were often considered no different than cooks, bus boys, or janitors. When Arnaz’s father heard the news, he protested much in the same way as did the parents and families of Arturo “Chico” O’Farrill, Machito, and other black and white Cubans interested in careers in popular music. It seems as though a rejection of a career in popular music cut across race and class. He exclaimed, “No, my son is not going to be a goddamn musician.” From a family of means in Cuba, his father had wanted his son to study at a university to be a doctor or a lawyer. To this race- and class-based opposition, Arnaz offered his father a practical response justified by a new national context: “This is the United States of America, and besides, it can’t be worse than cleaning birdcages.” Finally, with his father’s permission, he joined the band in the winter of 1936 earning \$39 a week.¹⁴

Local theater owner Carlos Montalban foreshadowed what would be Arnaz’s trademark: he noted that the bandleader’s appeal was not his musical talent but his personality and good looks. Of those early days at the Roney Plaza, Montalban noted, “He was always off-beat, but he’s an awfully nice guy, a clean-cut Latin.” It was likely Arnaz’s image as “clean-cut Latin” that drew the attention of Xavier Cugat, who invited him to audition for his band in New York City as soon as he graduated high school.

¹⁴ Arnaz, *A Book*, 43; Box 5, Folder 6, Recording Script from Marco Rizo, page 1, Marco Rizo Papers.

From his day's performing with Cugat's band at the Waldorf-Astoria, Arnaz recalled that he "learned not only about how the music should be played, how it should be presented, what the American people like to dance to, but also how to handle the band, the rehearsals, the salaries, and all the angles of the band business."¹⁵

After six months in New York City with Cugat, he decided to return to Miami to start his own band, what he claimed was "the only typical Cuban band in Miami Beach." With Cugat's permission and for a fee of \$25 per week, he advertised his new band as "Desi Arnaz and his Xavier Cugat Orchestra direct from the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City." Cugat sent him four "lousy" musicians, an Italian bass player, a Spanish drummer, a Jewish pianist, and an Italian violinist, and none had any experience playing Latin rhythms. It was during the second set of their first lackluster performance at Bobby Kelly's Park Plaza that Arnaz introduced a conga line to American audiences. Desperate to avoid being fired, he reportedly drew on the musical influences from his childhood in Cuba: "And my mind did a flashback to the yearly carnivals in Santiago, when thousands of people in the streets form a conga line...to the beat of African conga drums."¹⁶ In discussing the *comparsa* tradition in Cuba, ethnomusicologist Robin Moore has shown how these Afro-Cuban street bands, sometimes also called *congas*, originated from Three Kings' Day celebrations put on by slaves during the colonial period. Carnival celebrations came under attack in both Havana and Santiago throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a result of racial ideologies and beliefs that condemned African drumming and Afro-Cubans as savage, immoral, and backwards. That Arnaz Sr., as mayor of Santiago, had spoken out against *congas* and *comparsas* is

¹⁵ Arnaz, *A Book*, 44, 50-51, 69-74; *Time*, 26 May 1952.

¹⁶ Arnaz, *A Book*, 57, 59, 62-63.

more than just ironic given that his son would soon make a name for himself popularizing his own version of these expressions. As a young boy in Santiago, Arnaz had participated in these celebrations, and, despite local, national, and familial prohibitions or possibly because of them, he found in them an attraction and excitement.¹⁷

Shortly after his debut in Miami, Arnaz moved back to New York City, sharing a room in an apartment in Brooklyn with his bass player and bringing with him the conga line he had first made popular in Miami. His band got hired at the newly-opened La Conga on Fifty-first Street and Broadway in midtown Manhattan, which syndicated newspaper columnist Dorothy Kilgallen described as “the first nightclub that brought the Eastside of New York to the Westside.”¹⁸ With this remark, Kilgallen credited La Conga for bringing the immigrant, ethnic, and working-class popular representations and, to a lesser extent, popular audiences that generally characterized the Eastside of lower and midtown Manhattan during this period to the Westside of the city, perceived to be more upscale and sophisticated, particularly in terms of arts and culture. It was Arnaz’s conga line, she argued, that allowed La Conga to emerge as a sort of middle ground, bringing together elements of the city previously kept mostly separate by virtue of differences in race, ethnicity, and class.

La Conga had a “mostly Latin” clientele, according to a reviewer in attendance at a show in 1946 that featured Machito y sus Afro-Cubans with Miguelito Valdés as the show’s closer and headliner.¹⁹ With advertisements for the nightclub and its featured acts running in *La Prensa* and *Diario de Nueva York* as well as the *New York Times*, the

¹⁷ Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness*, 64, 68, 72.

¹⁸ Arnaz, *A Book*, 57, 59, 62-63.

¹⁹ *Billboard Magazine*, 5 October 1946, p. 37.

nightclub's "mostly Latin" customers were probably not people of color and most likely middle- and upper-class white and light-skinned Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Spanish migrants as well as visitors from Latin America interested in experiencing the conga craze and other Latin rhythms in what was described as an "unforgettable, authentic atmosphere."²⁰ Advertising in the *New York Times* suggests as well an interest by club owners Jack and Nat Harris to attract white North American audiences, a move seemingly confirmed by their decision late in 1944 to "[switch] somewhat into more American channels" and "[go] in more heavily for U.S. stuff," though they did retain Machito y sus Afro-Cubans till the band's contract expired in 1945.²¹

By the fall of 1940, the conga line was well on its way to becoming a national and international dance craze. The nightly spectacle of Arnaz's conga line also drew the attention of Broadway writers Richard Rodgers and Larry Hart and director George Abbot, who cast him as Manuelito Lynch, a football (not fútbol) star from Argentina, in the musical-comedy, *Too Many Girls*. Even before the release of the film version of the Broadway production, at least one reviewer noted another reason for the conga's popularity. Columbia Records had just released a four-disc set of congas performed by Arnaz's band called "Dance La Conga," which featured "an accompanying set of instructions by Arthur Murray [that] is intended to show purchasers how to conga almost as well as Señor Arnaz."²² In the Hollywood version of *Too Many Girls*, Manuelito leads a conga line during the film's finale in, perhaps, the strangest of contexts: at a bonfire

²⁰ Advertisement, *New York Times*, 8 July 1943, p. 22.

²¹ "La Conga Op Turns Band Leader Again," *Billboard Magazine*, 23 December 1944, p. 24; Box 1, Folder Festival WKCI, Interview with Bobby Woodland and Freddie Scarett, 5 August 1980, Carlos Ortiz Collection.

²² "Music: April Records," *Time*, 1 April 1940.

after a football game on the campus of a college in New Mexico with an almost 10:1 female to male ratio. Still dressed in his football uniform, Manuelito bangs on a conga drum adorned in Indian motifs, while his classmates, including Pepe, a Mexican tap dancer played by Ann Miller, perform the simplified steps in perfect sequence. That, in this peculiar setting, this “multicultural mass of humanity,” as Pérez-Firmat calls it, can easily and energetically follow along “stepping to the beat of the same conga drummer” demonstrates exactly why the conga explodes as a popular dance form. The film’s release in 1940 paved the way for the inclusion of the conga in subsequent Hollywood musicals in the early part of the decade, precisely because “it was a group dance, it was simple to do, and it had the requisite foreign, festive air to it.”²³

Coincidentally, it was while filming *Too Many Girls* in Hollywood that Arnaz met Lucille Ball. Shortly after production was complete, the two married in Connecticut on November 30, 1940 in an impromptu ceremony that forced Arnaz to miss his band’s scheduled performance at the Roxy Theater in New York City.²⁴ Arnaz went on to make other films during this first stint in Hollywood, including *Four Jacks and a Jill* and *Father Takes a Wife*. But, refusing to stay out west just to be near his new bride, and with few roles coming his way, he decided to return again to New York City to perform with his band for an engagement at the Rumba Casino.

Music remained his main focus. One reviewer for the *New York Times* explained, “Mr. Arnaz is a specialist in rhythm and when he leaps to the front of the line like the Pied Piper (in this case equipped with drums) one just automatically joins in. He’s a very persuasive man, that one.” Noting that “the drums never stop beating,” the same

²³ Pérez-Firmat, *Life on the Hyphen*, 53-56.

²⁴ “Lucille Ball Married,” *New York Times*, December 1, 1940, p. 63.

reviewer described Arnaz as “that handsome young witch doctor who is presently causing a good deal of fluttering among the females.”²⁵ Though the reference to him as a “witch doctor” might suggest an awareness of his appropriation of Afro-Cuban religious rituals, his version of the practice was apparently safe enough for young, white North American women. In fact, as early as 1931, members of the American Society of Teachers of Dancing worked to replace “the shorts steps and stamping of the Cuban rumba” with what they called “a ‘dance of decorum.’” They objected, in particular, to the “closeness” and “hugging” associated with dances like the rumba and fox-trot. Instructors had not yet given the new dance a name, though it did, they explained, have a “distinctly Spanish flavor because of the four-four time.”²⁶ The latter, it seems, was also an appealing characteristic of the conga: still of “Spanish flavor,” it was an easy-to-learn group dance that tempered the potentially sexual and erotic moves of partner dances like the rumba.

Arnaz’s stay in New York City was cut short, however, when officials at the U.S. State Department invited him to travel to Mexico as part of an envoy of musicians, entertainers, and actors being sent there to “kick off” President Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor Policy. Acts like this Hollywood Caravan, of course, demonstrate the various manifestations of “hemispheric solidarity” and interamericanism that characterized this period. Upon his return, U.S. officials asked him about the Mexican reaction to the policy, and his response suggests his understanding of himself as both a Latin American

²⁵ Arnaz, *A Book*, 83; Theodore Strauss, “News of the Night Clubs,” *New York Times*, 7 May 1939, p. X3; Theodore Strauss, “News of the Night Clubs,” *New York Times*, 6 August 1939, p. X8; Theodore Strauss, “News Of the Night Clubs,” *New York Times*, 28 1940, p. X3; “News of the Night Clubs,” *New York Times*, 10 March 1940, p. 153; “News of the Night Clubs,” *New York Times*, 7 April 1940, p. 124; *Billboard Magazine*, 2 March 1946, p. 24.

²⁶ “‘Dance of Decorum’ to Replace Rumba,” *New York Times*, 29 August 1931, p. 10.

subject to the very policy he was instructed to sell *and* as an agent of the United States. He reportedly told officials, “They are suspicious... ‘What do they want? Take the rest of Mexico? They already have taken a big chunk. What is it they want now?’ ... We turn it on too strongly and too suddenly. They do not understand our foreign policy.” He articulated a Mexican point of view that was likely more intelligible to him than to most of the non-Spanish-speaking musicians and celebrities on the Hollywood Caravan, but still maintained his belonging to the United States through the use of the “we” and “our” pronouns. Arnaz later traveled abroad and throughout the United States entertaining troops with the USO, stopping first in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and other parts of the Caribbean “where there were many Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and other Latin boys with our American troops.”²⁷ Here, he emphasized the inclusion of “Latin boys” among the “American troops,” concluding that they are American troops.

Despite his early successes on stage and on screen, Arnaz later claimed that his accent and ethnic background limited the roles available to him in Hollywood in the early 1940s. Media studies scholar Charles Ramírez Berg argues that Hollywood has formulated six common stereotypes of Latinos/as in film, namely *el bandido*, the harlot, the male buffoon, the female clown, the dark lady, and the Latin lover.²⁸ Arnaz himself described the limited kinds of roles open to “Latin types,” noting that “the only ones who

²⁷ Arnaz, *A Book*, 135-137, 141-142. For more on Hollywood’s role in the Good Neighbor Policy in Latin America, see Seth Fein, “Everyday Forms of Collaboration: U.S. Film Propaganda in Cold War Mexico,” in Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine LeGrand, and Ricardo D. Salvatore, eds., *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S. Latin American Relations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998): 400-450.

²⁸ Arnaz, *A Book*, 132-133; Charles Ramírez Berg, *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, and Resistance* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002): 66. See, also, Clara Rodríguez, *Latin Looks: Images of Latinas and Latinos in the U.S. Media* (Boulder: WestView Press, 1997); Mary C. Beltrán and Camilla Fojas, ed. *Mixed Race Hollywood* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

were known then were the romantic Valentino types and the George Raft types, or the other extreme, the Crispin Martin lazy Mexican character or the Leo Carillos.”²⁹

Still, whatever problems he encountered within the entertainment industry as a result of his Cubanness, Arnaz blamed not on racism or ethnic stereotypes but on his language skills and the whims of Hollywood producers. He recalled a conversation he had with Louis B. Mayer of MGM, who hoped to capitalize on the conga craze. Mayer believed that something special happened at the moment when Arnaz hung the conga drum around his shoulder, arguing that “up to that point you’re just another Mexican.” Though Arnaz retorted, “Not Mexican, sir, Cuban,” Mayer replied, “Well, one of those Latin fellows.”³⁰ That Mayer seemed to care little about the distinction is not entirely surprising given Hollywood’s indifference to Latin American national specificity. Pérez-Firmat has argued that Arnaz refused to portray himself “as a victim of prejudice and exploitation,” preferring instead to see his life as “an old-fashioned, rags-to-riches Cuban-American success story.”³¹ Such a perspective not only reproduces notions of Cuban-American exceptionalism but also fails to examine the ways in which Arnaz’s whiteness privileged his experiences in the entertainment industry. Given his light-skin and handsome, clean-cut appearance, it was likely his accent and last name that marked him as racially Latin. This was both an opportunity and a limitation: it created the initial interest in him to fill Latin parts on Broadway and in Hollywood, but also meant that other parts were closed to him and that he could be passed over when new Latin talent came along.

²⁹ Arnaz, *A Book*, 77.

³⁰ Arnaz, *A Book*, 141-142.

³¹ Pérez-Firmat, *Life on the Hyphen*, 72.

Arnaz seemed well aware of ethnic stereotypes, and though he appeared to have no problem reproducing them on stage and on screen, in his personal life he seemed more determined to confront the possibility of negative images. With few roles open to him now that Hollywood, he argued, had moved on to Ricardo Montalbán, Arnaz decided to return again to the band business in New York City.³² Throughout the mid-to-late 1940s, Arnaz and his band performed at downtown theaters and nightclubs in New York City, such as the Roxy, Copacabana, Paramount, and Strand, and toured throughout the United States, taking his band on the road to Cleveland, Chicago, Omaha, Nebraska, Milwaukee, and Los Angeles.³³ He refused to stay in Hollywood to be kept by his wife, believing that doing so “would really have completed the image most Americans had of us Latins, especially in those days.”³⁴ In many ways, Arnaz’s personal life and professional career reflect ambivalence towards ethnic stereotypes, quietly accepting and, to a certain degree, exaggerating them in the public contexts of politics and entertainment but forcefully rejecting them in private, domestic relationships.

Arnaz’s career took another brief pause when he entered the U.S. Army in 1943. His enlistment came shortly after his debut in the role of Private Félix Ramírez in the MGM production, *Bataan*, which portrayed the U.S. stand in the Philippines. Advertisements in African-American newspapers boasted to readers that “You’ll be proud that America had such martyrs of all races, creeds and color ready to fight to the

³² Arnaz, *A Book*, 161.

³³ Box 5, Folder 6, Recording Script from Marco Rizo, page 6, Marco Rizo Papers; Marco Rizo, 22 July 1993, David Carp Collection.

³⁴ Arnaz, *A Book*, 173.

bitter end against the treacherous sons of Tokyo.”³⁵ With the casting of African-American actor-singer Kenneth Spencer as Private Wesley Epps, a reviewer for the *Baltimore Afro-American* noted that the film featured “the first colored soldier to reach the silver screen (in reel life) in an heroic role.” The writer cautioned, however, that the fictionalized production failed to mirror the reality of racial inequality within the U.S. military, noting that “instead of a democratic army as pictured above, colored troops are jim-crowed.”³⁶ No mention was made in African-American, mainstream, or Spanish-language newspapers in New York City about Arnaz’s portrayal of a Latino/a soldier or about the ways that the U.S. military actually treated Latino/a soldiers racialized as non-white. The casting of Arnaz in the film constructed Latin and African American as wholly separate. Not only did the *Afro-American* rightly note the failure of the movie to depict Jim Crow, *Bataan* also did not reflect the ways that Latinos/as and Afro-Latinos/as, in particular, experienced segregation in the U.S. armed forces.³⁷

The inclusion of both an African-American and Latino soldier (as well as Philippine Scout Private Yankee Salazar) marks *Bataan* as unique among World War II films. This inclusion, however, does not mean that the film avoided stereotypes or that the racial representations in the film portrayed only positive characteristics. The racial messages in the film, especially with regard to Private Ramírez, are mixed: at times, his status as “other” is less obvious and reflects the culmination of his Americanization; at

³⁵ *Atlanta Daily World*, 21 May 1943, p. 3; *Afro-American*, 22 May 1943, p. 10.

³⁶ “Uncle Sam Could Easily Do This,” *Afro-American*, 13 March 1943, p. 10; “Dead Film Stars in Resurrection,” *Chicago Defender*, 30 January 1943, p. 18; “This Proves a Guy is as Old as his Whiskers Even When a Star,” *Chicago Defender*, 6 February, 1943, p. 19.

³⁷ For more on Latino/a participation in the U.S. military during the Second World War, see Maggie Rivas-Rodríguez and Emilio Zamora, *Beyond the Latino World War II Hero: The Social and Political Legacy of a Generation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009). For a very brief analysis of Arnaz’s performance in the film, see Pérez-Firmat, *Life on the Hyphen*, 57-58.

other times, his status as “other” is marked in more direct ways, suggesting a sort of foreignness and difference. Private Ramírez introduces himself to Sergeant Dane (Robert Taylor) simply as a member of a tank battalion from California, making no reference to his national origin or ethnic background. In another scene, he finds a battery-powered radio and rejoices when he comes across a station broadcasting Tommy Dorsey live from Hollywood. When Sergeant Dane complains, “Don’t tell me that’s Jap jive!,” Private Ramírez quickly counters, “No, Serg, that’s good ol’ America, that’s U.S.A....oh, [Dorsey] sends me, Serg! He makes me lace up my boots!” Perhaps as a reference to Arnaz’s career as a bandleader and wink to his fans, the scene ends with Ramírez tapping his hands on the table in a motion that simulates Arnaz’s furious beating of the conga drum during a performance of “Babalú.” Later in the film, as he nears death from malaria fever, Ramírez’s Latin otherness takes center stage when he mumbles aloud in Spanish “pobre mamacita” (“poor mother”) and imagines that he is confessing his sins to a priest in both Spanish and Latin. Following Ramírez’s death, Sergeant Dane instructs one of the other soldiers to remind Navy sailor Purckett, who has assumed the task of making grave markers for the dead, of the correct spelling of his last name. That this Spanish surname required repeated instructions on its proper spelling, a process apparently not needed for the names of the other soldiers in the group, indicates that his national origin and ethnic background did not go unnoticed and that his Latinness did indeed mark him as foreign and “other” within the U.S. Army.

While *Bataan* premiered in theaters across the United States, Arnaz prepared for his entry into the U.S. military. His decision to enter the U.S. armed forces rather than the Cuban Army did not go unnoticed among Latinos/as in New York City. One reporter

for *La Prensa* commented that Arnaz, “the well-known Cuban artist,” despite his commission in the Cuban Army, chose instead to join the U.S. armed forces “thanks to the recently celebrated accords between Cuba and the United States.”³⁸ A recurring knee injury prevented him from passing the physical for the U.S. Air Force, and he spent the bulk of the war years in the U.S. Army entertaining wounded soldiers and personnel at Birmingham Hospital in California and other bases across the country.³⁹ Though Arnaz’s position in the U.S. Army had as much to do with his celebrity status and Hollywood connections, it also illustrates the privileged opportunities available to light-skinned Latinos like himself and Marco Rizo, as another example. In fact, Arnaz revealed that his only encounter with ethnic otherness in the U.S. military came at his induction ceremony when a sergeant who had trouble pronouncing his name suggested he shorten it on his citizenship certificate. Born Desiderio Alberto Arnaz y de Acha in Cuba, he was reborn as the American Desi Arnaz upon entering the U.S. Army.⁴⁰

As an Afro-Cuban bandleader with little command of the English language, Machito’s experiences in the U.S. Army during the Second World War were quite different. Having been drafted in 1943 in the midst of his band’s long-term engagement at La Conga, the Afro-Cuban showman left the band under the leadership of Mario Bauzá. Also called for a different kind of duty were replacement singers Polito Galíndez and Graciela, who left Cuba having already signed a contract with the nightclub owners. Machito spent his time in the U.S. Army as part of an all-black unit based in Camp Hood

³⁸ Photo with caption, *La Prensa*, 6 May 1932, p. 2.

³⁹ “Desi Arnaz, Film Actor, in Army,” *New York Times*, 28 April 1943, p. 20; *Time*, 26 May 1952; Arnaz, *A Book*, 141, 146-147, 161.

⁴⁰ Arnaz, *A Book*, 10.

in Texas. With limited mobility caused by a childhood leg injury, he worked as a cook to avoid the more physically demanding tasks assigned to the other members of his tank destroyer battalion. While at the base, he also formed a band that played “American music” at area hospitals, thanks to the stock arrangements his wife sent him from New York City. But, by this time, Machito already had three children and his Army paycheck failed to meet the needs of his growing family. He asked his wife to send him scissors, razors, brushes, and electric clippers so that he could make extra money as a barber, recalling that he “took the clippers to a ton of those Afros.” After six months, the Army released him with an Honorable Medical Discharge, a timely release since just a few months later many of the men in his division would die at Normandy.⁴¹

That the conga craze thrived throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s among North American audiences does not mean that all Cuban performers joined the conga line. Machito was one such reluctant performer. He recalled performing at the Stork Club, located at 3 East Fifty-third Street in Manhattan, in 1940 for a fundraising event organized on behalf of Nelson Rockefeller. Between sets, one of the organizers requested that he form a conga line. Though he insisted that he “wasn’t nor had he ever been a *conguero*,” he grabbed the conga from his conga player and started a conga line, eventually turning the drum upside down so that guests could place their donations in its hollow. He reportedly collected over twenty thousand dollars during the dance, earning himself a hundred dollar tip, which he feared he might lose during his subway ride

⁴¹ Graciela Pérez, interview by René Lopez and Raul A. Fernández, 19 September 1998; Box 1, Folder Boy’s Harbor, Transcript of Machito interview by Patricia L. Wilson Cryer, 20 January 1981, Carlos Ortiz Collection; Graciela Pérez, interview by Max Salazar, 19 May 1985, David Carp Collection.

uptown.⁴² Despite the conga line's popularity, Machito explained that he generally avoided drumming, especially early on in his career in Cuba where he performed with María Teresa Vera and Miguelito Valdés. He considered the practice too closely associated with Catholic and Yoruba religious rituals and himself too much of an amateur percussionist. He held the drumming rituals sacred and did not want to do it casually: "I never considered myself to be qualified to play conga or to drum...I didn't want to be embarrassed. It was very dangerous in Cuba in my days that you don't know how to play and you'd say let me play, you could get beat in the head."⁴³

Though Machito largely resisted the commercialized performance of the conga line, he did not refuse the opportunity to perform at the very basement nightclub made famous by the popular dance and spectacle. Whereas Arnaz accepted credit for bringing "the Eastside of New York to the Westside," Machito y sus Afro-Cubans marked their booking as the house band at La Conga in 1942 as a sign of racial progress and integration, bringing uptown music, *barrio* musicians, and, eventually, Latino/a audiences to the stages and dance floors of downtown Manhattan. Cuban musician and bandleader José Curbelo recalled that "everything was on Broadway between 42nd, the Astor Roof, and 54th, where the Palladium was" and noted the accomplishment of the Afro-Cubans as "the first band, black, to come from El Barrio...to play on Broadway." As a replacement for the recently departed Anselmo Sacasas Orchestra, the band's booking at La Conga had as much to do with musical ability and widespread appeal as it

⁴² Box 1, Folder Boy's Harbor, Transcript of Machito interview by Patricia L. Wilson Cryer, 20 January 1981, Carlos Ortiz Collection.

⁴³ Box 1, Folder Festival WKCI, Machito Interview, Carlos Ortiz Collection.

did with the progressive vision of one of the club's owner, Jack Harris. Curbelo reasoned that Harris "didn't believe in color, [he believed] in music."⁴⁴

But compromise also mattered, and one of the first moves made by Harris and the other owners of La Conga was to change to the band's name from the Siboney Orchestra to Machito y sus Afro-Cubans. The band had been performing uptown as the Siboney Orchestra, a name that did not emphasize their Afro-Cubanness but, rather, their Cubanness, perhaps in an attempt to differentiate themselves, racially and musically, from African-American bands and performers in that part of the city. Harris reportedly rejected the name Siboney as much for its unfamiliar reference to indigenous peoples as for its commonness since other bands had performed under that name in both Cuba and the United States, including, for example, the one Arnaz had joined in Miami. Machito recalled his openness to finding an original name for the band: "There was nothing that specified the type of music that we were making. So, then, [the new name] saved me because it was a name that was given to the band that was new."⁴⁵

Born Frank Grillo, Machito explained that, being the first boy born in a family with four girls, his nickname since birth had been Macho. Club owners, however, argued that "Macho sounded too rough" and that they preferred the diminutive "Machito." The gendered implications of this change cannot go unmentioned. The diminutive ending "ito" in Spanish serves to indicate that something is smaller in size and generally renders words less harsh in intent. In this case, owners rejected "Macho," meaning man or a

⁴⁴ José Curbelo, 3 October 1993, David Carp Collection; *Billboard Magazine*, 17 October 1942, p. 24.

⁴⁵ Box 1, Folder Boy's Harbor, Transcript of Machito interview by Patricia L. Wilson Cryer, 20 January 1981, Carlos Ortiz Collection; Box 1, Folder Festival WKCI, Machito interview, Carlos Ortiz Collection.

person who is overtly masculine, in favor of “Machito,” meaning “little man.” That said, the “ito” ending can also signify affection, shifting the meaning in this case to signify “our little man.” Intended here most likely as a term of endearment rather than as an insult, the preference for the name “Machito” over “Macho” also worked to develop familiarity and rapport between audiences and the performer.⁴⁶

Though Mario Bauzá argued that the band was called “Afro-Cuban” at his insistence, Machito recalled that he did worry when club owners agreed that the band would be billed as Machito y sus Afro-Cubans. He insisted that “this band is cooperative, and I have to ask all peoples...and Afro was too black for the Latins, you know. So, I knew I was going to have troubles with the band.” Whatever role an awareness of African roots and black consciousness played in Bauzá’s preference for the “Afro-Cuban” modifier, for the other members of the band, especially those less interested in publicly acknowledging blackness as a collective identity, money and job security garnered their approval. “Money changes attitudes,” Machito explained, and upon learning that they would be earning \$140 a week, “they said, there is no difference on the subject of the name of the band.”⁴⁷ This is not entirely surprising, especially from a marketing perspective, given the increasing familiarity with and use of the “Afro-Cuban” modifier in musical and cultural contexts. By using this modifier in the band’s name, club owners likely hoped to draw audiences looking for authentic, genuine

⁴⁶ Box 1, Folder Boy’s Harbor, Transcript of Machito interview by Patricia L. Wilson Cryer, 20 January 1981, Carlos Ortiz Collection; Box 1, Folder Festival WKCI, Machito interview, Carlos Ortiz Collection.

Pérez-Firmat employs a similar mode of analysis with regards to naming practices in *I Love Lucy*, namely differences between Ricky and Rick.

⁴⁷ Box 1, Folder Festival WKCI, Machito interview, Carlos Ortiz Collection; Box 1, Folder Boy’s Harbor, Transcript of Machito interview by Patricia L. Wilson Cryer, 20 January 1981, Carlos Ortiz Collection.

purveyors of the popular Latin rhythms of the period without having to cross the Ninety-sixth Street color line that divided New York City during this period.⁴⁸

When Machito arrived in New York City in 1937, his sister, who was married to Bauzá, greeted him at the dock, and the two rode into Harlem where the three shared an apartment on 142nd Street and Seventh Avenue, near the Savoy Ballroom. On that first drive through the streets of Harlem, Machito recalled that he “had never seen so many blacks together in a long time,” arguing that “Cuba was more integrated in terms of housing.” “The deeper we got into Harlem the blacker it got,” he explained, believing he had arrived “in paradise because I am in a country of my people.” “Paradise,” however, had its borders, and during this period that meant that a man with “a toasted complexion,” as Machito described himself, could not be seen below Ninety-sixth Street with a white woman without arousing police suspicion. As we saw in the first chapter, Bauzá recalled similar, albeit informal, restrictions against black men associating with white women in Cuba. On his first date with his light-skinned Puerto Rican girlfriend, whom he eventually married, Machito decided to take her to the Apollo Theater, which he described as being located in “my section,” to avoid any problems. Interestingly, not only had she never been to the Apollo, but she had also never even been to Harlem, suggesting, again, the existence of racism and racial tensions within the *colonia hispana*. But more than this, Machito’s reasoning reveals his sense of belonging and inclusion in Harlem among *both* African Americans and dark-skinned Cubans and Puerto Ricans as

⁴⁸ For more on *Afrocubanismo*, see Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness*; De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*; For more on the racial geography of New York City, see Irma Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900-1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (London and New York: Verso Press, 1998); Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

well as a strategy for negotiating the social and legal constraints placed on inter-racial and inter-ethnic relationships during this period. As we will see in the next chapter, however, Machito's own sense of racial identity as well as his response to the bi-racial color divide, particularly at the level of interpersonal relationships, remained inconsistent and contingent on specific social and geographic contexts.⁴⁹

Once in the United States, Machito noted that he performed with Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Spanish bandleaders, including Alberto Iznaga, Noro Morales, Augusto Coen, and Xavier Cugat, and that he generally "found work easily" throughout the late 1930s. He admitted, however, that "it was difficult to make a living just by performing because the Latin colony was still small and we had to play small clubs and private dances." As shown in previous chapters, performing at social events sponsored by Cuban, Puerto Rican, and other ethnic social clubs and organizations continued throughout the 1940s and 1950s, though in the later period the relationship was likely as much about maintaining and strengthening cultural ties as it was out of financial necessity. In any case, Machito had come to New York City to establish himself as a professional musician, and because he had managed to save some money before leaving Cuba, he had

⁴⁹ Isabelle Ortiz, "Machito A Living Legend," *Canales*, January 1979, Carlos Ortiz Collection; Box 1, Folder Festival WKCI, Machito interview, Carlos Ortiz Collection; Box 1, Folder Boy's Harbor, Transcript of Machito interview by Patricia L. Wilson Cryer, 20 January 1981, Carlos Ortiz Collection.

For more on racism within the Latino/a community of New York City, generally, and racism within the Puerto Rican community, more specifically, see Ruth Glasser, *My Music is My Flag: Puerto Rican Musicians and Their New York Communities, 1917-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores, eds. *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

little interest in supplementing his income with odd jobs or manual wage labor, asserting that he “wasn’t going to any factory forced.”⁵⁰

Though statements made by and about Desi Arnaz and Machito suggest that securing livelihoods as professional entertainers was never entirely doubted, remarks from them and other black and white Cuban musicians generally demonstrate that a career in the entertainment industry was, nonetheless, hard work. By 1940, Arnaz’s parents had divorced and his mother came to live with him in New York City at his sublet penthouse apartment at 60 Central Park West. His mother complained that he “worked too hard,” and while he admitted that he was doing the “conga bit” up to five times a day, he reasoned that audiences “want to see me sweat, Mama, and I don’t mind.” Marco Rizo described Arnaz’s schedule during this period as “very strenuous” and noted that “he didn’t have much time to sleep,” especially on the weekends when he performed in *Too Many Girls* on stage and then went off to La Conga for shows starting at nine, eleven-thirty, and two in the morning.⁵¹ A reviewer for *Billboard Magazine* indicated as well that this rigorous pace continued into the mid-1940s: “Realizing that customers like to see boys work for their coin, Arnaz makes sure that ringsiders get their money’s worth. He knocks himself out in hopping down from the bandstand to the dance floor and puts on a one-man show with conga drum and a dance to match.”⁵²

To develop a profitable career in the entertainment industry, a musician not only had to develop management skills, book nightly performances, and schedule regional and

⁵⁰ Isabelle Ortiz, “Machito A Living Legend,” *Canales*, January 1979, Carlos Ortiz Collection; Box 1, Folder Festival WKCI, Machito interview, Carlos Ortiz Collection; Box 1, Folder Boy’s Harbor, Transcript of Machito interview by Patricia L. Wilson Cryer, 20 January 1981, Carlos Ortiz Collection.

⁵¹ Box 5, Folder 6, Recording Script from Marco Rizo, page 5, Marco Rizo Papers.

⁵² Arnaz, *A Book*, 99; *Billboard Magazine*, 2 March 1946, p. 24.

national tours, but also a keen awareness of the needs and preferences of those in the audience. That Desi Arnaz had a relatively lukewarm following among audiences within the *colonia cubana* and *colonia hispana de Nueva York* is not entirely surprising given his oft-stated desire to reach mainstream, white, middle-class North American audiences even at the risk of displeasing critics and “people who can afford to go to ‘21’ in New York.” Throughout his career, he insisted that “I’ve always got the guy in Omaha in mind.”⁵³ Whether because of his early crossover success, likely a result of the fact that his light skin, good looks, and charming personality fit one of the “Latin types” preferred by Broadway and Hollywood producers who cast him in small roles in theatrical and film productions aimed primarily at North American audiences or because of his inability to compete musically, in terms of technique and style, with other Cuban musicians, Arnaz maintained a limited physical presence within the *colonia hispana* and *colonia cubana de Nueva York* throughout the late 1940s and especially throughout the 1950s.

The *colonias hispanas de Nueva York* as well as Cubans on the island, nonetheless, noted Arnaz’s early success. A reporter for *La Prensa* commented on his rising popularity in the United States, a place “where so many thousands of men from all parts of the world look for a little bit of glory but where so few find it.” According to this reporter, however, for Arnaz, “his arrival has been easy, without ordeal, without deception, as if a fairy godmother had taken him by the hand down the handsome road to success.”⁵⁴ A reporter for the Havana-based newspaper *Diario de la Marina* also

⁵³ “Television: The New Tycoon,” *Time*, 7 April 1958; Hazel Washington, “This is Hollywood,” *Chicago Defender*, 24 February 1958, p. A17; Arnaz, *A Book*, 199-200.

⁵⁴ Sandra Joy, “La Semana en Hollywood,” *La Prensa*, 27 November 1940, p. 5; *Ecos de Nueva York*, 25 July 1954, p. 18.

remarked on Arnaz's sudden rise to fame, describing him as example of a Latin American artist who "has been able, through their own merits, to stand out."⁵⁵

His limited physical presence is not to say that critics and audiences within the *colonia hispana* failed to situate the origins of his professional career in New York City, all while emphasizing his Cubanness. One report in *La Prensa* noted that it was common for actors to leave the theaters of New York City for the Hollywood big screen, citing Carmen Miranda, Carmen Amaya, Los Chavalillos, and Desi Arnaz as recent examples.⁵⁶ With the release of *Too Many Girls* in New York City, for example, representatives from numerous Spanish-language newspapers and magazines as well as Cuban consul Cayetano de Quesada attended a private screening of the film, and reviewers made sure to explain that the "Cuban actor" had gotten his start on the stage in New York City.⁵⁷ By 1946, many within the *colonia hispana* recognized Desi Arnaz as a bandleader and stage and film actor. At that year's *Gran Festival*, *La Prensa* announced that the program would feature "the most decorated elements of the artistic nucleus of the *colonia*," including what was described as a "surprise" presentation by Arnaz. In New York City to perform with his band at the Copacabana Club, Arnaz not only attended the fundraising showcase but also participated in the event, offering "excellent poetry" as he

⁵⁵ "Nuevos Triunfos Conquista Desi Arnaz, Astro Cinematográfico, Desde la 'NBC' de N.Y.," *Diario de la Marina*, 2 February 1941, p. 22.

⁵⁶ "La Guerra Ha Oscurecido la Gran Vía Blanca pero el Teatro se Halla en Nueva Era de Auge," *La Prensa*, 14 April 1943, p. 5.

⁵⁷ "Exhibición privada de 'Too Many Girls' dio aquí la R.K.O.," *La Prensa*, 31 October 1940, p. 5; "Proyección especial en honor al actor cubano Desi Arnaz," *La Prensa*, 24 October 1940, p. 5.

presented Xavier Cugat with his winner's trophy in the *Orquestas* category.⁵⁸ That the newspaper billed his appearance as a surprise suggests that Arnaz mattered within the *colonia hispana* not as an active participant in community events but as a symbolic figure whose growing prominence in the entertainment industry on a national level reflected back on his origins in the city.

From a commercial and financial standpoint, it makes sense that some within the *colonia hispana*, especially white and light-skinned, middle- and upper-class elements, would want to claim Arnaz as one of their own just as it seems plausible that the Cuban bandleader would opt to appeal mostly to white North American audiences in pursuit of bigger audiences and even bigger paychecks. Arnaz revealed that he hoped his band would benefit from the showmanship and gimmicks that had made Xavier Cugat so famous across the United States and internationally. In fact, when he started his latest band in 1946, he explained that his band would be nothing like the Afro-Cuban/Latin jazz bands that were becoming increasingly popular in New York City. Arnaz's remarks to a record producer in California demonstrate his distance from the Latin music scene in New York City and, by extension, his remove from the tastes and preferences of the *colonia hispana* and *colonia cubana*: "Latin American music in this country has had a basic fault. When a band like Machito in New York plays Latin music, the rhythm is great but the sound is not melodically good enough – it's tinny... My idea is to combine the Latin rhythms of Machito with the lushness of [Andre] Koselantetz."⁵⁹ What this remark seems to indicate is an interest in merging influences drawn from both popular

⁵⁸ "Enorme Entusiasmo por Asistir Mañana al Gran Festival Pro Fondo de Caridad," *La Prensa*, 25 May 1946, p. 1; *Billboard Magazine*, 25 May 1946, p. 53; "El Festival de 'La Prensa' para entregar los trofeos artísticos, fue insuperable," *La Prensa*, 28 May 1946, p. 2.

⁵⁹ Arnaz, *A Book*, 161.

and classical music, a move that also suggests that Arnaz did not aim to impress critics or other Cuban and Latin musicians but wanted, instead, to appeal to as broad an audience as possible. At least one critic seemed to think he succeeded in this regard, describing “the musical dynamite from Cuba” as “the Toscanini of swing rhythms, the poor man’s Stokowski.”⁶⁰

Arnaz’s musical and marketing strategies reflect his belief that both Broadway and Hollywood offered fewer opportunities to “authentic” Latin musicians and performers. In some respects, he was not alone in his implicit critique of the disadvantages of commercial “Latin” markets. Machito argued similarly, explaining that “the market had its limitations. It still has it. And it’s not the fault of the Americans. It’s our fault because we cater to the Spanish people, the Spanish market.” Though he recognized that the “Spanish market” remained “big and productive,” Machito blamed low record sales on the fact that his band performed and recorded songs exclusively in Spanish. He explained that it was not until they recorded the *Afro-Cuban Jazz Suite* in 1950 with Norman Granz, Arturo “Chico” O’Farrill, Charlie Parker, Flip Phillips, and Buddy Rich as well as other instrumentals with Stan Kenton and Dizzy Gillespie that the band achieved what he described as “artistic and economic success.” He believed that “it was after that, that we were able to jump another hurdle in the market or in the American community that would permit us to sing in Spanish.”⁶¹ That is, Machito argued that language, not race or ethnic representation, overwhelmingly determined whether or not a band or performer could appeal to audiences beyond the *colonias hispanas*. His

⁶⁰ Box 2, Folder 9, Jack Rachman, “Desi, Band Acclaimed,” no publication date, no date/year, Marco Rizo Papers.

⁶¹ Box 1, Folder Boy’s Harbor, Transcript of Machito interview by Patricia L. Wilson Cryer, 20 January 1981, Carlos Ortiz Collection.

reasoning is not entirely unfounded given that other Cuban performers like Xavier Cugat and Desi Arnaz relied on instrumentals, a repertoire of English-language favorites, and “latunes” to attract as wide a public as possible. Pérez-Firmat has argued that “latunes,” or rumbas with English lyrics like Arnaz’s “Cuban Pete,” exemplified biculturation: “the rhythm is Cuban, the lyric is American, but the whole is Cuban American.” What this mode of thinking ignores, however, is that these other performers might have also succeeded not solely because some of their songs contained English lyrics, but also because these were white Cubans, or as one reviewer described Arnaz, “an exuberant and handsome Latin lad,” performing a slowed-down, commercialized form of Afro-Cuban music that made listening and dancing easier for white North American audiences.⁶² That he identified the recording of the *Afro-Cuban Jazz Suite* as a turning point, at least in terms of more widespread appeal, for Machito y sus Afro-Cubans seems important as well for it marks a moment of collaboration with well-known white and African-American jazz musicians and producers, and it may have been that connection and the increasing popularity of black jazz in the 1940s and 1950s rather than language that introduced the band to the “American community.” Interestingly, Machito did not look to his partnerships with Miguelito Valdés as a source of his appeal to broader audiences, even though music critic Max Salazar has argued that the “mass exposure” the band received after appearing alongside “Mr. Babalú” in the film *Tropical Night* led to increased record sales and touring dates across the United States. From this perspective,

⁶² *Billboard Magazine*, 24 April 1948, p. 36; *Billboard Magazine*, 2 March 1946, p. 24; *Billboard Magazine*, 13 April 1946, p. 126; *Billboard Magazine*, 1 November 1947, p. 115; Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, “Latunes: An Introduction,” *Latin American Music Review* 43, no. 2 (2008): 180-203; Pérez-Firmat, *Life on the Hyphen*, 88.

it appears as though Hollywood was not exactly closed just less open to “authentic” Latin performers.⁶³

Machito was not alone in drawing distinctions between North American and “Spanish” markets. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, a sort of dialogue took place within the pages of the Spanish-language newspapers of New York City that admitted differences in cultural production but contested the perceived inferiority of Latin artists on the basis of audience preference. One report in *La Prensa* noted that the North American theater and Latino theater in New York City were “as different as the temperaments of both races. Instead of Spanish and French sentimental plays we find here an abundance of light comedies, whose only purpose is to entertain without delving too deeply into the problems of the soul.”⁶⁴ A few years earlier, the Broadway columnist for *La Prensa* responded to comments made by American entertainment writer Ed Sullivan, who stated that, with the exception of Carlos Ramírez, Desi Arnaz, Diosa Costello, and Carmen Miranda, artists from Latin America “have very little to offer” and are inferior to those from the United States, England, and France. The columnist argued that Sullivan knew very little about the “tastes and habits of the people of New York.” He reasoned that New York nightclub and cabaret owners “exploit the Latin American artistic ‘atmosphere’ ...because the public is who determines these things....because the public, obviously bored with the monotony of these atmospheres, the British, and the

⁶³ Max Salazar, *Mambo Kingdom: Latin Music in New York* (New York: Schirmer Books, 2002): 45; Max Salazar, “Machito the Musician: A Historical Perspective of His Afro-Cuban Sound,” *Latin Exchange*, Spring 1980, Carlos Ortiz Collection.

⁶⁴ “La Guerra Ha Oscurecido la Gran Vía Blanca pero el Teatro se Halla en Nueva Era de Auge,” *La Prensa*, 14 April 1943, p. 5.

French, want a change!”⁶⁵ American record producer Ralph Peer revealed to *Diario de Nueva York* that Latin American rhythms like rumba and samba and songs like “Brasil” and “Babalú” far exceeded the sounds of Tin Pan Alley in popularity because “it is primarily happy and it seems to be the preference of many people that desire to see themselves suddenly free of reality.”⁶⁶ Though made specifically in reference to the production of *I Love Lucy*, Arnaz’s remarks about the function of his mode of entertainment confirm a growing preference for light-heartedness and simplicity. He argued, “Some people call it superficial, with no literary or intellectual values – only escapism. Okay, but I see nothing wrong with a show that is just that.”⁶⁷

Both La Conga as physical place and the conga line as cultural expression illustrate the possibilities of racial integration without the perceived loss of musical and cultural authenticity, on the one hand, and the reality of racial and cultural borrowing that manifests itself in a more watered-down commercial form, on the other. Perhaps nothing illustrates this better than a comparison of performances of “Babalú” by Miguelito Valdés and Desi Arnaz/Ricky Ricardo. It deserves mention, of course, that Margarita Lecuona, cousin of well-known Cuban composer Ernesto Lecuona, wrote and composed “Babalú” during a period in the mid-1930s when the popularity of white Cuban artists “increased within Cuba and internationally,” according to Moore, “as a result of writing Afrocuban-

⁶⁵ Fausto, “La Gran Vía Blanca,” *La Prensa*, 8 October 1940, p. 5.

⁶⁶ “La música latinoamericana es la más popular en el mundo,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 13 March 1950, p. 2.

⁶⁷ Arnaz, *A Book*, 267.

inspired popular song.”⁶⁸ What I provide here is not a thorough textual analysis of similarities and differences in the ways in which Valdés and Arnaz/Ricardo performed “Babalú,” but, rather, a critical examination of the ways in which North American audiences, music critics, and especially those within the *colonia hispana de Nueva York* responded to each variation of this cultural text with obvious Afro-Cuban themes (namely the hailing of the *orishas* or Santería gods Babalú-Ayé and Changó).

One of Valdés’ earliest performances of “Babalú” came in 1943 at a dance hosted by an organization in New York City known as Unificación Hispana. Described as “the great Cuban singer...idol of the *colonia*,” Valdés at first resisted performing because of a sore throat, but, according to a report in *Pueblos Hispanos*, “before the enthusiastic multitude, this artist of the people delivered and delighted those in attendance with his extraordinary Babalú.”⁶⁹ With the release of the RKO production *Panamericana* in 1945, a film which a critic from *Diario de Nueva York* described as “a musical revue of pure hispanic flavor with well-known artists from nuestra colonia,” his performance of “Babalú” reached broader audiences beyond Havana and New York City. More importantly, reviews positioned “Babalú” as belonging to Valdés, indicating that others identified him with this particular performance of the Afro-Cuban song, eventually referring to him, and not Desi Arnaz, simply as “Mr. Babalú.”⁷⁰

In New York City to perform at La Conga in 1944, a report in *La Prensa* did more than present Valdés as synonymous with “Babalú,” as it had done in 1943 when the

⁶⁸ Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness*, 137; Salazar, *Mambo Kingdom*, p. 42; “Margarita Lecuona en la coronación de Olga Primera,” *La Prensa*, 7 May 1958, p. 5.

⁶⁹ “Se Comenta,” *Pueblos Hispanos*, 20 March 1943, p. 6.

⁷⁰ “‘Panamericana,’ nueva película RKO de sabor hispana, en los Loews,” *Nueva York al Diario*, 24 March 1945, p. 12; “Mirándolos Pasar,” *Seminario Hispano*, 25 May 1946, p. 10; Luis Miranda, 16 April 1994, David Carp Collection.

singer won the *Caballeros* category in the newspaper's *Concurso de Popularidad*. In this instance, the newspaper cited "the Cuban singer [who offers] picturesque Afro-Cuban interpretations" as the "creator of Babalú" and noted that he performed to a "packed house" his first evening back at the nightclub on Broadway.⁷¹ Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, advertisements and announcements in Spanish-language newspapers in New York City billed Valdés as the "creator of Babalú," "the Great Babalú," the "inimitable Babalú," "Mr. Babalú," and credited him for popularizing "extensively throughout the United States the Afro-Cuban folkloric feeling." Not surprisingly, he performed at hotels, nightclubs, and other venues all across New York City, including downtown and midtown spots like La Conga, Havana-Madrid, the Hotel Diplomat, and the Manhattan Center, uptown venues like Hunts Point Palace, the Audubon Ballroom, and the Embassy Ballroom, and in New Jersey at the Rustic Cabin in Englewood Cliffs and the Casino in Palisades Park.⁷²

More so than most other Cuban musicians of the era, Valdés' professional career seems a balanced combination of musical authenticity and innovation, on the one hand, and commercial crossover and gimmick, on the other. Born in Havana, the son of a Cuban-Spanish father and Mayan-Indian mother, Valdés worked for a time as a boxer

⁷¹ "Miguelito Valdés demora su viaje para cantar en el festival del 28," *La Prensa*, 24 March 1943, p. 3; "Unos dicen que es 'sex appeal,' otros no se explican a Miguelito ni Sinatra," *La Prensa*, 28 October 1944, p. 5.

⁷² 30 April 1947, *La Prensa*, p. 4; 22 May 1947, *La Prensa*, p. 6; Babby Quintero, "En Broadway," *Diario de Nueva York*, p. 5; "Noche Antilla hoy, en el Hunts Point Palace," *La Prensa*, 11 December 1948, p. 3; "Festival Antillano en el Hunts Point Palace," *Diario de Nueva York*, 11 December 1948, p. 7; Advertisement, *La Prensa*, December 13, 1948, p. 5; "En Broadway," *Diario de Nueva York*, 17 December 1948, p. 7; Photo and advertisement, *La Prensa*, 5 March 1949, p. 5; "En Broadway," *Diario de Nueva York*, 24 March 1950, p. 5; "En Broadway," *Diario de Nueva York*, 13 September 1950, p. 6; "En Broadway," *La Prensa*, 23 April 1952, p. 5; Advertisement, *La Prensa*, 25 April 1952, p. 5; "En Palisades Park," *La Prensa*, 3 May 1952, p. 5; "Miguelito Valdés y la pareja de Raul y Estrellita en el Festival de Mayo," *La Prensa*, 22 April 1953, p. 1; "En Broadway y en todas partes," *La Prensa*, 15 April 1954, p. 5; "En Broadway," *La Prensa*, 9 May 1955, p. 5; Babby Quintero, "En Broadway y en todas partes," *La Prensa*, 8 February 1956, p. 5; *Billboard Magazine*, 5 October 1946, p. 37.

while also singing in various nightclubs in Havana, including the Havana-Riverside Casino. He left Cuba for Panama between 1933 and 1936 to perform as the lead vocalist with the Lucho Azcarraga orchestra. He returned to Cuba in 1936 to perform with Los Hermanos Castro, but left the band in 1937 to organize his own ensemble, Orquesta Casino de la Playa, which most Cubans perceived as a “white band.”⁷³ It was with Casino de la Playa that he first recorded his version of “Babalú” in 1939. Soon thereafter, in April 1940, he left Cuba for New York City, where he joined Xavier Cugat’s band at the Waldorf-Astoria and on tour throughout the United States. By 1942, a reviewer in *Billboard Magazine* declared that “Valdés finds himself a strong attraction on the radio, in theaters, hotels and on the many Victor and Columbia records which he has made.” And the source of that “strong attraction” was none other than “Babalú,” with this same reviewer explaining that “this lusty Latin performer...has carved out a unique niche for himself with his sock renditions of native Afro-Cuban songs, made more wild and rhythmic by his savage pounding on a conga drum.”⁷⁴ So intense, according to another reviewer, was his “energetic, vital, and primitive personality” that after performing “Babalú” and “Rumba Rhapsody,” he “finally staggered off soaking wet and beat to the socks to bellows and shrieks that must have been heard in the streets.”⁷⁵

Valdés left Cugat’s band just two years into his five-year contract with the bandleader, a split likely motivated by differences in musical style, mutual professional jealousy, and disputes over money. That Cugat received side billing to Valdés likely

⁷³ Armando Sánchez, 2 September 1992, David Carp Collection; Luis Miranda, 16 April 1994, David Carp Collection; Max Salazar, *Mambo Kingdom*.

⁷⁴ “Miguelito Valdés: Sock Song Salesman of the Good Neighbor Policy,” *Billboard Magazine*, 25 March 1945, p. 4; *Billboard Magazine*, 25 April 1942, p. 4.

⁷⁵ *Billboard Magazine*, 5 October 1946, p. 37.

caused tension as did the fact that Valdés was cut out of his scene in the film *You Were Never Lovelier* where he sang alongside Cugat. Even more to the heart of the matter, a contractual clause that required Valdés to give a percentage of his outside earnings to Cugat frustrated the partnership.⁷⁶ According to Afro-Cuban flutist Alberto Socarrás, Valdés reportedly disparaged Cugat, saying “he cannot conduct,” but reasoned that “as long as he pay [sic] me all the money he’s paying me, I take it.”⁷⁷ Cuban bandleader Nilo Curbelo revealed that Valdés expressed to him that he “suffered” during his time with Cugat’s band, having to listen and perform what he described as “such horrible music.”⁷⁸ These criticisms notwithstanding, his break with Cugat did little to stunt his professional career, as he went on to headline at nightclubs and theaters across the United States, including the Mocambo and Club Brazil in Los Angeles and La Conga, Havana-Madrid, and the Strand in New York City. What was described as his “barrel-chested chanting of Afro-Cuban songs” became the signature of his nightclub performances. So much did audiences anticipate this performative element that even after almost eight years of closing his shows with “Babalú” one reviewer noted that “it was the high spot of the evening. His energy and enthusiasm for it did not appear at all worn out.”⁷⁹

Valdés appeared in advertisements for upcoming performances in jungle costumes and formal tuxedos, got his start in the music industry in New York City with Xavier Cugat but later collaborated with Dizzy Gillespie in a battle between “Be-bop Cubano” and “Be-bop Americano,” and performed at events sponsored by Cuban and

⁷⁶ Salazar, *Mambo Kingdom*, 43-45; “Valdés Quits Cugat as Offers Pour In,” *Billboard Magazine*, 18 July 1942, p. 19.

⁷⁷ Alberto Socarrás, 16 January 1983, David Carp Collection.

⁷⁸ Nilo Curbelo, 3 October 1993, David Carp Collection.

⁷⁹ *Billboard Magazine*, 22 January 1949, p. 26; *Billboard Magazine*, 24 April 1948, p. 41.

Latino/a social clubs and charitable organizations in New York City just as often as he toured throughout Latin America and appeared in Hollywood films.⁸⁰ In other words, his professional career in the United States throughout the 1940s and 1950s is marked by his ability to navigate the mainstream commercial entertainment industry as well as the local interests of the black and white residents of the *colonia hispana* and *colonia cubana de Nueva York*. Part of his success rested on his awareness of going beyond audience expectations. Valdés explained to music critic Max Salazar, “I was always dressed in a tuxedo when I presented Afro-Cuban music to society. I tried to present it in the best light.”⁸¹ That he achieved crossover success with white North American audiences was not without criticism, particularly in terms of his racial ambivalence and marketing strategies. For example, Machito argued that “the people don’t know Miguelito Valdés, because he created a personality. When he got here, he was inspired by Cab Calloway. He had loose hair, you understand, he was so talented that he created a personality. He made an outstanding thing of *babaloo* [sic], it was just another song, but his personality, his power, his know-how to play conga, he was a tremendous conga player, bongo player, *timbales*, forget it.” Machito insisted that it was a combination of Valdés’ musical talent, showmanship, and European physical features that contributed to his success: “Because Miguelito was a showman. Miguelito was a nice-looking guy, you know in Havana women like men with good hair, you understand?”⁸²

Others agreed that the singer’s “good looks” and “good hair” increased his popularity among women and contributed to his success in the entertainment industry in

⁸⁰ 5 March 1949, *Diario de Nueva York*, p. 7; 17 December 1948, *Diario de Nueva York*, p. 7.

⁸¹ Salazar, *Mambo Kingdom*, 39.

⁸² Box 1, Folder Festival WKCI, Machito Interview, Carlos Ortiz Collection.

Havana, New York City, and Hollywood. One reviewer in *La Prensa* described Valdés as the “antithesis of [Frank] Sinatra,” explaining that “he has a shape that is as notable as it is original, with the shoulders of a dockworker, small head, athletic waist and relatively small eyes, though extremely expressive, with straight hair that he allows to fall in disarray over his temples when he is ‘possessed’ by any one of his songs,” including “Drume Negrita,” “Cabildo,” “El Cumbanchero,” “La Negra Leona,” “Rumba-Rapsodio,” and, of course, “Babalú.”⁸³ Afro-Cuban percussionist Armando Sánchez attributed the success of Arsenio Rodríguez’s mambo to the fact that he found in Valdés an “interpreter” that appealed to wider and whiter audiences: “he was very lucky because he found in a mulatto that looked like a white man but was black inside and born from a black woman, the name was Miguelito Valdés, ‘Mr. Babalú’ and he was the best interpreter he could find.” Sánchez explained, “And Miguelito being a light-skinned black, he had the feeling of the African music and he could express it...He looked like white...but he never hid that he was black, that’s one thing I know, he never hid it. He was accepted because, you know, by the way he looked.”⁸⁴ Many Afro-Cuban musicians cast Valdés as authentic (a mulatto) and a real musician, while also marking him less as an innovator and more as a product created by Arsenio Rodríguez and recognizing his appeal to North American audiences as whiteness of a sort. Graciela emphasized, however, that Valdés never claimed whiteness or denied his blackness or Indianness.⁸⁵ Lighter skin, “good hair,” and other European physical features facilitated Valdés’

⁸³ “Unos dicen que es ‘sex appeal,’ otros no se explican a Miguelito ni Sinatra,” *La Prensa*, 28 October 1944, p. 5

⁸⁴ Armando Sánchez, 19 September 1995, David Carp Collection; Armando Sánchez, 2 September 1992, David Carp Collection.

⁸⁵ Graciela Pérez, interview by René Lopez and Raul A. Fernández, 19 September 1998.

inclusion in an entertainment industry that sometimes denied the spotlight to performers of color. As we have seen in other chapters, though among white North American audiences it was Xavier Cugat's non-whiteness that lent him authenticity as he performed Afro-Cuban music, among Afro-Cuban musicians and journalists, it was Valdés' blackness that authorized and validated his performances of Afro-Cuban music.⁸⁶

Most musicians and news reporters recognized that Valdés drew from Afro-Cuban religious and musical traditions as well as from his various interactions with African-American musicians in New York City. Sánchez explained that in addition to his familiarity with “practically all the religious culture that were existing in Cuba,” due in part to his residence in the Jesús María *barrio* of Havana, Valdés “was a smart [guy] and he was a, he always say the right words...he was [an] entertainer, natural born entertainer.”⁸⁷ Valdés himself insisted that “I believe in Santería, and I know what I am singing about when I open my mouth. Whoever sings about Santería or Ñañigo should know about these religions.”⁸⁸ A reviewer for the *Atlanta Daily World*, commenting on Valdés' performances at “swank night clubs” in Acapulco, Mexico, noted that “Mexico seems to enjoy Afro-Cuban or African entertainment... ‘Mister Babalú’ is a singer whose style makes you think of Cab Calloway. It seems as if he is chanting the tribal war song of ancient African warriors.”⁸⁹ In his performances of “Babalú,” Valdés often broke from the white Afro-Cubanist representation of Santería into actual *santero* moves, a purposeful shift with dual significance: this is both the most commercialized moment,

⁸⁶ Adrian Burgos, Jr., *Playing America's Game: Baseball, Latinos, and the Color Line* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007): 4, 85-87, 96, 242.

⁸⁷ Armando Sánchez, 2 September 1992, David Carp Collection.

⁸⁸ Salazar, *Mambo Kingdom*, 39.

⁸⁹ “Notes from Mexico,” *Atlanta Daily World*, 2 January 1955, p. 4.

when he is performing the primitive, and the most authenticating moment for black musicians because he shows himself to be a cultural insider.

Though widely acclaimed within the *colonia hispana* and throughout the United States, his performance of “Babalú” also faced some criticism. In particular, the club owner of the Cal-Nevada Lodge in Lake Tahoe complained that the song had to be cut from his set list, insisting that “I don’t want no Mexicans yelling in my joint!”⁹⁰ What was likely intended as a generic insult was not entirely inaccurate given that Valdés was *mestizo*, the son of a Mexican-Indian mother and white Cuban father. His mixed parentage, however, received no mention in English- or Spanish-language newspapers and magazines with most referring to him simply as the “Cuban warbler,” the “Cuban singing favorite,” “the most notable singer from Cuba,” “the spectacular Cuban singer,” the “great Afro-Cuban singer,” “el cubanisimo,” and the “boy Latin singer.”⁹¹

Desi Arnaz first performed “Babalú” at Ciro’s in Los Angeles in 1945 as part of his final conga number with the drum, two years after Valdés had already popularized the routine in his nightclub and theater acts.⁹² Only Marco Rizo has claimed that Arnaz introduced “Babalú” in the United States before Valdés, a misstatement likely influenced by the pianist-composer’s longstanding admiration and respect for his childhood friend.⁹³ In any case, by 1946 one reviewer in *Billboard Magazine* noted that the song had become

⁹⁰ *Billboard Magazine*, 24 April 1948, p. 20.

⁹¹ *Billboard Magazine*, 17 January 1942, p. 20; “Miguelito Valdés Strand Hold-Over,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 15 April 1950, p. 17; Advertisement, *La Prensa*, 1 October 1941, p. 5; “Vencedores del Concurso de Popularidad de ‘La Prensa,’” *La Prensa*, 18 March 1943, p. 1-2; “Miguelito Valdés Huésped de Honor en el Baile, Hoy,” *La Prensa*, 23 December 1944, p. 8; “Efectuarán mañana el sexto festival de la Benjamin Franklin,” *La Prensa*, 14 March 1953, p. 6; *Billboard Magazine*, 5 October 1946, p. 37.

⁹² Arnaz, *A Book*, 164.

⁹³ Marco Rizo, 6 August 1993, David Carp Collection.

his “standard” closing number, while another concluded that he had made the number “his own, to a great extent, giving it a lot of oomph.”⁹⁴ Making the song his own seemed to require playful exaggeration in the form of a huge conga drum, which one reviewer deemed “stage savvy, with his spirited ballading and gimmicks.”⁹⁵ Joe Conzo, Latin music insider and long-time business associate and biographer of Tito Puente, insisted that Arnaz relied on “gimmicks” when he performed “Babalú.” He also revealed that Valdés and Arnaz knew that they were both performing different versions of the same song. When attending one another’s performances, both reportedly took part in stirring up a sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile rivalry, cursing each other with choruses of “*maricón*.”⁹⁶

The derogatory term *maricón*, whose literal meaning is “queer” or “fag” and has historically suggested a passive role in sexual encounters, has also held a variety of figurative meanings among Cubans. Political scientist Ian Lumsden explains that among Cuban heterosexuals the term “on occasion may be used with underlying affection” in the same way as references like *gordito* or *negrito*. More commonly, however, Lumsden argues that the term means coward, a particularly negative association “in a country that has had to fight hard and long for its national liberation.”⁹⁷ Whether uttered to signify its literal or one of its mostly negative figurative meanings, the use of the term *maricón* by Arnaz and Valdés, two men whose professional success rested as much on their musical

⁹⁴ *Billboard Magazine*, 25 May 1946, p. 53; *Billboard Magazine*, 22 June 1946, p. 49.

⁹⁵ *Billboard Magazine*, 29 October 1949, p. 52; *Billboard Magazine*, 16 July 1949, p. 44.

⁹⁶ Joe Conzo, Interview by author 20 March 2010, Bronx, New York.

⁹⁷ Ian Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays: Cuba and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996): 217, 30, 7, 53; See also, Martin Nesvig, “The Complicated Terrain of Latin American Homosexuality,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 81, no. 3-4 (August-November 2001): 689-729.

talents as it did on their handsome good looks and sexual appeal among young women, reveals their understanding of the links between musical authenticity and perceptions of masculinity. By calling one another *maricón*, both Arnaz and Valdés likely aimed to undermine the other's artistic value and authenticity. In doing so, both also made an indirect assertion about their own masculinity and manly prowess, which in the Cuban context is inextricably tied to nationhood and national pride.⁹⁸

Though popular throughout the mid-to-late 1940s, it was not until Desi Arnaz performed "Babalú" as Ricky Ricardo on *I Love Lucy* that on much wider scale millions of Americans across the United States came to recognize the act as belonging to Cuban, though not explicitly Afro-Cuban, traditions. On the show, newspaper columnists, trade magazine writers, publicity agents, teenagers, policemen, furniture salesman, locksmiths, English tutors, old ladies, old men, housewives, bikini models, even made-up royalty like the "Maharincess of Franistan," and real celebrities like Harpo Marx, all came to identify the Cuban Ricky Ricardo with "Babalú."⁹⁹ Even though most of the show's viewers likely knew very little about *orishas* or Santería rituals, Ricky Ricardo, nonetheless, introduced this Afro-Cuban religious practice and form of cultural expression to white North American audiences, albeit a more watered-down and commercialized version.

Early in the first season of *I Love Lucy*, audiences saw Ricky Ricardo take the stage at the Tropicana Club to perform "Babalú." The white Cuban, dressed in a black tuxedo and backed by an orchestra of white musicians in festive rumba sleeves, loosened

⁹⁸ Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999): 126-127.

⁹⁹ *I Love Lucy*, television performance, CBS, 19 November 1951, 4 February 1952, 25 February 1952, 12 May 1952, 6 October 1952, 24 November 1952, 29 December 1952, 22 June 1953, 5 October 1953, 9 May 1955, 26 November 1956.

his tie, gazed upwards as if looking towards the gods in sky, and chanted repeatedly “Arriba con la conga” as he worked himself into a sweaty, out-of-breath mess. By mid-season, Ricky’s association with “Babalú” is confirmed when he enters the living room reading directly from a review from the evening newspaper. Excited to share the news with Lucy and Ethel, he reads aloud, “The undisputed star of a great evening of entertainment, the genius of the conga drum who as usual topped the show with his rendition of ‘Babalú,’ Ricky Ricardo.” The review suggests that this is just one of many versions of “Babalú” circulating within the nightclub circuit of New York City, though this does little to temper Ricky’s excitement or limit the extent to which the performance or references to the performance would figure throughout the series. So much so does “Babalú” become synonymous with Ricky Ricardo that during the final season of the series not only is Ricky still performing the song on stage, but after becoming part-owner of the Tropicana Club he renames it “Club Babalú.” For Ricky, “Babalú” meant steady income, the possibility of reduced financial strain, and his signature achievement within and beyond the professional entertainment industry. During the third season of the show, Ricky investigated the possibility of buying a periwinkle blue Cadillac with a custom horn that played “Babalú.” Later, in the show’s final season, stressed by the new burden of homeownership, Ricky complains to Lucy, “You realize how many times I’m going to have to sing ‘Babalú’ to pay for that house!”¹⁰⁰ Perhaps the same anxieties led Desi Arnaz to suggest similar associations. After signing a deal with Orson Welles to produce *The Fountain of Youth* in 1958, he warned the director, who had a reputation for going

¹⁰⁰ *I Love Lucy*, television performance, CBS, 19 November 1951; 4 February 1952; 15 February 1954; 4 February 1957.

over budget without much to show for it, “This is my ‘Babalú’ money, so don’t you fuck around with it.”¹⁰¹

During the final season of *I Love Lucy*, in an episode that aired on December 3, 1956, the Ricardos make their first trip to Havana, a trip organized as part family reunion, part show business engagement. As the show’s only episode set in Cuba, the plane carrying the family touches land as the Cuban national anthem plays in the background. Ricky’s Cubanness as well as his status as a return migrant are major themes of the episode. At his appearance at the Casino Parisienne at the Hotel Nacional, the club’s master of ceremonies narrates Ricky’s migration story explaining, “Some years ago a young boy left Cuba and went to America, the only thing he took with him was a drum full of rhythm and a heart full of hope. He’s back home tonight.” Interestingly, Arnaz brought his guitar, not a drum, with him from Cuba to the United States, a creative switch that signals, as Mario Bauzá argued, the association of authentic performances of Cubanness with rhythm rather than melody. Ricky follows these opening remarks, singing “Wherever I am, I’m home,” a song that describes the luck he has enjoyed in both New York and Havana. What follows this performance is testament to the significance of “Babalú” as an act that, even for Ricky, signified Cuban patriotism just as much as it led to his insertion into national and international commercial markets. Before ending the show, Ricky invites his son, Little Ricky, to join him on stage for the finale. He tells the audience that “even though Little Ricky was born in America, I want to prove to you that there’s a lot of Cuba in his heart.”¹⁰² From the perspective of the North American public,

¹⁰¹ Arnaz, *A Book*, 307.

¹⁰² *I Love Lucy*, television performance, CBS, 3 December 1956.

Little Ricky could convey his cultural connection to the island with no song other than “Babalú.”

The popular Cuban musicians and bands of this period worked in an industry that required, at least if the performer wanted to make money and sell records, creativity, openness, and an awareness of audience preferences. The popularity of the Palladium Ballroom in midtown Manhattan throughout the late 1940s and 1950s illustrates not only some of the ways that Cuban and Puerto Rican promoters and musicians developed followings beyond the *colonia hispana* but also how mobility within the nightclub and dancehall circuit of New York City happened alongside processes, sometimes divisive and other times harmonious, of racial negotiation, musical innovation, and creative marketing.

In 1948, Tommy Morton, then owner of the Palladium, hired Machito y sus Afro-Cubans to perform as the exclusive house band at the venue not simply because of the band’s popularity, especially among Jewish audiences, but also because its musical versatility led to financial pragmatism. The band’s ability to play Afro-Cuban music as well as foxtrots, waltzes, boleros, jitterbug, and polka eliminated the need of hiring a second band.¹⁰³ The move proved fortuitous with a report in *Diario de Nueva York* noting that “Mario Bauzá and Machito continue with their boys in the Palladium...and everything indicates they will continue there for a long time.”¹⁰⁴ By 1950, the Palladium had become the mecca of Afro-Cuban music and “for the first time, the Latin orchestras

¹⁰³ Steve Loza, *Tito Puente and the Making of Latin Music* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999): 55; Salazar, *Mambo Kingdom*, 88-89.

¹⁰⁴ “En Broadway,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 24 December 1948, p. 6.

were acting like stars, not as the uncomfortable fill-in that they had been reduced to by the American promoters of the time.”¹⁰⁵ Suggesting another explanation for the band’s success beyond the “Spanish market,” Machito reasoned that before the band’s performances at the Palladium they played mostly in nightclubs and in El Barrio, that they “were not known in American ballrooms and our music less.”¹⁰⁶

But some fans, including Jewish dancers from the Catskill resorts, were slow to follow the band to the Palladium as were Cuban, Puerto Rican, and African-American crowds who rarely went to nightclubs or dancehalls below 110th Street. Mario Bauzá solicited the help of Puerto Rican promoter Federico Pagani, and the two set out to advertise an upcoming Sunday matinee dance that featured six bands, including Machito y sus Afro-Cubans, Noro Morales, José Curbelo, and a merengue band. To promote this first event, the pair distributed leaflets and posted cardboard signs in neighborhoods across the city. Later, they would expand their marketing strategy, also placing advertisements in both Spanish- and English-language newspapers and magazines. Latinos/as and African Americans, blacks, whites, and mulattoes from Harlem and Brooklyn, all traveled downtown for the dance, Bauzá told ethnomusicologist Steve Loza. He recalled that he had “never seen so many Latinos in midtown Manhattan...the guy made more money on that one Sunday than he had done for the months since he had opened up.” Pagani recalled that the racial makeup of the crowd shocked and upset the club owner, who complained that “this is Broadway and you are going to ruin my business.” Morton eventually accepted Pagani’s marketing strategy, giving in to the

¹⁰⁵ Vernon Boggs, *Salsiology: Afro-Cuban Music and the Evolution of Salsa in New York City* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992): 127-128.

¹⁰⁶ Box 1, Loose file, Machito interview at home, Carlos Ortiz Collection.

promoter's reasoning that "if you want the green, you must have the black!"¹⁰⁷ An alternative version exists of Morton's awareness of and response to the black crowds at the Palladium. That is, Bauzá claimed that even before he partnered with Pagani to promote the Palladium's new image as a Latin dancehall, he warned the club owner that the crowds would be mostly black. Asked how he felt about black people, Morton reportedly replied, "Look, I'm only interested in the color green."¹⁰⁸ Whether it was Pagani or Bauzá who acted primarily as agents of racial integration at the club matters less than the fact that what secured the acquiescence of the club owner was not a principled commitment to racial integration, but a willingness to risk the disapproval of neighbors if it meant the promise of healthy profits.

The Palladium Ballroom could host between seven hundred and fifty to a thousand dancers, especially during the more "heavy" Friday and Saturday night dances. Early on, the venue averaged between 2,300 and 2,500 dancers a week, and entrance costs ranged between \$1.20 on Saturday and Sunday evenings, \$.98 for other evenings, and \$.60 for matinee dances.¹⁰⁹ The audience at the Palladium, sociologist Vernon Boggs argued, "was never exclusively Latin." Wednesday nights featured mambo dance lessons and exhibitions by "Killer Joe" Piro and a decidedly Jewish, Italian, and celebrity crowd. The dancehall hosted a mostly Puerto Rican crowd on Friday nights, "Hispanics of all

¹⁰⁷ Box 1, Loose file, Machito interview at home, Carlos Ortiz Collection; Loza, *Tito Puente and the Making of Latin Music*, 55-56; Box 1, Folder Federico Pagani's Interview, Interview with Federico Pagani, Carlos Ortiz Collection; Box 1, Folder Socarras + Machito, Abstract for MACHITO, Carlos Ortiz Collection; Armando Peraza, 21 May 1993, David Carp Collection.

¹⁰⁸ Loza, *Tito Puente and the Making of Latin Music*, 55-56; Salazar, *Mambo Kingdom*, 89; Graciela Pérez, interview by René Lopez and Raul A. Fernández, 19 September 1998.

¹⁰⁹ *Billboard Magazine*, 19 July 1947, p. 27.

origins” on Saturday nights, and “American blacks” on Sundays.¹¹⁰ Afro-Cuban percussionist Armando Peraza recalled that before the era of the Palladium “New York was no integrated...The Latin dancing was exclusive for Latinos.” He explained that during “that time was very strict to the black Americans to coming, to dance in the Latin dances...After they created that Sunday, then we all integrated...All these black guys from Harlem was comin’ to dancing.”¹¹¹ Ray Santos recalled that “the black dancing public...really good dancers” from Harlem, Brooklyn, and the Bronx would come down to the Palladium, especially on Sunday evenings.¹¹² Cuban musicians as well as several scholars have described the Palladium as an “egalitarian” and “integrated” dancehall of “intercultural compatibility,” though this perspective is somewhat peculiar given that different racial and ethnic groups seemingly preferred to patronize the club on different days of the week.¹¹³

For as much as the Palladium became the premier venue for dancing and listening to mambo and other Latin rhythms in the 1950s, the dancehall remained a place where Cuban and Latino/a social clubs and civic organizations hosted events and activities. That is, the Palladium became a fixture within the Cuban-American and pan-Latino/a cultural landscape that developed in New York City during this period, avoiding misappropriation or cooptation by mainstream North American audiences that might have

¹¹⁰ Boggs, *Salsiology*, 129, 147; Box 1, Folder Festival WKCI, Interview with Lenny Hambro, Carlos Ortiz Collection; Ray Santos, 3 August 1992, David Carp Collection; *Billboard Magazine*, 27 November 1948, p. 42; *Billboard Magazine*, 8 January 1949, p. 35; Pérez-Firmat, *Life on the Hyphen*, 96.

¹¹¹ Armando Peraza, 21 May 1993, David Carp Collection.

¹¹² Ray Santos, 2 August 1993, David Carp Collection.

¹¹³ Singer and Martínez, “A South Bronx Latin Music Tale,” 184; Loza, *Tito Puente and the Making of Latin Music*, 222.

led to formal practices of exclusion or discrimination as well as a watering-down of the musical performances. In 1951, organizers celebrated the crowning of Miss Latin America 1951 with a dance at the Palladium that featured Machito y sus Afro-Cubans and Tito Rodríguez.¹¹⁴ Billed as “the Birthplace of Mambo,” the Palladium hosted celebrations commemorating Cuban independence, sponsored cultural events such as *Una Noche en Habana*, and boasted regular performances by Machito y sus Afro-Cubans, Miguelito Valdés, Marcelino Guerra, Arsenio Rodríguez, Tito Puente, and Tito Rodríguez.¹¹⁵

Federico Pagani and other promoters found creative ways to attract bigger crowds from within and beyond the *colonia hispana* to the Palladium. For example, promoters organized a Sunday matinee dance featuring Arsenio Rodríguez and Tito Rodríguez that would culminate in a television set give-away.¹¹⁶ Other promotions included a Beer and Cracker Eating Contest and the Miss Palladium Most Beautiful Legs Contest with Pagani leading chants of “Higher, higher!” and reportedly “lifting the skirt up to show more leg.”¹¹⁷ These marketing gimmicks did not go unnoticed within the *colonia hispana*, with one columnist for *La Prensa* suggesting that these types of promotions indicated desperation: Federico Pagani and other promoters “are performing acrobatic stunts to keep their roles in the department of promotion and publicity at the Palladium Ballroom,

¹¹⁴ *Pasatiempo*, 21 March 1951, p. 13.

¹¹⁵ “Baile dedicado a Cuba en el Palladium Ballroom,” *La Prensa*, 19 May 1951, p. 6; “En Broadway,” *La Prensa*, 28 March 1952, p. 5; “Fiesta Cubana en el Palladium,” *La Prensa*, 17 May 1952, p. 6; “Noche Cubana en el Palladium Ballroom,” *La Prensa*, 20 May 1952, p. 5; “En Broadway,” *La Prensa*, 12 May 1955, p. 5.

¹¹⁶ “El Palladium regalará el domingo un ‘set’ de televisión,” *La Prensa*, 12 April 1952, p. 5.

¹¹⁷ Ray Santos, 2 August 1993, David Carp Collection.

as they are closely watched by their boss.”¹¹⁸ But publicity and promotions were just one of the many requirements for success in the entertainment industry. Ray Santos described Pagani as a “real street hustler,” “the original promoter up in Harlem,” and recalled that he would distribute leaflets and posters for display in barbershops and grocery stores in exchange for a few free tickets to the dance.¹¹⁹

That a Harlem promoter could be marked as “a real street hustler” even within the *colonia hispana* suggests that publicity and marketing, especially in the entertainment world, required creativity and a generous amount of exaggeration. Arnaz noted that during the early portion of his career as a bandleader, his press agents “decided to keep building me up as a playboy and a ladies’ man, which they considered would be good for business.”¹²⁰ If such a reputation could increase the chances of him being cast as a “Latin lover,” then it proved a smart strategy, his press agents reasoned. A similar scenario made its way into the first season of *I Love Lucy*. Ethel appears in the Ricardo kitchen, telling Lucy that a story in the *Daily Mirror* suggests that Ricky’s being a “two-time Cuban heel.” Ethel reads aloud, “What Cuban bandleader with the initials R. R. is making cat’s eyes at his dancing mouse?...There’s more going on during that floor show than the script calls for.” Ricky responds that his publicity agent planted the story in the newspaper to keep his name in the public and reminds Lucy that such stories will continue to appear in the press as long as he works in show business.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ “En Broadway,” *La Prensa*, 30 April 1952, p. 5.

¹¹⁹ Ray Santos, 2 August 1993, David Carp Collection.

¹²⁰ Arnaz, *A Book*, 174.

¹²¹ *I Love Lucy*, television performance, CBS, 17 December 1951.

Examples of this sort of appeal to the public and Ricky's concerns that he remain in the press are numerous throughout the show's six seasons. Viewers of the show are given an almost vulnerable view into just one of the many less glamorous aspects of a career in the professional entertainment industry. Ricky often complains about working in show business, and not simply because Lucy is always pestering him to be included in one of his acts down at the club, though he notes that "she is like everybody else who only sees the glamour and fame." During the show's third season, Ricky appears particularly dissatisfied with show business, complaining that "every day is a tough day. Everyone wants more money, better billings." This theme of despair continues in a later episode in the same season when Lucy explains that Ricky is in a "Cuban snit" because "things went wrong down at the club, cleaner forgot his tux, one of the acts didn't show up, in the big number the lights went out in the whole neighborhood so everyone left and went to the nightclub across the street" where Liberace was performing his entire act by candlelight.¹²²

At the downtown Tropicana Club, Ricky attracted mostly white North American audiences looking for an evening of entertainment that included jugglers and dancers, American musical standards and tropical rhythms, and the bandleader's rendition of "Babalú." What viewers of the show saw in terms of setting and atmosphere in a nightclub that featured a Cuban bandleader and orchestra differed in significant ways from what Cuban, Puerto Rican, African-American, and ethnic white audiences experienced at nightclubs and dancehalls like the Palladium, Hunts Point Palace, and the Tropicana in the Bronx in late 1940s and 1950s. For example, during this period, Hunts Point Palace hosted privately-sponsored dances and events organized primarily by Puerto

¹²² *I Love Lucy*, television performance, CBS, 8 December 1952; 5 October 1953; 26 April 1954.

Rican civic and cultural organizations as well as independent event promoters. The venue did not have a regular or set schedule, but it boasted a loyal clientele within the *colonia hispana*. The venue held nearly 2,500 people, presenting orchestras on a large bandstand and accommodating dancers with ballrooms on two floors and an elaborate balcony that wrapped around the interior of the building.¹²³ Many of the top musicians and bands of the era performed at Hunts Point Palace, including Xavier Cugat, Machito y sus Afro-Cubans, Generoso Montesino y el Conjunto del Ritmo, Miguelito Valdés, Marcelino Guerra, Arsenio Rodríguez, Noro Morales, and Tito Puente, as well as lesser-known bands like Orquesta Quisqueya, Frank García, and José Budet. Puerto Rican musician Ray Santos recalled that the venue became “pretty famous for its fights,” explaining that dances would sometimes end because a fight would result in “chairs flying down from the balcony onto the dance floor.”¹²⁴

Located on the corner of 153rd Street and Westchester Avenue in the Bronx, the Tropicana Club opened in early summer of 1946 under the ownership and management of Pepe Sánchez and Manolo and Tony Alfaro. The Alfaros, two white Cuban brothers, reportedly worked as *boliteros* in control of the illegal numbers racket, a seemingly not-so-secret side project with news columnist Babby Quintero describing the partners as “potentates” and the Tropicana as their “bulwark.”¹²⁵ Writers Roberta L. Singer and

¹²³ Singer and Martínez, “A South Bronx Latin Music Tale,” 188; “Lucida Fiesta Bailable de la Asociación de Hijos de Patillas,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 3 November 1948, p. 5; “Cugat y Machito en el Hunts P. Palace el próximo domingo,” *La Prensa*, 19 March 1943, p. 5; “El Centro Social Hispano da Baile Hoy en el Bronx,” *La Prensa*, 30 March 1946, p. 8; “Noche Antillana hoy, en el Hunts Point Palace,” *La Prensa*, 11 December 1948, p. 3.

¹²⁴ Ray Santos, 2 August 1993, David Carp Collection.

¹²⁵ Horacio Riambau, 1 December 1995, David Carp Collection; Babby Quintero, “En Broadway,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 24 November 1948, p. 5; Babby Quintero, “En Broadway,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 3 January 1949, p. 5; Ray Santos, 2 August 1993, David Carp Collection.

Elena Martínez have argued that “inspired by the glitzy Tropicana Cabaret in Havana, [the Tropicana in the Bronx] was the mecca for Latinos seeking floor shows with a chorus line, first-rate dance bands, and first-class Cuban cuisine.”¹²⁶ Advertisements in *La Prensa* and *Diario de Nueva York* promoted the club as a “luxurious cabaret” that would host “famous orchestras” and “acclaimed artists.” The promises mostly came true with the club offering regular entertainment on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday nights that featured popular bands and performers, including Vicente Singler, José Luis Monero, Conjunto Puerto Rico, Tony Novo y Su Orquesta Española, and Marcelino Guerra with Gilberto Ayala.¹²⁷ Machito y sus Afro-Cubans also performed at the Tropicana Club. One of the band’s performances at the venue in 1950 caused what one columnist described as “a real ‘revolution’ among the regulars that filled the ‘Tropicana.’”¹²⁸ I have found no evidence to suggest that the band’s booking led to complaints from the nightclub’s regular patrons, so that their performance caused a “revolution” referred most likely to exposure to new musical sounds and styles.

Manolo Alfaro achieved notoriety unrelated to the Tropicana Club in the late 1950s and early 1960s as the manager of Afro-Cuban boxer Benny “Kid” Paret. Paret died on April 3, 1962 as the result of injuries he sustained during a title bout against Emile Griffith. Many news columnists and sportswriters charged that Alfaro could have done more to protect Paret both in and out of the ring. Instead, critics reasoned, the restaurateur and promoter cared more about money than about the health and well-being of the young boxer he had recruited from the island. Closer to the topic at hand, Paret met his Puerto Rican wife at the Tropicana Club where she worked as a dancer in one of the floor shows. See also, Christina D. Abreu, “The Story of Benny ‘Kid’ Paret: Boxing, U.S.-Cuba Relations, and U.S. Media Representations, 1959-1962,” *Journal of Sport History* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 401-419.

¹²⁶ Singer and Martínez, “A South Bronx Latin Music Tale,” 192.

¹²⁷ Advertisement, *La Prensa*, 31 May 1946, p. 5; Advertisement, *Diario de Nueva York*, 3 March 1950, p. 6; Advertisement, *Diario de Nueva York*, 31 March 1950, p. 5; Advertisement, *Diario de Nueva York*, 13 May 1950, p. 5; Advertisement, *Diario de Nueva York*, 8 September 1950, p. 6; Advertisement, *Diario de Nueva York*, 3 March 1951; Advertisement, *Diario de Nueva York*, 4 May 1951, p. 5; “En Broadway,” *La Prensa*, 23 May 1951, p. 5.

¹²⁸ “En Broadway,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 15 May 1950, p. 5.

The Tropicana Club also hosted cultural celebrations and community events such as a dance organized in 1950 in honor of Cuban independence that featured music by the Lecuona Cuban Boys.¹²⁹ Along with the managers and promoters from the Palladium and the Park Plaza in East Harlem, Sánchez and the Alfaro brothers not only collaborated with organizers at *Diario de Nueva York* to generate interest for and host the *Carnaval de Oro*, a dance competition that featured professional and amateur mambo dancers, but they also agreed to the task of establishing the rules of elimination for the contest.¹³⁰ Club owners also came together with members of El Club Cubano Inter-Americano to host a dance at the venue to raise funds for the cultural organization's baseball team. Club records do not indicate whether the two parties negotiated a rental fee or split the profits from cover charges, but the arrangement must have pleased both sides given that El Club Cubano hosted additional fundraisers for the baseball team and for the purchase of a new radio at the Tropicana throughout the 1950s. Of course, as two of the major sources of and venues for Cuban and Latino/a cultural expression aimed at the *colonia hispana* in the Bronx, it is not entirely surprising that the owners of the Tropicana Club and leaders of El Club Cubano established, at some level, an informal partnership.¹³¹

Advertisements published throughout the late 1940s and 1950s billed the nightclub as “a tropical paradise in New York” and “a cabaret from Broadway in the

¹²⁹ Advertisement, *Diario de Nueva York*, 19 May 1950, p. 5.

¹³⁰ “Una Pareja de ‘Mambo’ fue la primera en inscribirse en el Palladium Ballroom,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 5 September 1950, p. 2.

¹³¹ Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 15 January 1952, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 31 March 1952, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers; Bound book, Box 1, Folder 11, Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 30 September 1952, Club Cubano Inter-Americano Papers.

Bronx.”¹³² Cuban dancer Horacio Rimbau reasoned that the latter slogan aimed to attract a wider and whiter audience from downtown to the nightclub in the Bronx, explaining that “there was a lot of publicity to attract the white people to go there so they can make a living.” This strategy certainly makes sense given the financial imperatives of nightclub ownership, but the possibility exists for an alternative interpretation. That is, with this slogan, club promoters also indicated to potential audiences within the *colonia hispana* that the Tropicana Club was no different from the nightclubs and dancehalls located on Broadway in Manhattan, that there was no need to make the trip downtown (or to Miami or Havana) to venues that likely did not welcome people of color for a night a quality entertainment. With the rising popularity of the Palladium on Broadway, a venue that by all accounts “was one of the few places [in Manhattan] where people of all colors, nationalities, and classes came together and were accepted,” the slogan likely functioned as a last ditch effort to persuade audiences that they would not miss out on any excitement by staying in the neighborhood.¹³³

Whatever the intentions of the club’s marketing strategy, according to Rimbau the club attracted a mostly Puerto Rican audience alongside some Cubans and “a lot of Americans,” though it is not clear if he meant white or black Americans. Rimbau described the atmosphere at the Tropicana in the Bronx as “rough,” but he insisted “that it was safe to go there, it was no problem there, you go there and nothing happen to you. Because I went many times, even at four o’clock in the morning you take the subway, no

¹³² Advertisement, *Diario de Nueva York*, 29 April 1949, p. 7; Advertisement, *La Prensa*, 24 May 1951, p. 6.

¹³³ Singer and Martínez, “A South Bronx Latin Music Tale,” 184.

problem.”¹³⁴ Ray Santos recalled that at venues like Hunts Point Palace and the Tropicana “there was never any friction at all there, you know, between the Latinos and blacks” and that “the priority was good dancing.” He admitted, however, that “some rowdy elements” did cause fights that cut the dances short but insisted that they were not motivated by tensions “between the blacks or the Latinos or between the Latinos themselves.”¹³⁵ It is important to note that in discussions of this “golden era” of Latin dancehalls, Latino/a, African-American, Jewish, and ethnic white musicians and dancers often reproduce a myth of racial harmony, that was at times a reality, but also remains clearly part of a particular reconstruction of the past.¹³⁶

Efforts to attract broader audiences notwithstanding, marketing ploys and gimmicks also targeted potential clientele from the *colonia hispana*. In September 1950, for example, the management of the Tropicana Club sponsored the *Premio de Verano*, a summer raffle that offered the winner a round-trip, week-long, all-expenses-paid vacation to Puerto Rico or Cuba. The winner of the raffle, a young Puerto Rican woman who lived on Tenth Street between First Avenue and Avenue A in Manhattan, an indication, perhaps, of both the Tropicana’s city-wide popularity as well as the mobility of the *colonia hispana*, opted to “realize her dream trip” to visit her aunt in Havana. For the managers of the club, who, according to one report, “always want to offer valuable

¹³⁴ Horacio Riambau, 1 December 1995, David Carp Collection.

¹³⁵ Ray Santos, 2 August 1993, David Carp Collection.

¹³⁶ See, for example, Boggs, *Salsiology*; Singer and Martínez, “A South Bronx Latin Music Tale;” Loza, *Tito Puente and the Making of Latin Music*.

attractions to their patrons,” the raffle proved “once more that at the ‘Tropicana’ promises are delivered.”¹³⁷

While Desi Arnaz portrayed Ricky Ricardo as an entertainer and master of ceremonies at the fictional downtown Tropicana Club, Perucho Irigoyen, a white Cuban actor and comedian, became a fixture at the actual Tropicana Club in the Bronx where he worked as host and master of ceremonies since 1947 and throughout the 1950s. Irigoyen performed throughout New York City in “virtually every hispanic theater...except the San Juan,” on radio’s *La Voz Hispana del Aire*, and on television on New York City’s WATV (Canal 13).¹³⁸ Broadcast on Saturday afternoons, the “hispanic program” he hosted on Canal 13 featured Irigoyen “as comedic actor, *declamador*, announcer, and, if needed, as singer.”¹³⁹ More than a comedian, he was also a writer. Explaining that “it is necessary to make the public laugh,” from his offices on 101 West 104th Street, he began publishing a satirical magazine, which he titled *Perucherías*, in 1954.¹⁴⁰ Irigoyen had come to New York City from Havana in 1945 where he had worked as *negrito*, or comic black man, in a theater company of *bufos cubanos* (the *negrito* character typically reproduced racial stereotypes and played a central role as singer and dancer in these blackface performances). Though he came to New York City already under contract with the Teatro Hispano, he insisted that he arrived “without anyone here knowing his name in

¹³⁷ “Premios en el ‘Tropicana Club,’” *Diario de Nueva York*, 21 September 1950, p. 5.

¹³⁸ “Charlando Tres Minutos con: Perucho Irigoyen,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 25 May 1950, 5; “Manifiéstase gran interés en los locutores de radio y televisión,” *La Prensa*, 22 March 1957, p. 1; “Brillantes locutores deleitan a los televidentes hispanos de N.Y.,” *La Prensa*, 23 March 1957, p. 1; “Por los Teatros,” *La Prensa*, 28 March 1947, p. 5; “Laurita y Rey, Perucho y Ramonita y León el domingo,” *La Prensa*, 6 May 1949, p. 1; Advertisement, *Ecos de Nueva York*, 26 February 1950, p. 28.

¹³⁹ “Perucho y Eulogio Peraza participan,” *La Prensa*, 3 May 1957, p. 1.

¹⁴⁰ “Ecos de Broadway,” *Ecos de Nueva York*, 22 August 1954, p. 23; “Ecos de Broadway,” *Ecos de Nueva York*, 5 September 1954, p. 20.

advance...and it was precisely here that he was ‘discovered.’” By 1957, he hosted the most popular program on Spanish-language television, earning himself the nickname “Mr. Television.”¹⁴¹

Like Irigoyen, many of the black and white Cuban entertainers working in New York City during the 1940s and 1950s navigated careers in the entertainment industry not as neatly packaged as the one enjoyed by Ricky Ricardo on *I Love Lucy*. For Ricky, much of his success as a bandleader and international star rested not on the development of a strong relationship with Cuban and Latino/a audiences but on his production of cultural representations of Cubanness and Latinness that emphasized non-blackness and tropical escape, representations that appealed to mostly white North Americans.

Irigoyen, on the other hand, developed a professional career within the *colonia hispana* that relied on his close ties and affiliations with local nightclubs like the Tropicana in the Bronx, ethnic social clubs and cultural organizations, and charitable causes. Latino/a New Yorkers loved neither Lucy nor Ricky. They loved Perucho.

Deemed “one of the most popular hispanic artists of New York City,” Irigoyen placed in *La Prensa*’s *Concurso de Popularidad* each year between 1946 and 1959, winning the *Caballeros* category in 1950 and 1951 and the *Locutores* category in 1957. Reflecting on the recognition he had received in the contests, Irigoyen argued that he won only because “the public supported me with the kindness of their votes.” The “very popular” entertainer also served as master of ceremonies for the newspaper’s *Gran Festival* throughout the 1940s and 1950s. At the 1950 *Gran Festival*, for example,

¹⁴¹ “‘Botaron la pelota con el festival’ opine Perucho,” *La Prensa*, 23 May 1946, p. 2; Ángel M. Arroyo, “Magno Éxito del Festival de Caridad,” *La Prensa*, 7 May 1957, p. 1; “Pasajes interesantes de Perucho Irigoyen, como actor de cine,” *La Prensa*, 17 November 1958, p. 5; “Ecos de Broadway,” *Ecos de Nueva York*, 15 January 1956, p. 24. For more on minstrelsy performance in Cuba and other stock characters common to the *teatro vernáculo*, see Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness*, 41-61.

Irigoyen reportedly “filled and stole the heart of the entire public with his voice of gold.” He insisted that he would continue participating in the festivals “just as I have always cooperated and will cooperate in all the just causes that benefit *los nuestros*.”¹⁴² As we saw in the previous chapter, Irigoyen’s reference to *los nuestros* indicates a sense of belonging to the Hispanic community hailed by the newspaper vis-à-vis its musical popularity contests and fundraising festivals.

The *colonia hispana* did more than use their votes in the *La Prensa* popularity contests to demonstrate their affection for Irigoyen. Commercial venues and ethnic cultural clubs sponsored celebrations and tributes in honor of the popular host and comedian throughout the late 1940s and 1950s. Described as “the happy and funny entertainer and master of ceremonies” so crucial was Irigoyen to the Tropicana Club that the Alfaro brothers organized a send-off for their host before he left on a return visit to Cuba in 1948.¹⁴³ Three years later, the Asociación de Artistas Hispanos, an organization which Irigoyen had helped establish to serve the needs of the Hispanic artists of the city, offered a tribute to the “well-known and popular” host and comedian at the Teatro Puerto Rico in the Bronx.¹⁴⁴ In 1958, “various civic and social organizations” came together to organize an event in honor of “the entertaining artist” because he “has always been willing to offer his support to all charitable functions and for his colleagues.” Held at the Teatro Puerto Rico, the event featured performances by Vicentico Valdés, Machito,

¹⁴² “Perucho Irigoyen en N.Y. influido por la nostalgia,” *La Prensa*, 10 April 1952, p. 3; “Charlando Tres Minutos con: Perucho Irigoyen,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 25 May 1950, 5; “Rita Montaner, Pous, Bergaza y Perucho en el Programa Artístico del Manhattan,” *La Prensa*, 27 April 1948, p. 1; “Celebrase ayer con todo splendor el Festival y Baile pro Caridad,” *La Prensa*, 22 May 1950, p. 1; “Diego y Anita, y Oreste Menéndez en el Festival Artístico del domingo 18,” *La Prensa*, 8 May 1952, p. 1.

¹⁴³ Babby Quintero, “En Broadway,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 24 November 1948, p. 5.

¹⁴⁴ “Homenaje a Irigoyen será un espectáculo excepcional,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 21 June 1951, p. 5.

Consuelo Moreno y Estrellita, Tito Puente, Conjunto Casino de Guayama, Silvestre Mendez, and Willie Chevalier, among others, as well as a showing of a film in color.¹⁴⁵

Irigoyen believed that his success rested on his ability to read his audience, picking up on cues that indicated when they were in the mood to laugh and when they preferred he just introduce the next act.¹⁴⁶ Approaching the peak of his career in 1950, at least as measured by the *La Prensa* popularity contests, during an interview that reportedly took place over a bottle of rum, Irigoyen told *Diario de Nueva York*'s Babby Quintero that he was "very grateful for the población hispana de Nueva York and especially the Puerto Rican population. They have been very good to me." He explained, "New York is glory. This was the place I was looking for. Mi Cubita bella is in my heart, but New York...man!"¹⁴⁷ Two years later, after an almost year-long visit to Cuba, Irigoyen's affection for New York City had not wavered, as the "celebrated comedian" explained to a reporter at *La Prensa* that he returned to the city "influenced by the nostalgia of being once again among the hispanic public that has treated me so well during the seven years that I have lived in this country."¹⁴⁸ According to one reviewer in *La Prensa*, Irigoyen "was one of those artists and 'natural' humorists whose sole presence on the stage served to animate the event."¹⁴⁹ His success came from "know[ing]

¹⁴⁵ "Homenaje a Perucho," *La Prensa*, 23 May 1958, p. 7; "Gran homenaje hoy en el 'Puerto Rico' a Perucho," *La Prensa*, 7 June 1958, p. 7.

¹⁴⁶ "'Botaron la pelota con el festival' opine Perucho," *La Prensa*, 23 May 1946, p. 2.

¹⁴⁷ "Charlando Tres Minutos con: Perucho Irigoyen," *Diario de Nueva York*, 25 May 1950, 5.

¹⁴⁸ "Perucho Irigoyen en N.Y. influido por la nostalgia," *La Prensa*, 10 April 1952, p. 3.

¹⁴⁹ Laurita y Rey, Perucho y Ramonita y León el domingo," *La Prensa*, 6 May 1949, p. 1.

this community to its core and know[ing] how to make the people laugh.”¹⁵⁰ Perhaps some of his popularity also came from his ability to deliver a joke just as well as he took one, as happened during an interview with Quintero who playfully doubted Irigoyen’s insistence that he was born in Havana (Irigoyen rejected rumors that he had been born outside of the capital).¹⁵¹ He also avoided explicit political commentary. When asked his opinion of the *golpe de estado*, or coup d’état, that had recently taken place in Cuba with Fulgencio Batista seizing power three months before elections in 1952, Irigoyen responded that the only “golpe” he had felt was the one on his head upon entering his dressing room a few months back.¹⁵²

More so than many of the other Cuban performers discussed in this dissertation, Irigoyen navigated the technological changes in the mass culture industries, adapting his style to succeed on stage, radio, and television formats. Irigoyen’s connection to the *colonia hispana* and the neighborhood that had welcomed him so warmly upon his arrival from Cuba did not dissipate in relation to his rising popularity. Audiences that followed Ricky Ricardo’s career on *I Love Lucy* saw similar adaptations and career changes with the Cuban performer expanding his local nightclub duties to include work as a television host, film star in Hollywood, and, later, property owner after buying the Tropicana during the show’s sixth season. But there was at least one major difference: Irigoyen worked exclusively in Spanish while Ricky (and Desi) aimed his performances at an English-speaking public. Another difference existed as well. Occasionally, Irigoyen’s jokes bordered on the “risqué,” but he never failed to get plenty of laughs, at least according to

¹⁵⁰ 27 March 1958, *La Prensa*, p. 4.

¹⁵¹ “‘Botaron la pelota con el festival’ opine Perucho,” *La Prensa*, 23 May 1946, p. 2.

¹⁵² “Perucho Irigoyen en N.Y. influido por la nostalgia,” *La Prensa*, 10 April 1952, p. 3.

a columnist for *Ecos de Nueva York*. Perhaps in one of his less tasteful comedic efforts, a photographer from the same newspaper caught Irigoyen in the midst of an impromptu “beauty” contest. Backstage after a performance at the Tropicana, Irigoyen looked to beat out three young women – an exotic ballerina, a *rumbera*, and a mambo dancer – for the title of “most beautiful calves.” Still in a formal suit but with one pant leg rolled up to almost mid-thigh, he offered the camera an exaggerated flirtatious pose.¹⁵³

Participation in community affairs marks a third difference. Ricky generally balked at the chance to participate in charitable events or social club activities. He performed for fundraisers or showcases organized by Lucy and Ethel’s women’s club, for example, only after the pair initiated some sort of scheme to force his cooperation. This is not to say that Ricky failed to notice that charity work oftentimes led to good publicity, but he aimed to appeal to broader, national audiences, rather than local ones. In one episode, he volunteers to host the Heart Fund Benefit Show, likely because the program would air on television coast to coast. During the show’s sixth season, Ricky excitedly organized a benefit show down at the club that included the participation of Orson Welles, but complains when forced to participate in charity events organized by Little Ricky’s school and a local historical society.¹⁵⁴ Such remove from neighborhood and community activities is not surprising given that Arnaz, and here I note a particular instance of the merging of Arnaz/Ricardo, gave his time and talent mostly to events that had greater national and international significance, such as in 1942 when he joined the Hollywood Victory Caravan, a two-week tour described as “the most ambitious money-

¹⁵³ “Ecos de Broadway,” *Ecos de Nueva York*, 5 September 1954, p. 20; “Concurso de ‘Belleza,’” *Ecos de Nueva York*, 10 October 1954, p. 30.

¹⁵⁴ *I Love Lucy*, television performance, CBS, 7 January 1952; 14 January 1952; 4 February 1952; 28 March 1955; 15 October 1956; 17 December 1956; 18 March 1957.

raising project ever staged by the theatrical world” featuring more than a dozen actors and actresses, to raise funds for U.S. Army and Navy Relief.¹⁵⁵

Alongside many other notable Cuban and Puerto Rican performers, Irigoyen hosted a charitable event sponsored by newspaper columnist Babby Quintero and *Diario de Nueva York* at Benjamin Franklin High School in East Harlem to raise funds for poor students within the *colonia hispana*. The following year, in 1951, Irigoyen recited poetry at the fundraiser at Benjamin Franklin High School, this time in a more formal role as president of the Asociación de Artistas Hispanos, one of the event’s co-sponsors.¹⁵⁶ He also participated in artistic events sponsored by ethnic cultural clubs like Club Cultural Chileno and Acción Civica Cubana. For the latter club’s second anniversary, he organized *Una Tarde Cubana*, a “show with local and foreign artists” held at the Hotel Whitehall.¹⁵⁷

The yearly fundraiser organized by *Diario de Nueva York* for the students at Benjamin Franklin High School as well as the annual *Gran Festivals* sponsored by *La Prensa* stand out as two examples of collaboration between popular Cuban and Latino/a entertainers and print media as acts of both social consciousness and positive public relations. Other smaller-scale events took place throughout the 1940s and 1950s, some

¹⁵⁵ “Ilona Massey, Jon Hall Get Lead Roles in ‘The Invisible Spy’ at Universal,” *New York Times*, 14 April 1942, p. 17; Thomas Brady, “Shooting Scripts by Uncle Sam,” *New York Times*, 19 April 1942, p. X3; “Farley Described Tuberculosis Rise,” *New York Times*, 19 May 1946, p. 44; “Actors’ Temple Benefit,” *New York Times*, 9 December 1949, p. 37; Brooks Atkinson, “Barrymore Comes to Town,” *New York Times*, 11 February 1940, p. 127. Among other activities of this kind, in 1946 he and other stars participated in a benefit dance for the National Jewish Hospital in Denver.

¹⁵⁶ “Gran desfile de artistas en el Festival Pro Estudiantes el 5,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 28 March 1950, p. 1; “Resultó muy lucido el festival de la Benjamin Franklin High School,” *La Prensa*, 18 April 1951, p. 3; “Extraordinario programa artístico el domingo en la Benjamin Franklin,” *La Prensa*, 11 March 1953, p. 5.

¹⁵⁷ “Club Cultural Chileno,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 14 March 1950, p. 6; “La Acción Civica da un baile el domingo,” *La Prensa*, 21 April 1954, p. 6.

sponsored by the ethnic social clubs of the *colonia hispana* or civic organizations and others organized by commercial venues or nightclub promoters. Under the leadership of the 112th Street and Fifth Avenue Block Councils of the Urban League of Greater New York, “the little people of Harlem, housewives, mothers, small shopkeepers and mechanics, whose names never get into the society columns of the papers, put on a successful dance for the benefit of their East Harlem community at the Palladium Ballroom.” Machito, Miguelito Valdés, José Curbelo, Fausto Curbelo, and Noro Morales, the only Puerto Rican bandleader to participate, as well as “several Negro groups” performed at what was billed as a “benefit interracial dance” at no cost to the organizers of the event. One report in the *New York Amsterdam News* explained that the two block councils served nearly “10,000 Puerto Rican and Negro families in the area” and stated that the performers and orchestras “donate[d] their services to promote interracial brotherhood among the people of the area.”¹⁵⁸ That the newspaper described these interactions as “interracial” suggests that at least some African Americans did not see Puerto Ricans and Cubans as largely of African descent. It also confirms that, like Irigoyen, Machito and Valdés demonstrated a sense of civic awareness and social responsibility. This sense of duty extended beyond the confines of New York City. In the days leading up to the sixth annual fundraising festival at Benjamin Franklin High School in 1953, Machito found time to take the lead in organizing a campaign to encourage individuals within the entertainment community to give blood to the Red Cross in support of U.N. soldiers fighting in Korea. With the “popular musician” explaining that “we all have to do our part,” all members of Machito y sus Afro-Cubans

¹⁵⁸ “Housewives Give Dance,” *Chicago Defender*, 11 June 1949, p. 8; “Two E. Harlem Block Councils to Hold Dance,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 14 May 1949, p. 26.

reportedly donated blood alongside their bandleader. A few days later, a photo appeared in *La Prensa* that showed a “nervous” Valdés preparing to give his donation while Machito explained that “all citizens” should participate in the blood drive.¹⁵⁹

Machito’s sponsorship of this blood drive is quite similar to Arnaz’s participation in the Victory Caravan and USO shows during the Second World War with the major difference being that the former aimed primarily at the Spanish-speaking residents of New York City while the latter targeted English-speaking audiences. Machito’s participation in this sort of war effort makes sense given that he had served in the U.S. Army during the Second World War and that Puerto Ricans and Cubans in New York City as well as Puerto Ricans on the island were subject to the draft and considered, in varying degrees, collectively as “our boys.” Machito called specifically on “citizens” from within the *colonias hispanas de Nueva York* to participate in this war effort, a move that raises important questions about his own citizenship. Machito’s date and place of birth remain a mystery. Journalists, historians, and even Machito himself have given different accounts of his date and place of birth, ranging in time from 1907 to 1912 and location with Miami, Tampa, Havana, and Santiago de Cuba all cited as possibilities. World War II Army Enlistment Records list 1912 as the year and Florida as the place of his birth.¹⁶⁰ One journalist reported his date and place of birth as 1907 in Miami, while another agreed on the year but listed Havana as the location.¹⁶¹ In one interview,

¹⁵⁹ *La Prensa*, 11 March 1953, p. 6; *La Prensa*, 14 March 1953, p. 6.

¹⁶⁰ U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Electronic Army Serial Number Merged File, ca. 1938-1946, World War II Army Enlistment Records, created 6/1/2002-9/30/2002, documenting the period ca. 1938-1946, Box 0580, Film Reel Number 2.244.

¹⁶¹ Box 1, Folder Socarras + Machito, Abstract for MACHITO, Carlos Ortiz Collection; Box 1, Folder La Herencia del Jazz Latino, Carlos Ortiz Collection; Isabelle Ortiz, “Machito A Living Legend,” *Canales*, January 1979, Carlos Ortiz Collection.

Machito indicated that he was born in Cuba and that he automatically became a U.S. citizen ninety days after joining the U.S. Army in 1943.¹⁶² Carlos Ortiz, a Puerto Rican filmmaker who released a documentary on Machito's musical career in 1987, suggests that the bandleader was, indeed, aware of the discrepancies regarding his place of birth but that he did nothing to dispel the errors, arguing that "for although he has a deep loyalty for the country in which he is now residing, his heart and his roots are still in Cuba."¹⁶³ With Machito's father working for a time in the tobacco business, it is entirely plausible that he was born in Florida, possibly Tampa, and migrated back to Cuba with his family when the cigar industry began its decline in the late 1910s and 1920s.¹⁶⁴ Machito's strategy of ambiguity regarding his birthplace is not entirely surprising since recognition of birth in the United States might have "watered-down" his claims to be an "authentic" performer of "música típica" and "ritmos criollos" and could have rendered less effective, as we will see in the following chapter, his use of Cubanness to temper racial prejudices.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, thousands of Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Spanish migrants as well as smaller numbers of African Americans, Jewish Americans, and whites crowded into nightclubs and ballrooms across New York City. Venues like Hunts Point Palace, the Tropicana in the Bronx, and the Palladium Ballroom offered Cuban and Latino/a New Yorkers an opportunity for socialization and cultural expression in a local,

¹⁶² Box 1, Folder Boy's Harbor, Transcript of Machito interview by Patricia L. Wilson Cryer, 20 January 1981, Carlos Ortiz Collection.

¹⁶³ Box 1, Folder Socarras + Machito, Abstract for Machito, Carlos Ortiz Collection.

¹⁶⁴ Box 1, Folder Pagani's Interview, Machito interview at home, Carlos Ortiz Collection.

community context. Performers like Machito, Miguelito Valdés, and Perucho Irigoyen enjoyed favorable reviews and a strong following within the *colonia hispana*. At the same time, millions of mostly white North American viewers gathered around their television sets to watch Desi Arnaz portray their favorite Cuban bandleader on *I Love Lucy*. An examination of critical moments of intersection in the personal lives and professional careers, both lived and imagined, of these Cuban performers and representations confirms the diversity and complexity of the Cuban-American cultural landscape that developed during this period.

Chapter 6

A Panamerican Paradise?: Migrants, Music, and Politics in Miami's *Colonia Cubana*

Like many real-life Cuban musicians and performers based in New York City in the 1940s and 1950s, the fictional Ricky Ricardo and his band made the trip south to Miami during the winter months to perform at one of a growing number of hotels and nightclubs popping up along the city's shoreline. During the sixth season of *I Love Lucy*, in an episode that aired November 26, 1956, Ricky and his band travel to Miami for an engagement at the Eden Roc Hotel, a luxurious ocean-front resort on Collins Avenue between Forty-fifth and Forty-sixth Streets located right next door to the larger and, perhaps, even more grand Fontainebleau hotel. Just a few days into the trip, Ricky announces to Lucy, Fred, and Ethel that producers have asked him to be in a film called *The Florida Story*, a documentary set to explore the state's history from the early days of exploration led by Spaniard Juan Ponce de León to the present day. Ricky and his band have been cast to represent the contemporary period, and producers have decided to include their performances at the Eden Roc in the film. Later in the episode, the Ricardos and the Mertzes are stranded on what they believe is a deserted island, only to learn that the entire production company is on location filming a scene for the movie with actor Claude Akins. In this scene, Akins has been cast as a native inhabitant dressed in tribal war paint and elaborate headdress. Though viewers learn little else about the content of *The Florida Story*, this framing of Florida's history seems to suggest a narrative of

progress, one that advances from a state of primitive nature populated by primitive peoples to one of modern architecture featuring modern performers, modern music, and glamorous guests.

The casting of a touring white Cuban bandleader like Ricky Ricardo as representative of 1950s Florida reproduces the notion that the Cuban and broader Latino/a presence in Miami and other parts of Florida remained transient and impermanent, at the whims of the changing seasons. The city's newly-established nightclubs and hotels booked some of the most popular Cuban and Latin bands of the era as tourists from across the United States and Latin America, including thousands of Cuban visitors, crowded onto dance floors to the beats of the rumba, mambo, and cha-cha-chá. Not everyone, however, saw Miami as a temporary destination or vacationer's tropical paradise, and this chapter also examines how both black and white Cubans, ordinary migrants and professional entertainers, helped construct the *colonia latina* and Cuban-American cultural landscape that developed in the city before it became a refuge for the hundreds of thousands of Cuban exiles who fled the island after the Cuban Revolution of 1959. In particular, this chapter examines the role that race, inter-racial and inter-ethnic relations, especially with African Americans and Puerto Ricans, ideologies of Panamericanism, and local and international politics played in shaping the perspectives and experiences of the tens of thousands of Cuban migrants, musicians, and performers who settled and worked in Miami in the 1940s and 1950s. Nowhere greater was the Cuban presence felt than on the terrain of popular culture. But, rather than focus solely on representations of Cubanness and Latinness produced and consumed in the commercial venues that catered mostly to U.S. and foreign tourists, this chapter recovers

the social activities, cultural events, patriotic celebrations, and political agendas that developed within this *colonia latina* as well as those endorsed by the two most prominent Cuban social clubs of the city, namely the *Círculo Cubano* and *Juventud Cubana*. In doing so, I also note moments of collaboration and interaction between the Cubans and Cuban social clubs in Miami and those in New York City during this period.

The story of Cubans in Miami in the 1940s and 1950s offers a distinct context through which we can trace some of the same musicians and musical styles that were simultaneously becoming key parts of the Cuban-American cultural landscape of New York City. In New York City, Cuban musicians and migrants lived and worked within a much larger Puerto Rican community and participated in downtown and uptown music scenes. New York City was also a place where Afro-Cubans forged independent institutions. It was in these contexts that both black and white Cubans discussed and negotiated questions of Cuban national identity, race and ethnicity, and musical authenticity. In Miami, a relatively small number of Cuban residents lived in the context of a more massive back-and-forth movement of tourists, business professionals, and temporary workers between the United States, Cuba, and the rest of Latin America. Miami in the 1940s and 1950s belonged as much to the Jim Crow South as it did to the internationalist propaganda of tourist boosters and businessmen with an eye towards Latin America. As a result, a certain kind of Cubanness came to be used to attract Anglo tourists to Miami as a “near Cuba” experience. Ideologies and commercial practices of Panamericanism shaped relations between local officials (especially the Miami Chamber of Commerce), certain ethnic institutions and activities (including Spanish-language newspapers, parades, and national commemorations), and the city’s Cuban social clubs.

In Miami, island-based politics also played an incredibly important role in structuring community life, though there still seemed to be at least a little time left for dancing.

Historians have long recognized Miami as a summer vacation destination and place of political refuge for Cubans, especially since the 1930s with the rise and fall of the Gerardo Machado regime. That Ricky Ricardo, a white Cuban bandleader performing mostly Latin popular music in a recently-opened Miami hotel, was called upon as representative of 1950s Florida signals, even in this fictional casting, an acknowledgement of the *latinization* of Miami in the context of a burgeoning tourist industry, an industry that helped designate the “exotic city,” as one historian described it, “an international crossroads of travel, finance, and intrigue.” The emergence of a Cuban music scene in Miami, however, began earlier in the twentieth century, far-removed from the boom in construction and expansion that took place in south Florida after the Second World War.¹

In the early 1930s, a white Cuban trumpet-player named Enrique Mendoza and a few of his co-workers at the Summerfield Cigar Factory in Miami decided to start a band. They would gather after hours for “daily jam sessions, Latin style,” and after a few weeks of rehearsals Mendoza decided that his rumba band was ready to perform in public. Named after the cigars the musicians made at the factory, El Dulce took the stage at the Roney Plaza hotel in Miami for the entirety of the 1933 season. Their success that first season not only earned the band bookings at other hotels and clubs on the beach for the following year but also garnered the attention of aspiring young musicians. One such

¹ Gary R. Mormino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005): 25.

musician was Desi Arnaz, who auditioned for Mendoza's band, but was turned away because the band already had a guitarist. Though El Dulce stopped performing in the late 1930s, reportedly as a result of the poor economy, Mendoza and his band played a significant role in introducing Cuban popular music to the dancing publics of Miami and greater south Florida. In 1957, a report in the *Miami Herald* credited Mendoza as a "pioneer of sorts," describing him as the "man who introduced the bongo-beating, hip-swinging Latin music to Miami." Despite this recognition, the former bandleader now worked as a baggage clerk at Miami's Greyhound terminal, an outsider looking in on the world of Latin entertainment he had introduced to the city two decades earlier. But his is not simply a story of failed celebrity, for it offers an opportunity to explore the multiple ways that Cubans became integrated into south Florida's newly emerging tourism industry. Mendoza remained in Miami to raise a family and felt a deep connection to the area that had welcomed earlier generations of his family. His father, José González Mendoza, lived and worked in Key West at the tail end of the nineteenth century and had used a percentage of his earnings in the lottery business to help finance and maintain a school there. His daughter, María Mendoza Kranz, lived her entire life in Miami and Hialeah and professed that she and the generations of her family before her "always loved their two homelands," Cuba and the United States.²

The Mendoza family's multiple migrations from Cuba to Key West to Tampa to Miami mirror a pattern of movement and settlement experienced by many Cubans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The outbreak of the Ten Years' War in

² Bill Kennedy, "How the Rumba Got Started," *The Miami Herald*, 28 April 1957, María Mendoza Kranz Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami; "Los Mendoza: Una familia americana de Hialeah que no olvida sus raíces cubanas," *El Sol de Hialeah*, 13 April 1989, María Mendoza Kranz Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

1868 as well as U.S. trade policies that favored the importation of tobacco over cigars helped Key West emerge as the first Cuban settlement in Florida. By 1885, there were 2,811 mostly Cuban cigarmakers working in Key West's ninety cigar factories. Soon, however, labor unrest and the increased involvement of cigarworkers in the Cuban independence movement prompted factory owners to relocate their operations elsewhere in Florida. Thanks to an agreement brokered by a group of Spanish and Cuban manufacturers, including Vicente Martínez Ybor, and a group of local businessmen who agreed to subsidize the purchase of land, Key West's cigar factories (and cigarworkers) began the move to Tampa in the late 1880s.³ It was during this period of relocation that the Mendoza family made its move north, mostly likely living and working in Tampa for some years before settling in Miami. Though most attempts to establish large-scale cigar factories in Miami had failed prior to 1926, one exception was the Summerfield Cigar Factory that relocated from Tampa to Miami in the late 1920s. Summerfield employed mostly Cuban migrants who soon made the move south to work in the factory.⁴

Other changes came to Miami's economy in the 1930s, and many of these transformations centered on attracting tourists and investors from the Northeast and the Midwest as well as from Latin America. New industries emerged, but, as historian Melanie Shell-Weiss has shown, only those "that would not tarnish the city's image as a tropical paradise were considered." These included clothing, hat, and shoe manufacturing plants as well as pharmaceutical and furniture production and garment and

³ Susan Greenbaum, *More Than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002): 58-60.

⁴ Joseph Rosendo, "Christmas Smoke," Joseph Rosendo's Travelscope, http://travelscope.net/blog/view_post/christmas_smoke/ (accessed May 15, 2012); Patsy Cusmano, e-mail message to Joseph Rosendo, May 16, 2012.

food processing plants. Also key to the city's growth was the increase in air traffic: Pan American World Airways, which had primarily provided air mail and passenger service between Key West and Havana, became the primary mail carrier for Latin America in 1925; Eastern Airlines and National Airlines moved their headquarters to Miami in 1938; and, finally, the city could boast completion of a new 846-acre International Airport in 1941. The recruitment efforts of the Miami Chamber of Commerce as well as declining land prices attracted Jewish businessmen, especially hotel owners from the Catskills and the Jersey shore, to open hotels and inns in Miami and Miami Beach. By 1940, there were nearly eight thousand Jews in Miami, quite an increase from the fifty individuals that made up the city's Jewish community in 1915.⁵

But Jews were not the only newcomers to arrive in Miami in the late 1920s and 1930s. According to historian Louis A. Pérez, Jr., "a small Cuban community formed in Miami in the 1920s, consisting mainly of workers, musicians, and entertainers whose presence contributed to the local 'color' in the rendering of Miami as tropical." That small presence increased in the late 1920s and early 1930s as "political exiles, first as opponents of the Gerardo Machado government and subsequently as members of the fallen Machado government" sought refuge in Miami. Among those former public officials now residing in Miami was Desi Arnaz's father, the now former representative and mayor of Santiago. Pérez conservatively estimates that "by the late 1930s, about six thousand Cubans lived in Miami." Records from the 1940 U.S. census, for their part, indicate that 11,460 Cubans (defined as foreign-born or having a mother or father born in

⁵ Melanie Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami: A Social History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009): 103-105, 122. Anti-Semitism reached its peak in Florida, especially in Miami and Miami Beach, in the 1920s and 1930s. But, despite the recruitment of Jews to Florida, discriminatory policies persisted well into the 1950s, with one in five Miami Beach hotels barring Jews in 1953. See, Mormino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams*, 96.

Cuba) lived in the state of Florida, and of those born in Cuba, nearly seven thousand were classified as “white” compared to only about one thousand designated as “black.”⁶

From a keener eye fixed on Latin America as a source of trade and tourism to a general rise in population, the onset of the Second World War in Europe brought even more changes to Miami. Between 200,000 and 311,000 Latin Americans visited the city each year throughout the Second World War, according to the Miami Chamber of Commerce. As trade with Europe and Asia was cut off by the war, officials in Miami looked to strengthen their economic ties with Latin America. In particular, historian Nathan Connolly has argued that Panamericanism functioned “as a means of strengthening the country’s commercial ties to its southern neighbors while staving off the expansion of Nazi and Communist ideology in the Americas.” The presence of the U.S. Armed Forces in south Florida led to improvements in the region’s infrastructure, including building new and repairing old roads and bridges as well as expanding the rail system, port, and airport. In turn, local boosters worked to solidify Miami’s role as the “Gateway to the Americas.” Wartime expansion and the city’s efforts of self-promotion did more than attract Latin American tourists. Between 1940 and 1945, nearly 50,000 people moved to Dade County, and, by the end of the war, a majority of the residents in Miami had been born outside of the state. This growth in population included more than 80,000 newcomers from Georgia, 26,000 from New York, 14,300 from Pennsylvania, and 12,000 from Ohio, continuing the previous decade’s trend of Northeasterners and

⁶ Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999): 431-434; Steven Ruggles, Matthew Sobek, Trent Alexander, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, Patricia Kelly Hall, Miriam King, and Chad Ronnander. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 4.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2008.

Midwesterners moving south to Miami. By 1950, Miami was the state's largest city, counting 250,000 inhabitants. That figure likely included the majority of the Cuban population in Florida, which held steady throughout the 1940s. The 1950 U.S. census found that 11,597 Cubans (defined as foreign-born or having a mother or father born in Cuba) resided in the state of Florida with 7,230 of the Cuban-born individuals given a "white" racial classification and 495 categorized as "black."⁷

Contributing in significant ways to the permanent Cuban presence in south Florida were temporary visitors. Beginning in the late nineteenth and continuing throughout the twentieth century, the back-and-forth movement of Cuban tourists, business professionals, transient workers, and political exiles and allies between Havana and Miami resulted in what many scholars have described as the "ties of singular intimacy" that have historically joined Cuba and the United States. Close proximity, favorable climate (especially in the summertime), air-conditioning, and the relatively low costs of transportation, shopping, and other services facilitated the ease of travel between Havana and Miami, leading to cultural familiarity and affection. Pérez has argued that "Miami entered the Cuban consciousness as a place of refuge and residence: it was readily accessible, the cost of living was reasonable, and most of all it was vaguely familiar." Round-trip travel by steamship cost less than \$40, and round-trip airfare between Miami and Havana – a short forty minute flight – cost about \$30 in the 1950s. Pan American Airlines operated an average of twenty-eight flights daily between the two

⁷ Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami*, 124-129; Nathan Connolly, "By Eminent Domain: Race and Capital in the Building of an American South Florida," (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2008): 9, 163-164; Mormino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams*, 25; Steven Ruggles, Matthew Sobek, Trent Alexander, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, Patricia Kelly Hall, Miriam King, and Chad Ronnander. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 4.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2008.

cities. Developers and architects had designed Miami with Cuba in mind, working to reproduce Havana's Spanish colonial heritage in their city. At the height of the construction boom in the mid-1920s, builders and architects imported more than two million roof and floor tiles from Cuba. Perhaps hoping for his chance at reclaiming the fortune he lost in the Revolution of 1933, Desi Arnaz's father also got into the tile import business during his first few years in Miami in the 1930s.⁸

An average of 40,000 and 50,000 Cubans visited Miami each year throughout the 1940s and 1950s, according to Pérez. Thousands of Cuban couples honeymooned in Miami, including the young Fidel Castro and his bride Mirta Díaz Balart, whom he married in 1948. In fact, Castro came to Miami frequently throughout the late 1940s and 1950s (a trip commonly made by former and hopeful Cuban politicians), making repeated visits to the Mary Elizabeth, a black-owned hotel on the corner of N.W. Seventh Street and N.W. Second Avenue. On the hotel's first floor was a Cuban-run barbershop that attracted Cuban patrons. Connolly explains: "Discussing every topic between baseball and The Revolution, young Cuban men would converse in the Mary Elizabeth's barber-chairs by day and grace the hotel's dance floors by night."⁹ Among those Cubans who traveled to Miami on tourist visas, some would overstay the conditions of their travel permits. In his memoir *Before Night Falls*, Cuban writer and poet Reinaldo Arenas tells the story of his uncle and mother who left for the United States, explaining, "In those days of extreme poverty, the dream of all who were down-and-out in Cuba was to go 'north' to work" even if that meant travelling as a tourist without permission to work but

⁸ Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*, 432-444; See, also, Mormino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams*, 282-284; Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami*, 104-105.

⁹ Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*, 434-435; Connolly, "By Eminent Domain," 252-256.

doing so anyway. He imagines his “mother in some run-down apartment in Miami in the fifties,” where she worked “taking care of the children of those who were lucky enough to get a job in factory.” Despite spending just a few days, weeks, or months in Miami before returning to the island, Cuban tourists and temporary residents made symbolic *and* material contributions to the development of the city’s *colonia latina* and *colonia cubana*.¹⁰

According to U.S. census records, by 1960 the Cuban population (defined as foreign-born or having a mother or father born in Cuba) in Florida had quadrupled, rising to just over the 48,000 mark. It would be easy to suspect that the dramatic increase in the number of Cubans residing in Florida occurred mostly in the late 1950s, directly as a result of the Cuban Revolution of 1959, but even conservative estimates admit that nearly 20,000 Cubans lived in Miami before the Revolution. More recently, Shell-Weiss has found that local officials reported to the *Miami Herald* that 46,000 Cubans resided in Miami-Dade County by the mid-1950s, living alongside an estimated 30,000 Puerto Ricans, 3,500 Colombians, 2,000 Venezuelans, 1,200 Ecuadorians, 800 Mexicans, and 2,000 individuals from other parts of Central America. All of this is to say that a stable Cuban and broader Latino/a presence in Miami began to transform the city’s cultural landscape in far greater numbers and much earlier in the twentieth century than has previously been acknowledged.¹¹

Historian Gary R. Mormino has argued that “already in 1950, Miami was the Cuban city of the future, even though no identifiable Cuban neighborhood or colony yet

¹⁰ Reinaldo Arenas, *Before Night Falls: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993): 31-32; Mary Lynn Conejo, Interview by author, 9 April 2010.

¹¹ Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*, 501; Connolly, “By Eminent Domain,” 211-212; Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami*, 152.

had taken hold in Miami.”¹² As we saw in the second and third chapters of this dissertation regarding Cubans in New York City, however, claims based solely on population size or housing patterns too easily dismiss the more symbolic and cultural uses of the concept of *la colonia latina* or *la colonia cubana*. That said, brief man-on-street testimonials solicited by a reporter from *Diario las Américas*, one of the major Spanish-language newspapers in Miami during this period, revealed that Cubans and other Latinos/as lived in all parts of the city, though most preferred the southwestern and northwestern sections. One respondent, a *bodeguero* named Miguel Mendez explained that he lived in the northwest part of Miami because he “had very good neighbors and I am very happy for that. I understand that the neighborhood doesn’t make the people, but exactly the opposite, the people make the neighborhood.” A worker named Herminia Eslos Escolas reported that she preferred living in the southwest section of Miami because she “considers it the best situated part of the city and the one that has the best future.”¹³ In 1956, a news report revealed that of the 609 students enrolled at Buena Vista Elementary School, located at 3001 N.W. Second Avenue, 239 spoke more Spanish than English. With most of the students coming from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and other

See, also, Alejandro Portes and Alex Stepick, *City on the Edge: The Transformation of Miami* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993): 101; Eric Tscheschlok, “‘So Goes the Negro:’ Race and Labor in Miami, 1940-1963,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 76 (Summer 1997): 45; Morton D. Winsberg, “Housing Segregation of a Predominantly Middle Class Population: Residential Patterns Developed by the Cuban Immigration to Miami, 1950-1974,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 38, no. 4 (October 1979): 403-418.

¹² Mormino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams*, 17.

¹³ Paul D. Pérez, “Entrevistas Breves,” *Diario las Américas*, 11 February 1954, p. 3.

Central and South American countries, the school “is rapidly converting itself into the first bilingual school in the county, forced by these circumstances.”¹⁴

Countless reports and advertisements published in the *Miami Latin News* (*Noticiero Latino*) and *Diario las Américas* directly and indirectly hailed a *colonia latina*, *colonia latinoamericana*, *colonia Hispanoamericana*, and *colonia cubana* throughout the 1940s and 1950s. One of the clearest indications of a stable and identifiable Cuban and Latino/a presence in Miami can be seen in the proliferation of retail shops, hotels, and restaurants that welcomed and, in many cases, catered explicitly to consumers within the *colonia latina* and *colonia cubana*. As early as 1946, with a menu offering *bistec al cubano* and *arroz con pollo*, El Restaurant Habana, located at 214 N.E. Second Avenue, billed itself as “The Preferred Place of the Latinos.”¹⁵ That same year, across town at 1101 North Miami Avenue, Restaurant La Concha celebrated “15 years of service in the *colonia latina*.”¹⁶ Other restaurants, retail shops, and food stores opened their doors throughout the late 1940s and 1950s, such as El Toreador, Panadería y Dulcería El Siboney, Alva Upholsterers, Restaurant Florida, Cuqui Peluquería Cubana, Dixon Barber Shop, and Quinta Avenida and La Cubanita, both described as *latino* butcher shops and markets.¹⁷

¹⁴ “Más Estudiantes Hispanos Hay Ahora en Dade County,” *Diario las Américas*, 18 September 1956, p. 5. By late 1960, a map published in the *Miami Herald* showed that the largest concentrations of Latinos/as could be found mostly in the southwestern and northwestern parts of the city on both sides of the Miami River as well as along N.E. Second Avenue. Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami*, 154; See, also, Winsberg, “Housing Segregation of a Predominantly Middle Class Population,” 408-409.

¹⁵ Advertisement, *Miami Latin News*, 11 August 1946, p. 2; “Mientras Miami Duerme Lo Vi...Y me Lo Contaron,” *Miami Latin News*, 14 July 1946, p. 4.

¹⁶ Advertisement, *Miami Latin News*, 11 August 1946, p. 7.

¹⁷ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 21 March 1954, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 29 December 1956, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 16 March 1957, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 21 April 1957, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 8 December 1957, p. 4;

In fact, many of these businesses published advertisements in these newspapers that emphasized Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Latino/a ownership and management. Some of the most direct in announcing their ties to Cuba, Latin America, and other Latino/a communities in the United States included La Casa Caribe, a retail and wholesale shop that sold imported goods recently opened by Mario A. Pérez at 513 North Miami Avenue, La Giralda Churrería-Restaurant, owned by the Rodríguez family who had previously managed a restaurant in New York, and La Sin Rival de José Álvarez, a shop specializing in knife-sharpening “by the most famous scissor-sharpener in Havana.” Advertisements for Hilda’s Beauty Salon and Feliz Barber Shop announced that its stylists had received training and arrived directly from the “best salons” in New York and Havana, and one for Carlo’s Restaurant promised “the best arroz con pollo in the city” thanks to its owners “from the internationally-renown Sorrento Restaurant in Havana, Cuba.” The two Cuban owners of Las Brisas Cubanas invited diners to enjoy their “comidas criollas” and “feel as if they were in Cuba.”¹⁸ By 1956, a reporter for *Diario las Américas* argued that “with each day that passes, Miami becomes more and more hispanic,” to the extent that “we don’t know with scientific precision the exact number of ‘peluquerías,’ ‘barberías,’ ‘colmados,’ ‘bodegas,’ ‘almacenes,’ ‘tiendas,’ (they are known by all of these and other names) at which nuestra colonia acquires ‘hispanic’ provisions.”¹⁹

Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 10 December 1957, p. 6; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 12 December 1957, p. 8.

¹⁸ Photo with caption, *Diario las Américas*, 19 December 1953, p. 3; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 29 December 1956, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 21 April 1957, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 6 October 1957, p. 8; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 24 October 1957, p. 6; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 10 December 1957, p. 6.

¹⁹ Manuel H. Lopez, “Dia de Reyes en Miami,” *Diario las Américas*, 24 November 1956, p. 6; See, also, Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*, 434-444, 501; Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami*, 153-155.

Targeting both the city's Latin American visitors *and* established residents, within the pages of the *Miami Latin News* and *Diario las Américas*, Panamericanism circulated as public discourse. The *Miami Latin News*, which was published every Sunday, described itself as "a newspaper published in the interest of Greater Miami's Spanish-speaking population and our visitors from Latin America." Founded in 1953, the larger daily, *Diario las Américas*, carried a slogan that confirmed the city's near-obsession with Panamericanism, boasting that it stood "for liberty, culture, and hemispheric solidarity."²⁰ I have not yet determined whether either of these two newspapers received direct support or financial backing from tourist boosters or city officials, though it is likely that the Miami Chamber of Commerce, committed as it was to expanding the city's economic base to include international tourism as well as other year-round industries, would have had at least a casual interest in both publications (and in attracting Cubans and other working-class Latinos/as to Miami).²¹

The growing Cuban presence in the city as well as the influx of large numbers of tourists from Latin America complicated Miami's white-over-black racial hierarchy. Miami was, after all, still a city in the Jim Crow South and that meant the segregation of blacks and whites in public places, including in schools, restaurants, hotels, and transportation. As government and police officials in Miami worked to maintain the color line through intimidation, violence, and economic and legal means, historians have shown that some exceptions were made for Spanish-speaking tourists and residents, including those with dark skin. Instances of receiving better treatment than African Americans, however, did not mean treatment equal to whites or that a systematic method

²⁰ *Miami Latin News*, 11 August 1946, p. 1; *Diario las Américas*, 19 December 1953, p. 1.

²¹ Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami*, 6, 132, 152-157.

of racial classification was in place. Connolly, for example, has argued that as tourists from the Spanish-speaking world flooded into south Florida, whiteness took on “a decidedly more diverse face.”²² Interestingly, of the 29,000 foreign-born Cubans in Florida, as recorded in the 1960 U.S. census, all were classified as “white.” What these numbers mean in the context of Jim Crow and the growth of Panamericanism is not entirely clear, though there are at least three possible explanations, all of which may have been in operation: first, that mostly white, middle- and upper-class Cubans left the island amidst the economic uncertainty and political turmoil that characterized Cuban society throughout the 1950s; second, that the harshness of the Jim Crow South during this period likely prompted Cubans of color not to settle permanently in south Florida; and, third, that a process of racialization was taking place within a bi-racial system that oftentimes classified Spanish-speaking Cubans, even those with darker skin color, as different from and, in some cases, more welcomed than English-speaking African Americans.²³

During the Second World War, the many hotels, inns, and restaurants dotting Miami’s landscape assumed a different purpose. With wartime rationing making travel and discretionary spending quite difficult, instead of welcoming tourists, many of the city’s tourist attractions substituted as U.S. military housing and training sites. This

²² Connolly, “By Eminent Domain,” 163-164; Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami*, 155.

²³ Steven Ruggles, Matthew Sobek, Trent Alexander, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, Patricia Kelly Hall, Miriam King, and Chad Ronnander. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 4.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2008.

Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami*, 155; Connolly, “By Eminent Domain,” 33, 163-164, 188, 204-205; Adrian Burgos, Jr., *Playing America’s Game: Baseball, Latinos, and the Color Line* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

temporary dip in growth in the tourist sector improved as economic investment in the tourist industry, particularly in hotel and nightclub development, intensified in Miami immediately following the end of the war. But that growth might have come on too soon in relation to the number of “war-profit-laden tourists” making their way to Miami for the winter season. By 1946, Miami’s nightclubs could seat just over 20,000 guests, and one report in *Billboard Magazine* estimated that this “would put the area in a class with New York, the largest night club center in the world (all year ‘round) and leave Miami in a most unfavorable position vis-à-vis profits.” Established nightclubs like the Colonial Inn, Copa, Beachcomber, Mocambo, and the Brook Club, recently-opened hot spots like the Burgundy Club, Blackamoor, and Park Avenue, and numerous local hotels competed not only for patrons but also for quality entertainers.²⁴ Competition among the many hotels, nightclubs, and entertainment promoters continued throughout the late 1940s and 1950s, but what may have been troubling to club owners and promoters proved beneficial to entertainers and audiences alike. For example, Xavier Cugat commanded a \$15,000 contract for a one-week booking at the Americana. By 1956, Miami’s nightclub scene boasted a veritable “who’s who among stars from television, screen, night club and stage for appearances in the hotel-cafes around which nocturnal activities will center.” In fact, another reporter for the *New York Times* put a positive spin on the “conflict between rival hotel groups here in booking dazzling attractions,” arguing that “the whole thing looks very good for customers who enjoy famous performers, particularly as it seems to involve cut rates for these patrons.”²⁵

²⁴ Connolly, “By Eminent Domain;” Mormino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams*, 308; “Miami a Showbiz Bust-So Far,” *Billboard Magazine*, 12 January 1946, p. 33, 37.

Perhaps more so than in other areas, the Cuban and Latino/a cultural presence in Miami developed strongest within the world of entertainment and popular music. Not only could a “devoted” public listen to “music from our native countries” carried by the local radio stations in Miami, but they could also come together in commercial and cultural spaces to enjoy live performances. In particular, a reporter for *Diario las Américas* explained, “And with what delight and nostalgia we attend evening gatherings, concerts, or recitals at which some local or imported hispanic group delights us with happy or romantic and even dancing notes of the music of nuestra raza!”²⁶ Increasingly throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the many hotels and nightclubs in Miami and Miami Beach not only promoted Cuban, Puerto Rican, and other Latino/a musicians and performers but also promised audiences an evening of “genuine Latin American atmosphere.”²⁷ That these promises appeared within the pages of the city’s Spanish-language newspapers suggest that these events and venues welcomed *and* actively solicited the participation of this growing resident community in addition to U.S. and foreign tourists. Hotels and nightclubs like the Hotel Caribbean, Hotel Cadillac, Club Chalet en la Playa at the Hotel Lucerne, the Cha Cha Lounge, and Salon Pompey at the Eden Roc Hotel featured performances by entertainers like Tony Meléndez, Bobby Escoto, Fernando “Caney” Storch, Arturo Santirzo, Fausto Curbelo, and Los Tres

²⁵ Lary Solloway, “Stars Over Miami,” *New York Times*, 2 December 1956, p. XX4; C. E. Wright, “Seeing Stars,” *New York Times*, p. 133; “New Show System at Miami Beach,” *New York Times*, 2 November 1958, p. XX5. See, also, Tracy J. Revels, *Sunshine Paradise: A History of Florida Tourism* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011): 2, 104; Mormino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams*.

²⁶ Manuel H. Lopez, “Día de Reyes en Miami,” *Diario las Américas*, 24 November 1956, p. 6.

²⁷ Advertisement, *Miami Latin News*, 7 July 1946, p. 5.

Galanes.²⁸ Noting that the venue provided air conditioning, did not charge a cover, and had only a one-drink minimum at “popular prices,” The Pied Piper Lounge on 2860 Coral Way announced a performance by Ricky Carmen “El Rey del Calypso, Mambo, y Rumba.”²⁹ In 1956, the “sumptuous” Club Chalet at the “exclusive” Hotel Lucerne advertised its *Fiesta del Cha-Cha-Chá* and noted that the event would be “livened up by the most popular orchestra of maestro Luis Varona,” a Cuban pianist who had previously been a member of Machito y sus Afro-Cubans. The management of the hotel reportedly “had special interest in inviting the members of the *colonia Hispanoamericana de Miami* to enjoy the [event],” as evidenced by the announcement that guests would not be charged a cover and that “popular prices” would be extended to all in attendance.³⁰ Of course, the slashing of cover charges also served to give a venue an edge over its competitors who may not have been able or willing to be less selective in their pricing scales and admittance policies.

Popular and more well-known Latin musicians and entertainers also performed in Miami during the 1940s and 1950s, including Xavier Cugat at the Beachcomber and Americana, Desi Arnaz at the Roney Plaza and Brook Club, Miguelito Valdés at the Mocambo and the Shel-i-Mar Room at the Hotel Saxony, Cuban dance team Raul y Eva Reyes at the Colonial Inn, and Los Chaveles de España at the Pagoda Room at the Hotel

²⁸ Advertisement, *Miami Latin News*, 7 July 1946, p. 5; *Miami Latin News*, 28 July 1946, p. 4; Advertisement, *Miami Latin News*, 11 August 1946, p. 6; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 20 October 1956, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 26 October 1956, p. 6; Photo with caption, *Diario las Américas*, 15 June 1957, p. 4.

²⁹ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 6 August 1954, p. 4.

³⁰ Photo with caption, *Diario las Américas*, 5 October 1956, p. 4.

Saxony.³¹ Cuban dancer Olga Chaviana came to Miami in 1954 to perform at the Teatro Olympia after having performed in musical revues and film productions in Venezuela, Mexico, and in Havana at the Sans Souci and Tropicana. Despite these hemispheric travels, Chaviana told a reporter for *Diario las Américas* that “the public in Miami is the most friendly I have seen, it knows how to understand my dances and admires with much enthusiasm the efforts we have made to present to them this type of revue.”³²

Not to be overshadowed by Havana or New York City, Miami had a Tropicana Club of its very own in the 1950s located at 420 S.W. Eighth Avenue in the space formerly occupied by the *Círculo Cubano*. One of its earliest events was a 1956 New Year’s Eve dance that featured continuous music by two large bands from eight in the evening to five in the morning, all at “popular prices.”³³ The Tropicana Club quickly developed a reputation as “the most excellent public center for dancing in Miami,” hosting a variety of events, including dance competitions, raffles, and other contests, and performers, such as the Conjunto Palladium from New York, Orquesta Casino de Miami, Conjunto Caney, Juanito Sanabria, Vitín Avilés, and Noro Morales.³⁴ Owned by Puerto Rican Joe Colón and managed by José Montoro, the “modern and welcoming” Tropicana

³¹ “Xavier Cugat en festival de Westchester County el domingo próximo,” *La Prensa*, 7 March 1941, p. 3; “En Broadway,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 29 November 1948, p. 5; *Billboard Magazine*, 6 March 1948, p. 40; *Billboard Magazine*, 12 January 1946, p. 36; *Billboard Magazine*, 16 June 1951, p. 32; *Billboard Magazine*, 15 December 1951, p. 13; *Billboard Magazine*, 26 January 1952, p. 45; Photo with caption, *Diario las Américas*, 4 February 1954, p. 3; Lary Solloway, “Stars Over Miami,” *New York Times*, 2 December 1956, p. XX4; “New Show System at Miami Beach,” *New York Times*, 2 November 1958, p. XX5.

³² Marcos Martínez, “Olga Chaviano La Reina del Mambo,” *Diario las Américas*, 2 May 1954, p. 4.

³³ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 29 December 1956, p. 4.

³⁴ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 19 January 1957, p. 4; Photo with caption, *Diario las Américas*, 15 February 1957, p. 5; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 1 March 1957, p. 4; “Club Tropicana Rompe Marca de Popularidad,” *Diario las Américas*, 5 March 1957, p. 4, 7.

Club “had definitely earned the support of young people of all ages.” According to a report in *Diario las Américas*, Colón “spared no expense in offering the colonia Hispanoamericana de Miami a welcoming, beautifully-decorated place with the best music like it is at the ‘Tropicana Club.’” The reporter predicted that because of these efforts the Tropicana “will be patronized more and more by the vast colonia Hispanoamericana de Miami.”³⁵

On Saturday and Sunday nights, the Tropicana drew onto its dance floor what one reporter described as “excellent young people...to the popular interamerican club of Miami.”³⁶ That advertisements framed the club as “interamerican” suggests not only the diversity of the *colonia latina* of Miami but also the diffusion of Panamerican ideology within the popular cultural landscape of the city. It seems that the Tropicana’s owner purposefully aimed to attract a large and diverse crowd to the nightclub. Colón waived the cover charge for hundreds of his guests several times in 1957, a gesture that likely went a long way towards attracting loyal patrons. In fact, the nightclub “saw a steady increase in its clientele” with one report in *Diario las Américas* noting that “both a North American and Hispanoamericano public is attending the Tropicana on the weekends.”³⁷ Later in 1957, Colón partnered with Club Damas Panamericanas to host dances at the Tropicana featuring the “popular” Conjunto Tropicana. The festivities reportedly

³⁵ “Club Tropicana Rompe Marca de Popularidad,” *Diario las Américas*, 5 March 1957, p. 4, 7.

³⁶ Photo with caption, *Diario las Américas*, 10 March 1957, p. 4.

³⁷ “Baile Mañana Sábado en el Tropicana Tiene Gran Sorpresa,” *Diario las Américas*, 29 March 1957, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 13 April 1957, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 19 April 1957, p. 5; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 25 May 1957, p. 4.

“resulted in a complete success, so much for the quantity as for the quality of the people that come to the club every weekend.”³⁸

The weekend dances hosted at the Tropicana Club regularly featured local bands like Conjunto Caney and Orquesta de Miami and more famous performers like Juanito Sanabria and Noro Morales. In 1957, the “colonia hispana of Miami had the opportunity to hear and personally see” Benny Moré, the singer who is “well-known by all the públicos latinoamericanos for his interpretations of afrocubanos,” perform at the Tropicana Club for a one-night-only engagement.³⁹ The following month, “all of Miami, especially among members of the amusing colonia Hispanoamérica, filled with liveliness” in anticipation of the debut of Celia Cruz “La Guarachera de Cuba” at the Tropicana Club.⁴⁰ Though the club succeeded in attracting a steady stream of quality local performers and internationally-recognized Cuban singers, the Tropicana ended the year under new management and promised that it would now offer “Latin American music and popular American music.”⁴¹

Just a few steps down from the Tropicana Club, another bar and nightclub seemed to target the *colonia cubana* of Miami more directly. An advertisement for Barra Guys and Dolls, located at 442 S.W. Eighth Street, announced, “Cuban friends, if you want to have a good time in distinctly *criollo* atmosphere, visit Barra ‘Guys and Dolls,’ where you can dance and have fun however much you desire.”⁴² If the bar’s owner, Octavio

³⁸ “Club Tropicana,” *Diario las Américas*, 27 April 1957, p. 4.

³⁹ Photo with caption, *Diario las Américas*, 25 May 1957, p. 4.

⁴⁰ “Tropicana Club,” *Diario las Américas*, 5 June 1957, p. 4.

⁴¹ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 27 December 1957, p. 6.

⁴² Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 16 March 1957, p. 6.

Tacón, drew any inspiration in naming his new business after the widely successful 1950 Broadway musical and 1955 Hollywood film starring Marlon Brando, Frank Sinatra, Jean Simmons, and Vivian Blaine, then one could suspect that an evening at Barra Guys and Dolls might have included a little more than dancing and drinking. The Broadway and Hollywood productions of *Guys and Dolls* portrayed Havana as home to casinos and exotic nightlife, as a place to let loose, dance, and drink delicious Bacardi rum. In the film, Marlon Brando plays the role of Sky Masterson, a bold gambler who takes on a seemingly impossible \$1000 bet: he must convince Sarah Brown (played by Jean Simmons), an uptight sergeant in the Save-a-Soul Mission, to go to dinner with him in Havana, a difficult proposition since Sarah and the Mission are vehemently opposed to gambling. She agrees to the date only because Sky pretends to be interested in reform and promises to bring a dozen sinners to the Mission.

Once at a nightclub in Havana (where they appear to be the only Anglo tourists), Sarah is transformed by her exposure to Afro-Cuban music, hip-pulsating dancers, a rum drink served in a coconut shell, and sexual jealousy – an alluring, dark-haired, red-lipped, brown-skinned Cuban woman tries to seduce Sky. Her response is almost immediate: she finds herself a Cuban partner, joins in the dancing, shaking her hips and shimmying her shoulders, and confronts her Cuban competition with a quick punch to the face. This scene encapsulates the image of Cuban tourism that was being captured by local entrepreneurs in Miami who, by offering a near-Cuba experience in their city, hoped to keep tourists from making the easy hop from Miami (or New York City) to Havana for exotic revelry. In hailing the image of *Guys and Dolls*, Tacón's message was clear: his bar in Miami could provide just as much excitement and tropical escape as any bar in

Havana. Rather than reject what some would rightly perceive as a negative or exaggerated stereotype, in this particular advertisement, this bar owner, instead, used familiar cultural (mis)representations of Havana's nightlife as a means of explicitly hailing Cuban patrons to what he deemed a "distinctly *criollo* atmosphere." Whether Cuban residents or tourists responded positively to the advertisement is not known, but that Tacon would want to attract Cubans to his club makes sense if he also hoped to convince U.S. and other foreign tourists that they could find in his club a genuine *Guys and Dolls*-type experience.

As the Cuban population in Miami increased throughout the 1950s, so did the number and variety of social events, cultural activities, and patriotic celebrations organized and hosted by two of the city's Cuban social clubs, *Círculo Cubano* and *Juventud Cubana*. The *Círculo Cubano* opened its clubhouse doors at 420 S.W. Eighth Avenue on May 20, 1952, an historic date that marked the fiftieth anniversary of Cuba's formal independence from the United States. The club maintained this space as its clubhouse and the location of the majority of its events and activities until 1956 when, for reasons I have not yet uncovered, the club moved its headquarters to 90 N.W. 27th Avenue between Flagler and First Avenue. While club members prepared this "new and modern" space in a "magnificent and special building" for its grand opening, the banquet hall at the headquarters of the Miami Police Benevolent Association, located at 2300 N.W. 14th Street, served as the temporary venue for club functions.⁴³ Then, on December

⁴³ "Celebrará Aniversario el *Círculo Cubano* de Miami," *Diario las Américas*, 9 May 1954, p. 7; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 12 October 1956, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 27 October 1956, p. 4.

8, 1956, the *Círculo Cubano* invited “all of the Latinos in the city of Miami” to celebrate the opening of its new social space with an inaugural dance featuring the music of Hilda Salazar y sus Guaracheras.⁴⁴

The *Círculo Cubano* hosted countless social events throughout the 1950s that offered Miami’s *colonia latina* and *colonia cubana* an opportunity to enjoy musical performances by a variety of Cuban singers and orchestras. For example, in 1954, the club celebrated its two year anniversary with “a typical Cuban event” featuring “a parade of highly sought-after jewels in nuestra colonia” and open to “all our compatriots as well as anyone else who wants to attend these festivities.”⁴⁵ Later that year, the club hosted a Halloween dance at its clubhouse that reportedly caused “great enthusiasm within the colonia latinoamericana of Miami.”⁴⁶ Described as an “enthusiastic and friendly society,” the *Círculo Cubano* hosted afternoon and evening dances throughout the year, featuring nearly five hours of continuous music from performers like Arturo Santirzo, Hilda Salazar y sus Guaracheras, Arturo Benson y su orquesta Cubanacan, Luis Varona, Cheche de la Cruz y sus Ases del Ritmo, Heriberto Curbelo, and Conjunto Casino de Miami.⁴⁷ In October 1956, the club organized a matinee dance featuring Rogelio Darias, a “notable Cuban musician” and former member of Xavier Cugat’s band, with one report

⁴⁴ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 8 December 1956, p. 4.

⁴⁵ “Celebrará Aniversario el *Círculo Cubano* de Miami,” *Diario las Américas*, 9 May 1954, p. 7.

⁴⁶ “Anuncia un grandioso baile el *Círculo Cubano* de Miami,” *Diario las Américas*, 29 October 1954, p. 5.

⁴⁷ “Gran entusiasmo para el baile del *Círculo Cubano*,” *Diario las Américas*, 21 September 1956, p. 4; “Baile del *Círculo Cubano*,” *Diario las Américas*, 6 October 1956, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 12 October 1956. P. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 15 December 1956, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 12 January 1957, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 23 March 1957, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 5 April 1957, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 19 April 1957, p. 5; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 24 October 1957, p. 6; Advertisement, *Diario de las Américas*, 14 November 1957, p. 6; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 14 December 1957, p. 6.

noting that the event generated excited anticipation “among Cubans as well as the rest of the city’s very important colonia Hispanoamericana.”⁴⁸ Other events hosted by the club included a musical battle pitting the cha-cha-chá rhythms of Hilda Salazar y Sus Guaracheras against The Five-Spades, an American rock ‘n’ roll band.⁴⁹ Audiences must have enjoyed this musical pairing, given that the Círculo Cubano invited both bands to perform at its *Noche de Mamboleo Cubano* held a few months later in June of that year.⁵⁰ Other events with distinctive Cuban themes took place throughout 1957, such as the club’s *Carnaval Habanero*, an event that featured a costume contest and music by Heriberto Curbelo.⁵¹

In addition to musical festivities and other social events, the Círculo Cubano also hosted celebrations in honor of Cuban patriotic holidays. In September 1956, for example, the club organized a “monumental dance” to commemorate *Día de la Caridad del Cobre* in honor of the “patroness of Cuba.” The event featured “the most popular Cheche de la Cruz courtesy of the Hotel Saxony and the no less popular Art Santirse [sic]” as well as a rumba dance competition that promised to award the winning couple a \$25 prize offered by Café Pilon.⁵² In January 1957, the Círculo Cubano marked what would have been José Martí’s 104th birthday with a celebration at its clubhouse featuring popular music and performances by Hilda Salazar, described as the “exquisite Cuban songstress,” Miguel Cruz, Ruben González, Los Capiellos, and Los Royales, among

⁴⁸ “Gran matinee bailable en el Círculo Cubano,” *Diario las Américas*, 7 October 1956, p. 7.

⁴⁹ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 7 February 1957, p. 4.

⁵⁰ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 1 June 1957, p. 4.

⁵¹ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 23 March 1957, p. 4.

⁵² Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 7 September 1956, p. 4.

others. More than 500 people attended the event, including Eduardo Hernández, Consul General of Cuba, municipal and county public officials, and “other personalities of Miami public life.” German Negroni, a reporter for *Diario las Américas*, boasted that “few times has there been celebrated in the city of Miami an act that displayed such sparkle and signaled such importance than the one hosted by the *Círculo Cubano de Miami*.”⁵³

As typical of events held in honor of Martí’s birth, club leaders announced the winner of the *Canastilla Martiana*, usually a monetary gift but sometimes a basket of blankets, bottles, and other baby necessities, given to the parents of the first infant born on January 28 in Miami. At this event, the *Canastilla Martiana* went to Puerto Rican Ramón Rivera González and his Colombian wife María Garzón, who gave birth to a boy whom they aptly named José Martí Rivera.⁵⁴ Negroni described this naming act as one of the “most sublime demonstrations of Panamericanism that he, also a jíbaro borinqueño, had had the opportunity to witness in a long time.” This remark demonstrates that Panamericanism could also be an expression of pan-Latino/a unity, particularly drawing on the history of joint Cuban and Puerto Rican nationalist movements, rather than an exclusive Anglo-Latin American relationship.⁵⁵

⁵³ German Negroni, “Extraordinario homenaje a José Martí en Miami,” *Diario las Américas*, 30 January 1957, p. 7.

⁵⁴ German Negroni, “Extraordinario homenaje a José Martí en Miami,” *Diario las Américas*, 30 January 1957, p. 7. Though Negroni does not indicate whether one or both of the parents of the newborn child had to be club members to be eligible for the *Canastilla Martiana*, it is clear that neither parent had to be Cuban.

⁵⁵ German Negroni, “Extraordinario homenaje a José Martí en Miami,” *Diario las Américas*, 30 January 1957, p. 7.

A few days after this event, club president Antonio Larrondo emphasized that the *Círculo Cubano* welcomed not only Cubans but all members of the city's *colonia latina* to its civic and social events. Larrondo explained that he and club members aimed "to unite the club, that honors and represents Cuba, in the interamerican cause, of which José Martí, the great American, was an eternal champion." More so than ever, Larrondo promised, the club would "warmly welcome...the residents of Miami that belong to other Latin American extractions." Negróni concluded that this event demonstrated the *Círculo Cubano*'s position of leadership within the *colonia latina*, especially in terms of organizing many local activities of civic, social, and political nature, and signaled the club's efforts towards the materialization of Martí's interamerican ideals. That the club "battl[ed] against the apathy of many," drawing on the leadership of both men and women and the cooperation of "various artists and notable personalities in Miami," led Negróni to conclude that the club had "definitely established its role as an entity that honors the community in which we live as an indisputable factor of progress and cultural dissemination."⁵⁶

Not surprising given the club's interamerican interests, the *Círculo Cubano* also celebrated dates of significance not explicitly marked as Cuban national holidays. In 1957, the club placed an advertisement in *Diario las Américas* extending "a cordial and respectful greeting to the authorities and governments of the Americas on the 67th anniversary of Panamerican Day."⁵⁷ Later that year, the club organized a dance,

⁵⁶ German Negróni, "Cronica Gráfica de la Velada Martiana del *Círculo Cubano*," *Diario las Américas*, 3 February 1957.

⁵⁷ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 14 April 1957, p. 3. Panamerican Day commemorates the First International Conference of American States. Ending on April 14, 1890, the conference resulted in the creation of the International Union of American Republics, which was a precursor to the Organization of American States.

featuring the music of the “distinguished” orchestra of Cheche de la Cruz, in honor of *Día de la Raza*.⁵⁸ As these examples demonstrate, many of the events hosted by the *Círculo Cubano* throughout the 1950s solicited the participation of the entire *colonia latina* in Miami, and some reports suggest that the club maintained a reputation, if not a formal policy, of inclusion and openness beyond the *colonia cubana*. For example, in 1954, the *Círculo Cubano* celebrated a *Carnaval Latino Americano* featuring the Cuban dance team Raul y Eva, who reportedly had established residence in Miami some time earlier, as well as musical performances by the Orquesta de Luis Herrero. The event also featured a competition to decide the best *comparsa* from among “an entertaining group of ‘mexicanos,’ ‘gitanos,’ ‘apaches,’ and others, all ready to come out winners.” The event earned the club praise not only for the success of the dance but also for “its tenacious work towards the cultural rapprochement of the resident hispanicamerican entities in the city of Miami.”⁵⁹

Despite these numerous examples of the club’s commitment to Panamericanism and pan-*latinidad*, evidence also exists to suggest that events and activities sponsored by the *Círculo Cubano* sometimes excluded or aimed to exclude some members of the city’s *colonia latina*. At the very least, some members of the *colonia latina* in Miami felt less than welcomed at club activities, as evidenced by a letter to the editor sent by a former member of the club to German Negrón at *Diario las Américas* late in 1957. The letter charged that the *Círculo Cubano* discriminated specifically against Puerto Ricans and more broadly against other members and other organizations within the *colonia latina*. In

⁵⁸ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 12 October 1957, p. 5.

⁵⁹ “La Voz de Tampa,” *Diario las Américas*, 23 March 1954, p. 7; “Carnaval Latino Americano,” *Diario las Américas*, 26 March 1954, p. 4; Chichi Aloy, “Notas Sociales,” *Diario las Américas*, 31 March 1954, p. 4.

response, club president Mario Pérez and club secretary Heriberto Borroto insisted that the *Círculo Cubano* had “never rejected nor censored anyone because of nationality, especially given that all decent people are welcomed in our organization.” The letter explained that “[our] doors have always been and will always be open to all and especially to those who, without being Cuban, join us to strengthen the ties that should unite all latinos in general.” Pérez and Borroto cited the participation of many individuals of “distinct nationalities” in club activities as well as in positions of leadership in the club as testimony to the *Círculo Cubano*’s openness and argued that for these reasons they could not accept such “unjust declarations.” Whether these specific accusations came from a club member interested in generating bad press for the club or a club member who had directly witnessed or been subject to racial or ethnic discrimination in formal and informal gatherings organized by the club is not entirely clear. What matters more, for our purposes, is that the public discourse generated as a result of these accusations reveals an example of the coded language that the *Círculo Cubano*, and presumably other social clubs in Miami, used to exclude unwanted persons from club activities. It also suggests the presence of tensions within the *colonia latina*, particularly between Cubans and Puerto Ricans, the two largest migrant groups from Latin America in Miami during this period. That club leaders responded that all “decent people” are welcomed at club activities and as club members leaves open the possibility of exclusion based on unstated variables, though one might suspect that race, ethnicity, class, and political affiliation shaped how some club associates used this discretionary language as social practice.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ *Diario las Américas*, 14 December 1957, p. 6.

Other more subtle attempts at exclusion can be found in the club's many advertisements printed in *Diario las Américas*. Many of these ads noted that the club "reserves the right to refuse admission," a clause that suggests that club members minding the door could deny entry to individuals or groups at their discretion. As we saw practiced by the leaders and members of the Ateneo Cubano and other Cuban social clubs in New York City, this policy often served to exclude persons of color from gaining entry into events and activities. Not alone in this practice in Miami, the Juventud Cubana also adopted a similar admissions policy stating in advertisements a strict dress code requiring "jacket and tie" and noting that "the commission reserved the right of entrance."⁶¹

This is not to say that the Cubans and Puerto Ricans living in Miami in the 1950s did not sometimes collaborate on a political level, perhaps in symbolic demonstration of what many believed to be the case, that Cuba and Puerto Rico are "of one bird the two wings."⁶² For example, in 1956, a group of Cubans and Puerto Ricans, including two lawyers, one pharmacist, one professor of public instruction, and one former chief of police, came together to protest statements made in the *Miami Daily News* by Judge Charles Snowden of the Municipal Court of Miami and Thomas O'Connell, Assistant District Attorney in Miami. In particular, Judge Snowden charged that Puerto Ricans and Cubans committed the majority of the store robberies in the city. The group took their rebuttals to the editorial staff at *Diario las Américas*, evidence as well of the newspaper's organizational and advocacy role within the *colonia latina*, explaining that remarks such

⁶¹ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 7 December 1956, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 8 December 1956, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 29 December 1956, p. 5; "Baile de Carnaval Hoy en el Círculo Cubano de Miami," *Diario las Américas*, 2 March 1957, p. 4.

⁶² The phrase "of one bird the two wings" can be traced to the popular poem written by Puerto Rican poet and revolutionary Lola Rodríguez de Tío in 1893. Journalist German Negroni of *Diario las Américas* used the saying to dismiss the notion of strained relations between Cubans and Puerto Ricans in Miami.

as these “stomp...the efforts invested by fair and impartial public officials, eager to improve relations with Hispanoamérica.” Importantly, here we see resident Latins using Panamericanism to defend themselves against unfair accusations based on their race and ethnicity. One member of this group, Ricardo Morales, a lawyer, insisted that “as a Cuban, resident in the country for more than fifty years, I protest that now that we are known as more than tourists in the city, we, hispanos, are insulted in this way.”⁶³ This act by Cuban and Puerto Rican residents of Miami demonstrates an early, albeit seemingly ad hoc, instance of pan-Latino/a unity in the struggle for social justice in south Florida.

It also suggests that as Cubans and Puerto Ricans came to be seen more and more as residents rather than tourists, it became harder for them to achieve and maintain the privileges of white racial membership. Increasingly during the 1950s, Shell-Weiss explains, many of the city’s Cubans and Puerto Ricans came to Miami from the Northeast, especially from Spanish Harlem, rather than from the islands to work in the city’s hotels and other industries. Comparisons with Harlem led to images of “dark and volatile people” and false reports by city officials, including Miami’s Police Chief Walter Headley, that crime was on the rise and that “working-class Latinos...were the root of the problem.” For some members of the *colonia latina*, however, white racial membership may not have been the only or exclusively preferred category of identification, as it seems that at least some migrants found ways to come together as *hispanos* representing pan-ethnic community interests and perceptions.⁶⁴ Negative remarks by police officials

⁶³ German Negroni, “Expresan su Protesta a las Palabras de un Juez,” *Diario las Américas*, 14 November 1956, p. 1.

⁶⁴ Connolly, “By Eminent Domain,” 210-212; Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami*, 149, 153-153.

are also striking given that Cuban social clubs like the *Círculo Cubano* and *Juventud Cubana* rented space from the P.B.A. to host social functions. Though it may have been strictly out of economic interest or because of (perceived) whiteness and higher economic standing, in some instances Cuban migrants managed to stay in the good graces of Miami's police department.

In addition to cross-ethnic political mobilization, the private institution of inter-ethnic marriage served as yet another means of bringing together Cubans and Puerto Ricans on a broader, more public stage. The marriage of Cuban José and Puerto Rican Alice Ricardo serves as a case in point given that the couple owned the "well-known" *Centro de Televisión*, located at 3933 N.W. Seventh Avenue, and had, in 1957, purchased the rights to the *Hora Latina*, a radio program hosted by Ramón Gutierrez. The Ricardos settled in Miami in 1955, and during the past two years had "earned a seat of honor of special popularity within nuestra colonia hispanoamericana in general." The Miami Ricardos, not entirely different from the Ricardos of *I Love Lucy* fame in terms of inter-ethnic and charismatic appeal, represented not only "the two most populous colonias hispanas" but did so "as the soul and dynamism" of one of the main venues of pan-Latino/a popular cultural expression in the city.⁶⁵

Founded four years after the *Círculo Cubano*, the *Juventud Cubana de Miami* entered the scene in 1956, hosting social and musical events at rented spaces and venues scattered across the city, including at the P.B.A. on 2300 N.W. Fourteenth Street and the Hungarian Club on 3901 N.W. Second Avenue. Within the year, on the eve of 1957, the "friendly and dynamic society" inaugurated its new clubhouse, located at 768-770 S.W.

⁶⁵ "Como los esposos Ricardos se han ganado las simpatías de todo Miami," *Diario las Américas*, 14 July 1957, p. 8.

Eighth Street, with a “monumental dance” featuring performances by “the well-known orchestra” of Arturo Santirzo. The opening of the Juventud Cubana’s own social hall also neatly coincided with the club’s celebration of its first anniversary in early January 1957.⁶⁶ One advertisement indicated that the festivities would be transmitted live by Hugo Jimenez on Miami’s WMIE, an act that would broadcast the club’s rising prominence within the *colonia latina* and *colonia cubana* as well as reach audiences not able to afford the event’s strikingly pricey entrance fees of five and three dollars for men and women club members and six and four dollars for men and women non-members.⁶⁷

Many of the social and cultural events organized by the Juventud Cubana featured musical performances by some of the very singers and orchestras also hired to perform at events sponsored by the Círculo Cubano, namely Luis Herrero, Hilda Salazar, Conjunto Caney, Arturo Santirzo, Orquesta Casino de Miami, and Cheche de la Cruz.⁶⁸ In addition to weekly matinee and evening dances, the Juventud Cubana also hosted events to celebrate American holidays like Halloween and Thanksgiving, and some of these events drew audiences from within and beyond the *colonia latina* and *colonia cubana* of Miami, including Patrick Cannon, a U.S. Congressman between 1939 and 1947 and elected circuit court judge of Dade County since 1952, as well as other “distinguished

⁶⁶ Photo with caption, *Diario las Américas*, 31 January 1957, p. 4.

⁶⁷ “Baile de fin de año en Juventud Cubana de Miami,” *Diario las Américas*, 28 December 1956, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 28 December 1956, p. 4.

Many of the events sponsored by the club were free for members, though some events sponsored by the club required an entrance fee of \$1 for all club members and \$1.50 for men and \$1 for women who were non-members.

⁶⁸ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 5 October 1956, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 15 December 1956, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 7 December 1956, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 18 January 1957, p. 4; “Juventud Cubana de Miami,” *Diario las Américas*, 4 October 1957, p. 4.

personalities from local society.”⁶⁹ In 1957, the Juventud Cubana celebrated *Día Panamericano* with a matinee dance, publishing an advertisement in *Diario las Américas* that sent “a respectful greeting to the authorities and governments of the twenty-one nations of Americas, fervently in favor of the democratic unity among their noble peoples.”⁷⁰ The message of “democratic unity” is somewhat curious given that military dictators – from Fulgencio Batista in Cuba and Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic to Gustavo Rojas Pinilla and Gabriel Paris Gordillo in Colombia and Marcos Pérez Jiménez in Venezuela, as just a few examples – had usurped control away from “noble peoples” of the Americas. The club hosted many of its events at other popular venues in the city, as it did in the summer of 1957 with a dance at the Tropicana Club featuring the music of Conjunto de Rolando Scott.⁷¹ Later that year, the club invited “all of the colonia Hispanoamericana and people in general” to an event celebrating El Grito de Yara as well as two upcoming dances – “the magnificent Bailes de la Guayabera y de las Américas” – in honor of *Día de la Raza*. The latter events featured music by Juanito Sanabria, Luis Herrero, and Don Galán as well as performances by Velia Martínez, described as “the most complete singer and actress of Cuban television and radio,” and Ramiro Gomez Kemp, billed as “the romantic voice of the moment,” courtesy of Radio Reloj (CMQ) in Havana.⁷²

⁶⁹ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 27 October 1956, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 17 November 1956, p. 4; Photo with caption, *Diario las Américas*, 18 November 1956, p. 4.

⁷⁰ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 13 April 1957, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 14 April 1957, p. 3.

⁷¹ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 15 June 1957, p. 4.

⁷² Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 6 October 1957, p. 8; Photo with caption, *Diario las Américas*, 9 October 1957, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 10 October 1957, p. 6; Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 12 October 1957, p. 4.

Some social events drew the collaboration of both the *Círculo Cubano* and the *Juventud Cubana* and extended publicity beyond Miami, such as the Miss Caribe 1957 contest, a beauty pageant sponsored and organized by Mario A. Pérez, the main distributor of *Café Caribe* in Florida, Ramón Gutierrez, director of *Hora Caribe*, and German Negroni, writer for *Diario las Américas*. Contest organizers counted the final mailed-in votes at the *Baile de Proclamación* hosted by the *Círculo Cubano*, while organizers tasked the *Juventud Cubana* with hosting the official coronation of Miss Caribe 1957, a young woman chosen “for her friendliness and popularity within the *colonia hispanoamericana de Miami*.” Rosita González, a young Puerto Rican woman, won that year’s contest and Hilda Serrano, of Cuba, claimed the runner-up spot. With many in the *colonia latina* reportedly engaged in the build-up to the contest results, it is not entirely surprising that the contest also drew the interest of the managers of the Tropicana Club. Shortly after the end of the contest, the managers announced that they would host a dance “dedicated to the *colonia puertorriqueña de Miami*” and promised that Miss Caribe 1957 would be in attendance as the evening’s guest of honor. Spanish-language newspapers in New York City, including both *Diario de Nueva York* and *La Prensa*, also featured stories on the *Concurso Caribe* and, later, reported on González and Serrano’s celebratory visit to New York City. “The most beautiful young woman in the hispanic community established in Miami, Florida,” one report explained, attended several receptions and dances organized by the city’s many *sociedades Hispanoamericanas*, including the Centro Mexicano, the Ateneo Cubano, the Spanish Baseball League, and the *Círculo de Escritores y Poetas Iberoamericanos*, and sat for

interviews with various Hispanic radio programs as well as the increasingly popular *Perucho Show*.⁷³

Perhaps inspired by the success, both in terms of widespread popularity and marketing potential, of the *Concurso Caribe*, the *Círculo Cubano* announced later in 1957 that one of the first moves of the club's new Board of Directors would be to sponsor its very own pageant to select the club's first Miss *Círculo Cubano*. The club's newly-elected president was Mario Pérez, organizer of the *Concurso Caribe*, and this experience likely motivated club leaders and members to join in the efforts. The contest offered the winner a free trip to Spain and promised to find the "most attractive" young woman in greater Miami.⁷⁴

Other social events organized during this period also demonstrate not only collaboration between the *Círculo Cubano* and *Juventud Cubana* but also with the greater *colonias hispanas* in both Miami and New York City. For example, the *Juventud Cubana*, together with *Casa Caribe* and Mario and Elio Pérez offered a reception and matinee dance in honor of the *Reina del Desfile Hispano de Nueva York* in June 1957.⁷⁵ Though not explicitly stated, this event must have also drawn the participation of members of the *Círculo Cubano* given that Mario Pérez served as the president of that

⁷³ "Gran Baile de Carnaval Ofrece el Sábado el Concurso Caribe," *Diario las Américas*, 26 February 1957, p. 4; "'Diario de Nueva York' destaca del progreso del 'Concurso Caribe,'" *Diario las Américas*, 1 March 1957, p. 4; "Baile de Carnaval Hoy en el *Círculo Cubano* de Miami," *Diario las Américas*, 2 March 1957, p. 4; "Proclamacion de 'Miss Caribe' sera manana Sábado, Marzo 16," *Diario las Américas*, 15 March 1957, p. 4; "Hoy Sábado se proclamará con gran Pompa a 'Miss Caribe 1957,'" *Diario las Américas*, 16 March 1957, p. 4; "Baile del Tropicana de Mañana Sábado dedicado a 'Miss Caribe,'" *Diario las Américas*, 22 March 1957, p. 4; "Sociedades hispanas agasajan a la Reina," *La Prensa*, 5 April 1957, p. 3.

⁷⁴ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 12 July 1957, p. 4.

⁷⁵ "Reina Hispana de Nueva York llega mañana a esta ciudad," *Diario las Américas*, 8 June 1957, p. 4; "Matinee Bailable," *Diario las Américas*, 9 June 1957, p. 4.

club during this period. Later that year, Hugo Jiménez of WAHR, Miami's first full-time Spanish-language radio station, organized what was billed as a "sensational dance festival" featuring two orchestras, free beer, and thousands of dollars in prizes at Bayfront Park Auditorium on Biscayne Boulevard and N.E. Third Street. Neither the *Círculo Cubano* nor the *Juventud Cubana* served as sponsors of the event, but advertisements stated that members of these clubs would receive reduced admission prices. This marketing strategy likely encouraged members of both clubs to attend in greater numbers, suggesting that, perhaps, event organizers believed that this increased presence would motivate others within the *colonia latina* to attend as well.⁷⁶

Without the benefit of organizational records for the *Círculo Cubano* and *Juventud Cubana*, information on the memberships and missions of both clubs remains limited to newspaper clippings found in *Diario las Américas*. These reports indicate that these social clubs operated independently of one another. Though it remains possible that individuals belonged simultaneously to both clubs, it seems more likely that members of the *colonia latina* and *colonia cubana* formally joined one or the other exclusively. The actions and perspectives of Cuban businessman Augusto Piloto stand as a case in point. Described primarily as a "social organization," the *Círculo Cubano's* officer elections for the year 1956 demonstrate that at least some members hoped the club would serve a broader purpose. Piloto, the losing candidate for president, wrote an open letter to Jesús Solís, the newly-elected president of the club, reminding him that the close vote indicated that members wanted "a general meeting every month, at least one free dance a month exclusively for members and their families, and an improvement to all the services that the club offers its associates and that are very deficient." Not to be interpreted solely as

⁷⁶ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 22 September 1957, p. 8.

petty complaints from a disgruntled opponent, the latter portion of Piloto's message pointed to the club's larger role within the *colonia cubana* during a time of influx and expansion. He asked the club's new leadership to "keep fighting for and defending the Círculo Cubano de Miami, a piece of our beloved Cuba that today more than ever needs the affection of its children."⁷⁷

Piloto's belief that both the Círculo Cubano and "our beloved Cuba" needed the support of the Cuban people demonstrates an awareness of political developments taking place on the island. In 1952, Fulgencio Batista seized power through a military coup, ousting Carlos Prío Socarrás, a member of the Auténtico party, from the presidency. The coup disrupted elections, elections in which Fidel Castro had campaigned for a seat in the House of Representatives as a member of the Ortodoxo party. The following year, on July 26, 1953, Castro and other young, armed revolutionaries opposed to Batista led an attack on the Moncada barracks in Santiago. The attack failed, and Castro and other survivors received fifteen-year prison terms for their participation. With the Auténtico and Ortodoxo parties leaderless and disorganized, Batista ran unopposed and was elected to a four-year term as president in 1954. Batista had the support of the U.S. government and U.S.-owned businesses, which is not surprising given that U.S.-owned companies controlled a majority of the land and utilities in Cuba. The Cuban people, however, had become increasingly more frustrated with his encouragement of gambling, his acquiescence to U.S. interests over Cuban needs, and the widespread poverty and unemployment that wracked the island in the 1950s. In May 1954, Batista released Castro and other revolutionaries from the Moncada attack from prison in a general

⁷⁷ "Nueva Directiva Fue Electa por Círculo Cubano de Miami," *Diario las Américas*, 6 December 1955, p. 4.

amnesty, and they soon departed for Mexico. Already in 1955, Castro had started to reorganize his 26th of July Movement and plan for a second attempt at armed resistance against Batista.⁷⁸ Revolution on the island was brewing, and Cubans on and off the island took notice.

After having not been elected as president of the *Círculo Cubano* for the year 1956, Piloto appears to have left the club soon after his loss and joined the *Juventud Cubana*. Known as a “businessman and dynamic entrepreneur of nuestra colonia hispanoamericana,” he donated a Cuban flag to be used as a prize for a raffle organized by the club in late 1956.⁷⁹ Just as he had been critical of the leadership of the *Círculo Cubano*, Piloto continued to issue protests as a member of the *Juventud Cubana*. In 1957, for example, he complained that the club’s leaders had decided to commemorate *El Grito de Yara* with a dance and show without first seeking the approval of club members. He urged members not to attend the festivities, arguing that “this is a sad day for our beloved Cuba until she is once again free.”⁸⁰ Piloto had consistently urged Cubans, on and off the island, to come together to liberate their homeland. Again, his remarks signaled a close following of events taking place in Cuba, most recently the landing of an expedition of revolutionaries, led by Fidel Castro, in eastern Cuba that marked the beginning of a sustained armed rebellion against Batista in December 1956 as well as an unsuccessful

⁷⁸ Thomas Paterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Julia E. Sweig, *Inside the Cuban Revolution: Fidel Castro and the Urban Underground* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁷⁹ “Nueva directiva fue electa por *Círculo Cubano de Miami*,” *Diario las Américas*, 6 December 1955, p. 4; Photo with caption, *Diario las Américas*, 26 November 1956, p. 4; Photo with caption, *Diario las Américas*, 14 June 1957, p. 4.

⁸⁰ “Piloto Protesta de Acto de la *Juventud Cubana*,” *Diario las Américas*, 10 October 1957, p. 4.

attack on the Presidential Palace in Havana by university students in March 1957. Piloto also had very specific ideas for what the “thousands of naturalized norteamericanos, descendants of Cubans” could do to “make visible our sympathies with the Cuban people.” These included writing letters to U.S. Senator George A. Smathers and pinning a piece of black cloth to shirt sleeves to demonstrate mourning for Cuba until freedom was realized.⁸¹

Despite these political stirrings, Cuban patriotic celebrations continued to take place in Miami separate from the events and activities organized by the *Círculo Cubano* and *Juventud Cubana* throughout the 1940s and 1950s. In 1956, individual families opened up their homes to private commemorations of the *Virgen de la Caridad* in Miami, a city “unable to escape the miraculous influence” of its thousands of Cuban residents. So widespread was the devotion that one reporter estimated that “the patron Saint was celebrated and venerated by thousands of Cuban residents in Miami as well as those that found themselves as tourists in the welcoming city.” Some of these Cuban residents, like Esther Llanos at 861 S.W. Twelfth Court and José Manuel and Odalina de Armas at 1720 N.W. Fourth Street, erected small altars in their homes in honor of the *Virgen de la Caridad*. Hilda Negretti, the Cuban wife of Miami lawyer Gino P. Negretti, donated an image of the patron saint to a church on Flagler and N.W. Twenty-ninth Street, presumably for the devotion of parishioners at Saint Michael the Archangel Catholic Church.⁸² The following year an advertisement appearing in *Diario las Américas* specifically hailed the city’s Cuban residents, asking them to send their donations to fund efforts to bring an image of the *Virgen de la Caridad* to the *Iglesia de Corpus Christi* at

⁸¹ Letter to the editor, *Diario las Américas*, 20 June 1957, p. 6.

⁸² René Viera, “La Caridad del Cobre en Miami,” *Diario las Américas*, 9 September 1956, p. 4.

3222 N.W. Seventh Avenue.⁸³ Given the increasing number of Cubans settled and arriving daily in Miami, that a *botánica* named La Caridad del Cobre opened on 726 North Miami Avenue in 1957 is not entirely surprising. The retail shop sold herbs, oils, religious beads and cords, candles, holy water, and images of Catholic saints, among many other things, used in Santería and other African-derived spiritual practices. What is, perhaps, more significant is that the shop's owner had recently moved to the Miami not from Havana or anywhere else on the island but from the Bronx, New York where he had previously owned a *botánica* known as El Rastro Cubano for more than ten years.⁸⁴

Public celebrations in honor of Cuban national holidays took place in Miami throughout the 1950s. In 1954, for example, Dr. Julio Salabarría, president of the Club de las Américas de Miami, commemorated José Martí's birthday by delivering remarks "on behalf of the city's hispanic civic association" a few steps from a statue of the Cuban revolutionary.⁸⁵ In 1957, Natalio Galán, "the well-known Cuban bandleader, who has toured all of the Americas, taking Cuban rhythms even to the most far-away corners of the continent," played an important role in organizing that year's festivals held in honor of El Grito de Yara. The Cuban pianist and composer had left Cuba to study music in New York City in 1947, composing throughout his career mostly chamber music and operas but also a few pieces for smaller orchestras. One reporter concluded that because of Galán's participation the events "are sure to be grand."⁸⁶ That this event featured the

⁸³ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 11 April 1957, p. 4.

⁸⁴ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 10 March 1957, p. 4; Advertisement, *Diario de las Américas*, 5 May 1957, p. 4.

⁸⁵ "Ante el busto de José Martí," *Diario las Américas*, 3 February 1954, p. 3.

⁸⁶ Photo with caption, *Diario las Américas*, 9 October 1957, p. 4; Helio Orovio, *Cuban Music from A to Z* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004): 88.

musical talents of a more “serious” musician like Galán suggests, perhaps, the unavailability of more well-known popular musicians for performances at cultural events as well as the possibility that the tastes of audiences within the *colonia cubana* and *colonia latina* in Miami varied from those in New York City.

Panamericanism, as we have seen, operated in Miami as both localized foreign policy and instrument of racialization.⁸⁷ The potential and limits of Panamericanism to facilitate racial inclusion and equality for dark-skinned Latin Americans was tested in 1946 when Machito y sus Afro-Cubans traveled to Miami to perform at the whites-only Mocambo nightclub. In fact, one of the most important places to examine these boundaries is in the realm of music. Though orchestral music and ballet were part of the official Panamerican programming, the nightlife that was so crucial to attracting tourists to Miami depended as well on a form of Latin music that was not only explicitly constructed by participants as Afro-Cuban but, in many instances, where black Cubans were the most popular performers.

African-American newspapers noted the significance of the band’s booking for the winter season at the “exclusive” Mocambo nightclub, explaining that “Miami Beach, that part of Southern Florida, which is the rendezvous of the rich and ultra-fashionable members of the upper strata of society, has for the first time in its history accepted an orchestra composed partly of colored musicians.” “But,” as one reporter quickly pointed out, “these colored men are not Negroes; they are ‘Afro-Cubans.’” The leader of the

⁸⁷ Connolly, “By Eminent Domain,” 9, 163-164.

orchestra is Machito, a Cuban [and] [t]heir contract calls for Cuban music only.”⁸⁸

Throughout their stay in Miami, Machito and his band mates, as likely was the case for other dark-skinned Cubans and Latinos/as, found themselves in a Jim Crow city that remained protective of its black-white model of racial classification, even as it became unsure of and inconsistent with its treatment and categorization of Cubans and Latinos/as of color.

Afro-Cubans and other dark-skinned Latinos/as sometimes managed to negotiate a place for themselves in segregated Miami between the poles of white inclusion and black exclusion. In Miami for the duration of the 1946 winter season, Machito booked a room at the whites-only Miami Hotel while other members of the band, including Mario Bauzá and Graciela, reportedly chose to board at the blacks-only Dorsey Hotel. Enoc Waters, a reporter for the *Chicago Defender*, noticed that Machito had managed to book a room at the Miami Hotel, “a white establishment from which Negroes (the American variety at least) are barred from bedding down by unyielding Jim Crow laws.” And, though Graciela described the Dorsey as a “luxurious” hotel in a black neighborhood, Waters offered a different perspective, describing the hotel as a “colored hostelry where a white man would not voluntarily elect to reside.”⁸⁹ Bauzá, for his part, recalled that he had reluctantly agreed to perform at the Mocambo nightclub because of negative experiences in Miami. He explained to oral history interviewers that he had told the promoter who booked the engagement for the band that “nobody colored play Miami Beach...No, don’t put me through that, I don’t wanna go through that. I been to Miami

⁸⁸ “Miami Beach Boasts ‘Afro-Cuban’ Band,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 19 January 1946, p. 22.

⁸⁹ Enoc P. Waters, “Dixie Hotel Rule Admits Cuban Ork Leader but Bars his Wife, Men,” *Chicago Defender*, 9 February 1946, p. 16.

too many times with the colored bands.” But, he agreed to go with the band anyway, noting that because of the band’s performances at the Mocambo, they “opened the door for colored performers.”⁹⁰

Historians have found that holding the bi-racial color line that divided the Jim Crow South in the late 1940s and 1950s became increasingly difficult, though not impossible, because of a practice known as racial “Trojan horsing” by which an individual pretended to speak or spoke a foreign language so as not to be perceived as a U.S. black.⁹¹ The strategy was familiar to Machito and his band, which included some African Americans with no Cuban background. But language alone did not deter exclusion. Rather, language along with claims to Cubanness, some members of the band found, would allow them to escape the hardened racial codes that confined the movement of U.S. blacks in the South. According to Graciela, while the band gathered in the lobby of the Miami Hotel, a white patron complained to the manager about the presence of U.S. blacks. She charged that none of them were speaking Spanish. Machito immediately insisted that there were no U.S. blacks among the group, only Cubans. Graciela recalled that Machito pointed to his various band mates identifying everyone as a Cuban “even though right there were the Americans...like four or five of them.” This explanation was enough to assuage the manager who moments later responded to the white patron, “How can you tell me that there are blacks here? They are Cuban.” Graciela questioned the

⁹⁰ Mario Bauzá, 19 April, 1989, Ruth Glasser/ Puerto Rican Musicians Collection; Mario Bauzá, 8 April 1991, David Carp Collection.

Bauzá had likely traveled through Miami in the separate “colored” circuit when he performed with Chick Webb and Cab Calloway before starting his band with Machito. Jazz musicians performed in colored hotels and clubs in Overtown, Miami’s black district, and many of these venues, especially later in the 1940s and 1950s, attracted white audiences and black celebrities, including Joe Louis and Lena Horne. See, Connolly, “By Eminent Domain,” 252-257.

⁹¹ Connolly, “By Eminent Domain,” 205-206; Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami*, 155.

distinction in narrating the story to oral history interviewers: “We were lucky because we were Hispanic. You know how they didn’t think that Hispanics were black, only black Americans. They were so stupid!”⁹² It might also have been a matter of geographic context, as Waters explained that these “unauthentic Afro-Cubans” had gone undetected in New York City. “Of course,” he reasoned, “no one cared very much in New York City, but Miami is quite different.”⁹³

Still, the practice didn’t always work, but when it did it may not have been the ability to speak Spanish or claim Cubanness but, rather, celebrity status that allowed for racial inclusion. It seems entirely plausible that it was Machito’s popularity as a Latin musician during this period, rather than claims of Cubanness as entirely different from African Americanness, that facilitated his ability to reside at a whites-only hotel. But even celebrity had its limits, as Machito was reportedly unable to convince the managers at the Miami Hotel to allow his brown-skinned Puerto Rican wife to stay with him during her visit to Miami. Instead, she rented a room at the Dorsey where Machito visited her, and the pair dined at several “Negro restaurants in defiance [sic] of the state separation laws if he is white as implied by his residing at the Miami Hotel.” Waters revealed that Machito asked the black press “not to discuss the matter in their columns,” apparently aware of “the confusion in the minds of the darker elements of the local population.” Not

⁹² Graciela Pérez. Interview by Raul Fernández and René Lopez. Engineered by Matt Watson. Sound recording. 19 September 1998. National Museum of American History, the Latino Oral History Project.

⁹³ Enoc P. Waters, “Dixie Hotel Rule Admits Cuban Ork Leader But Bars His Wife, Men,” *Chicago Defender*, 9 February 1946, p. 16.

lost on contemporary observers, then, this episode raised an important and controversial question: “Is an admitted Afro-Cuban a Negro?”⁹⁴

For Afro-Cuban percussionist Armando Sánchez, the process of negotiating a place in between the pole of white inclusion and black exclusion materialized both as metaphor and reality. On his way north from Key West to New York City in June 1945, Sánchez took his seat on the bus “in between the front and the back” even though he knew “at that time blacks had to sit in the back.” At a stop in Jacksonville, a white man asked him to move to the back of the bus so that he could offer the seat to his wife, but Sánchez refused, telling the man, in English, that he had paid his fare and would not move. Confusion followed. The couple saw that he was “dark” but, presumably because of his accent, realized that he was likely not a U.S. black. When asked where he was from, Sánchez responded that he was from Cuba. That declaration seemed to have further confused both the couple and the bus driver, who concluded that “he wasn’t gonna mess with that.” Sánchez noted that he rode all the way to New York City in that seat. Whether he saw himself as distinct from U.S. blacks and, therefore, not subject to the state separation laws remains unclear. Though this story of racialization is on its own a meaningful example of racial protest, what is perhaps more interesting is that Sánchez linked his sense of a struggle for racial equality not to his own experiences with racism in Cuba, Florida, or Harlem but to the nineteenth-century rebellions for Cuban independence from Spain. Explaining that his grandfather had been a member of General

⁹⁴ Enoc P. Waters, “Dixie Hotel Rule Admits Cuban Ork Leader but Bars his Wife, Men,” *Chicago Defender*, 9 February 1946, p. 16.

Antonio Maceo's Estado Mayor in the Cuban independence army, he charged, "I was a rebel since I was born. I come from a warrior family."⁹⁵

The ideology of Panamericanism, specifically between Cuba and the United States, manifested itself most clearly in celebrations of *Día de Cuba* in Miami. Records from meetings of the Board of Directors of the Miami Chamber of Commerce indicate that as early as 1941 members of what was called the Miami-Cuba Committee sought to "arrange for a Cuba day in Miami...with a view to trade development between the two points."⁹⁶ Cubans on the island took notice of patriotic celebrations held in Miami, as at least one report in *Diario de la Marina* suggests. In January 1946, for example, Cubans on and off the island participated in a simultaneous commemoration of the Cuban flag with coordinated ceremonies taking place at Bayfront Park in downtown Miami and at the Provincial Palace in Havana. With "a large group of beautiful Cuban and American girls as well as another of officials from the United States army and navy" in attendance, the event in Miami reached "extraordinary proportions." The event reportedly signaled interamerican cooperation, serving as "one more confirmation of the sincere and profound friendship that unites the great nation of the North to nuestra patria."⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Armando Sánchez, 19 September 1995, David Carp Collection.

Desi Arnaz recalled that Alfonso Menencier, one of his "conga friends from Santiago," had found life in the United States peculiar, particularly in the context of race consciousness: "It's a beautiful country," Menencier explained, "but before I came to Florida, the only time I noticed I was black was when I took a bath" (Arnaz, *A Book*, 312).

⁹⁶ Bound volume, Minutes of Board of Directors Meetings, Miami Chamber of Commerce, 3 November 1941, Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami, Florida.

⁹⁷ "En Miami y La Habana se ha rendido simultaneamente un homenaje a la bandera," *Diario la Marina*, 8 January 1946, p. 12.

By 1948, “numerous” Cubans, including “more than 20 civil and government officials,” celebrated *Día de Cuba* with the aim of “strengthening panamerican friendship.” The festivities that year included a series of banquets, popular music concerts, rumba contests, and an evening baseball game between athletic clubs based in Miami Beach and Havana.⁹⁸ Organized by the Primera Conferencia Interamericana de Música, celebrations of *Día de Cuba* in 1951 took place at the Dade County Auditorium in Miami. The main event featured a dance recital by the Cuban ballerina Alicia Alonso and musical performances by the Philharmonic Orchestra of Havana under the direction of Gonzalo Roig, who along with Ernesto Lecuona and Cesar Pérez Sentenat had founded the National Symphony Orchestra in 1922.⁹⁹ Whether motivated principally to increase tourism, to appease white government officials and residents of the city, or with the tacit approval of Cuban residents in Miami who preferred this genre of music and, by extension, an elevated social class, the choice of classical music over popular Afro-Cuban rhythms served in some ways to whiten and make less exotic representations of Cubanness. This choice of performers is made even more interesting given that many North American tourists, including thousands of Miamians, traveled to Cuba precisely to experience the exoticism and dance to the rhythms supplied by Afro-Cuban performers at nightclubs and hotels in Havana.

Connolly has argued that as part of the city’s Panamerican cultural programming, the act of funding these sorts of musical performances, in European classical tradition, served to demonstrate not only Good Neighbor promises but also represented “an obvious

⁹⁸ “Numerosos cubanos celebran el ‘Día de Cuba’ en Miami,” *La Prensa*, 7 September 1948, p. 5.

⁹⁹ *La Prensa*, 10 April 1951, p. 5; Orovio, *Cuban Music from A to Z*, 183-184; “Se estrechan los lazos culturales entre Miami e Iberoamérica; honran a Cuba,” *Diario de Nueva York*, 22 May 1951, p. 3.

departure from the ‘African’ culture of black Miami and certain Caribbean locales (i.e. Haiti and Jamaica [and Cuba]).” It seems that at least when on the northern side of the Florida Straits, Miamians, Cubans and Anglos alike sometimes preferred performances and representations of Cubanness perceived as elite and “synonymous with a kind of whiteness.”¹⁰⁰ That said, Miami Chamber of Commerce Records indicate that local officials continuously sought to expand the reach and visibility of the city’s Panamerican agenda especially among “all Latin residents of Greater Miami and visiting Latins.” For an upcoming celebration of Columbus Day in 1949, members of the city’s Pan American Committee decided on a “new approach to Latin American entertainment for this area.” The committee planned to subsidize ticket prices to the event by selling placards and posters arguing that the affair “is aimed at reaching the masses rather than the select few who have been able to attend dinners and similar balls in the past.”¹⁰¹

The status of Miami’s “Latin residents” was fundamentally shaped by their relations (or imagined relations) with “visiting Latins.” With such a focus on growing the leisure and trade business with Latin America, it stands to reason that the Miami Chamber of Commerce and other booster groups would want to encourage (or at least appear to encourage) positive encounters with and among Latin residents and visitors. Cubans and Puerto Ricans living in Miami in the 1940s and 1950s were decidedly working class, and most found employment in the tourist industry and, to a lesser extent, in manufacturing, construction, and agriculture. The majority of tourists from Latin America, however, were of the middle and upper classes, and higher economic status

¹⁰⁰ Connolly, “By Eminent Domain,” 198-199.

¹⁰¹ Bound volume, Minutes of Board of Directors Meetings, Miami Chamber of Commerce, 19 September 1949, Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami, Florida.

afforded these visitors, even those with darker skin, the privilege of racial tolerance if not always inclusion. It probably helped, too, that the number of dark-skinned Latin visitors remained at “fewer than a hundred per year.” During this period as well, the number of Cuban-born individuals racially classified as “black” dropped, according to U.S. census records, from almost one thousand in 1940 and less than five hundred in 1950 to zero in 1960. Though it may have been that the migration of darker-skinned Cubans to Florida dissipated because of the harshness of Jim Crow, the finding might also be an unexpected consequence of Panamericanism: Panamericanism in Miami, with relation to Latin Americans and the prospects of economic growth, contributed to a process of racialization that made whiteness a more flexible category, one in which brown and even black Cubans might find themselves included.¹⁰²

Throughout the mid-twentieth century, business elites and local city officials worked to cast Miami as a global city, a welcoming destination for tourists and investors from Latin America. Panamericanism functioned as a sort of racialized hemispheric neighborliness, penetrating all aspects of life in Miami, from housing and schooling to public transportation and even entertainment. It was, however, largely light-skinned and fair-haired Latin Americans, from white Cuban national heroes like José Martí to white Cuban musicians like Desi Arnaz, who benefitted from the hold Panamericanism had on the city during this period. In 1949, with the approval of the Miami City Commission, Nicolás Castellanos, the Mayor of Havana, erected a monument of José Martí in Miami’s Bayfront Park. Connolly has argued that the gesture signaled “the cultural and commercial ties between the so-called ‘sister cities’” and takes notice of the fact that General Antonio Maceo, “a black national hero equal to Martí in his importance to Cuban

¹⁰² Connolly, “By Eminent Domain,” 204, 209, 212.

independence, received no such honor from the City of Miami.” He attributes this purposeful oversight to a racialized Panamericanism, implemented by white government officials and tourist boosters in Miami. Of course, the elevation of the white Martí over the black Maceo, at least in public contexts, was not an uncommon act. The choices made by local government officials in Miami reflect that Martí, in Havana, Miami, and New York City, had become the national symbol par excellence even though there was another hero available. In the late 1940s, a group of black and brown Cubans in New York City and working-class Cubans in Miami tried to promote the side-by-side celebration of the two heroes. But, as we saw happen in New York City at the conclusion of El Club Cubano Inter-Americano’s campaign to erect a Monumento Martí-Maceo, within the *colonias cubanas* of both cities there existed a privileging of nationalized whiteness over blackness that operated on its own, though surely influenced by, ideologies of Panamericanism.¹⁰³

With that said, events held in honor of Maceo did take place in Miami, though these events occurred generally within explicitly politicized and working-class contexts. Under the auspices of the Partido Revolucionario Cubano (Auténtico) and led by former Cuban president Carlos Prío Socarrás, who was now living in exile in Miami, “an extraordinary amount” of “exiled and migrant Cubans,” mostly women, gathered at the Edificio de las Logias in December 1957 to commemorate Maceo’s death.¹⁰⁴ That same year, the 26 de Julio de Miami invited “all members of the colonia cubana” to tune in to

¹⁰³ Connolly, “By Eminent Domain,” 9, 197.

¹⁰⁴ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 6 December 1957, p. 9; “Exilados Cubanos Conmemoraron Muerte del Patriótica Gral. Maceo,” *Diario las Américas*, 10 December 1957, p. 1, 6.

WAHR to listen to its broadcast commemorating Maceo.¹⁰⁵ Nearly a hundred Cuban workers from the Arnold Company and other factories in Miami also gathered to commemorate the anniversary of Maceo's death in 1957. One of the Cuban workers present told *Diario las Américas* that "Cuba faces the most difficult stage of its republican life" and called for unity among all Cuban workers in the United States.¹⁰⁶ The mobilization of Cuban workers is not surprising. As was the case among Cuban cigar workers in Tampa in the late nineteenth-century struggles for independence from Spain, Cuban laborers had a history of organizing for the cause of national liberation.

By the mid-to-late 1950s, the political unrest and revolutionary spirit that increasingly came to characterize life on the island infiltrated and, in many ways, benefitted symbolically and materially from the increasing presence of Cubans in Miami. In particular, the 26 de Julio leadership targeted Cubans in Miami, working to draw more of their countrymen to the cause of overthrowing the increasingly unpopular regime of Fulgencio Batista. Almost daily throughout 1957, advertisements placed in *Diario las Américas* by the 26 de Julio de Miami urged the *colonia cubana* to attend rallies and informational events at the Edificio de las Logias, located at 215 N.W. Fourth Street on the corner of Second Avenue with a message of "Cuban! Fidel calls you! Now or Never! The End of the Monster is Near!" Many of the ads featured a pair of images, one a formal headshot of Fidel Castro, the other an almost floating caricatured disembodied head of the bearded leader. Each image seemed to serve a distinct purpose: the first

¹⁰⁵ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 7 December 1957, p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ "Obreros Cubanos de la Arnold Co. conmemoraron aniversario de Maceo," *Diario las Américas*, 13 December 1957, p. 6.

portrayed Castro as a serious, respected leader, confirming the legitimacy and realness of the revolutionary cause; the second conveyed a sense of whimsy and romance.¹⁰⁷ These were familiar representations. Images in other newspapers consistently captured Castro donning a short beard, wearing a military uniform and cap, and holding a rifle surrounded by trees, leaves and other jungle matter; his eyes appeared to be contemplative and his gaze fixed in the distance.¹⁰⁸ Herbert L. Matthews, writer for the *New York Times*, led the public campaign in declaring that the Cuban people “worshipped” Castro and reported that the young revolutionary had “become the leader and symbol of the struggle against the dictatorship of General Batista.”¹⁰⁹ On a more practical level, the ads also listed the bus routes that interested participants could take to arrive at the political events. That advertisements and coverage of transnational grassroots organizing took up an increasingly larger presence within the pages of *Diario las Américas* suggests that what might have been first devised as a vehicle of hemispheric solidarity and tourist propaganda had fully assumed the role of pseudo-activist local newspaper of the *colonia latina* and *colonia cubana*. As a result, the newspaper played an integral role in the development and dissemination of island and exile politics, leaving little evidence that it solely served the interests of tourist boosters, Latin American governments vis-à-vis consulate officials, or other proponents of Panamerican ideology.

By 1957, political mobilization on behalf of the Revolution was in full swing.

Clandestine student groups like the Directorio Revolucionario, members of the ousted

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, *Diario las Américas*, 27 April 1957, p. 7.

¹⁰⁸ Herbert L. Matthews, “Cuban Rebel is Visited in Hideout,” *New York Times*, 24 February 1957, p. 1; “Stories on Rebel Fiction, Cuba Says,” *New York Times*, 28 February 1957, p. 13; “Cuban Navy Men Revolt; Reported Routed by Army,” *New York Times*, 6 September 1957, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Herbert L. Matthews, “Castro Rebels Gain in Face of Offensive by the Cuban Army,” *New York Times*, 9 June 1957, p. 1.

Auténtico party in Cuba and in exile in Miami (former Cuban president Carlos Prío Socarrás among them), Fidel Castro and his 26th of July guerrilla movement, and peasants and squatters in Oriente, all came together as rural and urban insurgent forces aimed against Batista's U.S.-supported dictatorship. Miami's chapter of the revolutionary movement 26 de Julio commemorated the first anniversary of Auténtico-led failed attack on the Goicuría garrison, the military headquarters in Matanzas, by laying floral wreaths in honor of those who died that day at the foot of a statue of José Martí.¹¹⁰ A few weeks later in May, the Movimiento 26 de Julio, together with the Directorio Revolucionario, again used the site of the statue of José Martí at Bayfront Park to rally supporters and honor the memories of the university students who had participated in an unsuccessful attack on the Presidential Palace in Havana.¹¹¹ News reports indicated that Prío Socarrás as well as two of Fidel Castro's sisters, Emma and Lydia, attended these events organized by "political Cubans," "producing commentary from the entire colonia cubana in the city." These latter remarks as well as those that distinguished between "exiled and migrant Cubans" suggest that the *colonia cubana* was far from monolithic. In other words, while there may have been "political" or "exiled" Cubans in Miami interested and engaged in political activities, from fundraising for the Castro sisters to helping ship arms and supplies to aid the revolutionaries, there were others who touted the official representation of the consulate and remained supportive of the Batista government and still others, likely "migrant Cubans," who remained disinterested and disengaged in

¹¹⁰ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 27 April 1957, p. 7.

¹¹¹ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 12 May 1957, p. 7.

politics and focused more on work and their private lives.¹¹² Cubans on the island, for their part, took notice of these acts of solidarity, with one report declaring that “without exaggeration, we can say that Cubans, from the neighboring island, have their eyes fixed on what happens in Miami.”¹¹³

Advertisements for the 26 de Julio de Miami used the growing celebrity of the Castro sisters along with historical references of national significance to help raise funds for the movement. For example, one ad announced to “Cuban residents in Miami” that “just as our apostle José Martí did yesterday, Fidel Castro knocks on your door and your heart to ask for a contribution.” By listing the address where the Castro sisters would be “waiting for greetings from all the Cuban residents of Miami,” the ad had undeniable material intentions. By framing Castro as the Martí of today, the ad reclaimed the nineteenth-century independence movement led by Martí and other black and white Cuban rebels, serving as a point of symbolic motivation to join the current revolutionary cause.¹¹⁴ Historian Lillian Guerra has argued that in the early twentieth century, “the ‘myth’ that Cubans constructed of José Martí as a signifier of social unity was a fictional narrative, based on their desire for a harmonious, even utopic future as well as the need to shape and recollect the past in such terms.” Cubans, she explains, invoked the “myth” of Martí “to connote the common essence or root of Cubans’ nationality in the repeated narrative of self-sacrifice, collective struggle, and commitment to a ‘nation for all’ that emerged during the War of 1895.” As we have seen, the myth of José Martí remained

¹¹² Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami*, 153; Joseph Rosendo, Interview by author, phone interview, 15 May 2012; Mary Lynn Conejo, Interview by author, 9 April 2010.

¹¹³ René Viera, “Inusitado actividad desplegaron los politicos cubanos este fin de semana,” *Diario las Américas*, 21 May 1957, p. 1.

¹¹⁴ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 23 May 1957, p. 7.

powerful and useful among black and white Cubans in both New York City and Miami in the 1940s and 1950s. Martí remained a unifying symbol, but one that different groups of Cubans invoked to support their own visions of Cuban identity and the future of the nation on the verge of yet another Revolution.¹¹⁵

If the presence of the Castro sisters in Miami and elsewhere in the United States, including New York City, Chicago, and Washington, D.C., aimed to raise money, boost morale, and attract additional supporters to the revolutionary cause, then it also served to create tensions and highlight dissension within the ranks of 26 de Julio de Miami.¹¹⁶ The controversy stemmed from remarks the sisters made to an unnamed newspaper in Miami, stating that the only organization founded as an official affiliate of the Movimiento 26 de Julio was created by Fidel Castro during a visit to Miami at which time he designated Juan Cheda as president. In an open letter placed in *Diario las Américas*, Jacinto Vázquez countered that Juan Orta had been named president of the 26 de Julio de Miami and charged that the sisters “hold no position of leadership or responsibility in the revolutionary organization created by doctor Fidel Castro” and “have no authority of any kind to alter the course of the struggle.”¹¹⁷ To this, Juan Orta responded with his own public letter, affirming the statements made by the Castro sisters and charging that Vázquez had never held any position of leadership nor had he even been a member of the organization.¹¹⁸ Whatever the details of this disagreement, the point is that the *colonia*

¹¹⁵ Lillian Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005): 1-21.

¹¹⁶ José A. Benitez, “Buscan cooperación de los exilados cubanos,” *La Prensa*, 26 March 1957, p. 2.

¹¹⁷ “Club 26 de Julio de Miami, A la Opinión Pública,” *Diario las Américas*, 28 May 1957, p. 7.

¹¹⁸ “A la Opinión Pública,” *Diario las Américas*, 31 May 1957, p. 9.

cubana, at least in its political elements, appeared somewhat fragmented and disorganized. In an open letter “to all Cubans,” Rafael Izquierdo, treasurer of the 26 de Julio de Miami, renounced his position, lamenting that “division signifies [personal] ambition.”¹¹⁹

More broad-based political demonstrations took place in Miami throughout the late 1950s. For example, the 26 de Julio de Miami also hosted events during 1957 that featured the participation of representatives of the movement from Tampa, Key West, and Chicago. One such event, held in April 1957 at the Republican Headquarters Club on 1947 W. Flagler Street, included the mother of a young man killed in the struggle as well as journalist Cesar Marin, who spoke about the assassination of an army captain in Santiago de Cuba.¹²⁰ The Directorio Revolucionario helped arrange a mass at St. Patrick’s Catholic Church in Miami Beach to honor those who had died in the attacks against the Goicuría garrison and the Presidential Palace. From the pulpit, the priest called for “the ‘liberty of Cuba,’ and exalted the sacrifice of the Cubans who had died to continue the cause of José Martí.”¹²¹ In another act organized by the Directorio Revolucionario de Miami, “a large quantity of Cuban exiles and migrants” filled the Teatro Flagler to hear speakers discuss the situation in Cuba.¹²² Awareness of the political situation in Cuba manifested itself in other ways. For example, Roberto and Amparo Pérez Antelo and Luis Cabaleiro, owners of Un Restaurant Latino de Miami, located at East First Avenue between North Second and Third Streets, “decorated” an

¹¹⁹ “A Todos los Cubanos, Carta Abierta,” *Diario las Américas*, 4 June 1957, p. 3.

¹²⁰ Advertisement, *Diario las Américas*, 27 April 1957, p. 7.

¹²¹ Photo with caption, *Diario las Américas*, 21 May 1957, p. 1.

¹²² “Celebraron acto de unidad en el ‘Flagler,’” *Diario las Américas*, 22 October 1957, p. 9.

entire window of their restaurant with clippings from a variety of newspapers and magazines, including *Diario las Américas*, “alluding to the insurreccional crisis in Cuba.”¹²³

Some political demonstrations turned violent, as in June 1957 when police intervened as a group of Cubans, holding Cuban flags and placards protesting Fulgencio Batista, marched from the Cuban embassy to the statue of José Martí in Bayfront Park in Miami. Thirty Cubans were arrested after police reportedly tried to disperse the group, producing what was described as “great excitement.” Some witnesses explained, however, that the scuffle started when an officer tried to take a Cuban flag from one of the marchers.¹²⁴ What we see in Miami by the mid-to-late 1950s is the beginnings of the mass politicization of the Cuban migrant community in the United States well before Castro’s triumphant march into Havana in 1959.

In what was likely not a coincidence but, rather, a savvy publicity stunt orchestrated by local officials and television producers, just as *I Love Lucy* viewers watched Ricky Ricardo make the trip south from New York City to perform at Miami’s Eden Roc Hotel, Desi Arnaz made a journey of his own to the city that had first welcomed him when he left Cuba in 1933. Greeted by thousands of fans at Miami International Airport, Arnaz and Lucille Ball arrived in south Florida on November 26, 1956 to visit for a few days with Desi’s parents who lived in Coral Gables. While in Miami, the couple invited the city’s reporters to a reception at the Eden Roc and

¹²³ Photo with caption, *Diario las Américas*, 29 June 1957, p. 5.

¹²⁴ “Policia de Miami disolvio manifestación de Cubanos,” *Diario las Américas*, 1 June 1957, p. 1, 7.

participated in a benefit show at Bayfront Park Auditorium. But their trip was more than a family vacation or charitable arrangement. During this four-day visit, Eduardo Hernández, the Consul General de Cuba in Miami, presented the couple with the Orden de Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, the award of highest distinction offered by the Cuban government to foreigners and individuals not in the armed forces. The award reportedly served “as testimony of the admiration and respect his homeland had for the artist and his wife” and realized Marco Rizo’s call, made three years earlier, for the Cuban government to recognize Arnaz’s achievements.¹²⁵

Though described as “stars of the North American artistic world,” it was recognition by the Cuban government that brought Desi and Lucy to Miami from Hollywood. Noting that the pair had not visited Miami for quite some time, German Negroni of *Diario las Américas* explained that Arnaz, “whose hispanic origin we know well (he was born in Cuba), treated us with unlimited courtesy and spoke Spanish to us the entire time, with a light North American accent.” To the newspaper’s thousands of readers, Arnaz declared:

I could see among those gathered many Cubans and Latinos that called me by name, talking to me in Spanish. I felt very happy seeing those friendly demonstrations and I answered them in Spanish as well. You can tell the readers of *Diario las Américas* that I as a Cuban and both of us as artists, my wife Lucy and I, send them a warm embrace and we are sure that we will see each other again in the future.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ “Llegan hoy Lucy y Desi,” *Diario las Américas*, 26 Novemeber 1956, p. 4; German Negroni, “Miami y Cuba Rinden homenaje a Desi Arnaz y Lucille Ball,” *Diario las Américas*, 27 November 1956, p. 5; “Cuba Condecoro a los Arnaz,” *Diario las Américas*, 27 November 1956, p. 5; German Negroni, “Cuba les Rinde Homenaje: Los Arnaz Lloran,” *Diario las Americias*, 28 November 1956, p. 1, 5; “Top Cuban Prize to ‘I Love Lucy,’” *Chicago Defender*, 28 November 1956, p. 14.

¹²⁶ “Llegan hoy Lucy y Desi,” *Diario las Américas*, 26 Novemeber 1956, p. 4; German Negroni, “Miami y Cuba Rinden homenaje a Desi Arnaz y Lucille Ball,” *Diario las Américas*, 27 November 1956, p. 5.

Just as Ricky Ricardo and his brand of Latin entertainment had been tagged to represent contemporary Florida in the fictional *The Florida Story*, Desi Arnaz came to symbolize, as this ceremonial gesture would suggest, the idealized Cuban American, particularly in the context of Miami's racialized Panamericanism. Not only did the award demonstrate friendly and cordial relations between the Cuban government and local officials in Miami, but it also signaled a seemingly preferred performance of Cubanness: white, handsome, and "with a light North American accent."

Chapter 7

Conclusion

In New York City and Miami in the 1940s and 1950s, Cuban musicians and entertainers played key roles in shaping Cuban ethnic identity and experiences for other Cubans as well as for larger audiences of Puerto Ricans, African Americans, Latin American tourists, and white North Americans. Black and white Cuban bandleaders, singers, percussionists, and comedians participated in the construction of popular representations of Cubanness, Afro-Cubanness, and Latinness for these different publics. In the process, the content and meaning of these representations changed, revealing the ways in which different social contexts shaped the ways Cuban musicians and migrants thought about and experienced race, ethnicity, and culture. In oral history interviews and within the pages of the Spanish-popular press, black and white Cuban musicians often shared critical and oppositional stories of race, while at other times their stories emphasized musical nationalism and racial harmony. Most framed their perspectives within a field of nationalist discourse of Afro-Cubanidad but also in relation to differences in experience, in terms of their race, migration, and insertion into the Latin music scene, in both Cuba and the United States.

In New York City, black and white Cuban musicians and entertainers participated in social and cultural activities sponsored by ethnic social clubs, such as El Club Cubano Inter-Americano and the Ateneo Cubano de Nueva York, as well as musical events organized by the Spanish-language press, namely *La Prensa*'s musical popularity

contests and fundraising festivals. They performed and headlined revues at uptown dancehalls and downtown nightclubs like Hunts Point Palace, the Tropicana, the Palladium, and La Conga, and they participated in patriotic celebrations in honor of José Martí and Antonio Maceo as well as pan-ethnic festivities in commemoration of *Día Panamericano* and *Día de la Raza*. As we have seen, their experiences reveal the different roles of black and white musicians in making innovations and marketing Cuban popular music for Cuban and multiple broader audiences. Through their involvement in these institutions and activities, they not only helped their fellow Cuban migrants forge a Cuban ethnic identity but also made Cubanness and Afro-Cubanness central to Hispano and Latino/a identity. In doing so, they demonstrated ties not only to their new local communities – whether Harlem or *el barrio* – but also to a broader diasporic Cuban and Afro-Cuban community.

The story of Cuban musicians and migrants in Miami offers another context in which we can examine some of the same musicians and musical styles that were popular in New York City during this period. In Miami, Cubans encountered a tourism industry and business community that, in many ways, dominated life in the city. Local government officials and tourist boosters touted Panamerican ideologies of good neighborliness and interamerican solidarity with their Latin American neighbors to the south. But Miami remained a city of the Jim Crow South, and Cubans here learned that claims to Cubanness offered some advantages. Perhaps it was this emphasis on national origin, however, that sometimes strained the mostly cordial relations between Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and African Americans and limited the proliferation of ethnic social clubs, patriotic celebrations, and musical events that emphasized and celebrated Afro-

Cubanness and blackness. In Miami, a Cuban ethnic community of musicians, entertainers, business professionals, former and future politicians, workers, and temporary visitors participated in the construction of a broader transnational Hispano and Latino/a identity that emphasized both tropical escape and island politics.

Hollywood representations of Cubanness, Afro-Cubanness, and Latinness also mattered, for the fictionalized narratives presented on television and in film helped determine cultural expectations on the streets and in the nightclubs, social clubs, and newspapers of New York City and Miami. The fictional roles played by Desi Arnaz, whether as Manuelito Lynch in *Too Many Girls*, Private Félix Ramírez in *Bataan*, or most famously Ricky Ricardo in *I Love Lucy*, presented audiences, particularly white North American audiences, with an image of Cubanness and Latinness that emphasized non-blackness while maintaining appeal as exotic and tropical. These representations and their closely related musical styles offered white Cuban musicians and entertainers opportunities for social mobility and professional advancement not always extended to Cuban musicians of color. Within the *colonia cubana* and *colonia hispana* of both New York City and Miami, communities centered on local interests and transnational connections to the homeland, an understanding of musical authenticity developed that emphasized the relationship between the musician (and his musical innovations) and audience. In some instances, musical and cultural authenticity also depended on a musician's claims to blackness and Afro-Cubanness.

One of the major consequences of the massive exodus of Cubans to the United States since Castro's rise to power is that, in the process, the flourishing of Cuban-

American culture in earlier periods has become overshadowed by and deeply connected to the Cuban Revolution of 1959. This project has shown, however, that without the nearly 90,000 black and white Cuban migrants in New York City and Miami in the 1940s and 1950s the great boom in transnational Cuban and Cuban-American cultural production that characterized this and later periods would have been quite impossible. It was in nightclubs and dancehalls, at social club meetings and city-wide cultural events, and within the pages of Spanish-language newspapers in New York City and Miami that Cuban migrants and the popular culture they produced played key roles in the construction of a national and ethnic identity not always distinct from the prevailing discourses of Hispano and Latino/a identity and community. From within this cohort of black and white Cuban musicians, entertainers, and migrants, the Cubans who arrived in the United States in the post-revolutionary period could find traces of the racial (and racist) ideologies and practices, musical traditions and innovations, and nationalist sensibilities that marked pre-revolutionary Cuba. But, the discourses and practices of Cubanness, Afro-Cubanness, and Latinness produced by this small but significant community in the 1940s and 1950s also developed in relation to their local neighborhood, mostly immigrant, contexts in New York City and Miami as well as broader notions of transnational, hemispheric networks of *pan-latinidad*. This period of relative openness and inclusiveness, though I should emphasize that this was not always or even commonly extended to Cubans and Latinos/as of color, closed in on itself as the majority of Cubans in the United States, especially those in Miami and south Florida, came together as a “moral community” focused on ousting Castro from power.¹

¹ Alejandro Portes, “The Cuban American Political Machine: Reflections on its Origins and Perpetuation” in *Changes in Cuban Society Since the Nineties*, eds. Joseph Tulchin, Lilian Bobea, Espina

Both because of the emergence of new musical genres and the changing sensibilities of Cuban and Latino/a audiences, many of whom now preferred rock music and the Rolling Stones instead of mambo and Machito, few of the musicians examined in this dissertation maintained the same level of popularity or achieved the same successes as they had at the peak of their professional careers in the 1940s and 1950s. This is not to say that they did not continue to record and perform throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. Machito y sus Afro-Cubans held onto their 10-week summer engagements at the Concord Hotel in the Catskills of New York throughout the late 1960s, and, along with Mario Bauzá, the band continued recording and touring across the United States and internationally into the 1980s. A year before his death in New York City in 1993, Bauzá even enjoyed a guest appearance on *The Cosby Show*. In 1966, Xavier Cugat married his fourth wife, Charo, a Spanish comedian, actress, and singer known for her flamboyant dress and catch-phrase “cuchi-cuchi,” who fronted his band till the mid-1970s. The couple divorced, and the bandleader eventually returned to Spain, after five decades of immense commercial success in the world of Latin music entertainment. Marco Rizo pursued a solo career throughout the 1960s and 1970s, recording mostly piano and orchestral compositions, especially his own arrangements of the music of Ernesto Lecuona. He died of a heart attack in Manhattan in 1998. Arsenio Rodríguez continued performing for dances and social events organized by El Club Cubano Inter-Americano until about the mid-1960s when the club turned to newer and hipper bands, like those of Johnny Pacheco and Ray Barretto, who could attract younger audiences. He left New York City for Los Angeles in 1969 and died the following year

Prieto, and Rafael Hernández (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2005): 198-199; Alejandro Portes and Alex Stepick, *City on the Edge: The Transformation of Miami* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993): 107, 135, 142-144.

after suffering a stroke.² Miguelito Valdés entered semi-retirement in the late 1950s, though he returned to the world of entertainment in 1963 to record with Machito y sus Afro-Cubans. He also hosted his own television show between 1966 and 1976, but died two years later when he suffered a heart attack on stage in Colombia.

After production of new episodes of *I Love Lucy* ended in 1957, Desi Arnaz continued his work in television throughout the 1960s and 1970s, most notably as producer for the television series *The Untouchables*. He made occasional guest appearances on television, including a celebrity hosting spot on the first season of *Saturday Night Live* in 1976. There to promote the release of his autobiography, *A Book*, Arnaz appeared as an aged and grey-haired version of his most famous character, Ricky Ricardo. In his opening monologue, he made reference to his love of Cuban cigars and joked about the box of “Acapulco Gold” cigars presented to him by the cast. As he had done countless times throughout his early musical career and numerous times on *I Love Lucy*, Arnaz performed “Cuban Pete” and ended the show with “Babalú,” leading the cast and audience on a conga line throughout the studio. The episode also featured Desi Jr. in several sketches and, most significantly, joining in with his father on the “Babalú” finale. With Desi banging on a colorful conga drum, albeit less feverishly than he did in the 1940s and 1950s, Desi Jr. appeared in vibrant rumba sleeves and played the *timbales*. The scene is reminiscent of that episode in the final season of *I Love Lucy* when Ricky and Ricky Jr. perform together in Havana, father and son both dressed in tuxedos, playing the conga and singing to the *orishas*. In this case, though, there are key differences. Desi still plays the conga in a tuxedo and, as was his custom, loosens his tie to signal

² David F. García, “Contesting that Damned Mambo: Arsenio Rodríguez and the People of El Barrio and the Bronx in the 1950s,” in *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States*, eds. Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 196.

impending disorder and wildness, but Desi Jr. is now playing the *timbales* and wearing vibrant rumba sleeves. The differences reflect the present – the *timbales* are common percussion elements in salsa, the emerging genre dominating the Latin music scene of the 1970s – as well as the past – the rumba sleeves pay homage to more than they parody the Latin craze of the 1940s and 1950s.

The Cuban-American cultural landscape of New York City and Miami changed in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution of 1959. Some of the venues and organizations that hosted social and cultural events during the 1940s and 1950s, like Hunts Point Palace, remained open until the mid-1980s, while others, like the Tropicana and Palladium, closed in the early and mid-1960s.³ El Club Cubano Inter-Americano maintained its clubhouse until 1996, but former members and friends of the organization continue to gather formally once a year for the *Baile del Mamomcillo*. In Miami, Cuban social clubs like the Círculo Cubano and Juventud Cubana eventually became overshadowed by the rapid proliferation of exile political organizations that emerged in the city in the early 1960s. Though organization records remain unavailable, it seems possible that these two social clubs, given the political activism of leaders like Augusto Piloto, gave way without much resistance to the anti-Castro missions of these new groups that varied in approach from propaganda to paramilitary campaigns.⁴

Cultural studies scholar Gustavo Pérez-Firmat has argued that “after the much-publicized Revolution, the image of Cubans surely changed: the stereotype of the Latin

³ García, “Contesting that Damned Mambo,” 196.

⁴ For more on the exile political organizations that developed in Miami in early 1960s through the 1990s, see María Cristina García, “Hardliners v. ‘Dialogueros:’ Cuban Exile Political Groups and the United States-Cuba Policy,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 17, no. 4 (Summer 1998): 3-28; María de los Angeles Torres, *In the Land of Mirrors: Cuban Exile Politics in the United States* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

lover was supplemented by that of the guerrilla fighter and, somewhat later, by that of the drug dealer.”⁵ That the music and cultural production of Cubans in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s seemed to take a backseat to exile politics beginning in the early 1960s does not minimize the ways in which it influenced Cuban and Latin popular music in later decades. Writers Roberta L. Singer and Elena Martínez argue similarly: “For the generation that was the creative bridge between Latin music’s past and future, music was the primary vehicle for finding their own voice, rooted in the traditions of their forbears but carrying the distinct mark of their current reality.”⁶ In other words, the Cuban and Latino/a musicians and migrants of the 1940s and 1950s ought to be seen as sources of the origins of salsa in the late 1960s and 1970s.

The privileging of the Cuban exiles of the post-1959 era – in historiography, popular memory, and modern-day politics – made national news in the fall of 2011. That October, a reporter for the *Washington Post* accused Florida Senator Marco Rubio of misrepresenting the story of his parents’ migration from Cuba to the United States. Rubio, a rising star in the Republican Party and rumored vice presidential nominee, had throughout his career presented himself as the son of Cuban exiles who came to the United States fleeing the regime of Fidel Castro in the early 1960s. In truth, Rubio’s parents left Cuba in 1956 and were admitted as permanent residents shortly thereafter, spending most of their time settled in Miami and south Florida. His mother worked as a hotel maid and stocked shelves at Kmart. His father secured employment as a bartender

⁵ Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994): 13.

⁶ Roberta L. Singer and Elena Martínez, “A South Bronx Latin Music Tale,” *CENTRO Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 199; García, “Contesting that Damned Mambo,” 196.

and a school crossing guard. In 1958, he reportedly worked at the Roney Plaza, the same hotel that almost two decades earlier had introduced the Cuban music of El Dulce and Desi Arnaz to audiences in Miami Beach. His parents did visit the island a few times after Castro took power in 1959, but their return trips were brief, with only one stay lasting longer than a few weeks.⁷

Rubio's response to the accusation that he consistently misrepresented and exaggerated his family's history is quite telling, for it illustrates the significance of two of the main areas of intervention engaged in this project: methodology and periodization. First, Rubio blamed oral history for the false reports. To the *New York Times*, he explained, "The dates I have given regarding my family's history have always been based on my parents' recollections of events that occurred over 55 years ago and which were relayed to me by them more than two decades after they happened." In a similar manner, he told the *Miami Herald*, "I didn't lie about the date. I wasn't aware of it." The *Washington Post* reported a now familiar rebuttal from the young senator: "I'm going off the oral history of my family. All of these documents and passports are not things that I carried around with me."⁸ In effect, Rubio charged that his error was not purposeful, that it was carelessness in storytelling and the absence of written evidence that caused the accidental misinformation. This explanation is not entirely convincing, given the ways in which 1959 is memorialized among Cuban families and within the Cuban exile community, more broadly. It does, however, leave open the question of whether Rubio

⁷ Manuel Roig Franzia, "Marco Rubio's Compelling Family Story Embellishes Facts, Documents Show," *Washington Post*, 20 October 2011.

⁸ Michael D. Shear, "Rubio Denies Embellishing Family History," *New York Times*, 20 October 2011; Marc Caputo, "Marco Rubio Defends Himself Amid Family Exile Saga," *Miami Herald*, 21 October 2011; Manuel Roig Franzia, "Marco Rubio's Compelling Family Story Embellishes Facts, Documents Show," *Washington Post*, 20 October 2011.

independently changed his family's origin story or whether it was his parents who misremembered their dates of migration in their storytelling.

Second, he dismissed the relevance of the discrepancy itself. He argued that “the date doesn't really add anything. It doesn't embellish anything. The date is less relevant than the experience, the experience of people who came here to make a better life and who could never go back.” In a column released in *Politico*, Rubio argued that “people didn't vote for me because they thought my parents came in 1961, or 1956, or any other year. Among other things, they voted for me because, as the son of immigrants, I know how special America really is.”⁹ But dates and identity have come to matter, particularly within the context of *cubanidad*, and Rubio's not-so-accurate biographical narrative reveals some of the political reasons behind his attempts to distinguish himself from the Cuban migration that took place in the decades that preceded the Cuban Revolution of 1959. As historian María Cristina García has argued, Cubans who left Cuba in the 1960s called themselves exiles, not immigrants: “*Immigrant* implies a choice, and most Cuban émigrés believed that they had no choice; they had been pushed out of their country by the social, economic, and political chaos of the Castro regime....it was a powerful political statement.”¹⁰ By insisting that his parents had come to the United States in the 1960s because of Castro, Rubio claimed for himself an exile rather than an immigrant identity, and that positioning, especially in Florida, brings with it a sort of cachet not

⁹ Marc Caputo, “Marco Rubio Defends Himself Amid Family Exile Saga,” *Miami Herald*, 21 October 2011; Marco Rubio, “Marco Rubio: My Family's Flight from Castro,” *Politico*, 21 October 2011.

¹⁰ María Cristina García, *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959-1994* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996): 84.

applicable to pre-revolutionary Cuban migrants.¹¹ His claim to an exile identity not only brought him favor among conservative Cubans in Florida, but also rendered his experiences entirely different from (and, by extension, more acceptable than) that of other Latino/a migrants, migrants whose presence in the United States, whether legal or illegal, remains controversial and problematic.

What the very public Rubio drama reveals is that historians, political scientists, and other scholars have not been alone in constructing a narrative that locates the origins of a Cuban-American identity within the first cohort of Cubans who came to the United States in the wake of the Cuban Revolution of 1959. In doing so, the migrations of Cubans who lived, worked, and performed in the United States in the two decades that preceded the Revolution have been rendered irrelevant, at best, and nonexistent, at worst. This project does not offer an alternative origin narrative. Rather, in focusing on the stories of the nearly 90,000 black and white Cubans who came to New York City and Miami in the 1940s and 1950s, it draws important connections between the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Cubans who came to the United States fleeing the independence wars and looking for work in the cigar industries and those post-1959 Cubans who left the island to escape communism and Castro. This challenge to the idea of a radical discontinuity in the migration of Cubans to the United States not only draws the necessary links between these earlier and later periods of migration but also points to a historical moment when Cuban-American experiences are most similar to those of other Latino/a migrants.

¹¹ Manuel Roig Franzia, "Marco Rubio's Compelling Family Story Embellishes Facts, Documents Show," *Washington Post*, 20 October 2011; Fred Grimm, "Marco Rubio's Biography Didn't Need Fudging," *Miami Herald*, 24 October, 2011.

I began working on this project in the spring of 2009. I remember calling the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami just a few days after passing my preliminary examinations. When I explained my project to the archivist on the other end of the telephone line, I expected her to supply me with an endless list of potential collections, newspapers, and other resources for consultation. Instead, the archivist asserted unequivocally, “*Ay, niña, pero aquí no habian Cubanos en esos tiempos!*” (“Oh, hon, but there weren’t any Cubans here during those years!”) I had been naïve to think that the very assertion of the presence and significance of Cuban migrants in New York City and Miami in the 1940s and 1950s would not only disrupt but also directly challenge what many of the Cuban exiles of the post-revolutionary period had come to believe about their migration, identity, and community development in the United States. By challenging the long-held belief that Cuban-American identity and a Cuban-American cultural landscape originated with the massive post-1959 waves of exiles, this dissertation not only takes aim at feelings of Cuban exceptionalism but also finds that Cuban migration experiences had much more in common with the Puerto Rican and Mexican migrations of the 1940s and 1950s than scholars have previously acknowledged. Though this project identifies similarities and inter-ethnic interactions, it leaves to future scholars the crucial work of examining these comparative moments at greater depth.

That there were few collections dedicated to my particular research topic did not mean that I abandoned the questions that had first triggered my interest in this area of investigation. Instead, these initial difficulties encouraged me to situate questions of “Cuban,” “Afro-Cuban,” and “Latin” identity not only within broader ideologies and

discourses of Hispanidad and Latinidad but also in social contexts more commonly associated with the experiences of Puerto Ricans and African Americans in New York City and Miami. This expanded mode of inquiry allowed me to reconstruct the perspective and experiences of the Cuban musicians and migrants of the 1940s and 1950s from a variety of oral history interviews, popular press clippings, archival sources, and cultural texts. The result is a rich and multi-layered narrative that demonstrates the ways in which the Cubans of this period debated ideas and shaped practices related to musical and cultural authenticity and commercialism, racial and ethnic identity, and political consciousness, all while circulating, in both real and imagined ways, in different local and transnational contexts.

Appendix

1944 *Gran Festival Pro Fondo de Caridad* Accounting

Gross Income (\$4,183.00) – Federal Taxes (\$740.20) =		(\$3442.80)
Itemized Expenses =		
	Music (Juanito Sanabria)	(\$220.00)
	Manhattan Center (rent and services)	(\$448.00)
	Trophies and flowers	(\$285.00)
	Concert piano rental	(\$50.00)
	Permit from the Police Department	(\$10.00)
	Ticket printing	(\$12.12)
	Gifts and miscellaneous	(\$129.33)
Total Expenses =		(\$1,154.45)
Net Product =		(\$2288.35)
Donation to the American Red Cross =		(\$1000.00)
Balance remaining for the <i>La Prensa</i> Charity Fund =		(\$1288.35)

1945 *Gran Festival Pro Fondo de Caridad* Accounting

Gross Income (\$5,756.15)		
Itemized Income =		
	Adult ticket sales from printed tickets	(\$4,000.00)
	Children ticket sales	(\$194.50)
	Additional admissions sales	(\$425.00)
	Collection for taxes	(\$921.90)
	Additional income	(\$214.75)
Itemized Expenses =		
	Manhattan Center (rent)	(\$432.00)
	Orchestra (José Curbelo)	(\$180.00)
	Trophies and decorations	(\$250.00)
	Piano rental	(\$35.00)
	Flowers	(\$46.00)
	Miscellaneous	(\$286.16)

	Federal taxes	(\$921.90)
Total Expenses =		(\$2,151.06)
Net Product =		(\$3,605.09)

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