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La Gente de Migración y Acción: African Americans in Revolutionary Mexico 1880–1929

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LA GENTE DE MIGRACIÓN Y ACCIÓN: AFRICAN AMERICANS IN REVOLUTIONARY MEXICO, 1880-1929

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis argues that Mexico historically presented African Americans with options to pursue freedom through outlets of migration (civil) and counter-violence (violent resistance). In addition, the thesis exhibits Mexico's historical anti-slavery stance which reflects why Mexico was a viable place of relocation and resistance. Furthermore, it argues Mexico and the United States had roles in African Americans' relation to Mexico and these endeavors of resistance. By using primary sources such as newspapers and government reports, the extent of propaganda methods and use becomes discernible. The objective is to highlight the international assistance Mexico provided towards African Americans, the U.S. role in this undertaking, and the pursuit of equality and freedom for African Americans through an international level.

DEDICATION

Para mis Padres y la importancia de su historia personal. Nunca olvidaré.

For my wife Elizabeth, who provided me with endearing love, undying support, and endless assistance during this demanding task.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world
and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.
I bathe in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans,* and I've seen its muddy
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.
I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

*Lincoln's determination to end slavery was said to have started when, as a young man, he visited New Orleans for the first time.[1]

As Langston Hughes crossed the Mississippi River in the late 1910s on his way to Mexico he reportedly wrote this poem. Hughes depicted the importance of rivers to those of African descent as a historical personification of their relationship to those bodies of water. Crossing the river superseded cultural and ethnic bounds. 'Crossing the river' also is a phrase with recent contemporary meaning regarding immigrants from Mexico and Latin America crossing into the United States for a variety of reasons and through different methods. Langston Hughes' poem touched on some of the various rivers that had a historical connection to those of

[1] The Dubois Learning Center. http://www.duboislc.org/ShadesOfBlack/LangstonHughes.html (Accessed on April 17, 2012)

African descent. But he does not mention the Río Grande which offered African Americans a new beginning to start over at the turn of the twentieth century and beyond. The relationship between rivers and people of African descent includes the Río Grande and its connection to African Americans crossing it to escape atrocities of historical magnitude. This river was also a feature to the crossings of African Americans but also to the connection that they were players and pawns in a larger scheme of international relations and propagandistic motivations between vying countries. Black migration existed to alleviate some racial tensions, and migration to Mexico offered other avenues that African Americans hoped to take advantage of without considering the motivational factors behind the assistance.

The historiography of the migration of African Americans has focused significantly on certain continental migrations such as the Kansas and Indiana Exodusters of 1879-1881, the Oklahoma black towns of 1880-1910s, and the more prominently known Great Migration. This historiography has rightly noted the continental migratory efforts of southern blacks. It has also provided insight into the motivations for settling elsewhere in the U.S. However, another black migration has received decidedly less attention and investigation, the migration of African Americans to Mexico. My thesis proposes to highlight this migratory endeavor. Furthermore, my purpose is to connect the motivating factors of this undertaking regarding propagandistic agendas of all contributing parties. The efforts from the different groups vying for the successes and failures of this venture had agendas that were combating for a variety of purposes.

Mexico presented African Americans with an opportunity as an outlet for resistance and escape. This resistance culminated into two paths that had already been familiar to African Americans during the era of slavery. Migration was the form of civil disobedience, or basic survival and the revolutionary armed resistance along the United States/Mexico border was the

violent resistance. Both options gained support concurrently with the revolutionary process that was occurring in Mexico between 1876 and 1911(*Porfiriato*). This process allowed African Americans access to an international ally who sought to combat the U.S. hegemony because Mexico had a contentious relationship with the United States. The U.S. hoped for the failure of this project for two reasons. The first was that if African Americans were successful at migrating to Mexico, the U.S. would lose a huge portion of its agricultural laborers. Secondly, if they were successful from an international perspective other countries would view the U.S. as a possibly weak nation. While both outlets of resistance were used during the existence of the 'peculiar institution,' this interpretation is unique because African Americans usually had no foreign assistance. Therefore, during Mexico's radical transformation of 1876 through 1911, African Americans pursued their options with Mexico. However, Pan-Africanism was gaining popularity but it was an opportunity with limited access for most African Americans. Pan-Africanism was the idea that African Americans relocate to Africa in a Back-to-Africa movement. This was problematic because of the distance to Africa. On the other hand, Mexico's hardened view against slavery gave blacks in America opportunities to escape via migration. Additionally, the revolution occurring in Mexico created an ally against the hegemony of white supremacist America with the reactionary violence that coincided with a country that was at odds with the United States.

Hughes, known for his Pan-Africanism, Hughes also had a connection to Mexico. His father, James Nathaniel Hughes, lived there for some time after Langston Hughes was born. The plight of his father is reflective of the time. "His father, prevented from taking the bar exam in Oklahoma because of his race, abandoned his family. To avoid the racist apartheid practices of Jim Crow in the United States, [Hughes] first moved to Cuba, then Mexico, where he became a

lawyer."[2] His migration was a form of civil disobedience because he left the U.S. to seek out opportunity. Migration was not unfamiliar to African Americans in the United States. The well-known twentieth century Black Migration from the South's Black Belt to the northern cities in pursuit of better economic and social conditions is but one example. Another migration existed in the late part of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century; the Black Migration to Mexico occurred during its revolution.[3]

The migration of blacks to the northern industrialized states was generally widespread and linked to major cities such as Chicago, Detroit, and New York. This migration focused on movement within the framework of the national boundary, and not much has been focused on transnational movement. Most historical works on Black migration have focused on United States continental movements and not on transnational migrations. Both migrations can be interpreted as a form of civil disobedience.

The migration of African Americans to Mexico highlights two important points. The first is that regardless of racial or class 'status,' African Americans throughout American history have played a prominent role in the historical trajectory of the nation. Furthermore, Gerald Horne's primary thematic thesis regarding African Americans, argues that they influenced the matters of transnational importance and are significant in the global state of affairs, especially when considering the United States.[4] Secondly, African Americans have played a direct or indirect role in every major historical event in American history. Along these lines one factor not clearly

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[2] Aberjhani, Sandra L. West. *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance* (New York, Facts on File, 2003), 160.

[3] This revolutionary process can be attributed to a specific work. Hart, John Mason. *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of The Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1987).

[4] See Gerald Horne's *Negro Comrades of the Crown: African-Americans and the British Empire Fight the U.S. Before Emancipation*, (New York, NYU Press, 2012). *Fighting in Paradise: Labor Unions, Racism and Communists in the Making of Modern Hawaii*, (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2011), *The End of Empires: African-Americans and India,* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2008), *Black and Brown: African-Americans and the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920*, (New York, NYU Press, 2005).

stated is the relation to Latin America, but more specifically Mexico. Although some motivation and drive for the idea of migration was substantially racist, the ideas were also pushed by abolitionists stimulating colonizing efforts, and by African Americans themselves who wholly sought out better social and economic conditions and environments beyond the realm of the national borders and boundaries of the United States. Analyzing the agendas of all participating parties involved suggests an underlying motivation for Mexico to take in African Americans and for the United States to be critical of such moves, especially during the tumultuous time of revolutionary activity and agitation on the border.

The history of African Americans and Mexico is a different history than that of Afro-Mexicans. African Americans migrating to Mexico were culturally different from those Afro-Mexicans living in Mexico. The latter had become assimilated into Mexican culture and society before the 1910 Mexican Revolution. Black Migration featured people such as Langston Hughes, his father Nathaniel Hughes, William H. Ellis, Jack Johnson, Henry O. Flipper, and Virgil Richardson. While these are prominently famed African Americans, laborers and those of another socio-economic order also came to Mexico seeking economic opportunities and better racial relations.[5]

Black Migration to Revolutionary Mexico has a transnational theme that incorporates some of the watershed moments of American history, Mexican history, specifically the relations between the two nations, and its peoples. Initially, the thesis will navigate through moments of history where Black migration was discussed either prominently or in the background of major events and the motivation and inspiration for such dialogue. This argument displays the continuous and extensive role of Black migration to Revolutionary Mexico has had as a form of

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[5] Horne, Gerald. *Black and Brown: African Americans and the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920* (New York, NYU Press, 2005).

civil disobedience within the confines of American history and as well as Mexican history through a transnational lens. While the sheer number of African American migration to Mexico pale in comparison to those of the Black migration movement from the South to other parts of the United States, what remains is the idea of migration for blacks throughout American history as a means of escape and opportunity. The conversation is just as important as is the quantification of the migration movement to point out the outlet of migration as a non-violent form of resistance.

From Africa, Canada, Latin America, and Europe, African Americans have sought freedom through international migration from the United States. Sociologist Howard Odum, when observing race relations in the South during World War II stated, "There was an ever-increasing trend on the part of the Negro to resist folkways and to get 'out of his place.'"[6] African Americans resisted during World War I and II.[7] This resistance was however, prominently within the continental United States. 'To get out of his place' African Americans sought a revolutionary means to escape internationally. One facet of revolutionary means was escape by way of migration but another form was violent resistance by using the revolutionization of Mexico as a catalyst for black resistance internationally. Either joining in the violent struggles occurring in Mexico or using the Mexican government as an ally against the U.S. government allowed African Americans to take direct action. The revolutionary struggle occurring along the border allowed blacks to seek violent resistance and radicalize their identities as well.

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[6] Odum, Howard. *Race and Rumors of Race: Challenge to American Crisis* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1943), 180-181.

[7] Blackmon, Douglas A. *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York, Anchor Books, 2008).

The second chapter will focus on historical events of both American and Mexican history regarding the migratory discussions of African Americans. These events created the mythology behind the motivation of migration and pointing out the history of Mexico's view and political action against slavery. From the American Revolution to the Mexican Revolution, migratory efforts have existed to allow African Americans to divide from the U.S. 'peculiar institution.' While the governments at times ignored or traversed sensitive paths regarding the issue of slavery and free black individuals, colonization efforts existed to assist black migration to Latin America/Mexico. The motivational agendas for all parties will be assessed.

The purpose of this thesis is to highlight the African American connection to Mexico as a site of refuge, historical significance, relevance and assess the connectivity between the two. Often times African Americans and Mexican Americans fail to make a connection between their two respective ethnicities and how these groups were viewed by the United States. The history of African American migration to Mexico highlights the openly receptive nature of Mexico and its peoples to African Americans, although with some propagandistic motivations. The purpose is to also to draw attention to the idea that migration to Mexico was not spontaneous but was a seed proverbially planted in the minds of blacks in America.

The third chapter will focus on the migrations of Africans Americans to Mexico during the 1880-1929 period. The movements and historical events surrounding the migration correspond in 1880 with the revolutionary transformation of Mexico and Mexico's relationship with African Americans. This encouragement also spawned from the contentious relations that Mexico had with the United States. Migration efforts from the United States during this period reflect the historical patterns suggested in the previous section. The migration to Mexico was not something spontaneous but rather had a long process within United States' history and served

African Americans as a stronger form of civil disobedience transnationally. The supportive and receptive position of Mexico also has to be considered as a piece of propaganda used against the United States.

The fourth chapter will focus on the revolutionary/ideological similarities and activities between African Americans in the United States and revolutionary Mexico. The violence that African Americans took part in therefore reflects the second form of resistance. With the assistance of Mexico, African Americans found a strong outlet for resistance against the American system. Furthermore, other relationships were revealed in other parts of Latin America where radical blacks took part in and fomented revolutionary activity; an activity very familiar to them at the domestic level but not internationally. Consequently, Mexico was attractive to blacks on several levels.

Conclusively, African Americans shared a history with Mexico and its revolutionary process that occurred at a similar time. While Mexico could not offer African Americans the utopian race-eradicated society, it did offer options which in the United States could not. The United States seemed ardently entrenched in racial and social politics coalesced by the racist thoughts of pseudo-science in society as a whole, which limited African Americans' opportunity. While during the twentieth century, race riots, protests, violence, and civil disobedience erupted in the United States, African Americans prior to these events took part in another form of protest. They got up and left and attempted to detach themselves from the system that kept them down for centuries, a form of civil disobedience. They also armed themselves, joined revolutionary activity, and even joined with Mexican revolutionary forces. As James Baldwin stated in *Giovanni's Room,* "You don't have a home until you leave it and then, when you have left it, you

never can go back."[8] This was a problem all too familiar to African Americans as they attempted to resolve their social problems by leaving the United States only to find their situation unalleviated elsewhere. African Americans ran into the circumstances of the motivating rousing agendas of all parties that may or may not have been concerned with positive results for African Americans. At the domestic level, since Reconstruction, African Americans used armed resistance. However, this time their efforts were met with international cooperation with Mexico. This garnered international attention and forced the United States to possibly rethink their stance on racism and lynching. African Americans left their domestic situation as they tried to eek out a life for themselves in a country that did not want them but needed their labor.

[8] Baldwin, James. *Giovanni's Room* (New York, Dial Press, 1956), 171.

CHAPTER II

PLANTING THE SEED

"Remember, remember always, that all of us, and you and I especially, are descended from immigrants and revolutionists."

Franklin D. Roosevelt[9]

"The seed of revolution is repression."

Woodrow Wilson[10]

Exodus. African Americans have a long and well-documented pattern of migration. For African Americans in the United States, their history of migration had another story. Mexico had a role in providing a place for migration. The historical anti-slavery stance of Mexico offered them a perception that Mexico may be receptive towards them. During the later years of the Mexican Revolution, a period of change and radicalization produced sentiment for African Americans. The process of political radicalization in the United States called for President Woodrow Wilson to combat radicalism as anarchism and communism were gaining ground in American society, including African American communities. These similarities between the both parties enabled Mexico to seek out African Americans and vice versa. Both cooperated with similar aims and objectives; the primary one being to combat the U.S. racial dominion.

[9] President Franklin D. Roosevelt remarks before the Daughters of the American Revolution, Washington, D.C., April 21, 1938.—*The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1938,* p. 259 (1941).

[10] Woodrow Wilson: "7th Annual Message," December 2, 1919. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29560.

The Wilson Administration was attempting to prevent the disruption of the political system of the United States by radicals. Unfortunately, the political system under President Wilson was already frail and faulty given the repression African Americans had faced for some time. One answer to end this repression was migration. Yale scholar John Dollard, who studied the 1930s South, stated, "Oftentimes, just to go away is one of the most aggressive things that another person can do, and if the means of expressing discontent are limited, as in this case, it is one of the few ways in which pressure can be put."[11]

The repression faced by African Americans was economic, social, and often violent. While migration within the continental United States did ease some tensions, those tensions still existed. The discussed migrations of African American history are continental movements such as the Great Migration and the Western Migration. In *The Warmth of Other Suns,* Isabel Wilkerson stated: "It was the first act of independence by a people who were in bondage in this country far longer than they have been free."[12] In 1919 Jack Johnson, the famed pugilist, placed advertisements with words of convincing and powerful messages about their Mexico in black community newspapers. In the *Messenger*, "Jack Johnson's Land Company" extended the following enticing invitation:

> "Colored People. You who are lynched, tortured, mobbed, persecuted and discriminated against in the boasted 'Land of Liberty'…OWN A HOME IN MEXICO where one man is good as another and it is not your nationality that counts but simply you!" The price is

[11] Dollard, John. *The Early Sociology of Class: caste and class in a southern town, Volume 6* (New York, Taylor and Francis, 1998), 301.

[12] Wilkerson, Isabel. *The Warmth of Other Suns*: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration (New York, Random House Press, 2010), 10.

reasonable-$5.00 an acre and up- but "best of all there is [no] 'race prejudice' in Mexico and in fact, severe punishment is meted out to those who discriminate against a man because of his color or race. Neither is there censorship, espionage or conscription."[13] While credit is due to Jack Johnson for standing by his convictions and proclaiming this about Mexico, the idea was not a new and radical one and neither was it entirely factual.

The idea's historical lineage extends back to the period of colonial America. Furthermore, transnational migration has also played a role in shaping African American movement. The planting of the transmigrational seed to Latin America had been unearthed, as did the talk of African American transmigration.

One of the earlier anti-slavery works was the 1776 book of Reverend Samuel Hopkins entitled *A Dialogue Concerning the Slavery of the Africans.* Samuel Hopkins is not only vitally important for the abolitionist movement but also for earlier historical suggestions of free black migration from colonial America to the tropical countries of Latin America.[14] Although, Hopkins's suggestion is promising, the perception of his motivation may be clouded by presentism. His view however does not merit the same perception into the view of slaves. He however, is important to the start of the abolitionist movement that inspired others. In 1770, Hopkins also proposed the idea of migrating free blacks to places such as Africa, an early form of the Back-to-Africa Movement. Furthermore, this attests to the still very prominent African descended populations in Latin America and the Caribbean. During the American Revolution, Hopkins' position regarding migration became irrelevant as the Revolutionary War effort took

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[13] See 1919 advertisement from *The Messenger* in Theodore Vincent, ed., *Voices of a Black Nation: Political Journalism in the Harlem Renaissance* (San Francisco, Ramparts Press, 1973), 260.

[14] Schwartz, Rosalie. *Across the Rio to Freedom: U.S. Negroes in Mexico* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, University of Texas at El Paso, 1974), 20.

priority over the moral and religious inconsistencies of slavery. In *A Dialogue Concerning the Slavery of the Africans* (1776) Hopkins stated:

> But I think it of importance that this trade should not only be condemned as wrong, but attentively considered in its real nature, and in all its shocking attendants and circumstances, which will lead us to think of it with a detestation and horror which this scene of inhumanity, oppression and cruelty, exceeding every thing of the kind that has ever been perpetrated by the sons of men, is suited to excite; and waken us to a proper indignation against the authors of this violence and outrage done to their fellow men; and to feelings of humanity and pity toward our brethren, who are the miserable sufferers.[15]

Some of the American Founders focused on particular peoples' freedoms only. Other founders, in particular Alexander Hamilton, opposed slavery. Samuel Hopkins understood the travesties of the slave trade and the dire need to address the issue. He addressed *A Dialogue Concerning the Slavery of the Africans* to the Continental Congress of 1776. While slavery was discussed extensively at the Continental Congress, the founding fathers did not take heed. Slavery and the abject destitution became incorporated into the political system of colonial America which created, shaped, and molded American history and its inconsistent plea for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. For African Americans, these pursuits potentially came to fruition as the transmigration seed was planted early on in U.S. colonial history.

Decades later Sam Houston, a leader of the Texas Revolution, said that a leader is someone who helps improve the lives of other people or improves the system they live with. As tensions heightened with the Texas Revolution, the Texans' controversial defense of racism

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[15] Hopkins, Samuel. *A Dialogue Concerning the Slavery of the Africans; Shewing it to be the Duty and Interest of the American Colonies to emancipate all their African Slaves: with an Address to the Owners of such Slaves.* (Norwich CT, J.P. Spooner, 1776), 7.

made this quote inapplicable to Texas as immigration became an issue regarding slavery. As was preceded before, slavery was more important than equal rights for all, an American ideal. During the Texas Revolution, the colonization of Texas by Anglos was predominately consumed with the inclusion of slavery. Benjamin Lundy had a different idea and approach. This Quaker and abolitionist had a history of assisting free blacks. Lundy developed colonies in Haiti, Canada, and finally looked towards Texas and Mexico as other places of emigration.[16] His ardent anti-slavery sentiment led him to oppose the Texas Revolution because of the Texans' position towards the continued use and implementation of slavery in a country where slavery was not legal. Lundy "published the fierce anti-slavery polemic in 'The War in Texas' in 1836 and had received permission from Mexican authorities to establish a colony of free Negroes [in Corpus Christ] prior to the Texas Revolution."[17] Lundy's stake against the Texas Revolution was more than rhetorical.

Transmigration did not affect the Caribbean as it did the continental United States for two reasons. The first was the population of those of African descent in the Caribbean was vastly larger than in the United States and they were largely on islands. The second is that since the Caribbean had a huge population of African descendants, revolution was easier or rather less difficult to achieve there. Haiti's successful 1804 war for independence proved freedom could be achieved through revolutionary means. Revolution for slaves in the United States meant migration since they were a smaller portion of the population. Resistance and revolution existed in the United States but were combated effectively and largely by slave owners and the political system.

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[16] Schwartz, *Across the Rio to Freedom,* 20.

[17] Horne, *Black and Brown,* 15.

During the Texas Revolution abolitionists asked about the possibility of the emigration of blacks to Mexico. It is important to point out that early abolitionists were not primarily concerned with black freedom but rather white freedom from blacks. Pursuing colonization efforts in lands further from the concentration of the American population is critical to understanding the motivation for doing so. The movements could have stemmed from the racist idea to rid America of slaves and to send them to an area where another nation could tailor to them, a nation that was seen as inferior to the United States. This established early on, the United States racial hegemony. The then current Vice-President Valentín Gómez Farías responded to the request:

> If they [Negro slaves] would like to come, we will offer them land for cultivation, plots for houses where they can establish towns, and tools for work, under the obligation [that they will] obey the laws of the country and the authorities already established by the Supreme Government of the Federation.[18]

During the Texas conflict, the Mexican Secretary of War, José Maria Tornel, denounced the existence of slavery in his criticism of the United States. Mexican politicians used the criticism of slavery as a guise to construct their own moral virtue. United States and Mexico relations were at an unstable stage. Tornel "called attention to the 'astonishment of the civilized world' at the support given by the United States to the 'peculiar institution.'"[19] Furthermore, Tornel said that Mexico considered all men brothers which were created by our common father.[20] Tornel's criticism was a propagandistic ploy of denouncing U.S. activities to highlight

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[18] Relacionados con Texas, L-E 1057, III, Reservado Number 2, Secretary of Relations to J.M. Castillo y Lanzas, August 20, 1833, *Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores, Archivo Historico, Mexico City.*

[19] Schwartz, *Across the Rio to Freedom,* 24.

the 'receptive' nature of Mexico towards U.S. blacks, although Mexico had its share of racial problems. Additionally, Tornel's purpose was to overshadow the views of Mexican racial hierarchies and shine light on America's racial inconsistencies. Antonio López de Santa Anna, who played a wide-ranging colorful role in Mexico, uniformly wrote:

> There is a considerable number of slaves in Texas also, who have been introduced by their masters under cover of certain questionable contracts, but who according to our laws should be free. Shall we permit those wretches to moan in chains any longer in a country whose kind laws protect the liberty of man without distinction of caste or color?[21]

Comments by Mexicans such as those by José Maria Tornel and Antonio López de Santa Anna can be viewed as opportunistic to give political and proactive support towards the sentiment against slavery. However, this consensus existed nationally in Mexico prior to the Texas Revolution conflict and was reflective in Tornel and Santa Anna and their position. In 1810, at the start of the Mexican War of Independence from Spain, Miguel Hidalgo and Jose Maria Morelos (who was of partial African descent) proposed the decree for the abolition of slavery. Guadalupe Victoria, the first President of Mexico, also reiterated this position on slavery.

In 1820 the Plan of Iguala, proposed by Agustin de Iturbide and Vicente Guerrero called for the abolition of slavery in Mexico. The Plan of Iguala was an attempt to establish a fundamental constitutional foundation for the founding of Mexico separate from Spain and its colonial control. The Plan of Iguala also featured the three guarantees, which were independence,

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[20] José María Tornel y Mendivil, "Relations between Texas, the United States of America and the Mexican Republic," in Carlos E. Castaneda, ed., The Mexican Side of the Texan Revolution (Dallas, P.L. Turner Company, 1928), pp. 327-28. See also Carrigan, William D. and Waldrep, Christopher eds., *Swift to Wrath: Lynching in Global Historical Perspective* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2013).

[21] Antonio López de Santa Anna, "Manifesto Relative to his Operations in the Texas Campaign and his capture," in, Mexican Side of Revolution, p. 65.

rights of property and that the church will be protected, and most important for race relations that a 'union' be created among all ethnic and national groups.[22] Furthermore, the revised Plan of Iguala specified that "all inhabitants of New Spain, without distinction to their being Europeans, Africans, or Indians, are citizens of this Monarchy with the option to seek all employment according to their merits and virtues.[23] By Guerrero's standards racism, and old 'casta' systems were being dismantled. The political measures Guerrero was pronouncing were changing what it meant to be called a citizen and being redefined. According to Theodore Vincent, Guerrero's defined terms allowed for equality to exist amongst Mexicans. Vincent stated, "to Guerrero a 'citizen' felt a communal responsibility to the whole. As seen in 1815 in his first published pronouncement he joined the two meanings of the word *pueblo:* 'the people' (a collection of individuals) and 'the village' (a people responsible to one another).[24] In 1823 Guerrero issued another proclamation declaratively ensuring racial equality under the universality of citizenship. Guerrero proclaimed:

> We have defeated the colossus and we bathe in the glow of new happiness…. [We now know] the ways of the true freedom… [which is] living with a knowledge that no one is above anyone else, that there is no title no more honored than that of the citizen, and that applies be the person in the military, a worker, a government official, a cleric, a land owner, a laborer, a craftsman, [or] a writer… because the sacred belief in equality has leveled us before the law.[25]

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[22] Vincent, Theodore G. *The Legacy of Vicente Guerrero, Mexico's First Black Indian President* (Gainesville, University of Florida Press, 2001), 125.

[23] Plan of Iguala, Mora Institute, D.F. Mexico, 1987. For the second version see V. Riva Palacio Collection, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, 1887-89a: 119-121.

[24] Vincent, *The Legacy of Vicente Guerrero, Mexico's First Black Indian President,* 128.

Under the Mexican Constitution of 1824, a decree establishing the abolition of slavery was implemented in 1829. Vicente Guerrero, the first Mexican President of Black/Indigenous descent was also a "descendant of the 250,000 to 300,000 African slaves brought to colonial Mexico, he also had indigenous and Spanish roots,"[26] and proposed the official constitutional decrees in favor of the abolition of slavery in 1829.[27] On the 15th of September 1829 Vicente Guerrero decreed:

> The President of the United States of Mexico, know ye: That desiring to celebrate in the year of 1829 the anniversary of our independence with an act of justice and national beneficence, which might result in the benefit and support of a good, so highly to be appreciated, which might cement more and more the public tranquility, which might reinstate an unfortunate part of its inhabitants in the sacred rights which nature gave them, and which the nation protects by wise and just laws, in conformance with the 30th article of the constitutive act, in which the use of extraordinary powers are ceded to me, I have thought it proper to decree:
>
> 1st. Slavery is abolished in the republic.
>
> 2nd. Consequently, those who have been until now considered slaves are free.
>
> 3rd. When the circumstances of the treasury may permit, the owners of the slaves will be indemnified in the mode that the laws may provide. And in order that every part of this decree may be fully complied with, let it be printed, published, and circulated.[28]

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[25] Guardino, Peter. *Peasants, Politics, and the Formation of Mexico's National State: Guerrero, 1800-1857* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1996), 91-92. Garcia Macias, Alfonso and Lopez Escalera Sanchez, Juan de. *Diccionario Biographico y de la Historia de Mexico* (D.F. Mexico, Banco Internacional, 1987).

[26] Horne, *Black and Brown,* 13-14. SoRelle, James Martin. "The Darker Side of 'Heaven': The Black Community in Houston, Texas, 1917-1945," Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University, 1980, 8.

[27] Vincent, *The Legacy of Vicente Guerrero,* 195-197.

If that wasn't enough, the Mexican government earlier in 1824 "had attempted to abolish the slave system gradually through the Colonization Law of 1824, which emancipated slave children on their fourteenth birthday. Another law in 1832 forbade the further importation of slaves into Texas, but colonists simply ignored this statute in the face of weak Mexican enforcement."[29]

African Americans attempted to seize the opportunity to sketch a new life in Mexico. "During the 1830s, Matamoros, in particular, attracted a noticeable black expatriate population. Discussions were held between Mexican officials and the city's black community to open up a formal colony there, but it is unclear if these plans ever materialized."[30] Former slaves interviewed in 1937 such as Felix Haywood who saw Mexico as a safe haven for slaves stated, "There was no reason to *run* up north. All we had to do was to *walk* south, and we'd be free as soon as [we] cross[ed] the Río Grande."[31] Another former slave named Walter Rimm stated:

> All we had to do was *walk,* but walk south and we'd be free as soon as we crossed the Río Grande. In Mexico you could be free. They didn't care what color you were, black, white, yellow, or blue. Hundreds of slaves did go to Mexico and got on all right. We would hear about them and how they were going to be Mexicans. They brought up their children to speak only Mexican [sic].[32]

Mexico had its share of racial tensions present under President Guerrero but his administration placed the country far ahead of its northern neighbor. These racial tensions were

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[28] Given at the Federal Palace of Mexico, the 15th of September, 1829. Vicente Guerrero To José María Bocanegra. Vincent, 196. Sprague, William Forrest. *Vicente Guerrero: Mexican Liberator; a Study in Patriotism* (Chicago, R.R. Donnelly and Sons Company, 1939).

[29] Horne, *Black and Brown*, 13.

[30] Lundy, Benjamin. *The Life, Travels and Opinions of Benjamin Lundy, including his Journeys to Mexico; with a sketch of contemporary events, and a Notice of the Revolution in Haiti* (New York, NYU Press, 1969).

[31] Ronnie C. Tyler and Lawrence R. Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas,* (Austin, Encino Press, 1974), 68.

[32] Ibid, 68.0

part of the old hierarchical system established by Spain during the colonial era. In 1832, the German Carl Christian Becher visited Mexico and viewed the new found life that those of African descent gained in a post-Guerrero state. They and other groups previously restricted under the former colonial government were now exercising new found rights. "The so-called childlike Indians were participating in town councils, and the 'bad race' of Afro-Mexicans was seizing the economic and political opportunities opened through the abolition of caste restrictions."[33] Becher also compared Afro-Mexicans with African Americans and their social position in the United States writing:

> These blacks, as is known, are free in the republic of Mexico; which is to say, they enjoy, intimately, the same rights as do the rest of the inhabitants of the state, which is not the case in the United States of North America, where, as a result of the laws, or for prejudices, the blacks are humiliated and pressed down to the category of the lowest level of men.[34]

Previously, another German, Karl Wilhelm Koppe…"observed that legal rights seemed to energize the blacks and to result in widespread intermarriage of Africans and other races" in colonial Mexico.[35] The *casta* system was further being dismantled through miscegenation and while racism still existed in Mexico what was fundamentally different was that Mexico gave no legal basis to racial discrimination. Unfortunately, a United States official in Mexico noted, "it is a very great mistake to suppose that they [blacks] enjoy anything like social equality even with the Indian population….The Negro in Mexico…is looked upon as belonging to a class a little

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[33] Vincent, *The Legacy of Vicente Guerrero*, 152.

[34] Becher quoted in Pobblet, Martha. *Cien Vajeros en Veracruz: cronicas y relatos 4 vol.* (*Xalapa: Gobierno de Veracruz*), 231.

[35] Vincent, *The Legacy of Vicente Guerrero,* 153.

lower than the lowest."[36] The latter opinion is reflective of U.S. and Mexico relations when it came to the issue of slavery. More so, it highlights the tactic of propaganda (possible misinformation) to deter African Americans from viewing Mexico as a viable place of relocation.

At the height of the Mexican-American War, (an extension of the Texas Revolution), slaves, free Negroes, and generally speaking African Americans, were at the forefront of American crises. Senator Robert J. Walker of Mississippi wrote *The Letter of Mr. Walker of Mississippi Relative to the Annexation of Texas,* which was circulated to millions of Americans in 1844. He asserted, "Capitalizing on the ambivalence of northerners squeezed between expansionist and anti-slavery sentiment, Walker made a case for 'self-destruction' in the nature of United States slavery, leaning heavily on Mexico and other Latin American countries as the ultimate happy haven for ex-slaves."[37] While this sentiment primarily addressed ex-slaves, slaves still in positions of forced toil had sought out countries like Mexico since they were brought to colonial America.[38] This sentiment continued to exist beyond the existence of slavery where blacks in the United States still remained in sub-par social and economic conditions ripe with violence and the pursuit of revolutionary means to escape.

While the debate of the annexation of Texas went into the U.S. Congress, Sen. Robert J. Walker of Mississippi argued for the idea that if Texas was annexed, blacks had the option of leaving for Mexico, thus solving the race problem in the South. This was primarily motivated by the idea to rid the U.S. of blacks and motivate them to see another outlet for migration. The

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[36] Olivera, Ruth R. and Crete, Liliane. *Life in Mexico under Santa Anna: 1822-1855* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 21.

[37] Schwartz, *Across the Rio to Freedom*, 29.

[38] Ibid, 28-31.

annexation occurred in 1845 and Walker had set his slaves free earlier because of political pressure from Congress. Walker did not have a claim to slavery anymore; he however continued to have a racist view. Walker offered his approach and stated:

> The sparse population occupying the land [Mexico] would welcome the Negroes and treat them as equals. The people of Latin America are overwhelmingly persons of color…These people cherish no race prejudice against Negroes. The barriers of color, which in the United States would exclude Negroes forever from the privileges of equality, would not operate there. The Negroes would be integrated as equals in a society of equals and not always sullen inferiors in a despised caste.[39]

Walker's analysis provided insight into the 'colored' propaganda he was using to stimulate the 'options' the U.S. could pursue when concerning itself with African Americans and Latin America. Walker placed emphasis on the idea that "Latin America is overwhelmingly persons of color" and offered African Americans 'equality' in Mexico. Both groups were viewed diminutively by Walker and the majority of the U.S. society.

Walker also argued that conditions created by soil exhaustion in the Southern U.S. created the atmosphere for freed "Negroes" to migrate towards Mexico. "The freed Negroes, Walker continued, having no employment opportunities on exhausted soil, flow southward into Mexico, Central America, and South America, where an ideal climate similar to that of Africa, would provide abundant crops."[40] Similar to the soil destruction of the Dustbowl Era, migration was for those on exhausted land, but not for those who had given up.[41]

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[39] Merk, Frederick. *A Safety Valve Thesis and Texas Annexation* (Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLIV, 1969), 416-419.

[40] Schwartz, *Across the Rio to Freedom*, 29.

[41] Burns, Ken and Duncan, Dayton. *The Dust Bowl: An Illustrated History* (San Francisco, Chronicle Books, 2012).

Furthermore, Mexico was not merely an escape haven but a place where blacks could remedy their previous social position in the United States. While discussing the potential United States' annexation of the Texas Republic, Mexico stood steadfast behind blacks in their country. Juan Almonte, the minister plenipotentiary to the United States of Mexico stated Mexico's position in 1844 announcing:

> This convention of people of color, in the present circumstances, is…of highest importance to us, and shows that the African race begins to despair in this place, and that in case of a war between Mexico and the United States we should be able to count on them. In truth, already various individuals of color have offered their services in the case of war with Texas or with the United States…[42]

So while Mexico showed a noble purpose behind supporting the Negroes of the United States, she also displayed a desire to create defensible military positions given the proclivity of the United States for territorial acquisitions. Almonte's words were prophetic considering Mexico's position towards African Americans during the Mexican Revolution. Santa Anna also hoped to curb the military incursion by the United States by pointing out the peculiar position of African Americans in the U.S. military. He saw the possibility of African Americans deserting and joining the fight against the U.S. military. Santa Anna encouraged the idea that "there is no distinction of races; here indeed there is liberty and not slavery."[43]

During the 1850s Black Seminoles of Florida immigrated to Mexico and left the United States where both blacks and Indians were being persecuted. Racial identity was the primary

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[42] Juan N. Almonte to Minister of Relations, May 5, 1844. "Negros norteamericanos a favor de Mexico en caso de guerra," 4-12-6280, Mexico. *Archivo de la Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, Mexico City.*

[43] Relaciones con Texas, L-E 1091, XXXVII, Notice published in English, "The President of the Mexican Republic to the Troops engaged in the Army of the United States of America," August 15, 1847. *Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores, Archivo Historico, Mexico City.*

reason behind their tense existence in the United States as they attempted to escape massacres, slave catchers, and legal racism. Like other groups from the United States who did not fit into the status quo of 'ideal' citizens, the Black Seminoles migrated to the periphery of the newly established boundaries between the United States and Mexico along the Río Grande. Two things occurred when the Black Seminoles migrated to Mexico. Firstly, Mexico was able to use them from a military perspective to assist in warring with other Indian tribes within Mexico, the *Indios bárbaros.* This point highlights the type of racial problems Mexico had. Secondly, the Seminoles aided African Americans in seeking a friendlier home.[44] The Seminole leader John Horse stated he "would never let even the little children fight with the Mexican children, because when we came, fleeing, slavery, Mexico was a land of freedom and the Mexicans spread out their arms to us.[45]

Unbeknownst to the Black Seminoles, the constant political turmoil in the Mexican government eventually caused their removal from Mexico. With the entanglement of political allegiances during the War of the Reform (1857-1860) the Black Seminoles had to find another place of liberty. The governor of Coahuila, Santiago Viduarri, who used the Seminoles to fight the *Indios bárbaros,* eventually ceased to support the Seminoles under the French occupation of the Emperor Maximilian von Hapsburg.[46] With the talk of slavery and the execution of Viduarri who supported the French Crown the Black Seminoles had no other choice but to re-constitute an all too familiar concept, exodus. As the war was ending, so too was the hope that at this time Mexico could be the safe haven for blacks escaping racism in the U.S. Other opportunities arose

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[44] Vincent, *The Legacy of Vicente Guerrero*, 232.

[45] Porter, Kenneth W. *The Negro on the American Frontier* (New York, Arno Press, 1971), 433-435.

[46] Vincent, *The Legacy of Vicente Guerrero*, 233.

in the future for African Americans' migration efforts to be propagandized by Mexico. At this point however, Mexico ceased to need them. "By that time most of the Seminoles had recrossed the Río Grande, many to return to Oklahoma and others to become 'Indian fighters' in the United States."[47] A reoccurring theme for blacks from the United States who sought a haven was the short-lived experiences with liberty. A short-lived taste of freedom however, proved motivational for African Americans, and just as liberty and freedom are about constant vigilance, so too were the African Americans and their pursuit.

In 1857, a year after the *Bleeding Kansas* event which featured anti-slavery and pro-slavery protagonists battling, Frederick Law Olmsted "who was sent throughout the southern United States to report on the conditions of blacks for the *New York Times,"* commented via a "dispatch from a Mexican town on the Texas border that legal equality generated better treatment in day-to-day personnel interchange."[48] Furthermore, Olmsted cited the Mexican official who stated: blacks…"could make money faster than Mexicans themselves could, because they had more sense. [And] the Mexican government was very just to them, [so] they could always have their rights as fully protected as if they were Mexican born."[49] Economic opportunities were adequate enough to persuade blacks to leave for Mexico, but sheer freedom was a more enticing offer. "Texas officials estimated that by 1855 more than four thousand black fugitives valued at more than $3.2 million, had entered northern Mexico."[50] The border between the United States and Mexico in Texas was easily crossed and accessible. "Thousands of enslaved Africans were

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[47] Ibid, 233.

[48] Vincent, *The Legacy of Vicente Guerrero*, 153.

[49] Rogers, Joel A. *Sex and Race: A History of White, Negro, and Indian Miscegenation in the Two Americas.* 2 Vols. (New York, New York Press, 1970), 173.

[50] Horne, *Black and Brown*, 16.

able to escape into Mexico without trouble because the border, called the Río Grande in the United States, was little more than a heavy-duty stream. There was 'scarcely a bend in [this] river, 'said one commentator, that 'cannot be forded with the exception of a few feet of swimming."[51]

During the Civil War on January 11, 1864 an abolitionist and U.S. Senator James Lane from Kansas proposed "a bill in Congress that sought to create a colony of four million blacks stretching from the Río Grande to Colorado, and westward to New Mexico. He justified his resolution on the grounds that Mexicans would not object to the colony, given their racial tolerances, and even their proclivity for intermarriage."[52] Senator Lane's abolitionist sentiment was not driven by an egalitarian approach to life; it however was driven by his staunchly racist view. He sponsored a black law in 1857 that proposed to make Kansas an all-white state. His abolitionist view was for the removal of blacks, so his colonization efforts were determined by his view of blacks and objection to them remaining in Kansas.

The earlier abolition of slavery in Mexico and the welcoming environment Mexico presented to people of African and African American descent created a vivid testimony of anti-slavery sentiment in Mexico. The migration successes and attempts made by African Americans during the late portion of the nineteenth century and the early portion of the twentieth century seem unsurprising considering the social and cultural sentiments of Mexico towards blacks from earlier periods. Although some moves of criticism towards the United States regarding its position on slavery arose from conflicts between the two nations, Mexico typically reviled slavery and historically took positions against slavery. Mexico produced the equivalent of the

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[51] Ibid, 16.

[52] Vinson III, Ben. *Flight: The Story of Virgil Richardson, a Tuskegee Airman in Mexico* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 146.

international 'Promised Land' for African Americans. This optimistic view must consider the fact that most ventures were sponsored by propaganda by Mexico and the United States, respectively.

With this alleged promise in mind, African Americans hoped to establish permanent colonies during Mexico's revolutionary process as a means of civil disobedience via migration. This is interpreted as a form of non-violent resistance; a type of protest committed by blacks against America. African Americans now hoped to carve out a real existence in Mexico free of the entrenched legal racism and deep-rooted barriers of various levels.

> The abolition of slavery, apart from preservation of the Union, was the most important result of our Civil War. But the transition was badly handled. Slaves were simply declared free and then left to their own devises. Southern Negroes, powerless, continued to be underprivileged in education, medical care, job opportunities and political status.[53]

With the assistance of Mexico, African Americans now had a real prospect of constructing a life for themselves. It was now up to African Americans to formulate direct action. They employed a method of migration to combat the American system. Would they choose migration as a form of civil disobedience or would they actively seek confrontation via violent resistance through revolutionary means? Possibly both. One thing was certain; African Americans had to get to Mexico or at least its periphery.

[53] Silverman, William. *A Bitter Freedom* (Salt Lake City, American Book Publishing, 2012), 13.

CHAPTER III

UPROOTED

Any Mexican would recognize that Mexico was abused, undervalued and downgraded in international circles, most of all by the United States.

- Adolfo Aguilar Zinser[54]

If you want us, Mexico, we are ready to become your citizens and willing to do all that we can to make you a great power among the nations. If you want us, Latin America, we are ready to dwell among you and make you rich as we have made the southern white man rich.

- Jack Johnson[55]

The seed had been now strongly established. African Americans knew Mexico's position towards them and their acceptance. Mexico's propaganda was also clear. They hoped to use African Americans to combat the United States hegemony. Mexico was attractive to African Americans on two fronts. While the Civil War had emancipated all African Americans, liberation was still out of reach in the United States. But Mexico was a viable destination. Mexicans and African Americans were undervalued by the United States. This combination attracted African Americans to Mexico and Mexico to African Americans. Famed African Americans such as Jack Johnson, the proverbial voice for African Americans, pointed out the potential for this relationship to bloom. Migration to Mexico was a form of civil disobedience as African Americans tried to leave the U.S. This amalgamation complimented both Mexicans and African Americans as they were both abused by the United States.

[54] Obituary Adolfo Aguilar Zinser http://www.economist.com/node/4078262 (Accessed on December 18, 2012)

[55] *The Favorite Magazine* (*Chicago*), circa November 1919.

African Americans were aware of the importance of migration, especially to Mexico. Leaving home was a way to alleviate their social situation in the United States. Writing to the NAACP in 1913, an official in Mexico corresponded from Torreon, "The Jews and the Irish and many, many others had to leave home to solve their economic and race questions" and [here] a real man can be a real man. There is, as you know, no prejudice [in Mexico City]."[56] Unbeknownst to this correspondent, racist segregation existed in Mexico City which was brought by Americans during the influx of U.S. foreigners under the *Porfiriato* as they attempted to force their uncivil 'values' in Mexico.[57] However, African Americans and Mexicans worked cooperatively to combat this particular racism in Mexico. The American Walter Sanborn owned a nationwide set of stores in Mexico City, including a drugstore and restaurant. He attempted to establish American racism in a foreign land. Unfortunately for Walter Sanborn, he was not in the United States anymore and the client he upset was none other than Jack Johnson whom had ties to the revolutionary regime at the time in Mexico. Sanborn it was said "drew the color line and refused to serve Johnson.

> [Johnson] left but returned a few hours later with three or four of Carranza's generals. They drew their pistols and demanded that Sanborn apologize. Mexico, they informed him was not 'white man's country', Sanborn was forced to shakehands, embrace and finally serve Johnson."[58]

This type of example employed by Mexico served to denigrate U.S. racism against blacks. Johnson was also able to use this incident to legitimize his position within the

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[56] *The Crisis,* 5 (Number 5, March, 1913), 237. Ignatiev, Noel. *How the Irish Became White* (New York, Routledge Press, 1995).

[57] Hart, John Mason. *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico Since the Civil War* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2002).

[58] Roberts, Randy. *Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era of White Hopes* (New York, The Free Press, 1986), 209.

revolutionary regime in Mexico. His celebrity status helped evoke an idea and myth that Mexico was receptive to African Americans.

William H. Ellis, a San Antonio business man, wanted to establish a "Negro colony" in Mexico worked on agricultural staples such as coffee and cotton. These were crops that African Americans were definitely familiar with. To combat the Back-to-Africa Movement Ellis proclaimed, "that Mexico was not only closer but more civilized than Africa…The Negro emigrationist Henry Turner proposed migration as a 'solution for race problems…shouts of 'Africa' were met with shouts of 'Mexico.'"[59] These shouts were not unnoticed as the conditions of African Americans did not improve in the post-Civil War era. Furthermore, Ellis had an agenda behind this renouncement of the Back-to-Africa movement; he held monetary and profiting interests in the colonization scheme. Ellis wrote in 1889 in Mexico City that he had:

> just received my concessions from the Mexican government for the introduction of (20,000) twenty thousand Afro-American colonists from the southern United States of America into the states of Veracruz, Tamaulipas, and San Luis Potosi, in which states have over three million acres of rich lands and from the Mexico government I receive for every person over (12) twelve years of age ($50) fifty dollars in government bonds bearing (6%) six percent interest. I will furnish all the colonists for the first two years with all necessary farming tools, implements, wagons, also clothing and provisions of every kind.[60]

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[59] Redkey, Edwin S. *Black Exodus: Black Nationalist and Back-to-Africa Movements, 1890-1910* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1969), 187,188.

[60] Clipping, 19 November 1889, C192, Charles Turner Scrapbook A, Charles Turner Scrapbooks, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.

Ellis used every type of ploy as he sought out willing African Americans to migrate to Mexico. The ploys were hardly needed, the African Americans merely needed to look at their current state in America. Although the number of colonists Ellis recruited paled in comparison to the amount his colonization efforts sought; options, however bleak, still existed for African Americans. The number of colonists was roughly one thousand southern African Americans.[61] They were then situated at the Tlahualilo hacienda in Durango, a familiar plantation type setting for the colonists who soon began agricultural work. However, only a few months in, the colonists were to be set back in an unsettling fashion. Rather than the unfamiliar environment inhibiting development, disease impeded their potential progress in Mexico. Furthermore, the African American colonists were saved at the border by the system they were trying to flee.

On July 31, 1895 *The Watchman and Southron* newspaper of South Carolina published "Distressed Negro Colonists in Mexico." Several recent African American immigrants from Mexico were being held at Eagle Pass, Texas quarantined because of a disease.[62] These recent immigrants were part of a very unsuccessful colonization attempt made through the company *Compania Agricola Limitada del Tlahualilo* at the Tlahualilo Hacienda in Durango, Mexico and they were attempting to get back to the United States. Several factors went into the failure of the endeavor. The leader William H. Ellis was distant and disease and malady contributed to the collapse of the colonization attempt.[63] According to the Dwyer Report, the African American casualties were grim. Seventy died at the hacienda, sixty at Eagle Pass during the quarantine, ten

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[61] Jacoby, Karl. *Between North and South: The Alternative Borderlands of William H. Ellis and the African American Colony of 1895,* Samuel Truett and Elliot Young eds. *Continental Crossroads* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2004), 222.

[62] *The Watchman and Southron,* 31 July, 1895.

[63] Jacoby, Karl. *Between North and South: The Alternative Borderlands of William H. Ellis and the African American Colony of 1895,* 222-23.

at Torreon, and eight between Torreon and Eagle Pass-a total of about 148 deaths.[64] They were consumed for the most part by malaria and smallpox. Juan Llamedo, the president of the Mexican Colonization Company, spoke remorsefully about the failed effort. Llamedo stated, "This company has sustained great loss by the importation of the Negroes, and regrets that they have not met with the prosperity which in all sincerity we had hoped they would attain, while we have omitted no measure calculated for our mutual advantage."[65]

Unfortunately, African Americans in Mexico did not always have the encouraging experiences they hoped to realize. Mexico's propaganda was partly to blame for the misguided efforts. The U.S. government took advantage of the situation to aid the African American colonists combating the idea of a racist America. Southern American newspapers also used the occurrence to speak negatively of the colonization effort and to denigrate the African Americans. It was used as a ploy of propaganda to counteract the African American colonization efforts to Mexico. In Alabama (where most of the colonists came from) the *Courier* stated that "this is the home of the Negro. He should accept the Southern sun and the cotton fields and make of himself a more useful citizen."[66] African Americans were trying to achieve this idea to no avail in the South. Furthermore, the racism permeated in another newspaper. "They are happier among the white people who know them and are able to make allowances for their shortcomings" affirmed the Tuskegee *News.*[67]

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[64] U.S. 54 Congress, 1 Session, 1895-1896, *House Doc.* 169, "Failure of the Scheme for the colonization of Negroes in Mexico," p. 42. *The United States National Archives and Administration, Washington, D.C.*

[65] U.S. 54 Congress, 1 Session, 1895-1896, *House Doc.* 169, "Failure of the Scheme for the colonization of Negroes in Mexico," p. 24-26. *The United States National Archives and Administration, Washington, D.C.*

[66] Alabama*, Courier,* August 8, 1895.

[67] Tuskegee *News,* September 26, 1895.

A decade later another colonization effort commenced. At that time D.F. Whitaker, an editor at the liberal *Clearview Patriarch* newspaper of Oklahoma, sought to create a colony in Mexico for African Americans. In 1906 he, as president of the Oklahoma-Mexican Emigration Society, was in Monterrey seeking arrangements to purchase eighty-five square miles of land sixty-five miles south of Tampico, Tamaulipas to immediately place into cultivation.[68] Tamaulipas had remained an important locality for those of African heritage since the introduction of slaves on to plantations during the colonial era.

Maria Luisa Herrerra Casasús charted the historical populations of those of African descent in this colony. She listed the Tamaulipas populations of African lineage and mixed African heritage in 1853 as 10,531 out of a population of 180, 514.[69] Furthermore, the area Whitaker wished to colonize and populate with African Americans historically had the states highest concentration of African heritage peoples. According to Casasús, Tampico had the highest concentration of African-descent peoples at fifty out of 201 for the entire state in 1853. The tropical Tamaulipan climate, similar to the climate of the Southern States of the United States, was acceptable for those African Americans considering moving with this colonizing effort.[70]

Furthermore, D.F. Whitaker was seeking African Americans from the Southern States who were simultaneously migrating to northern states for better economic opportunities and less stressful racial relations. He argued once the Negro colony was to be established, the plots will be symbolically divided into forty-acre farms and will then be sold to the incoming immigrants

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[68] *The Brownsville Herald,* 9 April, 1906.

[69] Casasús, María Luisa Herrera. *Raices Africanas en la Poblacion de Tamaulipas* (Victoria, Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1998), 71.

[70] Climate Data for Tampico. http://worldweather.wmo.int/179/c01298.htm (accessed on 25 October 2012)

at inconsequential pricing.[71] He proposed that cotton and other products familiar to African Americans be cultivated in the Tampico colony. Like the Ellis colony, cotton was at the center of agricultural duties.

> In Ellis's eyes, the prominence of the American South in this endeavor was directly attributable to the agricultural skill of African American farmers. 'The American Negro is a cotton grower and in agricultural pursuits unexcelled in the world'…[72] He [the American Negro] has proven this by producing in the United States one fourth of the entire cotton crop of the world.' If black farmers frequently courted violence when they tried to purchase agricultural land in the United States, Mexico had 'millions of acres' of uncultivated lands that the country was willing to offer to whoever might develop them.[73]

Therefore, Whitaker's plots of forty acres were not far fetched. Mexico encouraged the colonization efforts with open arms.[74] In Mexico, African Americans might finally achieve the independence and self-sufficiency so long celebrated in American agricultural ideology-yet so long denied them north of the border.[75] This process of non-violent acquisition of property was an option for African Americans.

> M.M. Madden, a Negro attorney in Oklahoma City" had a plan in works regarding a monumental colonization effort that was garnering support from the U.S. government

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[71] *The Bourbon News*, Paris, Kentucky, April 10 1906.

[72] Jacoby, *Between North and South: The Alternative Borderlands of William H. Ellis and the African American Colony of 1895,* 213.

[73] Ibid, 213. Painter, Nell Irvin. *The Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 1992).

[74] *The Bourbon News*, Paris, Kentucky, April 10 1906.

[75] *San Antonio Express,* 14 October, 1895.

which disclosed "plans said to be…[a]foot for the establishment of a Negro state to be situated partly within the boundaries of Mexico.[76]

Similar to Whitaker's plan, Madden proposed his idea to the Senate Foreign Relations committee and the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. Madden hoped "for the acquisition of 500 miles square in Mexico, bordering the Río Grande and the Gulf of Mexico….negotiations are said to be under way with the [Venustiano] Carranza government."[77]

This idea was familiar in Mexico as Mexican President Porfirio Diaz encouraged immigration from the United States and Europe to Mexico. "For members of the Porfirian elite, the colonization of skilled foreigners had become by the late nineteenth century a key component of their campaign to transform Mexico into a modern nation-state with a capitalist, export-oriented economy."[78] Throughout the *Porfiriato,* the goals of the *cientificos* were to bring American enterprises into Mexico to cultivate and industrialize the nation. It's recognizable that it be fitting to bring in American workers as well.[79] Furthermore, "as early as 1877, Diaz had declared that attracting immigrants who could unlock Mexico's natural wealth was one of the 'imperious necessities of the republic.'"[80]

For example "in the 1880s, Black Texans even had approached Mexico's government with plans to launch a colonization movement there to boost Mexico's cotton production."[81] In a

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[76] "Weekly Situation Survey for Week Ending October 22, 1919, "Reel 17, #491, *Surveillance Papers. National Archives and Records Administration RG 59 Department of State, Washington, D.C.*

[77] "Weekly Situation Survey for Week Ending October 22, 1919,"Reel 17, #491, *Surveillance Papers.*

[78] Jacoby, Karl. *Between North and South: The Alternative Borderlands of William H. Ellis and the African American Colony of 1895,* 213.

[79] Hart, John Mason. *Empire and Revolution.*

[80] Jacoby, *Between North and South: The Alternative Borderlands of William H. Ellis and the African American Colony of 1895,* 213.

twist of racism and productive thought, written in 1900, Guillermo Wodon de Sorinee pushed for the immigration of African Americans to Mexico but with a slight reticence about holding back an excess of migrants because it could potentially produce problematic social consequences. His view was that Mexico was not entirely committed to total migration of African Americans, which points out the flaws in the propaganda pushed by Mexico as it asserted its position to the United States. Guillermo Wodon de Sorinne "believed that short infusions of blacks from the U.S. south could jump start the Mexican agricultural export sector."[82] Wodon De Sorinne, a Mexican, saw the potential for positive economic possibilities for Mexico, but simultaneously displayed Mexico's problematic racial issues. He thusly stated, "once the economy started getting into gear, he deemed it prudent to scale back on black immigration before it backfired by producing harmful social results."[83]

Similarly, during the Spanish-American War, the white supremacist Senator Ben Tillman also suggested the migration of blacks from the United States, this time, to the Philippines. Migration was encouraged not only through colonization efforts but as a means to solve the high populations of African Americans. "Sen. 'Pitchfork Ben' Tillman of South Carolina" who sought out new methods to solve the race problem of the United States "urged that the new territories be used as a racial safety valve to decrease lynchings by deporting troublesome blacks."[84] Tillman's pursuits also displayed the racism present in the United States by ignoring the ramifications of this plan towards the people of the Philippines.

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[81] Leiker, James, *Racial Borders* (College Station, Texas A&M Press), 115.

[82] Vinson, III, Ben. *Flight,* 154.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Leiker, James. *Racial Borders,* 109.

Although colonization efforts enticed African Americans to immigrate to Mexico, job opportunities were also motivating factors. "During the revolutionary era a large number of African Americans migrated from New Orleans to Tampico, Mexico, as the oil industry boomed. There they founded branches of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association."[85] Companies like the Veracruz and Pacific Railway offered African Americans employment as the companies canvassed the Southern states for those willing to work in Mexico.[86] Those states offered the best selection of African American emigrants because in the South they faced the harshest race relations. The Ellis colony recruited from the Black Belt.[87] Specifically, Ellis with the assistance of 'Peg' Williams, recruited hundreds from Alabama as they found:

> fertile ground in Tuscaloosa, which contributed close to six hundred colonists to Ellis's plan. Smaller groups from such nearby towns as Eutaw (162 colonists), Gadsden (58), Williams (24), Birmingham (24), Johns (15), and Carter (9) joined the train as it made its way west across Alabama and toward Mexico.[88]

D.F. Whitaker also recruited from this geographical area. "Mexico is willing to take a million Negroes into her population from the United States according to advice received by the Mexican embassy in Washington."[89] Furthermore, "the Colored Colonization Company of San

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[85] Horne, *Black and Brown,* 81.

[86] *The Daily Ardmoreite,* 31 March, 1903.

[87] Washington, Booker T. *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography* (Garden City, New York, Doubleday and Co., 1907), 108.

[88] Jacoby, Karl. *Between North and South: The Alternative Borderlands of William H. Ellis and the African American Colony of 1895,* 216.

[89] *The Daily Ardmoreite,* 31 March, 1903.

Diego was established by James Fowler in 1893 similarly with the same intentions as Ellis as it was 'declared, the Mexican emigration fever is rife here.'"[90]

The railways in Mexico had a history of their own. Both the *Porfiriato* and previous Mexican governments worked to entice foreign investment and assistance with the transformation of Mexico into a more modern and industrialized nation. While encompassing different facets of industrialization, the railroad was one that was highly motivating. Furthermore, during the Mexican *Porfiriato* the railroads played a central role in industrializing the nation. Once established the railroad system increased economic prospects for the country, fed military movement during the revolutionary process, and served as a mode of immigration.[91] For African Americans in the early 1900s, Mexican railways provided civil escape and employment. Akin to the Great Migration, these African Americans sought to help modernize Mexico whereas most moved from the South to the North to industrialize the United States' northern cities.

Mexico was not the only country in Latin America that opened itself to African American railroad workers after 1880. Guatemala sought those workers as well. "Beginning in the 1880s, as Reconstruction ceased, between seventy and eighty Negroes arrived weekly in Puerto Barrios in Guatemala from New Orleans particularly."[92] As railroad workers, African Americans "were pivotal in this industry throughout the entire region, including Mexico. These Afro-North

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[90] Shankman, Arnold. *The Image of Mexico and the Mexican-American in the Black Press, 1890-1935, Journal of Ethnic Studies, 3* (Number 2, Summer 1975), 43-56,43,45.

[91] Welsome, Eileen. *The General and the Jaguar: Pershing's Hunt for Pancho Villa* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2006), Cammisa, Rebecca. *Which Way Home.* DVD. Directed by Rebecca Cammisa. (New York City, HBO Films, 2009).

[92] Horne, Gerald. *Black and Brown,* 24. Opie, Frederick Douglas. *Adios Jim Crow: Afro-North American Workers and the Guatemalan Railroad Workers League, 1884-1921,* Ph.D. Dissertation, Syracuse University, 1999.

Americans…catalyzed the Guatemalan railroad labor movement and established a precedent for other Guatemalan labor movements."[93]

Economic and employment opportunities were not the only factors for African Americans emigrating from the United States. Lynching was another. In 1910, it was announced in the *Deseret Evening News* that more African American planned to immigrate to Mexico with a less formalized plan. To escape racism and sheer violence, fifty African Americans from Palestine, Texas where recently nineteen African Americans were killed via mob violence crossed through El Paso, Texas to Mexico on August 16, 1910. They told the *Deseret Evening News* that they "intended [on] establishing a colony in Mexico and moving their families from the United States. They asserted that the movement of Negroes to abandon eastern Texas was widespread."[94] Although by 1910 slavery had been abolished for several decades mob rule, and lynching were part of the Texas culture. Furthermore, "Texas was only second to Georgia in antiblack lynchings in 1916, with nine occurring that year in its eastern cotton belt."[95]

The Texas Legislature was quiescent when it came to lynching laws as "nothing was mentioned about lynching or a state anti-lynching law in the Texas legislature throughout the period 1900-1925."[96] This however in 1905, did not stop groups in the state from pursuing racist legal action, as "a group of citizens from Houston petitioned Governor Lanham that the state permit Negroes guilty of assaults upon white women to be punished by mobs.[97]

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[93] Horne, Gerald. *Black and Brown,* 24. Opie, Frederick Douglas. *Adios Jim Crow.*

[94] *Deseret Evening News,* Salt Lake City, Utah*,* August 17, 1910.

[95] Leiker, James. *Racial Borders,* 175.

[96] Livingston, David W. "The Lynching of Negroes in Texas, 1900-1925," M.A. thesis, East Texas State University, 1972, 106.

[97] Livingston, David W. The Lynching of Negroes in Texas, 1900-1925, 106.

Eastern Texas represented the egregious side of Texas, but West Texas offered African Americans a less violently racialized part of Texas. In El Paso it was "where the Negro community was largely a product of the railway industry and the military."[98] El Paso had seen a population boom along with other border communities. At the turn of the twentieth century the border communities grew. "During the previous thirty years, the population of border counties had risen from 30,000 to more than 110,000. El Paso experienced the most dramatic rise, growing from fewer than 4,000 to nearly 25,000 in less than twenty years."[99] El Paso's growth allowed for an influx of residents that sought employment opportunities and saw the growth of African American residents. "By this time, El Paso had become a major railroad terminus and a center for commercial, ranching, and smelting activities."[100]

Close proximity to the border with Mexico allowed African Americans access to a less restrictive life and allowed them to see revolutionary agitation firsthand. Some African Americans took violent action against the U.S. government.[101] "In 1910 revolution was erupting across the border and El Paso had a population of 1,400 Negroes out of a total population of over 37,000."[102] African Americans "enjoyed a degree of political and economic success unmatched elsewhere in Texas. El Paso's African-American community retained these advantages throughout the twentieth century, with some local Blacks even attaining wealth and

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[98] Horne, *Black and Brown,* 53.

[99] Leiker, James *Racial Borders,* 110.

[100] Ibid.

[101] See Chapter Three.

[102] Horne, Gerald. *Black and Brown,* 53. Dailey, Maceo C. and Navarro, Kristine. *Wheresoever My People Chance to Dwell: Oral Interviews with African American Women of El Paso,* (Baltimore, Black Classics Press, 2000), 13.

prominence."[103] African Americans found a niche in American society that allowed for them to live civilly and unbothered temporarily from the violent confrontations that existed in other parts of the United States. Although Jim Crow moved westward in a manner akin to the Manifest Destiny; the one so unkind and unforgiving towards the minorities in the United States was another telling story.[104] The few promising factors present in the proximity and periphery of El Paso were linked to Mexico.

There were distinct differences between East Texas which represented the Deep South and its racialized values, and El Paso which represented the less restrictive West/Borderlands. However, the West/Borderlands could not completely escape the Jim Crow laws. W.E.B. Dubois visited Nogales, Arizona and saw this first hand. While there were "several large property owners among the colored people, the colored children of this town have absolutely no school to attend as the state law requires separate schools for white and colored children."[105] The local government also refused to appease the situation. "The town authorities refuse to furnish a school or a teacher, claiming that there are not enough colored children to justify the expense."[106]

In El Paso segregation replaced an earlier policy of acceptance. Drusilla Nixon, an El Paso resident described her experience when segregation came in a few years after the Mexican Revolution began. She stated that "my husband used to say that if El Paso hadn't been in the

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[103] Horne, Gerald. *Black and Brown,* 53. Leiker, James, *Racial Borders,* Ph.D, dissertation, 262.

[104] Malcolm X stated "Not only does America have a very serious problem, but our people have a very serious problem. America's problem is us. We're her problem. The only reason she has a problem is she doesn't want us here. And every time you look at yourself, be you black, brown, red, or yellow -- a so-called Negro -- you represent a person who poses such a serious problem for America because you're not wanted. Once you face this as a fact, then you can start plotting a course that will make you appear intelligent, instead of unintelligent. Malcolm X, "Message to the Grass Roots" (speech, Northern Negro Grass Roots Leadership Conference, Detroit, MI, November 10, 1963), Message to the Grass Roots, http://xroads.virginia.edu/~public/civilrights/a0147.html

[105] *The Crisis,* 8 (Number 5, September 1914), 219.

[106] Ibid.

state of Texas…they wouldn't have had any segregation laws."[107] She recalled first hand, "as it was we couldn't go to any shows and we, of course, couldn't go to any restaurants," and went to a "separate school."[108] Life in El Paso wasn't always like that. During the Mexican Revolution the climate was different. Nixon described meeting a woman who had recently moved to El Paso. "I remember meeting a woman who moved out here during the war. She was from some little town in East Texas and she said, 'Oh my. This is wonderful!'" In "most places you live in a ghetto, but not in El Paso," Mrs. Nixon said.[109] The lady's husband was a doctor who had a practice in El Paso and "his practice was almost entirely Mexican."[110] El Paso allowed people from the border to exchange economic, commercial, and cultural services. It seemed African Americans had the most to gain from these exchanges.

> Many in this community found that they could escape the mundane indignities of Jim Crow Texas by crossing the border into Mexico where they could be served without rancor in restaurants and shop freely in stores, activities barred to them in their homeland.[111]

Texas and Arizona were not the only Southwest states to which African Americans migrated; New Mexico was also a site of black towns. One community was christened Blackdom, New Mexico and founded by Frank Boyer, the son of a former soldier in the U.S. military that fought in the Mexican-American War.[112] The town was founded in 1920 on the

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[107] Oral History, Drusilla Nixon, #194, 11 December 1975, *Archives of University of Texas, El Paso.*

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Horne, *Black and Brown,* 54.

cornerstones of "moral stewardship, personal freedom, and ethnic pride."[113] Unfortunately, the black-town lasted a short while. However, their persistence continued as they moved to Vado, New Mexico.[114]

Oklahomans like D.F. Whitaker were already familiar with dealings in Mexico as refuge for African Americans, but a decade later another Oklahoman proposed another migration to Mexico.

> Reverend Julius Pettigrew of Oklahoma was contacting the Mexican Consul in Calexico, California, in the hope of moving southward toward freedom. His family along with thirty other black families wanted to emigrate from the United States to Mexico. Why? The U.S. government did not provide the legal protection he pleaded for.[115]

African Americans were also subject to many degrading and violent forms of repression. Citing the report by the Mexican consul in Calexico, 19 December 1919, "These families sought '*otros lugares y mejores partes del mundo…Estamos dispuestos y deseosos de nacionalizarnos cuidadanos mexican.'*"[116] Translated this meant they sought 'other places and better parts of the world… we are ready and willing to become nationalized Mexican citizens.[117]

In 1919, Juan Uribe a famous district attorney from Mexico, visited Los Angeles and spoke about the sympathy his country offered towards the African American plight. Uribe stated

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[112] Walton, M.A. "Vado, New Mexico: A Dream in the Desert," in *African American History in New Mexico: Portraits from Five Hundred Years,* ed., Glasrud, Bruce A. (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 2013), 116-23.

[113] *Colores: Blackdom* (http://portal.knme.org/video/1482083459/), accessed on 10 July, 2013.

[114] Walton, M.A. "Vado, New Mexico: A Dream in the Desert," in *African American History in New Mexico: Portraits from Five Hundred Years,* 116-23.

[115] Horne, *Black and Brown,* 10.

[116] Report by Mexican consul in Calexico, 19 December 1919; Memorandum to Mexican consul, 19 January 1920, IV-736-10, *Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, Archivo Historico, Mexico City, Mexico.*

[117] Ibid.

"I was impressed with the fact that the Colored American will not much longer be content with the menial positions in life."[118] African Americans knew the sympathetic hand Mexico had historically offered and Uribe iterated the positive sentiment Mexico had towards African Americans. Uribe stated:

> I believe my Colored American friends in the United States have in their ranks talent of every kind and description… My only regret is that it is not physically possible to immediately transport several millions [sic] of these fine people who are my brothers and sisters to my beloved Mexico, where the earth yields her riches, as nowhere else and where… people are not disturbed by artificial standard of race and color.[119]

As Jack Johnson boasted "If you want us Mexico we are ready to become your citizens and willing to do all that we can to make you a great power among the nations."[120] This chant encouraged Jack Johnson and his circles of friends, but also to those less fortunate African Americans. Mexico was also receptive towards the average African American plight as citizenship was granted by the consul on 19 January, 1920, "*nuestra gobierno permita la entrada a este pais a un grupo de treinta familias de raza negra*," which meant, 'our government permits the entry to this country a group of thirty families of the black race."[121]

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[118] *California Eagle,* 13 September, 1919.

[119] *California Eagle,* 13 September, 1919.

[120] *The Favorite Magazine* (*Chicago*)*,* circa November 1919.

[121] Report by Mexican consul in Calexico, 19 December 1919; Memorandum to Mexican consul, 19 January 1920, IV-736-10, *Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, Archivo Historico, Mexico City, Mexico.*

An attempt to found a colony took place south of California in Baja California, Mexico by Theodore Troy a business man who resided in Los Angeles.[122] Although this was not the South, he along with other African Americans, experienced the grip of American racism even in the far west. Troy understood the opportunity Mexico offered to African Americans and exclaimed as others had before:

> I am going to a land where freedom and opportunity beckon me as well as every other man, woman, and child of dark skin. In this land there are no Jim Crow laws to fetter me; I am not denied opportunity because of the color of my skin, and wonderful undeveloped resources of a country smiled upon by God beckon my genius on to their development.[123]

As Whitaker and Pettigrew were from Oklahoma so too were the investors of the Baja California colony. "Mr. and Mrs. J.B. Key of Okmulgee were reported to be millionaire land holders thanks to profits from oil in their area."[124] Okmulgee was approximately thirty miles from Clearview and forty from Tulsa; the site of race riots during the period of 1921 where 150 blacks were killed.[125]

A U.S. agent named Gus Jones in San Antonio highlighted the massive paranoia in the United States concerning mass migration of blacks to Mexico in July of 1922. The intelligence report stated there were concerns that "fifteen million Negroes from the United States desire to immigrate to Mexico and form large colonies and industrial centers….This will double the

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[122] Vincent, Ted. 1997. "Black hopes in Baja California: Black American and Mexican.." *Western Journal Of Black Studies* 21, no. 3: 204. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCO*host* (accessed July 31, 2013), 204.

[123] *California Eagle,* 6 December, 1919.

[124] Vincent, Ted. 1997. "Black hopes in Baja California: Black American and Mexican..," 207.

[125] Vincent, Ted. *Black Power and the Garvey Movement,* (Oakland, Nzinga Books, 1988), 85.86.

population of the Republic in one stroke."[126] The Republic hoped to offset the loss of the land they incurred during the Mexican-American War with the influx of African Americans; an idea that gained steam under the *Porfiriato* which sought out foreigners to work the land. To check the validity of the story an official from the U.S. government contacted a correspondent in Mexico City. Jones spoke of this stating, "When our reporter called yesterday at the Presidency he found in the ante-chamber of the President, some fifty Negroes, correctly dressed."[127] Their suspicions were confirmed. J.B. Rice, a potential immigrant, spoke about the hope to migrate to Mexico. He said, "Amongst the Negroes desirous of coming to Mexico as colonists there are many millionaires, professionals, land owners, expert oil men and all are men who have dedicated their lives to honest work."[128] Another prospective immigrant named E.B. Kay "representing a large delegation of Negroes who of late arrived in the capital…has been in daily conference with President Obregon… [who] favored the project."[129] These two African Americans, while undoubtedly wanted to immigrate to Mexico, also displayed the motivating factor of selling the idea of how many actually considered the possibility of relocating to Mexico and their backgrounds.

African Americans held a peculiar position in relation to the United States and its relationship with Mexico. At times, Mexico presented African Americans the best counterweight towards the United States by granting them the possibility of an improved position in Mexico, near its proximity with the United States, or through the use of propaganda by Mexico. Both

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[126] Report by Gus Jones, 8 July 1922, Box 84, Folder 16, *Albert Fall Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.*

[127] Ibid.

[128] Ibid.

[129] Ibid.

countries employed the use of propaganda through their conflicting interests. Here, African Americans could attempt to establish themselves elsewhere in a civil manner. Mexico understood the strength of African Americans and their agricultural aptitude in strengthening Mexico's output. As U.S. hegemony grew in the western hemisphere, Mexico attempted to combat this by allying with groups of people such as minorities or radical elements within the United States. When these two groups were one in the same, it aided Mexico even further which will be granted attention in the upcoming chapter. Mexico presented African Americans a means to emigrate from the United States during a different and immense migratory movement (The Great Migration). This peaceful migratory effort can be interpreted as a form of civil disobedience against the racist system that existed in the United States. Another effort was occurring concurrently, one that was not so civil and friendly towards the United States. One where waiting for migration as the solution was not final and where non-violent action took place, so too did violence occur. Violence was a form of resistance. Malcolm X had a similar idea decades beyond the Mexican Revolution and its relation to African Americans, but history's repetition is uncanny. Malcolm X stated:

> If violence is wrong in America, violence is wrong abroad. If it is wrong to be violent defending black women and black children and black babies and black men, then it is wrong for America to draft us, and make us violent abroad in defense of her. And if it is right for America to draft us, and teach us how to be violent in defense of her, then it is right for you and me to do whatever is necessary to defend our own people right here in this country.[130]

[130] Malcolm X, "Message to the Grass Roots" (speech, Northern Negro Grass Roots Leadership Conference, Detroit, MI, November 10, 1963), http://xroads.virginia.edu/~public/civilrights/a0147.html.

CHAPTER IV

TAPROOTS

[Mexico] was "willing not only to give us the privileges of Mexican citizenship, but will champion our cause."

–Jack Johnson[131]

The cost of liberty is less than the price of repression.

–W.E.B. Du Bois[132]

For the countryside is not merely a seed bed of poverty: it is also a seed bed of rebellion, and acute social tensions often lie concealed behind the apparent resignation of the masses.

–Eduardo Galeano[133]

While most conditions did improve from the U.S. South and North, many obstacles still stood between African Americans as they sought better lives that were otherwise absent. W.E.B. Dubois and Jack Johnson aimed to combat products of racial hatred such as limited economic opportunities, racial violence, and burgeoning segregation; by criticizing the United States government and by radical and revolutionary means. While not directly combating the establishment, there were ways they could combat these ideas. Mexicans proved to be a great ally to African Americans because they held similar ideological concerns. Mexico not only presented itself as a physical site of refuge but also as a political ally against the U.S. government for African Americans. Therefore, Mexico and the borderlands proved to be a haven

[131] *The Favorite Magazine* (*Chicago*)*,* circa November, 1919.

[132] Dubois, W.E.B. *John Brown* (Philadelphia, George W. Jacobs Company, 1909), 76.

[133] Galeano, Eduardo. *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1997), 128.

for African Americans during Mexico's revolutionary process. Participation at the revolutionary level that often involved violence was a form of direct action for African Americans. Furthermore, the alliance between African Americans and Mexico proved frustrating to the United States' effort to continue their racial, hegemonic stance.

The famed 'father of African American history' Carter G. Woodson emphasized the shortcomings of African Americans' position in the United States and highlighted the importance of the freedom of movement to enable them to become productive citizens. When the freedom of movement was difficult to acquire in the United States, African Americans sought other parts of the United States and Mexico to seek their freedom. Woodson stated:

> Many persons now see in this shifting of the Negro population the dawn of a new day, not in making the Negro numerically dominant anywhere to obtain political power, but to secure for him freedom of movement from section to section as a competitor in the industrial world. They also observe that while there may be an increase of race prejudice in the North the same will in that proportion decrease in the South thus balancing the equation while giving the Negro his best chance in the economic world out of which must emerge a real man with power to secure his rights as an American citizen.[134]

The freedom of movement is vital because Mexico offered African Americans freedom as the United States impeded African American movement whether it be physical, economic, or racial. Mexico did not also have to balance the equation of racial discrimination and economic opportunity to ensure citizenship. Mexico had abolished slavery in 1824, decades before the United States. The United States was also weary of African Americans seeking alliances with nations especially those of close proximity with the United States. If African Americans had learned anything from their relationship with Mexico it was that Latin American nations might

[134] Woodson, Carter G, *A Century of Negro Migration* (Public Domain Books, 2004), 110.

be receptive to them and their work ethic. Moreover, if African Americans could not reach Mexico through the avenue of migration, violence and revolutionary activity were other avenues which to pursue to grant a voice that waslistened to by the United States and one that could be amplified by Mexico.

Jack Johnson praised Mexico over other Central and South American countries. Johnson announced, "Brazil may have its opportunities, but there are far better ones in this city [Mexico City]. "I believe this to be the best place in the world for our people….The expense of coming here, especially from the southern states, is considerably less than going to South American countries."[135] Johnson said this after he had created a land company in Mexico.[136] The *Chicago Defender* stated Johnson is "regarded as an important factor both in the business and political life here. He is the promoter of one of the largest land corporations in Mexico. Through this concern hundreds of men from the southern states are settling here."[137] Johnson's celebrity status aided the idea for southern blacks to move to Mexico. While he may have had some racial considerations behind as he pointed out better opportunities for his people, one must also consider the economic interests he had the chance to gain.

Johnson seemed to be promoting Mexico and its ideal race relations towards African Americans; however his efforts could also be seen as a propaganda ploy to get African Americans to settle the area. Speaking negatively of other Latin American countries and positively of Mexico was in the best economic interest of Jack Johnson. It also helped him politically as he hoped to stay in Mexico as his situation was better there than in the United

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[135] *Chicago Defender,* 7 June, 1919.

[136] Horne, *Black and Brown,* 31.

[137] *Chicago Defender,* 12 July 1919.

States. Johnson had a great standing with the current revolutionary regime in Mexico under President Venustiano Carranza. The incident with Walter Sanborn confirmed this:

> Johnson stands very high with the Carranza government and [there] are more Negroes now in Mexico City than ever before. Americans from there are of the opinion that the Carranza government are carrying out through Johnson quite a propaganda in the United States. Some time ago Johnson gave an exhibition in Nuevo Laredo and had about twenty Negroes from different portions of the United States meet him there.[138]

These claims were corroborated further by American spies and government agents. "A spy who had infiltrated the Socialist Party in Mexico told his paymasters in Washington that 'Johnson wished to spread race propaganda and he was interested in socialist ideology.'"[139]

While a spy could merely be reporting the conclusion the United States government wanted to hear, Johnson's radical ideas were also heard by many others. At a speech "given before a cheering crowd in front of the Vega Hotel in Nuevo Laredo, Johnson said that when and if the gringos invaded Mexico, American blacks would stand alongside their Mexican brothers."[140] Furthermore, Johnson reiterated his revolutionary position during the speech. Johnson boisterously exclaimed "the colored race are going to show them that when, or if the time ever comes when the Americans will attempt to come over there, the black man is your friend, and [is] with you, and will stand by you."[141] Analyzing this last portion at a further glance

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[138] William M. Hanson to Judge Kearful, 11 October 1919, Folder 177, William F. Buckley Papers, University of Texas, Austin.

[139] Horne, *Black and Brown,* 35. Roberts, Randy. *Papa Jack,* 212.

[140] Roberts, *Papa Jack*, 212.

[141] Horne, *Black and Brown,* 35. Roberts, *Papa Jack,* 212.

shows the hint of failure of a steady alliance between African Americans and the unstable Mexican government. There was not full commitment on the African Americans towards Mexico and possibly vice versa, although both groups had similar interests. Johnson used the phrase 'when they come over there' displayed the provisional commitment he had towards Mexico as a temporary asylum using 'there' instead of 'here' as he was in Nuevo Laredo.

The United States government was fearful of Jack Johnson and his anti-American sentiment in Mexico. The paranoia was further fed when Jack Johnson visited Panama, an important route for American trade.[142] A.L. Flint, the General Purchasing Officer and Chief of Office in Panama reported that Jack Johnson "may come to the Isthmus in the near future from Mexico."[143] The paranoia was not just banter, but very real. Guatemala was a prime example of African American support for revolutionary agitation.

The African American railroad workers aided with the formation of the railroad system in Guatemala and also contributed to the revolutionization of the country's political environment. They "organized the earliest challenge to the state and multinational corporations. These corporations were part of capitalist expansion by the United States into Latin America. By the early 1900s, they composed the largest segment of the railroad and banana industries' workforce."[144] Regardless of political and national allegiances that were often interchangeable, African Americans "staged the first public protest against the state and foreign capital in Guatemala and were blunt agents of defiance with reputations as revolutionaries and strike

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[142] Horne, *Black and Brown,* 36.

[143] A.L. Flint, Chief of Office, Panama, to Attorney General, 19 February 1920, Record Group 60, Department of Justice, Straight Numerical Files, File No. 164211, *National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.*

[144] Opie, Frederick Douglas. *Adios Jim Crow*.

instigators."[145] Decades later Guatemala was the location of military action against revolutionary agitation. Puerto Barrios along with Guatemala City, and the port of San Jose were bombed to reinstate the favored "government" which had the "mission of returning the land to United Fruit and other expropriated landlords."[146] While African Americans were reaching other parts of Latin America, Mexico was still the favored site and the United States was now keeping an eye on African American action in Latin America.

Jack Johnson illustrated the potent force of one African American and his alliance with those in Revolutionary Mexico. For the force of the Mexican Revolution had also reached all the way to New York and the African Blood Brotherhood and its leader Cyril Briggs.[147] The Mexican Consul in New York City acknowledged and appreciated the efforts this African American community had towards their colored brothers down south. The Mexican Consul reported "*radicales de este pais, haciendo una campagna energica en favor de Mexico* (Radicals of this country are forming an energetic campaign in favor of Mexico.)"[148] This radicalization and call for allegiance between oppressed minorities under the white supremacist government of the United States was also pointed out by Pancho Villa, a revolutionary Mexican. He stated when referring to America's racism that "hereafter when you meet a Chinaman, respect him; when you meet a Negro or Japanese respect them; respect burros; wherever and whenever you encounter a gringo," well one can only imagine what Villa thought of 'gringos' as he had attacked Columbus, New Mexico and was chased by General Pershing, oddly with some African

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[145] Opie, Frederick Douglas. *Adios Jim Crow*.

[146] Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America,* 114.

[147] Horne, *Black and Brown,* 140.

[148] Memorandum from Mexican Consul, 8 September 1919, 17-18-143, *Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores, Archivo Historico, Mexico City.* Translated: Radicals of this country are forming an energetic campaign in favor of Mexico.

American soldiers. Villa's decree did not come without its motivational reasoning when considering Villa's contentious position with the U.S. and its army. Villa similarly proclaimed as Jack Johnson did that "Negroes are all ready to side with us [Mexico]."[149]

During World War I German agitators sought out African Americans' alliance because of their peculiar position in the United States. Additionally, with the uncovering of the Zimmerman Telegram which secretly sought out Mexico's alliance with Germany, the United States had more potential collaborations to concern them. In addition, Germany had a viable ally in this endeavor. Mexico aided Germany in hopes to counter American hegemony and influence as a base of operation for Germany. The German agitators were especially keen on the American South as they knew this was the worst geographical location for African Americans because of the severe restrictions and limitations placed on them. Mexicans played a role with the Germans in the recruitment efforts of African Americans. The *New York Times* announced:

> Germans not only followed the Negroes into the cotton fields and mills, but also into the Army…All of the Negro propaganda workers were Mexicans and half breeds and men that were brought to Mexico City and instructed and sent across the border and the wave of Negro propaganda work went from the Mexican border east, and embraced the states principally of Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, [and] Georgia. North and South Carolina were on the outskirts of the movement.[150]

The *New York Times* reported that the U.S. government had "seized a white man and a black man at Birmingham after they toured Alabama, Louisiana, Georgia, the Carolinas, and Mississippi, 'posing as Bible salesmen and ministers of the gospel' and urging black people to

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[149] Katz, Friedrich. *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa,* (Palo Alto, Stanford University Press, 1998), 526.

[150] *New York Times,* 15 December 1918.

migrate to Mexico on specially designed trains."[151] The migration attempt was not merely a humanitarian effort. The Germans were hoping to sway African Americans from their allegiance to the United States. The allegiance was hardly entrenched. The *New York Times* was not the only newspaper publishing on the German clandestine operation in the United States. The black newspaper, the *California Eagle*, also reported on German agitation in the American south. The *California Eagle* reported that the "German government has agents in the south promising blacks if they 'rise against the whites and government' that the Kaiser 'will then place them on par with the whites.'"[152] The idea should have appealed to African Americans as they combated white American racial values.

Furthermore, the distribution of this idea infected North Carolina and had government officials alarmed. In Washington, North Carolina a meeting took place between Negro ministers. The official statement reported that:

> two of the most intelligent [men] have reported to [me] that at a place called Evergreen in Columbus County an old Negro man named Oliver, well known in that community, was approached a few nights ago by a German spy. He told him that he, the German, was visiting the colored people particularly to inform them that the Germans were their friends and that they fully expected to defeat the white people of this country and gain possession and that they colored people would not be molested under the new laws which the Germans would establish.[153]

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[151] *New York Times,* April 7, 1917.

[152] *California Eagle*, 4 April, 1917.

[153] Sprunt, J. to Hall, D. 2 April 1918, Box 26, II, *World War I Collection, North Carolina State Collection, Raleigh.*

Undoubtedly, for African Americans being potentially considered on par with whites was an important issue. Furthermore, the possibility for a prospective government to create laws on equal bearing for all citizens was a system African Americans could be seen supporting. Germany and Mexico were not the only countries offering assistance to African Americans. Japan a non-white nation offered the opportunity for a nation to come in and create equality through governmental action or at least they were promising this. The "Japs [sic] are promising certain things to the colored people on this coast if they will join in with Japan and Mexico when the trouble is begun here in California."[154] The U.S. south was not the only segment of the U.S. plagued with the prospect of collaboration. It seemed Germany had the south and Japan had the west. Equality was promised by Japan as it was with Germany. George Holman, a government agent in Los Angeles, was told that Tokyo "had been making overtures to the Negroes to side with them and that in a year or so they would take California and that when they did the Negroes would be treated right."[155]

African Americans were placed in a predicament. If they enlisted into the U.S. military and fought against Germany and Japan it was as second class citizens in the United States. Furthermore, if they fought against Japan, that enabled the continuation of 'white dominance' in the globe. Any African American who fought against Germany and Japan "is fighting for the white man against himself, for the white race against the darker races and for the perpetuation of white domination of the colored races."[156] Oklahoma Congressman William H. Murray

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[154] Report by George Holman, 24 October 1919, Reel 13, #0072, *Surveillance Papers. Department of Justice—Bureau of Investigation of Surveillance of Black Americans, 1916-1925. National Archives and Records Administration RG 65, Washington, D.C.*

[155] Report by George Holman, 24 October 1919, Reel 13, #0072, *Surveillance Papers.*

[156] Gallichio, Marc. *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945,* UNC Press, NC, 2000), 42-43.

demonstrated the paranoia of losing the hegemony of the 'white dominance' with regard to Mexico. Murray vehemently questioned "whether Mexico is to become a white man's country or to [fall] under control and domination of Asiatic races."[157] Murray worried of white domination of the countries neighboring the United States. He stated further that "it may ultimately determine not only the perpetuity of our own Republic but the civilization of the Aryan race."[158] This explained the resistance from the U.S. government towards radical action taking place within its sphere of influence, especially concerning Mexico and collaboration between African Americans and non-white races. Murray spoke of a radical solution to the 'darker races' cooperatively working together to uproot 'white supremacy.' Murray "would issue another military order breaking up the big estates in Mexico and order them sold in small tracts to any purchaser of the white race" and hope for the "white colonization of Mexico."[159] He then went on to say that "it does not violate our own interests to own every foot of land from here to the Panama Canal."[160]

The prospect of international assistance from nations seemed to have invigorated African Americans' push towards violent resistance. This time, African Americans hoped to employ collaboration on an international scale. They faced American racial hegemony not alone, but with comrades. If all the rhetoric Germany and Japan presented towards the African American community could have all been merely a ploy of propaganda, it still however motivated African Americans to act on a revolutionary scale. While African Americans had historically pursued

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[157] Remarks of the Hon. William H. Murray of Oklahoma in the House of Representatives, 7 November 1913, Box 6, Series 501, *Thomas Catron Papers, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.*

[158] Ibid.

[159] Ibid.

[160] Ibid.

violent means of resistance since Reconstruction, and earlier, the prospective international assistance they were introduced to as they pursued violent means put it on the international stage.

Revolutionary fervor through speech as rhetoric was one thing, but military propaganda proved to be a more serious allegation. There were intelligence reports in the United States that were cause for alarm. It seemed African Americans were arming themselves. One report claimed that "over the entire south, particularly Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas there are spread secret societies of Negroes for the purpose of aggressive action against the whites," as was reported in Texas by Texas Ranger Captain William M. Hanson.[161] Of course, the arming of African Americans was occurring in a violently racial part of America. This raised a more serious alarm than otherwise had been detected because some of these African Americans were also in the United States military. Captain Hanson iterated:

> The returned Negro soldiers are fostering this society and arms in great numbers are being procured…In the recent riot at Longview [Texas]…everyone was greatly surprised to see Negroes coming out of the cane brakes with 30-30 caliber rifles and as much as 200 rounds of ammunition…In the county in which Longview is situated approximately 8000 firearms were taken....The Houston riot of a few years ago was one of the first results of this Negro society.[162]

The Texas Rangers, who have a complicated history in Texas, discovered a situation in Wharton, Texas where munitions were being said to have been sought out by African Americans. The Texas Rangers discovered "unusual calls at the store for the purchase of high powered

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[161] Captain Hanson of Texas Rangers to Director of Military Intelligence, 15 October 1919, Reel 21, #824, Surveillance Papers. *National Archives and Records Administration RG 165 War Department: General and Special Staffs—Military Intelligence Division,, Washington, D.C.*

[162] Ibid.

revolvers and rifle ammunition on the part of Negroes."[163] The relation to Mexican agitation was validated because the Texas Rangers sought out blacks who spoke Spanish, which highlights two points of relevance. One is that the Texas Rangers and other government agencies reflected the paranoid sentiment towards African Americans and counter-violence and that Spanish speaking African Americans spoke of ties to Mexico. The Rangers were concerned that the "Mexican situation may appeal to [the] radical element among Negroes... [sought to] ascertain if about six Negroes speaking some Spanish [were] available for undercover work [,] particularly border points." The Texas Rangers were concerned about collaboration. "Efforts [were] being made by this office to locate the required number of Spanish speaking Negroes."[164]

Similar to the experiences of Captain Hanson in Texas, other West/Borderlands areas were inundated with revolutionary activity and collaboration with Mexicans. Since the revolutionary Mexican forces were in favor of equality amongst 'colored people' the U.S. needed to closely monitor collaboration. Furthermore, paranoia existed in white American society about the forming of a "society of colored anarchists."[165] Seventy miles from Clearview, Oklahoma the revolutionary Ricardo Flores Magon, had a gathering in Lehigh in 1912; which embraced "American and Negro compañeros*"* who "spoke in favor of the Revolution."[166] This oration was not futile, for some African Americans had enlisted in the Flores Magon forces, one

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[163] Report, 2 July 1920, Reel 13, #547, *Surveillance Papers. Department of Justice—Bureau of Investigation of Surveillance of Black Americans, 1916-1925. National Archives and Records Administration RG 65, Washington, D.C.*

[164] Report, 4 December 1919, Reel 5, #404, *Surveillance Papers. Department of Justice—Bureau of Investigation of Surveillance of Black Americans, 1916-1925. National Archives and Records Administration RG 65, Washington, D.C.* Horne, *Black and Brown,* 78.

[165] Ellis, Mark. *Race, War, and Surveillance: African-Americans and the United States Government During World War I,* (Bloomington, University of Indiana Press, 2001), 54.

[166] Johnson, Benjamin Heber. "Sedition and Citizenship in South Texas, 1900-1930," Ph.D dissertation, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2001), 86.

named in particular, "Lieutenant Roberts."[167] The Flores Magon brothers also had connections to San Antonio, Texas. In Houston, these types of meetings were also taking place. A government report stated that there were:

> secret meetings among the Negroes in Houston…. It is stated [that] both Negro and Mexican speakers are disseminating anti-American and anti-white propaganda. The Negroes are being told that trouble is about to arise between Mexico and the United States, and that the Mexicans are better friends to the Negroes than the Americans and that, therefore, the Negroes should join forces with the Mexicans in the conflict.[168]

Further south in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, a correspondence was uncovered between two brothers that called for recruitment of African Americans to Bolshevism. Maximo Alcocer of Nuevo Laredo sent a message to his brother Catarino Alcocer who was in San Antonio, Texas. Maximo wrote to Catarino, "my beloved Negroes are those whom we need in our party as they are the most humiliated. They should be most brave."[169] The letter represented the fear that the U.S. government had towards the recruitment efforts of African Americans by Mexicans. Government officials claimed "Bolshevists are now planning an active propaganda among the Negroes in America" and they feared that they "will come through the Mexican border."[170] William F. Buckley Sr. of Texas was informed about the radical activity concerning Soviet

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[167] Blaisdell, Lowell. *The Desert Revolution: Baja California, 1911,* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1962).

[168] Report, 10 March 1920, Reel 17, #491, *Surveillance Papers. National Archives and Records Administration RG 59 Department of State, Washington, D.C.*

[169] "Confidential" report, circa 1921, "For the period August 1, 1920 to January 31, 1921, " "General Intelligence Affairs," Box 71, Folder 16, *Albert Fall Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.*

[170] Report, 21 July 1920, Reel 17, #580, *Surveillance Papers.*

communist influence. He was warned "Bolshevism in this country came from Mexico."[171] Furthermore, the paranoid U.S. government feared the radicalized elements of minorities were alive and well. As anarchism and communism grew in the United States, the panic set in further as Mexico was used as a means to bring in these elements into the United States. Radical means were conceived to combat this ideological struggle. Buckley Sr. was advised concerning Bolshevism that "you will have to eradicate it from Mexico before you will be able to fight it successfully here."[172] This radicalization also influenced the U.S. government's decision to grant statehood to territories. In 1912 "the federal government wanted to stamp out western heresies before the idea infected other states" particularly from "people who worked with their hands [a socialist mantra]."[173] This mantra was familiar to African Americans and Mexicans who often had agricultural work duties.

African Americans did not make the situation easy for those attempting to quash any black agitation. Hanson reported that "much difficulty will be encountered in obtaining Negro informants, as in the present situation none could be trusted." Furthermore, "efforts are thought to be under way by the Carrancista government to get Negroes into Mexico in order that they may assist the army, many of them having already been trained in our own service."[174] According to another intelligence report Jack Johnson was "publicly in favor of race riots in [the]

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[171] Report "from: No. 16," "Source: Pedro del Villar," 4 November 1919, Folder 177, *William Buckley, Sr. Papers, University of Texas, Austin.*

[172] Report "from: No. 16," "Source: Pedro del Villar," 4 November 1919.

[173] *Tucson Citizen,* 12 February 1982, Ephemera-Statehood-History, 1848-1912," *Arizona Historical Society, Tucson.* See also Sloan Richard E., *Memories of an Arizona Judge,* (Palo Alto, Stanford University Press, 1932).

[174] Captain Hanson of Texas Rangers to Director of Military Intelligence, 15 October 1919, Reel 21, #824, Surveillance Papers. *National Archives and Records Administration RG 165 War Department: General and Special Staffs—Military Intelligence Division,, Washington, D.C.*

U.S." and furthermore was one of the "promoters of the Carranza propaganda in the U.S." [175] This same report indicated that there were "efforts under way to get Negroes into the Mexican Army."[176] Whether it was true or not, the allegations showed that the U.S. government feared collaboration between the Mexican government and African American groups. The role Jack Johnson played validated these claims because Johnson was accused of "fermenting racial feelings with blacks and Mexicans against whites."[177]

Gathering weapons and ammunition was a preliminary step for African Americans who were seeking violent action as a form of resistance. Taking part in revolutionary activities with the revolutionary forces in Mexico displayed the length that African Americans went through to ensure their place in Mexico. Those that were serving in the United States military had the best shot at enlisting in the Mexican armed forces as desertions rose. "Americans who have deserted from some of the regiments on the border are commanding companies of Mexican troops, according to Negro troopers of the Tenth Cavalry who were captured in Carrizal."[178] These commanders were identified as American deserters:

> William Givens, a private in Troop K…says he recognized a former private of the Twentieth Infantry in command of a detachment of the Mexican troops in the Carrizal

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[175] Memorandum, 15 October 1919, Reel 109, M1194, *Name Index to Correspondence of the Military Intelligence Division of the War Department General Staff, 1917-1941, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.*

[176] Ibid.

[177] Memorandum, 11 August 1919, Reel 109, M1194, *Name Index to Correspondence of the Military Intelligence Division of the War Department General Staff, 1917-1941, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.*

[178] *New York Sun,* 4 July, 1916.

fight. After the battle the prisoners were put in charge of the company commanded by this American….The American admitted that he had deserted at Columbus.[179]

To further attest the severity of the desertion rate in the United States military and the benefactors going to the Mexican forces, "Givens said he heard of other American soldiers with the Carranza forces."[180] *The Crisis* printed an account where "a colored man commanded the detachment of Mexican troops which shot an American immigration officer at Juarez, across the Río Grande from El Paso."[181] Henry O. Flipper, an African American who was a U.S. military agent spent time in Mexico. He saw the Mexican Revolution first hand and spoke of the African Americans who took part in military action in Mexican forces. He refused to take part in the "troubles in Mexico."[182] In a gesture which offered insight into the players of United States propaganda and the attempt to defuse revolutionary activity, Flipper exposed the black participants in the revolutionary forces in a correspondence. Flipper alleged:

> there was a Negro lieutenant in Huerta's army at Juarez. He had never been an American soldier but was a fugitive from justice and is now in the Texas Penitentiary, where he belongs [as a pass of judgment it seems.] There was a major in Villa's army, a colored man who previously kept a hotel at Torreon, a very fine man, but he is now at home in the United States. There was also a Negro in [Governor Jose Maria] Maytorena's

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[179] Ibid.

[180] Ibid.

[181] *The Crisis,* 6 (Number 5, September 1913), 219.

[182] Henry O. Flipper to Senator Albert Fall, 25 February 1914, Box 80, Folder 20, *Albert Fall Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.*

army in Sonora who operated a machine gun. It was said he was a deserter but this was later denied.[183]

For African Americans, the borderlands were not only a site for revolutionary agitation but also one of identity radicalization. Generally, speaking under Jim Crow laws black-white mixture in the United States was illegal and culturally stigmatized. In the borderlands where lawlessness was the norm, sometimes it worked for the better. Alva Stevenson in particular, led a historically rich life with an interconnected historical lineage. She had been a "resident of Los Angeles. Her maternal grandmother was Mexican and a native of San Jose de Gracia, Sinaloa, and a cook in the army of General Elias Calles during the Revolution. She met and married Stevenson's grandfather, an African American from Kerr County, Texas, during this tumultuous era."[184]

Her grandfather, an African American, illustrates the point of migration and his search for employment as he left the United States for Mexico. "He had migrated from Texas to Guadalajara at the turn of the twentieth century in search of work. After becoming fluent in Spanish, he secured a job as foreman on a railroad construction project."[185] His work as a foreman on a railroad project demonstrated opportunities that African Americans had in Mexico. "After the Revolution, the newlyweds returned to the United States and settled Nogales, Arizona- a favorite site for 'mixed couples.'"[186] Once the revolutionary tide ceased to grip

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[183] Theodore D. Harris, ed., *Black Frontiersman: The Memoirs of Henry O. Flipper,* (Fort Worth, Texas Christian University, 1997), 101, 103.

[184] Horne, *Black and Brown,* 48. Alva M. Stevenson to Gerald Horne, 23 May 2001, (in possession of Gerald Horne).

[185] Ibid.

[186] Ibid.

Mexico, they settled in an area of the United States that was less racially driven than the American south.

Another African American took advantage of Mexico in terms of avoiding the Jim Crow laws of the United States. "James Westerfield was residing in Louisiana when he was falsely accused of stealing horses-a capital offense. Like many before and since, he fled to Mexico where he rode with Pancho Villa, toiled as a railroad worker, and changed his name to Theodore Walker."[187] Mexico and the borderlands allowed African Americans to start anew, even with new identities. "He returned to the United States with Mexican citizenship and resided in El Paso, though he continued to spend a considerable amount of time across the border, in part because his wife was Mexican. He too spoke Spanish."[188] Radicalizing their identities was important for them to attempt to assimilate into the borderlands area. [In the early 1900s]"in the Far West many colored girls seemed to be 'passing.' If they couldn't possibly be white, then they straightened their hair, learned Spanish and posed as Mexicans."[189] The Stevenson and Westerfield examples represented the average African American who wished to lead a life away from racism. Prominent African Americans were also to seek normalcy. Maud Cuney the famed African American activist, Texan, and former fiancé of W.E.B. Dubois also contemplated 'passing' and changing her perceived identity to that of a more 'socially acceptable' identity. Oddly enough, "the husband of Maud Cuney convinced [her] to disavow her black heritage and pass into the white community as 'Spanish-American.'"[190]

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[187] Horne, *Black and Brown,* 48-49. Interview, David Westerfield, 17 May 2001 (in possession of Gerald Horne).

[188] Ibid.

[189] Horne, *Black and Brown,* 49. Handy, W.C. *Father of the Blues,* (New York, Macmillan Press, 1944), 205.

[190] Horne, *Black and Brown,* 49-50. Douglas, Hales. "The Cuneys: A Southern Family in White and Black," Ph.D. dissertation, Texas Technical University, 2000, 205.

The borderlands presented African Americans with a complex and complicated setting at times. W.E.B. Dubois visited Los Angeles in 1913 amidst the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution brewing just south. Dubois described it as "wonderful" and that:

> the air was scented with orange blossoms and the beautiful homes lay low crouching on the earth as they loved its scents and flowers. Nowhere in the United States is the Negro so well and beautifully housed, nor the average of efficiency and intelligence in the colored population so high.[191]

Texas, however was a different story representing the dichotomy of the South's brutal repression and the borderlands accessibility of freedom and hopefulness. "One shivers at the 'Jim Crow' cars of Texas. After the luxury of the West and the public courtesy and hospitality, the dirt and impudence of a land where to travel at all meant twelve to twenty-four hours in the most primitive accommodations, was an awful change."[192] Social and legal racism was visibly present in Texas, however personal and private exchanges between African Americans displayed the optimism and hope for social change. His Texas visit took him to Fort Worth. There, Dubois "spoke to 400 Negroes and a handful of leading whites, and….spoke the clear, plain truth as I conceive it. It was received without dissent or protest and its reception gave me deepest hope and satisfaction."[193]

Counter-violence was a form of direct action against the white supremacist government of the United States. However, it seemed to be a facet that represented a portion of the challenge to American racial hegemony. And where those that heard Dubois speak and received him

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[191] *The Crisis, 6* (Number 3, July1913), 131-132.

[192] Ibid, 132.

[193] Ibid, 132.

without dissent or protest did not mean that the reception was the same by other African Americans who faced U.S. racism. The setting was different, one where African Americans found an ally in Mexico and one where revolutionary agitation superseded national and ethnic boundaries. The proximity caused paranoia and suspicion by the United States government. While the Dubois example highlights the optimism for social change; violence was an avenue some African Americans would pursue to make their voices heard during this revolutionary era at the turn of the twentieth century.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

[To] those whose voyages have been uprootings.

–Frantz Fanon[194]

[Violence] is man re-creating himself.

–Jean-Paul Sartre[195]

For African Americans, there existed two paths; of civil disobedience and violent resistance. Revolutionary Mexico gave them a third opportunity; to gain a voice, a voice with a gun, and a voice that disappeared into Mexico. The latter was more tolerated than the former by the United States government. This could be attributed to America's racist society. W.E.B. Dubois, when speaking of an East St. Louis riot that occurred in 1917 highlighted the anger present in the African American community that was desperate to initiate some outlet of resistance for democracy. Migration of rural southern African Americans to East St. Louis during the Great Migration was a factor in the riot as white residents saw the possibility of the loss of jobs. Dubois angrily stated:

> We raise our clenched hands against the hundreds of thousands of white murderers, rapists, and scoundrels who have oppressed, killed, ruined, robbed, and debased their black fellow men and fellow women, and yet, today, walk scot-free unwhipped of justice,

[194] Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York, Grove Press, 2008), 103.

[195] Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Preface*, Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, Grove Press, 1963).

uncondemned by millions of their white fellow citizens, and unrebuked by the President of the United States [Wilson].[196]

However, both paths did not necessarily garner any success. It at least forced the United States and its government to think about its attitudes towards African Americans as they witnessed the great lengths they went through to ensure their freedom. African Americans' relation with Mexico also served to enforce the idea that they were garnering international attention, focus, and allies. That was something that the United States could not tolerate as a means to ensure their racial hegemony, which is important to note because they were active in hindering revolutionary activity when it concerned African Americans and Mexico.

The mythology of the idea behind African American efforts of migration and counter-violence with respect to assistance from Mexico is to be considered. What was the reality of Mexico's stance towards African Americans? But more importantly, how was Mexico perceived by African Americans? They saw the possibility of what Mexico purportedly offered, but one must think of all facets and motivating factors of motivating propaganda during the nineteenth and early twentieth century that Mexico and the United States as a whole offered. Unfortunately, African Americans were caught in the middle of a nation combating the hegemony of another nation. While propaganda was undoubtedly used, Mexico historically offered less racial resistance towards African Americans.

African Americans' migration to Mexico shows that Mexico offered better social, racial, economic opportunities, and advancement as compared to the United States. That's why during the Great Migration, some African Americans chose to migrate to Mexico from the Black Belt rather than to the northern industrialized cities. Mexico still has internal problems towards some

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[196] "The Massacre of East St. Louis," *Crisis* 14 (Sept. 1917), 219-238.

of its peoples; such as the lower classes within its borders. Mexico still was less racist as compared to the United States. Furthermore, migration was one facet used as a means of disobedience. The revolutionary sentiment and counter-violence of African Americans was also a form of disobedience. These two elements of disobedience have occurred periodically in the history of the Diaspora of African Americans whether it is in the continental United States, transnationally, or on a global scale.

The transnational connection established by African Americans with Mexico is important. James Clifford, an anthropologist, argues that "transnational connections linking diasporas need not be articulated primarily through a real or symbolic homeland...Decentered, lateral connections may be as important as those formed around a teleology of origin/return.[197] The migratory and violent efforts by African Americans during Mexico's revolutionary process show that transnational connections commenced as the assistance by Mexico provided "lateral connections." Furthermore, the African Diaspora and the spreading of African descent peoples throughout the globe represent the process of movement from "real or symbolic homeland" to newly established transnational connections.

Historian Frank Guridy views the African Diaspora "as both the dispersal of Africans through the slave trade and their ongoing social, political, and cultural interactions across various boundaries after emancipation."[198] Guridy is speaking of the Afro-Cuban and African American connections but his point is also relevant to African Americans and their relationship with Mexico and its people. Proximity is a factor. Guridy goes onto say, "although African Americans' self-understandings were shaped by their interactions with people of African descent

[197] James, Clifford. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1997), 249-50.

[198] Guridy, Frank. *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans In a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 2010), 4.

throughout the globe, Cuba's geographic proximity to the United States gave the "Negro in Cuba" particular significance and familiarity for African Americans."[199]

Historically, disobedience was the primary outlet for African Americans as slaves or second class citizens. These two outlets were usually through the process of a form of civil disobedience and violent resistance. Mexico offered African Americans opportunities on both fronts of resistance. Mexico played a pivotal role on both of these examples. These forms of disobedience have transpired concurrently. The dual disobedience also has a history; the slave disobedience of sabotage, passive resistance, ignoring orders, or slave uprisings, rebellions, mutiny, and the murder of slaveholders; as opposed to Martin Luther King Jr. peaceful marches to the Black Panther rallies. From the freedom riders to the Chicago Eight, the sit-ins to the riots John Lewis to Huey P. Newton, Correta King to Ella Baker, from Rosa Parks to Bobby Hutton, form forgiveness to cursing, from a shotgun to a black-gloved raised fist.

From Mexico's migratory acceptance and to their camaraderie as revolutionary allies against the United States; Mexico granted African Americans the prospect of citizenship and alliance. Mexico gave them welcoming arms and revolutionary arms. Let it be known that black and brown stood together at the turn of the twentieth century against the mechanized arm of racist America. And while they didn't win the battle against the racist American hierarchical hegemony, they did stand up to it. Langston Hughes celebrated Mexico. Hughes said, "Here nothing is barred from me. I am among my own people for…Mexico is a brown man's country."[200]

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[199] Ibid, 6.

[200] Rampersad, Arnold. *The Life of Langston Hughes: Volume I:1902-1941:I, too sing America* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2002), 41.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Alfredo Aguilar was born in Aurora, Illinois to hard working migrant parents. He earned a Bachelor's degree in History in 2010 from the University of Texas-Pan American with minors in English and Philosophy. As an undergraduate he earned a place on the Dean's List, became a member of Phi Alpha Theta, UTPA Ally, served as an aid to David Sanchez's campaign for district court judge, and was an AVID tutor at a middle school. As a graduate student of History he worked as a critical thinking, reading, and writing tutor at the university writing center and a philosophy tutor at the learning assistance center. He also served as a graduate reviewer to the second annual undergraduate research conference. Alfredo currently resides in Edinburg, Texas with his loving wife Elizabeth.