

Introduction

December 8, 2015, inaugurated a new period in Afro-Mexican history. For the first time since September 16, 1810, when Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla declared Mexican independence from Spain, the federal government counted its African-descended population as such. According to the intercensal survey completed by the INEGI in March of that year, 1.4 million citizens identified themselves “in accordance with their culture, history, and traditions” as “Afro-Mexican or Afro-descendant.” As 1.2 percent of the national populace, these numbers appear small, particularly in comparison to the 25.7 million people who self-reported as indigenous, the only other ethnic group that the government chose to include.¹ In a few coastal areas typically thought to have historical ties to

¹ Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, “Resultados definitivos de la encuesta intercensal 2015,” 8 de diciembre de 2015, www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/intercensal/2015/doc/especiales2015_12_3.pdf. The 25.7 million people who claimed to be indigenous possibly overstates Mexico’s indigenous population. This number is substantially larger than what is found in previous censuses. For example, using data from the 2010 census, the Consejo Nacional de Población concluded in 2013 that there were only 11.7 million people with at least moderately indigenous cultural or linguistic traits; see *La situación demográfica de México, 2013* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional de Población, 2013), 127, www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/112476/La_Situacion_Demografica_de_Mexico_2013.pdf. Although the counting of indigenous peoples has been a constant feature of the modern Mexican state, popular and official definitions of indigeneity have changed, thereby leaving the possibility for the number of citizens classified as indigenous to vary substantially; see Mara Loveman, *National Colors: Racial Classification and the State in Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Paula López Caballero and Ariadna Acevedo-Rodrigo, eds., *Beyond Alterity: Destabilizing the Indigenous Other in Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018). All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.

African slavery, this demographic visibility was more pronounced. On March 28, 2017, *Excélsior* explained that least 10 percent of the residents in 100 communities – including 69 in Oaxaca, 16 in Guerrero, and 12 in Veracruz – claimed an African heritage (See Map 0.1).²

Activists saw the INEGI's data as a necessary step to rectify the structural inequalities that the descendants of enslaved Africans encountered daily. Not looking for an enumeration of historical offenses, national newspapers described the findings with a vision toward future social justice initiatives, such as better public education, and the possibility of amending the Constitution of 1917 to give African-descended Mexicans the same institutional protections as the indigenous communities whose cultural presence the state had always counted. Scholars, artists, and public intellectuals believed that social recognition validated the humanity of African-descended Mexicans.³ Nonetheless, in an interview for *La Jornada*, Sergio Peñaloza Pérez, President and founder of the grassroots organization Black Mexico, *México Negro*, somberly noted that this new-found visibility was merely a step in the right direction: the INEGI's statistics, he clarified, "do not truly reflect how many we are, because many preferred not to assume this identity thanks to the historical discrimination that we have endured."⁴

In the United States, remarks were equally positive but often tinged with exasperation. On January 27, 2016, in the *Huffington Post*, Krithika Varagur published "Mexico Finally Recognized Its Black Citizens, But That's Just The Beginning." In response to what many academics and activists perceived as the state's erasure of African-descended identities, she wistfully asked "Why has it taken so long?" before continuing with the more hopeful query, "What's next for Afro-Mexicans?" her article

² "Uno de cada cien mexicanos es afrodescendiente, revela estudio," *Excélsior*, 27 de marzo de 2017, www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2017/03/27/1154391.

³ There are countless articles published in mainstream Mexican newspapers referencing these ideas, including César Arellano García, "La población afrodescendiente sufre más discriminación que la indígena: Conapred," *La Jornada*, 16 de marzo de 2015, www.jornada.unam.mx/2015/03/16/sociedad/034n150c; and Julián Sánchez, "CNDH demanda evitar discriminación a afromexicanos," *El Universal*, 3 de julio de 2015, <http://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion-mexico/2015/cndh-demanda-evitar-discriminacion-a-afromexicanos-1111784.html>.

⁴ Sergio Peñaloza Pérez qtd. in Blanca Juárez, "Habitan 1.4 millones de afromexicanos en el país: INEGI," *La Jornada*, 9 diciembre 2015, www.jornada.unam.mx/ultimas/2015/12/09/habitan-1-4-millones-de-afromexicanos-en-el-pais-inegi-7219.html. Also see Glyn Jemmott Nelson, foreword to Paulette A. Ramsay, *Afro-Mexican Constructions of Diaspora, Gender, Identity and Nation* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2016), xi.



MAP 0.1 Map of Mexico.

was as much the dutiful reporting of the INEGI's data as a political statement about Mexico's insufficient constructions of blackness, which she characterized as "a still tenuous identity." Like Peñaloza Pérez, she condemned the fragmented state of Afro-diasporic identity in civil society. Too many citizens, she lamented, "use labels like 'criollo' (creole) or 'moreno' rather than the ones black Mexicans tend to prefer. Peñaloza, for instance, describes himself as 'afrodescendiente (of African descent), negro (black), or afromexicano (Afro-Mexican).'"⁵

⁵ Krithika Varagar, "Mexico Finally Recognized Its Black Citizens, but That's Just the Beginning," *Huffington Post*, January 27, 2016, www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/mexico-finally-recognized-its-black-citizens-but-thats-just-the-beginning_us_568d2d9ce4b0c8beacf5of6b. For a similar perspective, see Sameer Rao, "Mexico Finally Recognizes Afro Mexicans in National Census," *Colorlines*, December 14, 2015, www.colorlines.com/articles/mexico-finally-recognizes-afro-mexicans-national-census?fbclid=IwARoX5DUZF-WxAptzWoXPgzvh7tdAYvsAPgJlBJKcX7Akyn2JSBtfz-TRHfs. Odile Hoffmann discusses the complex social questions surrounding blackness in "Negros y afromestizos en México: Viejas y nuevas lecturas de un mundo olvidado," trans. Camila Pascal, *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 68, no. 1 (2006): 103–35.

These responses to the INEGI's statistics point to the demographic, social, cultural, and spatial politics of African-descended identities in Mexico, the subject of *Finding Afro-Mexico*. The black body buoyed the socially visible and politically active form of diasporic subjectivity that Peñaloza Pérez and Varagur desired. Conceived through some combination of physiological, ancestral, and sociological attributes, the racialized body has often been reduced to a biological typology that scholars and policy makers can count, whether to surveil and oppress African-descended peoples, to study them, or both.⁶ However, the INEGI's groundbreaking work – and the turn-of-the-century grassroots mobilizations that advocated for it – signified a stark about-face from the cultural and regional constructions of blackness that Mexican intellectuals, political officials, and cultural producers had crafted in the two centuries between Mexican independence and the publication of the intercensal survey.⁷ To tell this history of how blackness became Mexican after the Revolution of 1910, this book integrates the political and cultural dimensions of the African Diaspora into Mexican nation-state formation and vice versa.

Finding Afro-Mexico contends that the celebratory refrains penned since the INEGI published its results have been erected on a false premise. The activists, scholars, and reporters who celebrated this newfound demographic visibility incorrectly assumed that Mexican

⁶ There is a large literature on the black body in Anglophone scholarship on the African Diaspora, including Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); and Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999). For a Latin American perspective, see Livio Sansone, *Blackness without Ethnicity: Constructing Race in Brazil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), esp. 11 and 79. On the construction of the body as a political act rooted in specific historical contexts, see Emily S. Rosenberg and Shanon Fitzpatrick, eds., *Body and Nation: The Global Realm of US Body Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014). Historian Jessica Marie Johnson challenges scholars to consider the quantifiable black body not only as a foundation for the study of slavery and the slave trade but also as part of the recuperation of black humanity; see “Markup Bodies: Black [Life] Studies and Slavery [Death] Studies at the Digital Crossroads,” *Social Text* 36, no. 4 (2018): 57–79.

⁷ Of course, the distinction between biological and cultural race is not absolute, even when Mexican nationalists claimed it to be. As historian Laura Gotkowitz explains, scholars need to consider constructions of biological and cultural race on a continuum and in conversation with each other; see “Introduction: Racisms of the Present and the Past in Latin America,” in *Histories of Race and Racism: The Andes and Mesoamerica from Colonial Times to the Present*, ed. Laura Gotkowitz (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 8–11.

nationalists uniformly sought to silence – if not erase – the country’s African heritage through *mestizaje*, a postcolonial project to craft a modern Mexico through the racial and cultural fusion of indigeneity and Spanishness.⁸ The recuperation of blackness, however, was a much more piecemeal process than they have described. This history reveals the social, demographic, cultural, and spatial dimensions of racial visibility and invisibility that are all too often lumped together, represented by the racialized body. At the turn of the twentieth century, tropes of black disappearance left intellectuals, like sociologist and lawyer Andrés Molina Enríquez, assuming that African-descended peoples were, as he stated in 1909, “insignificant” to the course of Mexican history.⁹ Yet, by the 1930s and 1940s, when the specter of global fascism placed the Revolution’s populist aims in conversation with the New Negro Movement, Afro-Cubanism, and other similar initiatives to refashion African-descended identities in the Atlantic world, enslaved Africans, often symbolized by Gaspar Yanga, entered the national narrative as patriotic rebels who foreshadowed postrevolutionary conceptions of social justice. These transnational dialogues provided a select but immensely well connected set of Mexican anthropologists, artists, and composers with the ethnographic methodologies to perceive and to discuss the similarities between the cultural expressions found in Mexico’s coastal regions and those of African-descended peoples in the United States, Cuba, and other American nations.¹⁰ In other words, the descendants of colonial Mexico’s free and enslaved black populations slowly became visible, first culturally and spatially, then socially and demographically. For the first time since independence, ethnographers could study African-descended peoples and cultures, as anthropologist Gonzalo Aguirre

⁸ For example, see Laura A. Lewis, “African Mexicans,” in *Concise Encyclopedia of Mexico*, ed. Michael S. Werner (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), 4; and Christina A. Sue, “Hegemony and Silence: Confronting State-Sponsored Silences in the Field,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 44, no. 1 (2015): 113–40.

⁹ Andrés Molina Enríquez, *Los grandes problemas nacionales* (Mexico City: A. Carranza e Hijos, 1909), 292.

¹⁰ By rooting my analysis in the intellectual strands of cultural production, I nuance B. Christine Arce’s argument that there is a paradox in Mexico, where the official narrative erases blackness but popular culture celebrates it as foreign and exotic. This tension, she explains, has its origins in the discursive, cultural, and tropological process of transforming black bodies into “no-bodies”; see *México’s Nobodies: The Cultural Legacy of the Soldadera and Afro-Mexican Women* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017), 3, 8, and 9.

Beltrán had in the decade preceding the 1958 publication of *Cuijila: Esbozo etnográfico de un pueblo negro*, the first book dedicated to blackness in postrevolutionary society.

The radicalization of Afro-diasporic politics in the 1960s, however, has cast aside Mexico's cultural and spatial visions of its African heritage. It has imposed what Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant call "imperialist reason," a foreign brand of diasporic authenticity, on Mexican history and society.¹¹ Characterized by the socially visible, racially conscious communities of the Anglophone world, an Afro-diasporic ideal-type has prevented Mexico from entering global conversations about blackness on its own terms.¹² As such, I ask, how did Mexican intellectuals and cultural producers construct African-descended identities as Mexican? By highlighting how Mexicans and their colleagues abroad discussed the nation's African heritage – rather than how they did not discuss it – *Finding Afro-Mexico* illuminates an alternative history and politics of racial formation and diasporic consciousness-raising to the ones activists and scholars heralded after the publication of the INEGI's data.

The intellectual and cultural histories I tell in *Finding Afro-Mexico* reveal the transnational interdisciplinary dialogues among the historians, anthropologists, writers and poets, composers, and artists in Mexico, the United States, and Cuba who selectively integrated the African Diaspora into Mexican nation-state formation and Mexico into the African Diaspora. Their constructions of Mexico's African heritage expose the ontological boundaries of modern Mexican mestizaje and Afro-diasporic politics. The potential for blackness to be cultural or demographic, Mexican or foreign, visible or invisible gave postrevolutionary

¹¹ Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, "On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 16, no. 1 (1999): 41–58. Regarding this critique for the study of Afro-Mexico, see Laura A. Lewis, "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans: The Dynamics of Race, Nation, and Identity in a Mexican 'moreno' Community (Guerrero)," *American Ethnologist* 27, no. 4 (2000): 898–926; María Guevara Sanginés, "Perspectivas metodológicas en los estudios historiográficos sobre los negros en México hacia finales del siglo XX," in *Poblaciones y culturas de origen africano en México*, comp. María Elisa Velázquez Gutiérrez and Ethel Correa Duró (Mexico City: INAH, 2005), 76–77; and Luis Eugenio Campos, "Caracterización étnica de los pueblos de negros de la costa chica de Oaxaca: Una visión etnográfica," in Velázquez Gutiérrez and Correa Duró, *Poblaciones y culturas de origen africano en México*, 411–13.

¹² Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "Rewriting the African Diaspora: Beyond the Black Atlantic," *African Affairs* 104, no. 414 (2005): 35–68; and Elisabeth Cunin, "Introducción: ¿Por qué una antología?," in *Textos en diáspora: Una antología sobre afrodescendientes en América*, ed. Elisabeth Cunin (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2008), 11–29.

intellectuals, cultural producers, and policy makers the opportunity to articulate their global visions, ideological projects, racial fantasies, and democratic yearnings more freely than they could through other racial categories. While indigeneity had to be conceived locally, where communities could negotiate with or rebel against the state, blackness first and foremost lived among abstractions, articulated to cast a positive light on state racial policies: it fed Mexico's claim to be free of the racism plaguing the United States. Blackness offered no specter of social or political revolution. No one had to write about it, and consequently every discussion of it was a radical act, pushing the boundaries of what and eventually who was Mexican and Afro-diasporic.

THE AFRICAN DIASPORA IN MEXICO

The INEGI's 2015 intercensal survey concluded a century-long project to document Mexico's cultural and racial diversity. In 1910 Francisco I. Madero led the charge to overthrow Porfirio Díaz, a dictator who had ruled Mexico since 1876. His goal was political, to create electoral democracy, but he unleashed a social revolution that transformed the relationship between civil society and the state. Calls for popular political participation, social justice, and the cultural representation of the people – whether male or female, urban or rural, indigenous or *mestizo* (racially mixed) – abounded. As anthropologist Manuel Gamio proclaimed in 1916, the histories and cultures of every community needed to be studied so that government officials could design policies to integrate each region of the country respectfully and efficiently into a modern unified nation-state.¹³

Although Mexicans gave primacy to indigeneity in their postrevolutionary ethnographic and historical accounts, they schematically wove African slavery into their narratives. Historians and social scientists constructed blackness and indigeneity in tandem. After all, the origins of the Atlantic slave trade could not be divorced from the precipitous decline of the indigenous population across the New World in the decades after Christopher Columbus set foot in the Caribbean, and Hernán Cortés, in Mexico. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Spanish and Portuguese colonial economies could not have prospered without African slavery. Free and enslaved blacks and their mixed-race progeny frequently worked in sugar production and silver mining, but they were also

¹³ Manuel Gamio, *Forjando patria (pro nacionalismo)* (Mexico City: Librería de Porrúa Hermanos, 1916).

ranchers, artisans, urban service workers, militiamen, and sailors, among countless other occupations.¹⁴ From 1521 to 1640, Africans outnumbered Europeans in colonial Mexico. The urban settings of Veracruz, Guadalajara, and Mérida housed at least as many African-descended individuals as Spanish settlers. In 1646, while the Atlantic slave trade turned its attention to other parts of the New World, there were approximately 35,000 Africans and another 116,000 African-descended individuals residing in Spain's most valuable colony.¹⁵

By the nineteenth century, the place of blackness in Mexican society had entered troublesome terrain. With the resurgence of the indigenous population, the expansion of a racially mixed caste population, and a preference for free wage labor throughout the colony, slavery had fallen out of favor. Manumission – whether through the benevolence of slave owners and abolitionists, religious or political decree, or self-purchase – accelerated. Slavery only continued as a viable institution in sugar producing regions, like Veracruz, where the economic reverberations of the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) created the opportunity for a race-based plantation economy to expand. When Father Miguel Hidalgo y Castillo called for Mexican independence on September 16, 1810, approximately 624,000 people, or 10 percent of the population, were of African descent.¹⁶

¹⁴ For example, see Ben Vinson III, *Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); and Herman Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570–1640* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003). The simultaneous crafting of indigeneity and blackness has also garnered scholarly attention; see Peter Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America* (London: Pluto Press, 1997); and Barbara Weinstein, “Erecting and Erasing Boundaries: Can We Combine the ‘Indo’ and the ‘Afro’ in Latin American Studies?,” *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe* 19, no. 1 (2008): 129–44.

¹⁵ Colin A. Palmer, *Slaves of the White God: Blacks in Mexico, 1570–1650* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 40 and 46; Patrick J. Carroll, *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz: Race, Ethnicity, and Regional Development*, 2nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), xiii–xv and 8–26; Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico*, 1 and 21–23. Of course, the slave trade did not end in 1640 and continued until its abolition in 1824; see Adriana Naveda Chávez-Hita, *Esclavos negros en las haciendas azucareras de Córdoba, Veracruz, 1690–1830* (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1987), 35–43; Antonio García de León, *Tierra adentro, mar en fuera: El puerto de Veracruz y su litoral a Sotavento, 1519–1821* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2011), 692–703; and Pablo Miguel Sierra Silva, *Urban Slavery in Colonial Mexico: Puebla de los Angeles, 1531–1706* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 107–43.

¹⁶ Carroll, *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz*, 55–56 and 65–78; and Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico*, 1. On the demographic shifts in sugar producing regions, see Naveda,

During and after the wars of independence (1810–21), liberal elites proclaimed that all Mexicans should be defined by their vice or virtue, not their racial heritage. First professed by Father Hidalgo on that fateful September day, abolition blossomed into a fundamental component of Mexican nation-state formation: it signified the idea that all citizens must be treated equally under the law. Two African-descended generals, José María Morelos y Pavón and Vicente Guerrero, reasserted Hidalgo's emancipatory sentiments respectively in 1813 and 1829. In between, wartime mobilization and other presidential decrees created new pathways to freedom.¹⁷ For liberals, slavery and caste were intrinsically bound together as a sociological problem in need of extirpation – and blackness, its most pernicious social and demographic incarnation, needed to disappear. If a postcolonial fantasy rooted in national unity and racial harmony were to become a reality, then the new nation's African heritage could only remain as a subject of historical inquiry buried in Spanish colonial archives.¹⁸ As historian Peter Guardino explains for the state of Oaxaca in years leading up to and during the wars of independence, “Afromexicans had a symbolic weight that was much larger than their demographic weight.”¹⁹ By the end of the nineteenth century, most liberal intellectuals and policy makers assumed that mestizaje, driven by the invisible hand of progress, rendered blackness socially and demographically invisible.²⁰

Esclavos negros en las haciendas azucareras de Córdoba, Veracruz, 63–65. For a discussion of slavery in a region not defined by sugar production, see Juan Carlos Reyes G., “Negros y afroestizos en Colima, siglos XVI–XIX,” in *Presencia africana en México*, coord. Luz María Martínez Montiel (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1997), 322–28. Ben Vinson has recently made the argument that the black population was likely overestimated in census data on the eve of independence; see *Before Mestizaje: The Frontiers of Race and Caste in Colonial Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 123.

¹⁷ Carroll, *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz*, 93–102; Naveda, *Esclavos negros en las haciendas azucareras de Córdoba, Veracruz*, 148–61; and García de León, *Tierra adentro*, 751–65.

¹⁸ Regarding the colonial foundations of blackness, see Patrick J. Carroll, “Los mexicanos negros, el mestizaje y los fundamentos olvidados de la ‘Raza Cósmica’: una perspectiva regional,” trans. Jeffrey N. Lamb, *Historia Mexicana* 44, no. 3 (1995): 403–38; and Álvaro Ochoa Serrano, *Afrodescendientes: Sobre piel canela* (Zamora: El Colegio de Michoacán, 1997), 21–24. On the discursive place of blackness in Mexico's postcolonial imaginary, see Vinson, *Before Mestizaje*, 182–202.

¹⁹ Peter Guardino, “La identidad nacional y los afromexicanos en el siglo XIX,” in *Prácticas populares, cultura política y poder en México, siglo XIX*, ed. Brian Connaughton (Mexico City: Casa Juan Pablos, 2008), 272.

²⁰ Studying the history of blackness in predominately indigenous countries helps scholars interrogate the racial and cultural boundaries of indigenous assimilation and mestizaje. For a discussion of why historians and anthropologists need to question these narratives,

This liberal dedication to a race-blind society has shaped how academics search for African-descended peoples to investigate and how activists advocate for these historically ostracized communities. The claim that there are no longer any African-descended people has regularly been the point of departure for historical, ethnographic, and cultural inquiries into modern Mexico's relationship to the African Diaspora. As such, it has become fashionable to lament the state of black identity in modern Mexico.²¹ Defining "nonblackness" as a pillar of *mestizaje*, sociologist Christina A. Sue concludes that state racial policies, theoretically ensconced in doctrines of racial harmony, guarantee "the marginalization, neglect, or negation of Mexico's African heritage." A spate of scholarly accounts contends that African-descended peoples embraced – and continue to embrace – racial identities affixed to indigeneity to downplay their African heritage. Presuming archival and demographic sources do not exist, most historians choose to remain in the comfortable confines of the colonial period or, at best, continue to abolition, when liberal scripts destined African-descended peoples to social and demographic obscurity.²²

The historical and historiographic lacuna between abolition in 1829 and the emergence of popular organizations, like Sergio Peñaloza Pérez's *Black Mexico*, at the end twentieth century casts Mexico's African-descended peoples as historical spectators consigned to colonial slavery, just as the nation's founders dreamed.²³ With the discussion of blackness

see Laura Gotkowitz, ed., *Histories of Race and Racism: The Andes and Mesoamerica from Colonial Times to the Present* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

²¹ Frederick Cooper and Rogers Brubaker unpack the social, cultural, and political dimensions of the term *identity* in "Identity," in *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*, by Frederick Cooper (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 59–90.

²² Christina A. Sue, *Land of the Cosmic Race: Race Mixture, Racism, and Blackness in Mexico* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 14. Also see María Luisa Herrera Casasús, *Presencia y esclavitud del negro en la Huasteca* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas, 1989); Rafael Valdez Aguilar, *Sinaloa: Negritud y Olvido* (Culiacán, Sinaloa, Mexico: Talleres Gráficos, 1993); and Francisco Fernández Repetto and Genny Negroe Sierra, *Una población perdida en la memoria: Los negros de Yucatán* (Mérida: Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, 1995), ix–x.

²³ Ben Vinson and Matthew Restall mention the lack of research on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Afro-Mexico in their introduction to *Black Mexico: Race and Society from Colonial to Modern Times*, ed. Ben Vinson III and Matthew Restall (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009), 8. Thinking about these historiographical tropes for the colonial period, Herman Bennett makes a similar case for the writing of Afro-Mexican history in *Colonial Blackness: A History of Afro-Mexico* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 6–7. Nonetheless, these methodological questions are not unique

reduced to the dichotomy between colonial visibility and postcolonial invisibility, *mestizaje* becomes nothing more than a euphemism for black disappearance. The possibility that it could also nourish democratic theories of nation-state formation built on popular suffrage, social justice, ethnic heterogeneity, and cultural pluralism vanishes.²⁴ Accordingly, the peculiarities of blackness in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Mexico and their relationships to the broader African Diaspora meet the same fate.²⁵ If African-descended communities continue only to be buried in the colonial past or to be ahistorically bound to contemporary ethnographic observations, then the cultural and political meanings of blackness remain fixed. The burden of diasporic consciousness-raising is left to academics and social activists from other regions of the Black Atlantic.²⁶

Census data – the clearest window into the state’s classification of the national populace – similarly points to the elision of blackness as a modern Mexican social reality just as it provides a rich source base for

to Mexico. The historical gap between abolition and recent movements to recover blackness exists in many of the Spanish American countries associated more with indigeneity than with the African Diaspora; for instance, see Heidi Feldman, *Black Rhythms of Peru: Reviving African Musical Heritage in the Black Pacific* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006); Kwame Dixon and John Burdick, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Afro-Latin America* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012); and Tianna Paschel, *Becoming Black Political Subjects: Movements and Ethno-Racial Rights in Colombia and Brazil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

²⁴ For example, see Agustín Basave Benítez, *México mestizo: Análisis del nacionalismo mexicano en torno a la mestizofilia de Andrés Molina Enríquez*, 2nd ed. (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2002); Peter Wade, “Afterward: Race and Nation in Latin America: An Anthropological View,” in *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*, ed. Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Roseblatt (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 263–81; and Rick A. López, *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

²⁵ The concept of black disappearance, which scholars across disciplines often affix to racial mixture and whitening, is not confined to Mexico. It has been a common theoretical tool for research in Latin American regions less associated with the African Diaspora; for example, see Peter Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); and Erika Edwards, “Mestizaje, Córdoba’s Patria Chica: Beyond the Myth of Black Disappearance in Argentina,” *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 7, no. 2 (2014): 89–104. As Paulina L. Alberto explains, scholars need to see the concept of disappearance not purely as a social phenomenon but rather as one rooted in storytelling; see “El Negro Raúl: Lives and Afterlives of an Afro-Argentine Celebrity, 1886 to the Present,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 96, no. 4 (2016): 669–710.

²⁶ Sociologist Tianna Paschel explains the need to historicize black political consciousness in *Becoming Black Political Subjects*.

inquiries into colonial slavery.²⁷ Sociologist Mara Loveman explains that national censuses allow states “to acknowledge or champion the presence of some types of people within the nation, while rendering others officially invisible.” In isolation, demographic recordkeeping does not establish political legitimacy, even if it helps the state codify certain social categories as legitimate and visible and dismiss others as dangerous, unmodern, foreign, or insignificant. As a historical outlier, twentieth-century Mexico offers a unique point of entry into questions about the relationship between racial formations and diasporic identities in the Western Hemisphere. Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Venezuela – like Mexico – historically rejected biological concepts of race and instead employed cultural indicators like language, religion, and clothing to categorize its citizenry. Yet, until 2015, Mexico stood out as the only Latin American state always to recognize indigenous communities and never to distinguish its African-descended population.²⁸

Although scholars, policy makers, and activists cannot retroactively rectify blackness’s demographic invisibility in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we can adjust the methodological and theoretical tools we use to study it. We have typically framed our cultural and social analyses of postindependence Mexican history in relation to the relative power of the pre- and postrevolutionary state. For the twentieth century, we ask, was the postrevolutionary state democratic? A modern Leviathan? Or, something in between?²⁹ The myriad relationships between local communities and the state have been the main points of departure for evaluating Mexican history and society. This approach presumes a social visibility – whether via self-identification, state-sponsored classification, or both – that the state failed to grant African-descended Mexicans until 2015. Thus, the descendants of enslaved Africans as well as more recent African-

²⁷ Carlos Paredes Martínez and Blanca Lara Tenorio, “La población negra en los valles centrales de Puebla: Orígenes y desarrollo hasta 1681,” in Martínez Montiel, *Presencia africana en México*, 21; and Ben Vinson III, “The Racial Profile of a Rural Mexican Province in the ‘Costa Chica’: Igualapa in 1791,” *The Americas* 57, no. 2 (2000): 269–82.

²⁸ Loveman, *National Colors*, 22, 135–37, 208, 233, and 241; and Mara Loveman, “The Modern State and the Primitive Accumulation of Symbolic Power,” *American Journal of Sociology* 110, no. 6 (2005): 1651–83.

²⁹ For an overview of these debates, see Alan Knight, “The Mexican Revolution: Bourgeois? Nationalist? Or Just a ‘Great Rebellion?’” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 4, no. 2 (1985): 1–37; Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent, eds., *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994); and Paul Gillingham and Benjamin T. Smith, eds., *Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938–1968* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

descended migrants from the Caribbean, many of whom fled Cuba's wars of independence (1868–98), were incapable of using their ancestry to shape the political and social boundaries of nation-state formation; they could not enter the historical annals as racially conscious political actors in the same way that indigenous communities could.

To place the history of Mexican blackness, in all its political, social, and symbolic incarnations, in conversation with these examinations of democracy and authoritarianism, I contend that we must give primacy to the interplay between cultural expressions and intellectual currents. Of course, we cannot ignore local histories of community formation. Afro-diasporic organizations, such as Peñaloza Pérez's Black Mexico, were instrumental in giving African-descended individuals state recognition for the first time since independence.³⁰ Understanding how Mexican intellectuals, cultural producers, and eventually local activists recovered the nation's African heritage expands our understanding of the state's racial policies, especially those focused on indigenous integration after the Second World War, when historians and anthropologists traditionally describe assimilationist and developmentalist policies as supplanting the postrevolutionary state's pluralist agenda.³¹ As such, I reframe questions about nation-state formation by examining the ways in which the Mexican state, if it wanted to be democratic or at least have the trappings of democracy, had to continuously refashion existing identities, like indigeneity, and introduce new ones, like blackness, into the nation's social fabric.³²

³⁰ Community formation, of course, is also a transnational process, as historian Fredy González examines in *Paisanos Chinos: Transpacific Politics among Chinese Immigrants in Mexico* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017). There is a large literature discussing the transnationality of post-revolutionary nation-state formation; for example, see Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations between the United States and Mexico, 1920–1935* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992); López, *Crafting Mexico*; and Karin Alejandra Roseblatt, *The Science and Politics of Race in Mexico and the United States, 1910–1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

³¹ The literature on the post-1940 transitions in Mexican indigenist policy is vast and rapidly expanding; for example, see Alexander S. Dawson, *Indian and Nation in Revolutionary Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004); López, *Crafting Mexico*; and Stephen E. Lewis, *Rethinking Mexican Indigenismo: The INI's Coordinating Center in Highland Chiapas and the Fate of a Utopian Project* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018).

³² Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), 93–148; and Judith Butler, "Restaging the Universal: Hegemony and the Limits of Formalism," in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, by Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2000), 11–43.

MEXICO IN THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

Afro-diasporic methodologies have similarly sidelined modern Mexico's cultural and spatial visions of blackness. Postcolonial Mexican history forces us to consider a diasporic politics framed more by liberal racelessness than by the maintenance of a racial consciousness rooted in specific histories of migration and political exclusion.³³ After all, African-descended individuals, including independence-era leaders like José María Morelos and Vicente Guerrero, embraced assimilationist rhetoric and, in the name of egalitarianism, promoted homogenizing acts such as the abolition of caste categories.³⁴ The possibility of a politically charged racial consciousness, the lynchpin of Afro-diasporic methods, manifested itself more acutely within the social anxieties of the nineteenth-century liberals and conservatives who wanted to whiten the nation than with the political motivations of the African-descended peoples who wanted rid themselves of slavery's stigmas. The liberal ideologies Mexico's founding fathers articulated were not seen, either at the time or subsequently, as some variation on W. E. B. Du Bois's "talented tenth" or as a south-of-the-border version of Uncle-Tom-ism looking to curry favor with the lighter-skinned elite.³⁵ Rather they were an alternative vision of

³³ For an overview of these definitions of diaspora, see James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (1994): 302–38; Colin Palmer, "Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora," *Perspectives on History*, September 1998, www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/september-1998/defining-and-studying-the-modern-african-diaspora; and Kim D. Butler, "Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 10, no. 2 (2001): 189–219.

³⁴ Lowell Gudmundson and Justin Wolfe make a similar argument for Central America; see their introduction to *Blacks and Blackness in Central America: Between Race and Place*, ed. Lowell Gudmundson and Justin Wolfe (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 2 and 16. For a discussion of why African-descended Mexicans rejected racial categories after abolition, see John Radley Milstead, "Afro-Mexicans and the Making of Modern Mexico: Citizenship, Race, and Capitalism in Jamiltepec, Oaxaca (1821–1910)" (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 2019). As historian Timo H. Schaefer explains, in the decades following independence, many different sectors of society, including indigenous communities, mestizos, and communities living on haciendas, selectively embraced aspects of liberalism; see *Liberalism as Utopia: The Rise and Fall of Legal Rule in Post-Colonial Mexico, 1820–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

³⁵ Literary scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr. analyzes African American assimilation, the talented tenth, and Uncle Tom-ism in "Parable of the Talents," in *The Future of the Race*, by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Cornell West (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 50. In regard to these questions in Mexico, see Joel A. Rogers, "The Negro Who Freed Mexico," *Negro World*, January 4, 1930; and Ted Vincent, "The Blacks Who Freed Mexico," *Journal of Negro History* 79, no. 3 (1994): 257–76. Peter Guardino argues that

postemancipation society, one built on the political equality theoretically bestowed when vice and virtue unseated race and caste.

The mapping of blackness in Latin American nations points to the methodological limitations cast by a political fixation on social visibility. Historian George Reid Andrews deconstructs the time-honored practice to divide Latin America into its African-descended regions, which are etched into Afro-diasporic geographies, and its predominately indigenous areas, which are not. Demography grounds his approach: at least 5 percent of the nation's populace must identify or be classified as African-descended to be part of Afro-Latin America. Accordingly, he includes Mexico in 1800, when it was a colony with race-based census data. The liberal rejection of racial categories forced him to state that there was "No data" in 1900. In 2000, there was an insufficient number of visible African-descended people to be included.³⁶ The tacit assumption that certain communities, regions, or nations can leave and even reenter the African Diaspora hovers over the history of blackness in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Mexico just as it does throughout Indo-Latin America.³⁷ This is especially apparent when we consider that colonial Mexico's place in the Afro-diasporic world goes unquestioned but post-revolutionary Mexico's is open to debate.

To query "Who is black?" is to be at odds with Mexican racial formations throughout most of the twentieth century.³⁸ However, black social and demographic invisibility neither suggests that Mexicans were unaware of diasporic movements in other American nations nor assumes that African-descended identities were antithetical to postrevolutionary nation-state formation. *Finding Afro-Mexico* shows that Mexican

racial discourses persisted more frequently among elites who claimed Spanish descent and who were concerned that the abolition of caste could lay the groundwork for a racial revolution akin to the Haitian Revolution; see *The Dead March: A History of the Mexican-American War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 27–28.

³⁶ George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 4 and maps 1, 2, and 3. Stuart B. Schwartz questions the validity of these longstanding distinctions between Indo- and Afro-Latin America in "Black Latin America: Legacies of Slavery, Race, and African, Culture," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 82, no. 3 (2002): 430.

³⁷ Kim D. Butler discusses the possibility for people to exit and to return to a diaspora in "Defining Diaspora," 207.

³⁸ The political pressures leading to the INEGI's inclusion of African-descended peoples in the 2015 census show that the question "who is black?" has become more acceptable; also see María Elisa Velázquez and Gabriela Iturralde Nieto, *Afrodescendientes en México: Una historia de silencio y discriminación*, 2nd ed. (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación, 2016), 36–38.

constructions of blackness were in constant dialogue with cultural and political projects such as the New Negro Movement and Black Nationalism in the United States, Afro-Cubanism, Haitian negrism, and Brazilian modernism.³⁹ The multiple disciplinary registers and cultural genres that rendered black identities socially visible in other countries also invigorated the postrevolutionary ethnographic mapping of African-descended cultures and then African-descended peoples.⁴⁰

Mexico's unique relationship to slavery in the United States helps us understand the nation's steadfast adherence to black social and demographic invisibility. When cotton producers in Texas declared their independence in 1836 and subsequently sought annexation to the United States, the contrast between Mexican abolition, on the one hand, and US slavery and racial discrimination, on the other, hardened.⁴¹ This hallmark of Mexican nationalism diverged slightly from the rest of mainland Spanish America, where the leaders of independence and the liberal intellectuals and statesmen who followed them affixed their respective claims of racial harmony more to the condemnation of the Spanish caste system than to US westward expansion. In this regard, Mexico's mid-century racial comparisons foreshadowed the more well-known rhetorical flourishes condemning US segregation articulated by Cuba's José Martí in the 1880s and 1890s, Mexico's

³⁹ For a discussion of these transnational conversations, see Kevin A. Yelvington, "The Invention of Africa in Latin America and the Caribbean: Political Discourse and Anthropological Praxis, 1920–1940," in *Afro-Atlantic Dialogues: Anthropology in the Diaspora*, ed. Kevin A. Yelvington (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2006), 35–82; Micol Seigel, *Uneven Encounters: Making Race and Nation in Brazil and the United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); and Frank Andre Guriidy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

⁴⁰ Among the many exemplary scholarly accounts of these interdisciplinary ethnographic methodologies, see Daphne Lamothe, *Inventing the New Negro: Narrative, Culture, and Ethnography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); David Luis-Brown, *Waves of Decolonization: Discourses of Race and Hemispheric Citizenship in Cuba, Mexico, and the United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); and Emily A. Maguire, *Racial Experiments in Cuban Literature and Ethnography* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011).

⁴¹ There has been a growing in historical interest in the intertwined histories of Mexican republicanism, Texan independence, and the Mexican–American War; see James E. Sanders, *The Vanguard of the Atlantic World: Creating Modernity, Nation, and Democracy in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 64–80; and Andrew J. Torget, *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800–1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

José Vasconcelos in 1925, and Brazil's Gilberto Freyre and Arthur Ramos in the 1930s and 1940s.⁴²

The perceptibility of blackness in Mexico had a different foil than in nations, like the United States, Cuba, and Brazil, where black bodies have been a point of departure for scholars, activists, and policy makers. In regions where black social visibility has gone unquestioned, its opposite has been invisibility: exclusion from politics, history, and culture. As African American novelist Ralph Ellison proclaimed in his prologue to *Invisible Man* in 1952, "I am invisible, understand, simply, because people refuse to see me . . . When they approach me they only see my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination – indeed, everything and anything except me."⁴³ Drawing on Ellison, philosopher Charles W. Mills defines African American history and society in relation to the invisibility – in other words, the dehumanization – that has been thrust onto the black body. "For blacks," he writes, "the body thus necessarily becomes central in a way it does not for whites, since this is the visible marker of black invisibility." In Mexico, the opposite was true until 2015. The Mexicans who grappled with the legacies of slavery described blackness in a manner more akin to what Mills calls "invisibly visible": its social and demographic absence facilitated its transformation into a culturally visible, universalized symbol of racial egalitarianism, social justice, and national modernity.⁴⁴

HISTORICIZING MEXICAN BLACKNESS

To understand contemporary Mexican constructions of blackness in all their vicissitudes, the intellectual and cultural histories of black identity need to be told. Mexico's unique vision of its African heritage, however,

⁴² Marixa Lasso, *Myths of Harmony: Race and Republicanism during the Age of Revolution, Colombia, 1795–1831* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007); and Paulina L. Alberto and Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, "'Racial Democracy' and Racial Inclusion: Hemispheric Histories," in *Afro-Latin American Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Alejandro de la Fuente and George Reid Andrews (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 264–316.

⁴³ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage International, 1995), 3.

⁴⁴ Charles W. Mills, *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 16. Mills is not alone in drawing on Ralph Ellison to think about the ways in which both racial universality and racial exclusion give birth to invisibility; for example, see Michele Wallace, "Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Problem of the Visual in Afro-American Culture," in *Dark Designs and Visual Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 369–70.

makes this narrative more difficult to recount without imposing racial vocabularies, politics, and ontologies from elsewhere in the diaspora onto Mexico's past, present, and future. As such, Mexicans concerned with tropes of diasporic authenticity have selectively embraced and rejected *negro* for its emphasis on phenotype not ancestry.⁴⁵ For some scholars and activists, the term Afro-descendant has the potential not only to overcome the pernicious nomenclatures of Spanish colonialism but also to unite communities of African descent through their common history of exploitation and exclusion.⁴⁶ In certain communities, especially in the states of Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Veracruz, terms like *mulatto*, *moreno* (dark-skinned, brown, or indigenous), and *jarocho* (a colloquialism in the region surrounding the city of Veracruz) are used in daily conversations to reference blackness in racial, cultural, or spatial terms.⁴⁷ Neologisms – such as *afromestizo*, which signifies a racially mixed person or culture predominantly of African descent – have gained academic appeal in Mexico and, to a lesser degree, the United States. Moreover, Mexico lacks a clear genealogy of racial vocabularies that, for instance, mirrors the linear progression from Negro to Black to African American in the United States. Even the increasingly common fusion of blackness and nationality – African American, Afro-Cuban, Afro-Brazilian, etc. – has not acquired the grassroots support seen elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere.⁴⁸

For the sake of clarity, I use the racial vocabularies found in my sources, along with their contexts and connotations, as accurately as possible. The frequency with which Mexican scholars, cultural producers, and policy makers looked abroad, especially to the United States and Cuba, to corroborate their empirical observations further complicates matters. These polyglot dialogues bridged national mythologies, political ideologies, and cultural imaginaries. The racial terminologies used by Mexicans

⁴⁵ Bobby Vaughn, "My Blackness and Theirs: Viewing Mexican Blackness Up Close," in *Black Mexico: Race and Society from Colonial to Modern Times*, ed. Ben Vinson III and Matthew Restall (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009), 215.

⁴⁶ Alejandro Campos García, introduction to *Identidades políticas en tiempos de afrodescendencia: Auto-identificación, ancestralidad, visibilidad y derechos*, ed. Silvia Valero and Alejandro Campos García (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 2015), 15–21.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of some of these popular vocabularies, see Alfredo Martínez Maranto, "Dios pinto como quiere: Identidad y cultura en un pueblo afromestizo de Veracruz," in Martínez Montiel, *Presencia africana en México*, 556–60.

⁴⁸ Michael Hanchard, "Identity, Meaning and the African-American," *Social Text*, no. 24 (1990): 35–36; and Gates, "Parable of the Talents," 50. Regarding some Mexicans' aversion to the term Afro-Mexico, see Vaughn, "My Blackness and Theirs," 210–15.

and foreigners concerned with blackness in Mexico were palimpsests reflecting the diasporic visions and perceived daily realities of nations where African-descended identities were socially identifiable as well as the dictums of Mexican nationalism that nourished black cultural and spatial visibility alongside black social and demographic invisibility.⁴⁹ In this context, the term African American is especially problematic, since Mexicans, like almost all Latin Americans, consider themselves to be Americans. Without an alternative elegant way to distinguish African-descended peoples in the United States from those in Mexico or other parts of the Western Hemisphere, I use African American solely to describe African-descended US citizens.⁵⁰

Because the intellectuals and cultural producers I analyze moved between disciplines and across multiple regional and national spaces, so do my sources. Anthropological, musical, historical, and literary texts written by a small but influential group of Mexicans and their colleagues provide the most extended discussions of blackness in Mexico. Newspaper and magazine articles as well as archival repositories dedicated to specific institutions and individuals provide me with the intellectual genealogies, transnational networks, and disciplinary debates necessary to enliven these published documents. Of course, Mexico's relationship to the African Diaspora was not one-sided; it was part of the nation's intellectual and artistic engagement with political and cultural movements on both sides of the Atlantic. In particular, archives dedicated to prominent African Americans – like W. E. B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, and Katherine Dunham – help explain the cultural and political convergences and divergences between Mexico and the African Diaspora.

My sources, their authors and intended audiences, and their spatial orientations are exceptionally varied. I found no archival folders or boxes dedicated specifically to blackness in twentieth-century Mexico, let alone a national archive tasked with the singular purpose of preserving it. I had to trace the intellectual and cultural networks found in letters, footnotes, and institutions to connect these disparate ideational threads. A few

⁴⁹ Similarly, in his analysis of racial vocabularies and translation, literary scholar Brent Hayes Edwards brilliantly argues that the inability to translate racial connotation sits at the root of diasporic identity; see *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁵⁰ In her ethnographic work, Laura A. Lewis explores these linguistic conflicts between African-descended Mexicans and African Americans; see *Chocolate and Corn Flour: History, Race, and Place in the Making of "Black" Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), esp. 314–18.

Mexicans, all of whom were men and none of whom were of African descent, stand out for their devotion to the subject. Most of them arrived at the subject through other pursuits. Artist Miguel Covarrubias (1904–57) participated in the New Negro Movement and in archeological expeditions to determine whether the cultural expressions he investigated were indigenous, African-descended, or some combination thereof. Composers Carlos Chávez (1899–1978) and Gerónimo Baqueiro Foster (1898–1967) moved between modernist and indigenist networks as they used jazz to recognize and modernize the nation's African-descended melodies, harmonies, and rhythms. Marxist José Mancisidor (1894–1956) moved effortlessly between fiction and nonfiction to craft a national narrative that celebrated slave revolts and venerated the abolition of slavery and caste. Only two of the individuals I analyze in *Finding Afro-Mexico* consciously set out to integrate blackness into the nation's historical narrative and cultural landscape: Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán (1908–96), an anthropologist who scholars and activists universally consider to be the founder of Afro-Mexican studies, and poet Francisco Rivera (1908–94), the official chronicler of the city of Veracruz.

Aguirre Beltrán, Baqueiro Foster, Chávez, Covarrubias, Mancisidor, and Rivera are at the center of *Finding Afro-Mexico*, because they constructed blackness as Mexican more coherently than their colleagues, who only referenced it while they researched other aspects of the histories and cultures of Mexico or the African Diaspora. As members of the generation born just before the 1910 Revolution, these six intellectuals and cultural producers came of age in the 1920s and 1930s, when modernist ethnographers and artists across the Atlantic world rejected the nineteenth-century racial hierarchies that justified the colonization of Africa and Asia and that proclaimed the absolute superiority of Western civilization.⁵¹ Accordingly they shared a steadfast belief that the study of Mexico's African heritage would make the postrevolutionary state socially just, culturally pluralist, and politically inclusive. With the exception of Rivera, all of them also worked with major state institutions, ranging from the INBA to the INI, as they undertook their respective projects to refashion blackness, indigeneity, and mestizaje. Most

⁵¹ Anthropologist George W. Stocking Jr. provides an overview of modernism's contribution to the history of anthropology in "The Ethnographic Sensibility of the 1920s and the Dualism of the Anthropological Tradition," in *Romantic Motives: Essays on Anthropological Sensibility*, vol. 6 of *History of Anthropology*, ed. George W. Stocking Jr. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 208–76.

importantly, they embodied Mexico's cultural conception of race. Blackness, they argued from their disparate spatial and disciplinary positions, had its roots in a history of cultural production and consumption, not a history of biological race; it could be enjoyed, studied, and constructed by anyone, even individuals like themselves who did not claim to possess any African ancestry.⁵²

The first part of *Finding Afro-Mexico* traces the historical, cultural, and ethnographic visions of blackness from independence to the early 1940s. It culminates with the state's selective embrace of black cultural and symbolic visibility during the socialist policies of the Lázaro Cárdenas presidency (1934–40). Chapter 1 describes the historical, archeological, and cultural currents that rendered blackness socially and demographically invisible after independence. A hallmark of nineteenth-century liberalism, the trope of black disappearance left Mexican nationalists without a coherent ideology on which to construct blackness prior to, during, and immediately after the 1910 Revolution. In sum, this chapter establishes a political and historiographic foundation for the evolution of Mexican blackness after the 1910 Revolution. In the 1930s, as the next two chapters detail, Marxism, modernism, and antifascism provided new political and aesthetic platforms to render blackness Mexican. Chapter 2 treats the Marxist historians who placed enslaved Africans and their descendants in the national pantheon. Black insurgency, Mancisidor and his compatriots claimed, helped lay the foundation for Mexican independence, postcolonial racial egalitarianism, and the Mexican Revolution. Chapter 3 turns to cultural sources – many of which had direct ties to Mancisidor, Covarrubias, or Chávez – to show the transnational manifestations of this black radical tradition.

The second part of *Finding Afro-Mexico* examines how the racialization of culture in specific local and regional spaces set the stage for blackness to become socially and demographically visible after the Second

⁵² For a similar historical study of Afro-diasporic consumption and performance by people without African ancestry, see George Reid Andrews, *Blackness in the White Nation: A History of Afro-Uruguay* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). While African-descended intellectuals, such as José María Morelos, Vicente Guerrero, and Vicente Riva Palacio, participated in nineteenth-century political and intellectual life, there has been a notable absence of self-identified or subsequently classified African-descended intellectuals in twentieth-century Mexico. For an excellent analysis of the history and politics of African-descended thought in Latin America, see Frank A. Guridy and Juliet Hooker, "Currents in Afro-Latin American Political Thought," in *Afro-Latin American Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Alejandro de la Fuente and George Reid Andrews (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 179–221.

World War. Chapters 4 and 5 highlight the innovations in anthropology and ethnomusicology that provided the theoretical and methodological rigor necessary for Mexicans to find African cultural retentions in contemporary society.⁵³ Chapter 4 traces Mexico's entrance into Afro-diasporic cultural politics. Mexican, Afro-Cubanist, and African American interests converged during the Second World War, when Mexico transformed into an ideal site for the inter-American study of indigenous and African-descended peoples and cultures. These antifascist conversations inspired Aguirre Beltrán and Covarrubias to construct the nation's African heritage for the first time. To examine the ascription of race and culture to space, Chapter 5 turns to Baqueiro Foster's investigations into the music of Veracruz, especially the musical genres encompassing "La bamba." This case study reveals how Mexican composers and Afro-diasporic performers, namely, Katherine Dunham, defined Veracruz's soundscapes as Afro-Caribbean.

After the Second World War, social visibility slowly began to define blackness in Mexico. In this context, Chapters 6 and 7 and the Conclusion foreground the multiple relationships between Mexican nationalism and Afro-diasporic methodologies in Cuba and the United States. Chapter 6 discusses popular culture, especially Rivera's poetry in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. His local response to the everyday forms of nation-state formation demonstrates how little the elite constructions of blackness detailed in previous chapters permeated the public sphere. Reading the same Afro-Cubanist ethnographers and writers who helped Baqueiro Foster and Dunham Africanize "La bamba," Rivera adopted an Afro-Cuban vernacular to denounce the pace of postrevolutionary progress and assert the port city's musical and historical relationship to the African

⁵³ Regarding these disciplinary histories, see Clara Meierovich, *Vicente T. Mendoza: Artista y primer folclorólogo musical* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1995); and Mechthild Rutsch, *Entre el campo y el gabinete: Nacionales y extranjeros en la profesionalización de la antropología mexicana (1877–1920)* (Mexico City: INAH, 2007). The question of whether African cultures survived the Middle Passage and New World slavery has been at the center of debates about African American anthropology since the 1920s. Until the 1940s, it was widely assumed that these cultures had not survived and that the black cultures found in the Americas were, in fact, native to the Western Hemisphere. For a discussion of these ideas and the research required to prove that African cultures did indeed survive the horrors of the slave trade and slavery, see Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York: Harper, 1941); Roger Bastide, *Les Amériques noires: Les civilisations africaines dans le nouveau monde* (Paris: Payot, 1967), esp. 214; and Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 21–23.

Diaspora. While music of Veracruz detailed in Chapters 5 and 6 tied regional cultural expressions to what is now called the Black Atlantic, the ethnographic and artistic constructions of blackness examined in Chapter 7 consider the political stakes surrounding the black body in Mexican nation-state formation and the global dimensions of African American activism. In part by focusing on the intellectual and cultural networks surrounding Aguirre Beltrán and Covarrubias, Chapter 7 explains how African Americans and Mexicans looking to make blackness socially visible articulated two disparate definitions of what and who was authentically African-descended. Finally, the Conclusion traces the evolution of blackness in Mexico – its spatial orientations, histories, and relationships to culture, society, and the black body – in the years leading up to the 2015 intercensal survey. It uses the transnational histories detailed throughout *Finding Afro-Mexico* to examine recent debates about the legacies of the long 1960s, post-racial societies, Afro-diasporic methodologies, and the politics of racial comparison.

