

# The Elusive Organization of “Identity”: Race, Religion, and Empire Among Caribbean Migrants in Cuba

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More than two decades ago, Gordon K. Lewis lamented the “linguistic fragmentation that has characterized Caribbean scholarship as well as Caribbean history.”<sup>1</sup> That same year, another leading Caribbean scholar, the sociologist Anthony P. Maingot, noted that “the single greatest lacuna” in the study of the Caribbean “is the absence of truly comparative intra-Caribbean studies, especially those which cross linguistic and political frontiers.”<sup>2</sup> The twenty-two years since these observations were made have witnessed the emergence of a great deal of scholarship in the Caribbean, and indeed, a number of students of the region have, through their research, confronted the dilemma that Lewis and Maingot presented. Yet it is equally true that today most of the work done on the Caribbean remains provincial, linguistically and politically fragmented, and separated by disciplinary boundaries. What is more ironic about this is that the first to cross the linguistic and political barriers within the region were (and are) the actors of whom social scientists and historians speak. Caribbean peoples have for years ignored linguistic and political frontiers and have moved from one island to the other, from their individual countries to the mainland, from the region to the metropolis, and back again.

This reality is evident to us in multiple ways throughout our past and present history: A Trinidadian may have a Barbadian parent, people from the Dominican Republic

1. Gordon K. Lewis, *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought: The Historical Evolution of Caribbean Society in its Ideological Aspects, 1942–1900* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), ix.
2. Anthony P. Maingot, “Caribbean Studies as Area Studies: Past Performances and Recent Stirrings,” *Caribbean Educational Bulletin* 10, no. 1 (January 1983): 4.

run small businesses in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, a space of peasant-cultivated land in Dominica is known by people as "Cuba," and a Barbadian migrant was both a labor activist and a Garveyite in Panama and Cuba. The questions are, then, what is being done to tackle these issues and to look at these intertwined and connected histories? How much is told, and how much is lost, either because people have passed away or because documents have been destroyed? Or worse, how much remains unknown because researchers have ignored or underestimated the transnational connections within the Caribbean region?

By looking at the history of migrants from the British Caribbean in Cuba during the early twentieth century, I have tried to open a window into the experience of many peoples who decided to cross the geographic, political, and linguistic boundaries of the Caribbean. In this essay in particular, I focus on the history of the organizational practices of these migrants in Cuba—their host society—and try to raise questions about yet other central issues within social science scholarship in the Caribbean: race, religion, and nation. Moreover, the story that emerges provides insights into the dynamics of identity formation of Caribbean peoples in transnational processes. The ability of social actors to use their multiple identifications is shown, thus presenting a challenge to social scientists using identity as a conceptual and analytical tool.

In the 1990s, I visited the Cuban towns of Banes, Baraguá, Chaparra, Delicias, and Jobabo, where many migrants from British colonies settled in the early part of the twentieth century. Some eighty years before my visit, these towns were semisegregated settlements composed of different social groups: North Americans, Spaniards, Cubans, and migrants from virtually every Caribbean country. At the end of the twentieth century, they were like any other Cuban rural community, albeit distinctive in many ways. Despite the transculturation process, the social and spatial divisions that once existed were still noticeable, and there was evidence of each group's particular cultural traditions. Both Banes and Baraguá hosted at least three Protestant churches at little distance from one another, all either founded or attended mostly by British Antilleans and their descendants. The Pentecostal Church of Banes was erected in the former location of the Universal Negro Improvement Association's (UNIA) Liberty Hall. It was in that Liberty Hall that the Mount Sinai Church of Banes, led by a woman descendant of immigrants from the British Caribbean, held its first meetings in the 1940s. In Jobabo, it was the other way around: the UNIA members held their meetings in the local Protestant church. What is now the *bodega* (local state-run food store) of La Güira section in Banes was the location of the Jamaican Club, and one of the local schools in Baraguá is in the building that used to be the British Antillean's Unity Club. Within Baraguá, a section

known as Bajan Town owes that name to the many Barbadian migrants who lived there. On a street in Bajan Town one can find the Grenadian Hall, founded by migrants from Grenada in the early part of the century. In the 1930s this locale hosted meetings for the labor unions<sup>3</sup> and nowadays serves as the place for the rehearsals of the folkloric group *La Cinta*, composed of descendants of migrants from the British Caribbean colonies. When I visited it, the main wall of the Grenadian Hall had a painting of two traditional cultural practices: the left half of the wall had a May Pole dance and the right half a cricket game.<sup>4</sup> It was in Baraguá where I met nonagenarian Celia L. Campbell, born in Barbados. Formulating my question to her in the past tense, I asked about the allegiance to the British Empire among the migrant community in the early part of the century. She moved her aged and fragile body towards me and looking at my face said with great confidence: “I am still a British Subject.”<sup>5</sup>

Those are the remnants of history, giving evidence that despite the hostility against the black migrants from the Caribbean, their place in Cuban history was not erased.<sup>6</sup> But the churches, associations, racial organizations, naming of towns and social clubs, and allegiance to the British Empire are evidence not only of the social practices of the Antilleans, but also of the different and changing forms of their identifications. Instances of social and religious organization were responses to an unwelcoming social environment. The organizational choices of the immigrants were an assertion of their distinctiveness within Cuba generally, but also about who they were in particular contexts, and which identification (that is, race, class, island) was more practical for specific purposes. By presenting the history of the migrants’ organizational practices I am also illustrating how they used their identity and identities, and the advantages or problems those different social and organizational identifications entailed.

3. Teófilo Gay Watkins, “Papel de las migraciones en la formación y el desarrollo de las fuerzas laborales nacionales,” 20 January 1997, 2. Private Papers, Teófilo Gay Watkins, Baraguá, Cuba.
4. Jorge L. Giovannetti, “Entry for 11 February 1999,” Journal 1998–1999 (in author’s possession).
5. Celia Leonore Campbell, interview by author, 11 February 1999. Specifically on Baraguá, see also Jorge L. Giovannetti, “Historia visual y etnohistoria en Cuba: Inmigración antillana e identidad en *Los Hijos de Baraguá*,” *Caribbean Studies* 30, no. 2 (July–December 2002): 216–52.
6. Black Caribbean migrants (British West Indians and Haitians) were “undesirable aliens” frequently subjected to racist attacks by the press and by Rural Guards in the Cuban countryside. They were accused of almost every problem arising in the country, from diseases and criminality to labor unrests and the erosion of Cuban nationality. See Alexandra Brown David, “Native and Foreign Laborers: Resistance and Control in Cuba’s Sugar Industry, 1913–1924,” (master’s thesis: University of Texas at Austin, 1989), 96–129; Marc Christian McLeod, “Undesirable Aliens: Haitians and British West Indian Immigrant Workers in Cuba, 1898 to 1940,” (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2000), 87–280; Jorge L. Giovannetti, “Black British Subjects in Cuba: Race, Ethnicity, Nation, and Identity in the Migratory Experience, 1898–1938,” (PhD diss., University of North London, 2001), 69–191.

## Religion, Labor, and Race

Social organizations founded by the islanders from the British Caribbean colonies emerged mainly during and after the 1920s, following the mass migration of the 1910s. However, an organizing tradition is noticeable as early as 1902 when Alexander Hay, a Jamaican veteran of the West Indies Regiment, started meetings of the Salvation Army in Santiago de Cuba. Hay, who had been employed in the construction of the railway, organized the meetings in the house of Robert Dixon, who was from the island of St. Kitts. Meetings in English were also conducted in Guantánamo, where the testimonies were “translated . . . into French, which Spanish-speaking people were able to understand.”<sup>7</sup> Other Salvation Army churches were not officially founded until later, and I found no further information about this early effort, yet it demonstrates the early organizational activities of English-speaking Caribbean migrants, and suggests the involvement of other language groups in the church—possibly Haitians and Cubans.

Despite an increase in immigration from the British Antilles between 1905 and 1911, I have not found more evidence of religious activism in the 1900s or the early 1910s (that, of course, does not mean that such activism did not exist). But following the mass immigration of the late 1910s during the boom of the sugar industry, other Salvation Army churches started to operate in Baraguá (Bajan Town) and Banes (La Güira) by 1918. The Christian Mission Church of Baraguá was founded in 1917. These three churches, founded and run by British Caribbean migrants, were all located within areas of the sugar company towns near their housing facilities. In Guantánamo, the British authorities reported in 1916 that there were “three protestant churches, Episcopal, Baptist and Methodist, with large congregations, of whom the majority are British West Indians. There are also two Masonic Lodges with large membership confined exclusively to British West Indians.”<sup>8</sup>

While religious organizations were started almost immediately upon the arrival of the immigrants to Cuba, labor organizing faced greater obstacles. In the 1910s, migrant workers were used as an alternative to the unstable local labor force. Their role as

7. Arch R. Wiggins, *The History of the Salvation Army*, vol. 5: 1904–1914 (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1968), 39.

8. “Memorandum in Regard to the Conditions of West Indian Labour in Cuba,” enclosed in Stephen Leech to Rt. Hon. Viscount Grey, Foreign Office, 8 September 1916, National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom, Foreign Office Papers (hereafter NA, FO) 277/190. On some aspects of the religious involvement of migrants in Cuba see Jualynne E. Dodson, “Encounters in the African Atlantic World: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in Cuba,” in *Between Race and Empire: African-Americans and Cubans Before the Cuban Revolution*, eds. Lisa Brock and Digna Castañeda Fuertes (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 85–103.

competition for native Cuban workers becomes evident when the 1914 Labor Congress, according to Cuban historian Jorge Ibarra, decided to oppose that migratory current.<sup>9</sup> Alejandro de la Fuente has shown how a dispatch of Jamaican workers was used to break the strike of the stevedores in the port of Cabañas in 1912 and mentions that the United Fruit Company also used Antillean workers to neutralize any demand for higher salaries made by native workers.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, de la Fuente notes that migrants participated in the strikes of 1917, although he only mentions William Benjamin, “a negro who is believed to be from Barbados.”<sup>11</sup> Notwithstanding the strikes of 1917, the sugar bonanza of the Dance of the Millions (in the late 1910s) was not fertile ground for labor activism, and certainly not for a labor movement in which Caribbean migrant laborers would be involved. For the immigrants, labor conditions in Cuba were a great improvement over those they faced in islands such as Jamaica, where “the labouring population was no better in 1916 than their forefathers who live[d] in the early days of emancipation.”<sup>12</sup> The Jamaican press reported in 1917 that in Cuba “the working man can earn about three times what he can earn in Jamaica.”<sup>13</sup> Major activism on the part of the Antillean migrants in the labor arena would have to wait for the late 1920s and the 1930s when the “precarious balance” in the sugar industry created unstable labor conditions.<sup>14</sup>

But the very context of labor insecurity was also a fertile ground for tensions among local and foreign laborers, creating obstacles for the organization of the immigrants as workers. This is partly evident in the Second National Labor Congress manifesto in 1925 in Cienfuegos, where the Cubans proclaimed:

Not being our concern the restriction of the entrance of the fellow immigrants and considering that they come misled, ignorant of the real situation in the country, where [they] lower the level of the labor force worsening the situation of the workers that look for our subsistence here [in Cuba], the SCON [*Segundo Congreso Obrero Nacional*] agrees to ask all the Workers’ Organizations in Cuba that they address their peers abroad advising them not to come to Cuba where the situation of the workers deteriorates more every day.<sup>15</sup>

9. Jorge Ibarra, “La inmigración antillana,” IV Encuentro de Historiadores Latinoamericanos y del Caribe, 1983. Manuscript available in the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Havana, Class Number: 325.2729, Iba, I, 1983, p. 24.
10. Alejandro de la Fuente, “Two Dangers, One Solution: Immigration, Race, and Labor in Cuba, 1900–1930,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 51 (Spring 1997): 40.
11. *Ibid.*, 42. McLeod also refers to Benjamin in “Undesirable Aliens,” 105.
12. E. Ethelred Brown, “Labour Conditions in Jamaica Prior to 1917,” *Journal of Negro History* 4, no. 4 (October 1919): 358.
13. “The Baptist Union at Work; the Shadow of Emigration; Further Decline of Membership; Fine Work of Calabar,” *Jamaica Times* (3 March 1917), 19.
14. Luis Aguilar, *Cuba, 1933: Prologue to Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 95. Aguilar describes the situation in the late 1920s as one that was already heading to the economic crisis that exploded in the 1930s.
15. Evelio Tellería Toca, *Congresos obreros en Cuba* (Havana: Editorial de Arte y Cultura, Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1973), 137–38.

While the intention was not to antagonize, the workers clearly preferred foreigners to stay away from the country and leave the space to those who had to work for their subsistence in Cuba. Somewhat paradoxically, a Jamaican, Henry (Enrique) Shackleton acted as representative of the Antillean Workers' Union of Santiago de Cuba (*Union de Obreros Antillanos de Santiago de Cuba*) in the same labor congress that produced this manifesto.<sup>16</sup> That same year, the Workers' Federation of Havana demonstrated against the government's attempt to divide local and foreign workers and blame the latter for labor conflicts. It opposed the idea that the "imported evil" had to be "eliminated through the deportation of foreign labor activists" and declared: "Among workers there is no distinction."<sup>17</sup> The position of Afro-Caribbean workers as foreigners made their relation to the labor movement and workers' organizations one of ambiguity and ambivalence, as Marc McLeod has noted.<sup>18</sup> This certainly presents a challenge to the researcher in tracing labor activism among migrant workers, yet Barry Carr has argued that evidence "of participation of black immigrants in Cuban labor unions is difficult, but not impossible to find."<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, some evidence does show the activism of foreign workers in Cuban labor struggles. In 1923, for instance, during a general strike in the district of Camagüey, the press reported that: "Haitians, Jamaicans and native cutters have joined hand[s] in this concerted movement to secure increases in pay and the situation is becoming more acute each day."<sup>20</sup> Carr has been able to document the efforts on the part of the labor and Communist organizations in Cuba to increase the participation of black workers, including Caribbean migrants. In what he labeled a movement of "pan-ethnic" solidarity, black migrants in the late 1920s and early 1930s refused to act as strike breakers, made demands to mill managers, were active in communist mobilizations, and had a role in the 1933 revolution.<sup>21</sup> In the 1930s, during an instance of labor mobilization at the Senado Sugar Mill, it is reported that some of the delegates on behalf of the workers were Spaniards, Jamaicans, and Haitians.<sup>22</sup> That a Jamaican by the name of Elijah

16. Ibid., 119, 188; Instituto de Historia, *El movimiento obrero cubano: Documentos y artículos*, vol. 1: 1865–1925 (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales/Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1975), 434. See de la Fuente, "Two Dangers, One Solution," 43; Barry Carr, "Identity, Class, and Nation: Black Immigrant Workers, Cuban Communism, and the Sugar Insurgency, 1925–1933," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 78, no. 1 (February 1998): 96.

17. de la Fuente, "Two Dangers, One Solution," 43.

18. McLeod, "Undesirable Aliens," 91.

19. Carr, "Identity, Class, and Nation," 96.

20. "Cane Strikers in Wild Rebel," *Telegram* (18 January 1923). Clipping posted by Major Albert K. B. Lyman to consular authorities in Santiago and found in National Archives of the United States (National Archives Building), Record Group 165, MID-2056–213 (M-1507, roll no. 7).

21. Carr, "Identity, Class, and Nation," 111–14.

22. Jorge B. Sánchez to the British Consul, Havana, 13 February 1934, NA, FO 277/228.

Sigree was shot in one of the mobilizations also points towards the activism of migrant workers in the labor arena.<sup>23</sup> In a separate instance, Cuban workers on the railroad and steamship company went on strike because of the dismissal of “fellow workers who were foreigners.”<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps the most significant attempt at formal labor organization by migrant workers is the Antillean Workers’ Union mentioned above, which was founded in 1924, and remained active until the 1930s. In his account of the union, McLeod has shown how the organization struggled on behalf of immigrant workers, but at the same time against the “nativist tendencies of the organized labor movement in Cuba.”<sup>25</sup> One of its leaders, Shackleton, had been active with a Garveyite by the name Dave Davidson in the People’s Committee assisting West Indians in distress in 1921. Shackleton later joined other British West Indians, Cubans, and some Haitians in starting the union, an organization that was provided some space to state their positions in *La Voz Obrera*, the paper of the Dockworkers and Stevedores Union of Santiago de Cuba. But McLeod also shows how, as the economic situation in the country got worse in the late 1920s, the support for the foreign workers by the local organization changed. He stresses, nonetheless, that formal labor organization was not the only way in which immigrants (British West Indians and Haitians) struggled for the improvement of their situation as workers. They challenged authority in the sugar mills (often personified in the Rural Guards and *guardias jurados* in charge of security), moved from one plantation to another if labor conditions were not acceptable (using their mobility and establishing the terms in which they were going to work), and in some cases burning the cane fields.<sup>26</sup> According to Jorge Ibarra, the evidence seems to suggest that the Antillean workers were not necessarily contented with their wages, and gradually participated in the labor struggles in Cuba from the strikes in the 1910s up to their involvement with the Cuban Communist Party in the 1930s.<sup>27</sup> The limited evidence of migrant labor activism, then, cannot be automatically taken to indicate a lack of participation, as sometimes these workers kept a low profile (or were protected by fellow workers) precisely for their vulnerable status in a foreign country. Also, by the 1930s, after the 1933 Nationalization of Labor Law, some migrants were using Spanish names and therefore, their presence in labor struggles is not completely evident in documentary sources.

23. H. A. Grant-Watson to Sir Ransford Slater, Captain General and Governor in Chief, Kingston, Jamaica, 28 February 1934, NA, FO 277/228.

24. H. A. Grant-Watson to Sir John Simon, 21 February 1934, NA, FO 277/228.

25. McLeod, “Undesirable Aliens,” 118.

26. See McLeod, “Undesirable Aliens,” 87–126.

27. Jorge Ibarra, “La inmigración antillana,” 24–25.

Organizing along racial lines in Cuba was a more complex issue for the migrants. Since the nineteenth century, non-white Cubans have been organizing on the basis of their color at different levels and in various ways.<sup>28</sup> However, the three decades of struggle for independence (1868–1898) and its nominal accomplishment in 1902 under United States surveillance brought a different set of rules to the game. Cubans, more particularly the elites, had to demonstrate their capacity for self-government and a certain level of “civilization” in the eyes of US officials. Civilization had to be Western civilization, one that had its own racial understandings favoring whiteness and despising blackness. Given that the independence struggle and its accompanying idea of nationhood were predicated on the basis of racial unity, organizing on the basis of race or skin color also seemed questionable. At the political level, some blacks and mulattoes—notably Juan Gualberto Gómez and Martín Morúa Delgado—joined the established political parties that were dominated by the white Creole elite. At the social level, other non-white Cubans did organize clubs and societies, despite the political pressures, but none of the existent societies presented a real challenge—ideological and practical—to the Creole establishment until the emergence of the short-lived Partido Independiente de Color (PIC). The price paid for an open questioning of the position of blacks within Cuba’s “racial democracy” and struggling to obtain a “rightful share” in the country’s social and political life was death. After an electoral defeat in 1908, the PIC was excluded from electoral politics by the Morúa Law, a regulation that prohibited the organization of people along racial lines in Cuba and bore the name of its proponent, Morúa Delgado, an Afro-Cuban politician himself. In 1912, the PIC organized an armed revolt that prompted the government’s action and ended with the killing of between 3,000 and 5,000 black Cubans. The event in itself was reason enough for black Cubans to think twice about organizing on the basis of race and color, and certainly for black immigrants to hesitate in joining any type of racial organization. Considering that Jamaicans and Haitians—as a foreign “menace”—were accused of taking part in the PIC revolt,<sup>29</sup> one could assume that they would certainly

28. See Philip Howard, *Changing History: Afro-Cuban Cabildos and Societies of Color in the Nineteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), for the creation of the Afro-Cuban *cabildos* during the nineteenth century. For the politics of Afro-Cuban associations during the final decades of that century and the Cuban wars of independence, see Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886–1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 23–54.

29. “Cuba Situation is Serious,” *Tobacco* 53, no. 7 (6 June 1912): 1, 19; Johns de Pool, “Cuba’s Present Rebellion: Its Sources and Dangers,” *Jamaica Times* (6 July 1912): 5, 8; “Cuban Revolt,” *The Daily Gleaner* (12 June 1912): 1. See also Helg, *Our Rightful Share*. For a different perspective on Helg’s analysis of the racial aspects and politics of the 1912 revolt, see the earlier assessment of Louis A. Pérez Jr., “Politics, Peasants, and People of Colour: The 1912 ‘Race War’ in Cuba Reconsidered,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 66, no. 3 (August 1986): 509–39, and the more recent work by Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 1–91.



take precautions before engaging in subsequent antiracist activism. Surprisingly enough, however, after the mass arrival of Caribbean migrants in the late 1910s, and the emergence and consolidation of the UNIA, many black laborers did venture to organize under the racial banner.

## Racial Organization and Strategy: The Case of the UNIA

After its incorporation in the United States in 1918, Marcus Garvey's UNIA proliferated internationally, including in the Caribbean region, where it had been initially founded. The growth of the organization was significant in those countries where British Caribbean islanders had gone in search of work, from the Panama Canal and railroads and banana plantations in Central America to the sugar *centrales* in the Dominican Republic and Cuba.<sup>30</sup> The latter country emerged as one of the more fertile grounds for the development of the Pan-African organization with a total of 52 UNIA divisions. However, in conformity with the Morúa Law and the legacy of 1912, the UNIA was registered with the Cuban authorities as the "Universal Improvement Association and Communities League," avoiding the words "Negro" and "African" used in the original name.<sup>31</sup> The racial nature of the organization disappeared, as it were, and as far as the authorities were concerned, the prime objectives of the UNIA—or UIA, for that matter—were the "confraternity between all its associates, assistance to members in need and the search of employment in the event of them requesting it."<sup>32</sup> For the purpose of learning and instruction, the association would eventually establish colleges, academies, and schools. Membership was provided to "men of good conduct and morals; and it was essential to prepare a written application signed by the interested person, as well as two members."<sup>33</sup> Unlike the constitution and bylaws of the parent body in the United States, the Cuban version of 1920 avoided, at least in print, that part of the objectives that referred to the "uplift

30. For the development of the UNIA in the Hispanic Caribbean, see the articles in eds. Jorge L. Giovannetti and Reinaldo L. Román, "Garveyism and the Universal Negro Improvement Association in the Hispanic Caribbean" (special issue), *Caribbean Studies* 31, no. 1 (January–June 2003).

31. This is evident in records for the registry of associations in Havana. See, for example, Sociedad 'Universal Improvement Association and Communities [*sic*] League, "Reglamento," (Negociado de Asociaciones), 17 February 1920; and Richard A. Bennett, and P. A. Beausoleil, President and Secretary of the Universal Improvement Association and Communities [*sic*] League, "Acta de Constitución," 3 March 1920, Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Havana (hereafter ANC), Fondo 54–Registro de Asociaciones, Leg. 388, exp. 11640.

32. See Sociedad 'Universal Improvement Association and Communities [*sic*] League', "Reglamento," [Negociado de Asociaciones], 17 February 1920, ANC, Fondo 54–Registro de Asociaciones, Leg. 388, exp. 11640.

33. *Ibid.*

of the Negro peoples of the world” and also any reference to the fact that membership was for people of “Negro blood and African descent.”<sup>34</sup>

By 1921, the Havana Branch of the UNIA had among its members Barbadian William Preston Stoute. Stoute had been both a labor activist and a Garveyite in Panama, where the government had imprisoned him for participating in a strike, but also because of uneasiness about his presence during the upcoming visit of Marcus Garvey in 1921.<sup>35</sup> Other Garveyites and activists from Panama who moved to Cuba at the beginning of the 1920s were Samuel Percival Radway and Dave Davidson.<sup>36</sup> The organizational experience of members such as these in the Cuban UNIA divisions, along with the awareness of the problems of organizing along racial lines, probably prompted the strategy of avoiding any racial reference in the UNIA’s public image. Nonetheless, in 1922 the Camagüey division did register the association under its full name in Spanish, including the words “Black Race” in its name, also stating that the purpose of the organization was the uplift of that race. Moreover, in contrast to the Havana Branch, in Camagüey it was explicitly stated that a requirement for membership was being a “person of the Black Race having a minimal drop of black blood in the veins.” Further registrations of the UNIA included the word “Negro” and “African” in official documentation. However, the bylaws and regulations of some of the Cuban divisions of the UNIA were written in a way that would not threaten the Cuban government. In their official incorporation with the authorities, the regulations of some of the Cuban divisions of the UNIA stated that:

Its members have to swear to respect the right of every human race, the Government under whose jurisdiction they operate, not to interfere with the political affairs of the country, not to speak against any other race . . . [and] not become interested in any discussion that would alter the peace, union, and harmony that must reign as the foundation of all well governed societies.<sup>37</sup>

34. See the Constitution and Book of Laws of the UNIA, particularly Article IX, section 1, with regard to membership, in *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, vol. 1: 1826–August 1919, ed. Robert A. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). This version of the Constitution and Book of Laws is as approved in July 1918. Although it was amended in 1920, the parts quoted above remained.
35. Jabez L. Clarke, “Havana Division Coming Up from the Rear: Holds Big Mass Meeting at Which a Live Wire from Panama Electrifies Vast Audiences,” *Negro World* (18 June 1921): 8; Jabez L. Clarke, “Rt. Hon. High Commissioner for Cuba, Mr. Eduardo V. Morales takes Havana Division by Storm: Leaves Her in Thorough Working Condition,” *Negro World* (16 July 1921): 8; William V. Stoute Green (son of Preston Stoute), interview by author, 13 February 1999.
36. See notes 4 and 5 to Marcus Garvey’s letter to William H. Ferris, literary editor, *Negro World*, Kingston, Jamaica, 21 May 1921, in *The Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, vol. 3, *September 1920–August 1921*, ed. Robert Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 424–25.
37. See Ethelbert Blackwood and Herman Angus, President and Secretary, “Reglamento de la Asociación Universal para el Adelanto de la Raza Negra,” 6 April 1922, Archivo Histórico Provincial de Camagüey (hereafter AHPC), Fondo-Registro de Asociaciones, Leg. 104, #12; T. D. Allen and H. P. Martin, President and Secretary, “Reglamento de la Asociación Universal para el Adelanto de la Raza Negra,” 3 June 1922; AHPC, Fondo-Registro de Asociaciones, Leg. 129, #6; and Westmore Chance and H. Geo Smith, President and Secretary,

In Havana, the UNIA Branch 593 of Marianao, that had adopted the above regulations in 1929, seems to have developed a parallel body that one year before registered under the name “Society of Entertainment and Sport, Universal Negro Improvement Association.” Its purpose was to “offer to its associates all kind of entertainment and sport” and its members had to “avoid discussions or acts that sustain political or religious principles.”<sup>38</sup> In central Cuba, the Sagua la Grande UNIA branch also portrayed itself in a similar nonpolitical and nonactivist fashion, yet without hiding the racial character of the organization.<sup>39</sup>

At some stages, the disparities and changes in the regulations brought members of the association into conflict with one another.<sup>40</sup> But generally, the Cuban divisions of the UNIA portrayed themselves to state officials as organizations that would not pose any “danger” to the Cuban society in general, and to the elites and government officials in particular. Race, an otherwise key organizing principle of the UNIA and a main mobilizing force for its members, was thus displaced from occupying such a central position for the eyes of the Cuban authorities. However, that the organization’s principal political stance had been strategically sacrificed did not mean that, internally, the UNIA lost its role in fostering racial consciousness among its members. To the contrary, Cuban Garveyites like Miguel G. Casanova, Carlos Collazo, Angel Estrada, and Pedro Montenegro wrote to the *Negro World* espousing the importance of the common historical experiences of peoples of African descent in the Americas, and condemning the obstacles and inequalities suffered by blacks in Cuba.<sup>41</sup> Also, oral testimonies such as that

“Reglamento de la División #593 de Marianao de la Asociación Universal para el Adelanto de la Raza Negra y la Ligas [*sic*] de Comunidades Africanas,” 17 February 1929, ANC, Fondo 54–Registro de Asociaciones, Leg. 306, exp. 8892.

38. C. S. Morris and Septimus Blair, President and Secretary, “Reglamento de la Sociedad de Recreo y Sport Universal Negro Improvement Association and A.C. L. Num. 593.” 13 May 1928, ANC, Fondo 54–Registro de Asociaciones, Leg. 306, exp. 8892.
39. See Frank A. Guridy, “‘Enemies of the White Race’: The *Machadista* State and the UNIA in Cuba,” in “Garveyism and the Universal Negro Improvement Association in the Hispanic Caribbean” *Caribbean Studies* (Special Issue), eds. Jorge L. Giovannetti and Reinaldo L. Román, 31, no. 1 (January–June 2003): 107–37. Guridy has argued that the fact that societies did not engage in politics responded to the actual regulations for associations (*Ley de asociaciones*), and has suggested that the explicit use (or non use) of race, due to the Morúa Law, may have changed as time went on and people felt less threatened by it (Frank A. Guridy, personal communication with author, March 2003). A factor to consider also, I would add, is the distance from Havana, the political center of power, as suggested by the Havana UNIA branch’s concealment of race and the explicit use of it by the Sagua la Grande and Camagüey branches.
40. Westmore Chance and others, to Gobernador de la Provincia de la Habana, 25 June 1928; and C. S. Morris and others, to Honourable Delegate, 30 September 1928, ANC, Fondo 54–Registro de Asociaciones, Leg. 306, exp. 8892.
41. Marc McLeod, “‘Sin dejar de ser cubanos’: Cuban Blacks and the Challenges of Garveyism in Cuba,” in “Garveyism and the Universal Negro Improvement Association in the Hispanic Caribbean” *Caribbean Studies* (Special Issue), eds. Jorge L. Giovannetti and Reinaldo L. Román, 31, no. 1 (January–June 2003): 87–90.

of former UNIA member Juana Chapé Cárdenas show us the impact of the UNIA in the development of her racial consciousness. As a descendant of slaves from central Cuba, this black woman living in Jobabo was able to link her personal life story with the aims and purposes of the UNIA.<sup>42</sup> The fact that the racial ideology of the UNIA influenced its members but was at the same time hidden away, illustrates Maingot's argument that "Caribbean peoples, have a capacity strategically to highlight or mute racial and color divisions in the pursuit of a desired goal."<sup>43</sup> Even with the concealment of race in the documents of the organization, by the very composition of its members, the UNIA was a black organization or, what was the same in Cuba, an association of Caribbean migrants. As such, even with its nonracial and nonpolitical stance, the association was under close surveillance by both Cuban and US government officials, and was accused of "openly preaching racial war."<sup>44</sup>

The strategic practice of the UNIA in Cuba illustrates Marc McLeod's argument that the movement "adopted different forms in different countries."<sup>45</sup> As he has noted, the UNIA fulfilled a central role in providing a sense of commonality and self-assurance to British Antilleans and in assisting them to survive in a hostile environment. This role, it could be argued, worked primarily within the migrant community, and only on few occasions did the UNIA openly challenge the racial inequalities of the country in which the migrant workers were living, dominated by the Cuban government and US political interests. The *Negro World* did serve as a space where some migrants could condemn their situation in Cuba, but as a general rule, the newspaper concentrated on positive descriptions of the meetings held by the different branches and on reproductions of speeches of some of the leaders. UNIA leaders outside Cuba were uncritical of the actions of the Cuban government against the migrants. It was the local leadership of the organization in Cuba who criticized the conditions the migrants were experiencing (Eduardo V. Morales

42. Juana Chapé Cárdenas, interview by author, 21 mayo 1999. See also the testimony of María de los Reyes Castillo Bueno ("Reyita") as written by Daisy Rubiera Castillo, *Reyita, sencillamente* (Havana: Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1997): 22–26.

43. Anthony P. Maingot, "Race, Color, and Class in the Caribbean," in *Americas: New Interpretive Essays*, ed. Alfred Stepan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 231.

44. Philander L. Cable to Dr. Guillermo Patterson, Cuban Secretary of State, Havana, 29 September 1921, and Philander L. Cable to U.S. Secretary of State, Washington DC, 30 September 1921, National Archives, College Park, United States (hereafter NACP), Record Group (hereafter RG) 84, Records of the Foreign Service Post, Diplomatic Posts, Cuba, Vol. 138, file 843. Later, the UNIA and its newspaper *Negro World* was declared illegal and banned, and its leader, Marcus Garvey, was denied entrance into the country in 1930. See Rupert Lewis, *Marcus Garvey: Anti-Colonial Champion* (London: Karia Press, 1987), 112, and "Cuba Puts ban on Garvey," *New York Times* (3 January 1930): 4.

45. Marc C. McLeod, "Garveyism in Cuba, 1920–1940," *Journal of Caribbean History* 30, nos. 1–2 (1996): 135.

and R. H. Bachelor) and challenged the dominance and abuses suffered under the plantation regime (Mr. Christian of the Preston Division).<sup>46</sup> But none of the leading UNIA officials who visited Cuba in 1921 (George A. McGuire, Henrietta Vinton Davis, J. S. de Bourg, and Marcus Garvey himself) seem to have made any critical public statement on the problems of the migrants at the time of their visit when the sugar crisis had clearly affected many Caribbean workers.

The contrast between the way the UNIA operated in the Cuban context and the discourse of its leadership, or indeed its principal leader, is perhaps more evident if one considers Garvey's visit in 1921. His arrival took place in complex times of economic depression and political transition with Mario García Menocal leaving the presidency to Alfredo Zayas. While Garvey did receive a high-profile reception by government officials and leaders of the Afro-Cuban elite such as those in the Club Atenas, differences and contradictions existed between his Pan-African ideology and the Cuban socioracial landscape. This became evident in the words of Club Atenas' president Miguel Ángel Céspedes who noted that due to their role in the constitution of the Republic, Cuban blacks "cannot conceive of having a motherland other than Cuba."<sup>47</sup> Garvey was then "cautious" in his pronouncements making clear that he had no intentions of intervening in Cuba's domestic political issues,<sup>48</sup> and even concealing the racial nature of the organization. Pedro Pablo Rodríguez has stressed the contradictions in Garvey's speeches and his focus on the economic aspects and projects of the UNIA as an organization.<sup>49</sup> Once out of Havana, it has been suggested that Garvey spoke "with more freedom", something that Bernardo García Domínguez has attributed to the fact that the "development of the UNIA in Havana may not be representative of the rest of the country."<sup>50</sup> Indeed, there were regional differences in the country that had an effect on the composition of the UNIA, but as will be shown below, there were also differences in terms of how the organization operated and which of its many functions (as a religious movement, an

46. See R. A. Bachelor, "Convention Report, 4 August 1924," in *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, vol. 5: *September 1922–August 1924*, ed. Robert Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 652; and Eduardo V. Morales, "Convention Report, 14 August 1922", in *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, vol. 4: *1 September 1921–2 September 1922*, ed. Robert Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 862. For the case of Mr. Christian, see "Hard Treatment to the Preston Division in Cuba," *Negro World* (8 October 1921): 10.

47. *Heraldo de Cuba* (4 March 1921), quoted in McLeod, "Sin dejar de ser cubanos," 79. See also Pedro Pablo Rodríguez, "Marcus Garvey en Cuba," *Anales del Caribe* 7–8 (1987–88): 282, 284.

48. Bernardo García Domínguez, "Garvey and Cuba," in *Garvey: His Work and Impact*, eds. Rupert Lewis and Patrick Bryan (Kingston: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies), 301.

49. Rodríguez, "Marcus Garvey en Cuba," 282, 290.

50. García Domínguez, "Garvey and Cuba," 302, 303.

immigrant protection society, a social club, or a racial organization) prevailed in Cuban context.

## From Race to Religion (or the other way around?): Beyond the UNIA

What, then, was the role of the UNIA for Caribbean migrants in Cuba? I believe that the function of the organization was twofold. First, part of its importance was that it nurtured the organizational tradition of the immigrants on Cuban soil. Secondly, the UNIA had a definite impact on the self-support of the British Caribbean community as “an immigrant protection society”<sup>51</sup> that operated mostly as a “civil religion.”<sup>52</sup> A glance at the reports of the UNIA in Cuba published in the *Negro World* indicates how the religious character of the organization prevailed. Rather than assuming the stance of a politicized black organization, the UNIA worked more as a religious movement consistently adopting the proceedings of McGuire’s *Universal Negro Ritual*.<sup>53</sup> It is to no surprise, then, that McGuire had visited Cuba twice, before and after Garvey, but also that the visits of the former seem to have been better received and more successful than that of the latter. In the account of his travels in Cuba, and apparently conceding to McGuire’s mobilizing skills, Garvey himself remarked:

From Moron I went to the little city of Nuevitas and there also I received another hearty response, and there the people “went over the top” 100 per cent. for the Black Star Line and the Libe[rian] Construction Loan, even though his Grace, the Chaplain-General, Dr. McGuire had been there and as an Archbishop, naturally he had cleaned up all Cuba and left not even a brass nickel there. [. . .]

From Nuevitas, I went to the great stronghold of the Universal Negro Improvement Association Preston. In Preston, I also received a warm reception. Dr. McGuire had preceded me there, and I believe in two nights took away all the savings of the people of Preston. So when I arrived there to get some more they did the best they could, and I think that the best can be measured with the best of any other center of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, because they open-heartedly did everything they possibly could to make my trip there a success. From Preston,

51. McLeod, “Garveyism in Cuba,” 134.

52. See Randall K. Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black Civil Religion* (Dover, Mass: The Scarecrow Press and the American Theological Library Association, 1978).

53. *Universal Negro Ritual: Containing Forms, Prayers, and Offices for Use in the Universal Negro Improvement Association, together with a collection of hymns authorized by the High Executive Council, compiled by His Grace, the Rev. George Alexander McGuire, Chaplain-General; Approved by His Excellency Marcus Garvey, President General and Provisional President of Africa* (1921). Available at the Rare Books and Manuscript Division, Schomburg Center for the Study of Black Culture, New York Public Library, Sc. Rare C 81–18.

I went to another great stronghold of Barnes [*sic*], where Dr. McGuire, I believe, in two nights got \$4,000 for the Black Star Line.

Immediately after his reluctant remarks on McGuire's fund-raising success, Garvey apologetically noted that:

I must say that I was sick all during my stay in Cuba because I contracted a very bad cold[,] having gone immediately from the cold in the north to the warmth in the tropics down in Key West. I took a very bad cold and having to speak every night it developed seriously and I was much embarrassed in my speeches in Cuba because I suffered [nightly] from the effect of the bad cold. Nevertheless I was sent out to represent the Universal Improvement Association [*sic*], and the first night hundreds and thousands of people assembled in the biggest theatre [in] the city of Barnes [*sic*] and I was suffering terribly while I spoke.

Garvey used ill health as an excuse, and also avoided the word Negro when referring to the UNIA, which is perhaps an illustration of his awareness of the organization's concealment of race in its discourse within the Cuban context.<sup>54</sup>

Garvey's speech and the particular references to McGuire are indicative of the emerging conflict between the two UNIA leaders at the time, but also give some insights into the strong influence of religion in the organization in Cuba.<sup>55</sup> That the visits of McGuire seem to have been more successful and well received than those of Garvey is probably the best evidence of this. McGuire, who was the first member of the UNIA's Executive Council to make an official trip to the Caribbean, traveled to Cuba twice from January to March and then from May to July 1921. Garvey met with the incoming and outgoing Cuban presidents and with Havana's Afro-Cuban leaders, and was interviewed by the national press, before continuing his tour across the island and departing to Kingston. McGuire's visit had a lower profile at the national level, but apparently had a significant impact in the different settlements of British Antilleans all across the island. In the complex mixture of the secular and religious functions of Garveyism in Cuba, the latter appears to be the most important. This, along with the concealment of UNIA's racial

54. "Marcus Garvey and Miss H. V. Davis Tell Thrilling Story of Trip to West Indies and Central America," *Negro World* 10, no. 24 (July 30, 1921): 3. See edited version of the speech in *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, vol. 3: *September 1920–August 1921*, ed. Robert A. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 532–45. The absence of the word Negro in the name of the organization is in page 534, when Garvey referred to Cuba. In the same speech, when referring to his activities in countries other than Cuba, Garvey did use the complete name of the organization with the word Negro.

55. For the conflict between the two leaders see Randall K. Burkett, *Black Redemption: Churchmen Speak for the Garvey Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), 11. After his return from Cuba, McGuire founded the African Orthodox Church, a fact that lead to preoccupations on Garvey's side as to the exclusion of other denominations from the UNIA. By 1923, according to Karl Prüter, Garvey and McGuire were in "open conflict." See Karl Prüter, *The Strange Partnership of George Alexander McGuire and Marcus Garvey* (Highlandville, Missouri: St. Willibrord Press, 1986), 4, 15–16.

image and the importance of McGuire in Cuba, seems apparent in the *Negro World* report of Garvey's visit to Banes:

The interests aroused by His Grace the Rev. George Alexander McGuire has resulted in the *conversion* of many members in Banes and their subsequent enlistment in the ranks of the Universal Improvement Association [*sic*] A hearty welcome awaits the return of the chaplain-general to Banes.<sup>56</sup>

Despite the UNIA's official stance on religion that declared no official affiliation to any Church, the Association's link with black Christian tradition was inevitable, and perhaps, as the above quote suggests, indispensable for the ultimate success in the spreading of Garvey's message.

In Cuba, a variety of religious figures played key roles in the development of the organization. In 1921, Rev. A. W. Charles (or William Alexander Charles) was the Secretary of the Chaparra Branch of the UNIA, and had participated in McGuire's visit to Guantánamo.<sup>57</sup> A former deacon of the Church of God, Retford E. M. Jack who joined Rev. Charles in his mission in Chaparra, was a member of the Episcopal Church and had been ordained by Archbishop McGuire.<sup>58</sup> Several of the meetings during 1921 had the participation of local Chaplain R. Daley Tibblis in Antilla, and also of a Reverend Duggan (or Duggan) who spoke at meetings in Camagüey, but apparently was Chaplain in the San Geronimo Branch of the organization.<sup>59</sup> Another Reverend by the name of T. C. Glashen presided over meetings of the UNIA in Havana.<sup>60</sup> In Camagüey, "Brother Roderick White," an officer of UNIA's advisory board and "Brother Wm. Letford," its chairman, were assisted by the "Captain of the Salvation Army of Florida [Camagüey], who is also a brother of the U.N.I.A.," in the organization of what was labeled a "big meeting" and

56. "UNIA News of Banes," *Negro World*, 6, 10, no. 12 (May 7, 1921): 8 (My emphasis). This link between the church and the UNIA is evident in the organization and the structure of the meetings elsewhere. For examples, particularly in the US, see Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement*, 23. For another Hispanic Caribbean example, in the Dominican Republic, see Humberto García Muñiz and Jorge L. Giovannetti, "Garveyismo y racismo en el Caribe: El caso de la población cocola en la República Dominicana," in "Garveyism and the Universal Negro Improvement Association in the Hispanic Caribbean" *Caribbean Studies* (Special Issue), eds. Jorge L. Giovannetti and Reinaldo L. Román, 31, no. 1 (January-June 2003): 139–211.
57. D. E. Ewart, Secretary, [UNIA], San Manuel, Cuba, "San Manuel Division Holds Regular Meeting," *Negro World*, 3, 10, no. 2 (26 February 1921): 7; O. Louis Sherwood, "Distinguished Visit Paid to the Guantánamo Division, as Well as others in Cuba, by His Grace, Our Esteemed Chaplain General, Dr. George Alexander M'Guire," *Negro World*, UNIA News by Wm. H. Ferris, 10, no. 5 (19 March 1921): 8.
58. "Priest and Deacon Organized by Chaplain General of the UNIA," *Negro World* 10, no. 12 (7 May 1921): 8.
59. "The Chaplain General Bids Farewell to Antilla, Oriente, Cuba," *Negro World* 10, no. 26 (13 August 1921): 11. "Camagüey Division U.N.I.A. & A.C.L.: Visited by Miss Henrietta Vinton Davis and Rt. Hon. Sidney De Bourg," *Negro World* 10, no. 20 (2 July 1921): 4; Sidney A. Wilson, Report[er], "Unveiling a Charter at San Geronimo, Cuba," *Negro World*, 1–2, 10, no. 2 (26 February 1921): 10.
60. "Enthusiastic Wednesday Night in Havana," *Negro World* 10, no. 24 (30 July 1921): 10, 13.



“beautiful *service*” of the division.<sup>61</sup> In Morón, another member of the Salvation Army, Mr. Rigard, “spoke words of encouragement, especially on education.”<sup>62</sup> Two other “Brothers,” B. B. Simms and William Holmes, were first vice president and executive secretary, respectively, of the Manatí Division of the UNIA. When they sought permission from the Manatí Sugar Company to hold meetings, it was reported that Brother J. T. Parris “and his committee of the church” played an “instrumental” role.<sup>63</sup> When the Florida branch of the UNIA unveiled its charter in 1924, the *Negro World* reported on a procession being led by “the band of the Salvation Army and its captain.”<sup>64</sup>

Despite the complications caused by the “religious question” at the higher levels of the organization (i.e., the conflict between Garvey and McGuire, and the UNIA’s position with regard to the church), it was precisely the religious aspect of the UNIA that served Caribbean migrants in Cuba best. In the history of the black peoples of the Americas in general, and the Caribbean in particular, religion had a significant role as an outlet for resistance and protest. Garvey, as argued by E. Franklin Frazier in the 1920s, capitalized on this aspect,<sup>65</sup> and his movement therefore proved to be successful in adjusting to the cultural and ideological tradition of its members and prospective adherents. In a way, the particular needs of the affiliates of the organization were the ones who ultimately defined its nature and the role of the UNIA within their communities. For that reason, among the many facets of the UNIA, the interrelated functions as a religious movement and as an immigrant protection society became dominant.

As a religious movement, the ethos of the UNIA fit within the religious tradition of many islanders from the British Caribbean colonies, but as an immigrant protection society, the UNIA would have to coexist with other ideological forces not necessarily in harmony with its values and beliefs. While the UNIA presented a challenge to British colonialism at other levels, by protecting the migrants in Cuba the UNIA ended up sharing that task with the consuls and officials of the British Empire. Such a paradox of criticism of, and alignment with, the British Empire illustrates both the defensive strategies of the migrants and also the contradictions embedded in the legacy of colonialism. The shared role in the protection of the migrants was evident particularly in the sugar crisis and deportations of 1921. In 1923, the British government considered granting official

61. H. Angus, “Camagüey Division holds big Meeting,” *Negro World* 10, no. 18 (18 June 1921): 10. My emphasis.

62. “Moron Division U.N.I.A. Unveils Charter,” *Negro World* 11, no. 2 (27 August 1921): 11.

63. “Manati Division, Oriente de Cuba, Secretary’s Report,” *Negro World* 11, no. 3 (3 September 1921): 11.

64. “Florida, Cuba,” *Negro World* 16, no. 13 (May 10, 1924): 8.

65. E. Franklin Frazier, “Garvey: A Mass Leader,” *Nation* 123 (18 August 1926): 148, quoted in Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement*, 15.

recognition to the organization in order to cope with the amount of work that was being devoted to the attention of matters related to the British Antilleans. Such “quasidiplomatic” recognition would come into contradiction with British policy towards the organization in the colonies and elsewhere. After consulting with local colonial governments in Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad, the semi-official recognition was not granted.<sup>66</sup> It is significant, however, that British Caribbean migrants themselves also chose their affiliation to the empire as the grounds for other organizational endeavors.

## The British Empire and Black British Subjects’ Organizational Practices

Even when one must recognize the UNIA’s role on behalf of the migrants, it is important to note that most migrants used their affiliation to the empire as a survival strategy in Cuba, requesting support from the consuls, but also from the Foreign and Colonial Offices in London, the colonial governors in their islands of origin, and even the King and Scotland Yard.<sup>67</sup> The migrants’ imperial affiliation was also evident in that they organized societies that were clearly based on their relation to the British Empire. This was expressed at what can be considered the island colony level or at the metropolitan level, the former being a sense of belonging to the British colonies of the Caribbean (same language and similar culture, however colonial it may be) and the latter expressed through their direct ties with Britain and the monarchy. It is telling nonetheless, that the UNIA served as the foundational organization for both the organizations based on island colony and metropolis. For example, the Jamaican Club of Banes and the Sociedad de Socorros Mutuos de Antillanos Británicos of Havana (1935) were created having the UNIA’s Liberty Hall as their precedent.<sup>68</sup>

Whether it was strategy or genuine belief in the empire and the altruism of its representatives, many of the societies formed by the migrants—especially in the 1930s and 1940s—were oriented around their links with the empire. Examples of these societies are the aforementioned “Sociedad de Socorros Mutuos” in Havana which would “make

66. Tony Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976), 49–51.

67. Giovannetti, “Black British Subjects in Cuba,” 202–15, 221–25.

68. See William Edwards Oakley, “Jamaican Club, corazón de la vida sociocultural de la inmigración anglocaribeña en Banes,” *II Simposio Internacional, La presencia de la cultura de los pueblos angloparlantes en Cuba* (November 1998), 9; Sociedad de Socorros Mutuos de los Antillanos Británicos, “Reglamento,” [Negociado de Asociaciones], 5 de noviembre de 1935, ANC, Fondo 54—Registro de Asociaciones, Leg. 334, Exp. 9902.

efforts for the mutual cooperation of its members” and “maintain them in an amicable contact with the Government of the Metropolis, protecting the cause of any British Subjects, as long as such cause is officially reported and just.”<sup>69</sup> The “Asociación de Súbditos Británicos” of Morón in Camagüey, active in the 1940s, accepted as members all the British subjects born in Cuba or other country “understanding that they are of British origin, and considering in all cases that the applicant speaks the English language.”<sup>70</sup> The “Asociación Cultural de las Antillas Británicas de Cuba,” explicitly said that the members would be those from the “BRITISH Antilles”: “the Bahamas, Barbados, British Guyana, British Honduras, Jamaica, and the Leeward Islands, Trinidad, Tobago, and the Windward Islands.”<sup>71</sup> This illustrates that the founders of the association had a clear sense of the regional colonial space of the British Empire in the Caribbean region. The women also had their own organization named “Club de Mujeres Antillanas Británicas, Estrella de Londres #1,” founded in 1942.<sup>72</sup> In Baraguá, many of these associations, including the Imperial Club and the Unity Club, were also linked to the Cricket Club and actively played the “imperial game” in the community and with immigrants from other sugar plantations.<sup>73</sup> An evident contradiction here is that while the associations were establishing the link with the empire, parts of their registration documentation (including the names of the associations) were written in Spanish. Given the fact that many of the associations mentioned were founded in the 1930s and 1940s, one wonders how much this is related to a tension between keeping the imperial affiliation at a specific time, yet showing a sufficient degree of assimilation to the Cuban (Hispanic) society through language. If one considers the Cuban nationalism of the 1930s and its manifestation in labor legislation affecting migrant workers, the latter alternative (assimilation) was certainly an attractive one. Those years were times not only of growing nationalism and xenophobia (against black migrants), but of political tensions and transitions. By registering the organizations with Spanish names, the migrants from the British Caribbean colonies were perhaps playing safe, as it were; yet one should not rule out that by

69. Sociedad de Socorros Mutuos de los Antillanos Británicos, “Reglamento,” [Negociado de Asociaciones], 5 de noviembre de 1935, ANC, Fondo 54—Registro de Asociaciones, Leg. 334, Exp. 9902.

70. Kenneth Mayne and Austin Hines, “Proyecto de Reglamento de la Asociación de Súbditos Británicos de Morón,” 27 May 1943, Archivo Histórico Provincial, Camagüey (AHPC), Fondo-Registro de Asociaciones, Leg. 125, no. 9.

71. C. C. Richardson y Aden N. Sandiford, Presidente Secretario. “Reglamento de la Sociedad Cultural Denominada ‘Asociación Cultural de las Antillas Británicas de Cuba.’” 13 de julio de 1943 [Aprobado agosto, 9 1943], AHPC, Fondo-Registro de Asociaciones, Leg. 305, no. 2.

72. Iris Robb, Herminia Provost, and James Wittick, “Reglamento-Club de Mujeres Antillanas Británicas, Estrella de Londres #1,” 30 May 1942, AHPC, Fondo-Registro de Asociaciones, Leg. 180, no. 11.

73. Giovannetti, “Historia visual y etnohistoria en Cuba,” 214–50.

the 1940s people active in these societies may have been born in Cuba and comfortable with the use of Spanish. Jamaican demographic data show that by 1943, a total of 6,713 people in Jamaica were registered as having been born in Cuba.<sup>74</sup> If Cuba held the second position as the country of birth of those residing in Jamaica by the 1940s, one can infer that many Cuban born West Indians were still in Cuba (an inference sustained by the visibility of West Indian communities to this date).

On occasions, the actual organization of these societies responded directly to the actions of the empire, as was the case of *The British West Indian Progressive Association of Central Delicias*, in Puerto Padre, and its partner in Central Chaparra, in northeastern Cuba.<sup>75</sup> These two organizations were founded in anticipation of the visit of British officers Sir Francis Stockdale and Sir George Ogilvie-Forbes in 1943 to examine the situation of the British West Indians in the country. The representatives of the organizations met and were interviewed by the British delegation and “asked that they should be repatriated.” Stockdale’s report noted that these migrants “prefer to return to their island homes or to go to any other part of the British Empire.” In contrast to migrants in other areas of Cuba, those of Chaparra “expressed a desire, in no uncertain terms, to be under the British flag.”<sup>76</sup> It is evident that the Caribbean migrants in Chaparra and Delicias had organized themselves on the basis of their British identity for some purpose, namely to press for repatriation and to obtain the support and sympathy of the British authorities in that task. However, what becomes clear from Stockdale’s recommendations is that the migrants would not be repatriated unless they were “destitute aged and chronic sick [*sic*]” and that colonial authorities would then “consider the repatriation” of “any special cases” of people with “little possibility of their earning capacity being sufficient to supply essential needs.”<sup>77</sup> The 1943 report clearly was advocating for an improvement of the conditions of the British West Indians *in* Cuba through a number of measures. Stockdale argued, for instance, that “American sugar companies were responsible for the introduction of most West Indians into Cuba and they may be regarded as having a

74. “Table 4, Population by Birthplace, Jamaica, 1921 and 1943,” in R. R. Kuczynski, *Demographic Survey of the British Colonial Empire*: vol 3: *West Indian and American Territories* (London: Geoffrey Cumberlege-Oxford University Press, 1953), 235. (Kuczynski’s data is compiled from the official Jamaican census.) Another possibility to consider is that registering the names of the associations in Spanish was part of a practice or policy of the Registro de Asociaciones.

75. *Constitution and Laws of the British West Indian Progressive Association of Central Chaparras, Pueblo Viejo, Oriente* (n.p.: Imprenta Lanuza, [1943?]) and *The British West Indian Progressive Association of Central Delicias, Municipio de Puerto Padre, Oriente, Cuba* (Puerto Padre: Imprenta Pimentel, 1943).

76. Frank Stockdale, “Report on the Present Conditions of the British West Indian Community in Cuba” (21 July 1943), 15, 17, PRO, FO 371/33832.

77. Stockdale, “Report on the Present Conditions,” 21. (My emphasis).

moral obligation to their welfare.”<sup>78</sup> Other recommendations included pressure on the Cuban authorities for the “exemption of British West Indians from the labor laws and regulations,” changes in the labor and alien registration laws, the development of gardens and cooperative farms for the migrants, and grants for the improvement of medical and educational services in the West Indian communities.<sup>79</sup> The paradox here is that while Caribbean migrants were organizing themselves under their imperial allegiance to gain repatriation, the interest of the empire was that they remain in Cuba. After the labor disturbances in the British Caribbean colonies in the 1930s, it is likely, there were worries that the sudden repatriation of hundreds of unemployed workers would create further labor and social unrest in the British colonies.

The opinion of the British authorities of these associations was clear, when they noted that: “Like all negroes in more or less civilized communities, the British West Indians in Cuba show an aptitude for forming themselves into Clubs and Societies which usually bear very grandiose names.”<sup>80</sup> British officialdom thought the motivation for the organization of the migrants was of a different kind, noting that: “With very few exceptions, the British West Indian mutual relief societies which exist in Cuba seem to be used as a means for affording an easy living to their officers.”<sup>81</sup> Yet, at the same time, the authorities recommended the “encouragement of the voluntary aid and welfare societies with small grants on a proportional basis” controlled by the empire’s consular officials.<sup>82</sup> In that way, the British government hoped to keep the British West Indians *in* Cuba, and avoid any large and costly repatriation scheme that would affect both “UK Treasury” and the situation in the British Caribbean colonies.

## Social Organizations and Caribbean Fragmentation: Some Questions

It is evident that British Caribbean immigrants in Cuba were not a passive or stagnant community during their stay in the country. They created a number of societies and organizations in order to live, assimilate, and survive their experience abroad. This practice was surely anchored in an organizational tradition that developed during the nineteenth

78. Stockdale, “Report on the Present Conditions,” 21.

79. Stockdale, “Report on the Present Conditions,” 18–21.

80. Vice Consul Weir, “Report on the Conditions of the British West Indians in Cuba,” Enclosed in George Ogilvie-Forbes to Anthony Eden, Foreign Office, 16 February 1942, PRO FO 371/30461, No. A2669.

81. H. Dodds to Hector McNeill, UK, 30 August 1948, PRO FO 369/3962, No. K13066.

82. M. E. Vibert, Foreign Office. “Minutes: British West Indian Relief in Cuba, S. Domingo and Haiti.” 1948, PRO, FO 369/3962, No. K656.

century in the British colonial Caribbean. After the end of slavery in the British Caribbean, former slaves and free people of color in the British West Indies organized in religious and secular ways, actively struggling as workers,<sup>83</sup> but also affiliating with different Christian traditions and Friendly Societies.<sup>84</sup> Given the rapid development of these types of organizations in Cuba among British Caribbean communities, there is every reason to believe that many of these migrants had a Christian (Afro-Caribbean or European) background and that they had either been members of Friendly Societies or knew about their existence and the benefits obtained from them. Not only that, but early twentieth century Cuba was itself a fertile ground for a variety of social organizations; their host society had a history of Afro-Cuban organization, from the nineteenth century *cabildos* to the societies of color at the turn of the twentieth century. For a Caribbean migrant arriving at, say, the sugar plantations of Chaparra or Delicias; it may have been difficult to follow the exact tradition of social organization left behind. Yet it was not necessary to start over again by initiating a new club. In places like Chaparra and Delicias, the migrants found, already in place, a social setting that was divided with its own clubs and societies, such as the “Club Demócrata” for Cubans “of color” and the Club Delicias for white people.<sup>85</sup> This segmented microcosm provided the rationale for the migrants to create their own types of organization, but also reassured the newly arrived group, confirming that the creation of clubs, societies, and churches was part of the way of life in the Cuban plantation society and a sensible thing to do.

83. O. Nigel Bolland, *The Politics of Labour in the British Caribbean: The Social Origins of Authoritarianism and Democracy in the Labour Movement* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2001), 24–211.
84. See, among others, Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982); Shirley C. Gordon, *Our Cause for His Glory: Christianisation and Emancipation in Jamaica* (Kingston: The Press University of the West Indies, 1998); Arthur Charles Dayfoot, *The Shaping of the West Indian Church, 1492–1962* (Kingston: The Press University of the West Indies, 1999), 161–222. For the historical background of the friendly societies in the British Caribbean, see the introduction of Colonial Office, *Friendly Societies in the West Indies: Report on a Survey by A. F. and D. Wells, and a despatch from the Secretary of State for the Colonies to the West Indian Governors dated 15th May, 1952* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1953), and also Howard Johnson, “Friendly Societies in the Bahamas, 1834–1910,” *Slavery and Abolition* 12, no. 5 (1991): 187–90; Glen Richards, “Friendly Societies and Labour Organisation in the Leeward Islands, 1912–19,” in *Before and After 1865: Education, Politics, and Regionalism in the Caribbean, in honor of Sir Roy Augier*, eds. Brian L. Moore and Swithin R. Wilmot (Kingston: Ian Rangle Publishers, 1998).
85. Pablo Armando Fernández, “De bateyes,” in *De memorias y anhelos* (Havana: Ediciones Unión, 1988), 16, 25–26. Cándida González, interview by author, 20 June 2003. González, a black Cuban woman born in Chaparra, married a Dominican migrant and went to live with him in Dominica. She also mentioned to me the way in which there was a club for whites and a club for the people of color. During my visit to Delicias I visited the house of the descendants of members of the Club Demócrata, which stress the nature of the club as one of the people “of color” (as opposed to black people). Jorge L. Giovannetti, “Entry for 24 May 1999,” *Journal* 1998–1999 (in author’s possession).

Sugar company towns were indeed segregated and divided, and the different clubs and societies sustained political, racial, ethnic, and national divisions. Yet, it would be naïve to assume that those societies limited the organizational options of the different peoples or that there was no contact between the different social and ethnic groups living throughout Cuba or specifically within the company towns. In the community of Baraguá, there were different social clubs as well, and while people knew “their place,” as it were, friendly relations existed when each club held a *fiesta* (party) or a social event.<sup>86</sup> About these interactions, an informant in the town of Jobabo even mentioned to me that “muchos jamaquinos eran jamaquinos pero . . . tu sabes, se adaptaron a la vida cubana . . . ron, fiestas.” (*many Jamaicans were Jamaicans, but . . . you know . . . they adapted to the Cuban life . . . rum, parties*).<sup>87</sup> The Garvey movement, for instance, while remaining as a society dominated by British West Indians, was an organizational effort that appealed to Afro-Cubans in a variety of ways, making them join the association and participate actively in its activities and ideology.<sup>88</sup> And as we saw, the UNIA also contributed to fostering an organizational tradition, by spearheading the formation of other clubs or organizations. Members of the UNIA were also affiliated with other clubs and/or churches at the same time. In the case of Dave Davidson, mentioned above, we also find links between the UNIA and the labor movement. Davidson was active as a Garveyite in Panama and Cuba, but also served as secretary of the People’s Committee (that preceded the Antillean Workers’ Union) which joined forces with the UNIA and other labor organizations in assisting West Indians in the crisis of 1921.<sup>89</sup>

How can we account for the cross-fertilization, influences, networking, and links that must have existed among these groups and organizations in the Cuban context, across time and linguistic and political frontiers? The history of organizational practices in the British Caribbean colonies provides some insights. The fact that working class nonwhite immigrants organized in multiple ways and in different societies in Cuba must not come as a surprise if one considers that in some British islands since the early twentieth century “the societies appeared to have been confined to the coloured [*sic*] population and to the poor.”<sup>90</sup> Also, that women organized independently in the Cuban context, as was shown, and that they were very active in the UNIA, is not surprising either when

86. Jorge L. Giovannetti, “Entry for 11 February 1999,” Journal 1998–1999 (in author’s possession)

87. Ignacio Anderson, interview by author, 21 May 1999.

88. See Guridy, “Enemies of the White Race,” and Marc C. McLeod, “Sin dejar de ser cubanos,” 75–104.

89. McLeod, “Undesirable Aliens,” 107–8.

90. Colonial Office, *Friendly Societies in the West Indies*, 18.

they had been active in Barbados since the nineteenth century through organizations such as the *St. Michael's Female Friendly Society*.<sup>91</sup> What was the impact of the various organizational efforts beyond both the Cuban context and the experience of the migrants in it? How important then was the organizational tradition of West Indians in labor and social struggles in Cuba? Or, how and in which specific ways did the experience of labor and social organization influence the activism of Caribbean migrants on their return to their islands of origin? How much of the development of Friendly Societies in the British Caribbean during the 1930s and 1940s and the increase in membership in some cases, can be attributed or related to the experiences of people abroad in places like Cuba, Central America, and the Dominican Republic?<sup>92</sup>

It is revealing that, as they did in Cuba, West Indians in their countries of origin held membership (and official positions) in more than one society or church.<sup>93</sup> Behind all these questions and the complex issues discussed above, what emerges is the ability of the migrants from the British Caribbean to establish multiple associations and organize in different ways within the host society, but also how they were capable of extending their organizational experience beyond national and linguistic boundaries. In what resembles Charles V. Carnegie's conceptualization of “strategic flexibility,” the migrants I have studied here were able to use the multiple organizational options they had available (in both their host society and their islands of origin) to live and survive their experience of transnational mobility within the region.<sup>94</sup> Many of the questions raised here remain unanswered by the scope of this essay, but those links and cross-Caribbean connections of peoples, ideas, and practices are to be found only through social and historical research that crosses linguistic and political barriers within the region.

## Organizations and the Use of Identity

The different organizational and mobilizing efforts of the immigrants within the Cuban context certainly triggers many questions about the nature of their racial, ethnic, national, and religious affiliations. Stuart Hall has noted that in “the diaspora situation, identity

91. Colonial Office, *Friendly Societies in the West Indies*, 18.

92. On the Friendly Societies in the British Caribbean see the works of Leonard P. Fletcher, “The Friendly Societies in St. Vincent and St. Lucia,” *Caribbean Studies* 18, no. 3–4 (October 1978/January 1979): 89–114; “The Decline of Friendly Societies in Barbados,” *Caribbean Studies* 15, no. 4 (January 1976): 73–85; “The Decline of Friendly Societies in Grenada: Some Economic Aspects,” *Caribbean Studies* 12 no. 2 (July 1972): 99–111.

93. Colonial Office, *Friendly Societies in the West Indies*, 24–32, 33.

94. Charles V. Carnegie, *Postnationalism Prefigured: Caribbean Borderlands* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 106–11.



becomes multiple,”<sup>95</sup> and it is clear that in the case presented here, the migrants not only had multiple ways of identifying, but they manifested their various identifications and self-understandings through the ways they organized. The immigrants of whom I have written here were blacks, workers, men, women, and either Baptists, Pentecostals, or Anglicans at different times and in different locations and contexts. They were also colonial subjects of Britain in the Caribbean, individuals who could either be loyal to that empire or able to challenge it if needed; British Caribbean immigrants who were indeed Caribbean, yet not necessarily British (or considered as such). They were West Indians who—as David E. Lewis once put it—were neither “West” nor “Indians.”<sup>96</sup> They could be also “people of color” different from the Cuban understandings of being “of color,” but at the same time shared with Afro-Cubans a sense of commonality strong enough to rally together behind the same organizations and movements, be it the UNIA or the labor struggles. If their identity was multiple given the diasporic context in which they found themselves, which was then their *actual* identity? Were they British West Indians? Were they Barbadians or Jamaicans? Were they blacks, British subjects of the empire, or black British subjects? What did British Caribbean migrants have, if anything, that made them *identical* to one another? And, if they had something in common at certain moments, how did that commonality operate and under which circumstances? Did that sense of communal belonging provide them with an identity in a particular moment, as when they unmistakably self-identified as British subjects to British officialdom? Here—and in the essay as a whole—I am trying to take on board recent criticisms of the concept and practice of identity within the field of social and human sciences by Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper.<sup>97</sup>

That the British West Indians organized on the basis of religion, ethnic origin, race, or colonial background is evidence enough to say that they had a specific self-understanding and that they felt something in common at a specific time and in a determined set of circumstances. We cannot assume, however, that because most of them were, or projected themselves, as Christians, there were no differences among the various nonconformist

95. Stuart Hall, “Thinking the Diaspora: Home-Thoughts from Abroad,” *Small Axe* 6 (September 1999): 1–18.

96. Presentation at the conference *Dialogue for Development: The Political and Economical Reconstruction of Haiti*, sponsored by: University of Puerto Rico, The World Peace Foundation and Haitian Studies Association, with the support of the Ministry of Planning, Government of Haiti, Mayagüez Hilton, Puerto Rico, 20–24 September 1995.

97. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity,’” *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (September 2000): 1–47. See also Richard Handler, “Is ‘Identity’ a Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 27–40, and Keith Negus and Patria Román Velásquez, “Belonging and Detachment: Musical Experience and the Limits of Identity,” *Poetics* 30 (2002): 133–45.

religions active in the migrant communities. It has also been evident in my research that we cannot assume that because all were British subjects they were uncritically loyal to the British Empire, or that there were no distinctions, differences, or tensions, among the different islanders.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, there were moments in which the island of origin became an important factor to obtain repatriation during the difficult periods of sugar crisis in 1921 and the economic depression in the 1930s. At the same time, the British Caribbean migrants were also categorized by others, be it the Cuban elite, the Cuban print media, the British consular officials, the Rural Guards on the plantations, or the immigration officers in their port of arrival. These aspects would surely have an influence on the way (or ways) in which the migrants self-identified and related to other individuals in the social landscape. While, as Brubaker and Cooper have noted, it is problematic to say that “Identity is something all people have, or ought to have, or are searching for,”<sup>99</sup> the organizational efforts of the migrants indicate that “identity” (or a particular identification) was something that the migrants used, *in practice*, at determined moments and contexts. In that sense, identity may have not been the “necessary result” or “outcome” of a social process.<sup>100</sup> Rather, the use of a specific identification may have been motivated by the need to achieve a specific outcome in the social landscape where the migrants were living. Here, perhaps, I want to stress further the emphasis on process and agency in Brubaker and Cooper’s proposal, but also that of social situation as a factor in the choices of (and for) identification.<sup>101</sup>

I believe that black British Caribbean migrants in Cuba, as a whole, did not have *an* identity “without being aware of it.” My research, and other studies, illustrate that migrants—as agents—were aware of the different identifications they had at their disposal, and the variety of common links and associations they had with other migrants and other people. They were also aware of the location and time in which they could *use* any of their multiple identifications. In the Caribbean, it has been noted, linguistic and religious boundaries and ethno-racial categories—constructed by social scientists—are constantly crossed by individuals and multiple identities have been seen by local populations as an advantage.<sup>102</sup> This was certainly the case of Caribbean migrants in Cuba during the early twentieth century. Even if we turn to the contemporary context,

98. See Giovannetti, “Black British Subjects in Cuba.”

99. Brubaker and Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity,’” 10.

100. *Ibid.*, 16.

101. See Jonathan Okamura, “Situational Ethnicity,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 4, no. 4 (October 1981): 452–65.

102. Immanuel Wallerstein, et al. *Open the Social Sciences: Report of the Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 57.

descendants of migrants from Jamaica and the Eastern Caribbean have reasserted their foreign social and cultural background to survive during the hard times of the “special period,” either by reestablishing links with their islands of origin (through churches), or using their familiarity with English to obtain work in the tourist industry. Therefore, while for the social and historical analyst identity may not be the best conceptual tool (or word) to tackle the dynamics presented here, for the migrants and their descendants, in practice, identity did actually “do a great deal of work.”<sup>103</sup>

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103. Brubaker and Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity,’” 8.