# “THE VIRUS OF IRRELIGION”: AFRO-CARIBBEAN RELIGIONS, US MEDICINE, AND IMPERIAL ANXIETIES IN PANAMA’S CANAL ZONE, 1904-1914

By

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To my mother, Marybel Vernaza Quijano

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In September 1905, Martinican ship passengers docking at Colon, Panama, refused to disembark or receive vaccinations from US doctors. With a "voodoo doctor" leading them, the Martinicans staged a mutiny that US police forces violently ended days later. Consulting US diplomatic letters, Canal Zone reports, memoirs, and literary works, this study explores the larger imperial anxieties and Black Atlantic traditions that underpinned life in the Panama Canal Zone and the 1905 mutiny. In the 1900s, US-Americans came to view Afro-Caribbean religions and spaces as spiritual and medical security threats, associating their presence with disease and the occult. This study argues that US-Americans depended on religio-medical metaphors and on physical spatial orders to demarcate the Canal Zone between secure, sanitized spaces and unruly, Black spaces. In resistance, West Indians circulated Afro-Caribbean religious and placemaking practices, disrupting the US's spatial designs at the Canal Zone. Thus, unbeknownst to US authorities, Afro-Caribbean religions and spatial practices became stitched into the Canal Zone's cultural and spatial fabric. More largely, the histories of imperial anxieties and West Indian radical traditions in the Canal Zone reveal how the Black Caribbean-Atlantic and West Indian imaginaries molded the US's nascent empire and its history from below.

# CHAPTER 1
# INTRODUCTION

> Most of those who go to the Canal Zone seem to become inoculated with the virus of irreligion.[1]
>
> –*The Missionary Review of the World,* 1907

On September 29 of 1905, US quarantine officer Dr. Claude C. Pierce waited as hundreds of passengers left the French steamship Versailles to step foot in Colón, Panama. Roughly 300 Colombians and 579 French West Indians were departing from the steamship, most to find new lives as laborers for the Panama Canal's construction.[2] Throughout the day, those leaving the Versailles approached a table at Colón's harbor, where Dr. Pierce and two other physicians carried out medical examinations and administered smallpox vaccinations. Yet, by 1:30 p.m. of that day, Dr. Pierce noticed that the passengers who left the ship ceased to approach his table for their medical inspections.[3] After approaching the ship and speaking to the Martinican passengers on board the ship, Pierce learned that 175 remaining passengers from Martinique refused to step foot on the Panamanian isthmus. Pierce, the other medical officials, and French representatives at Colón asked themselves before investigating: why?

Pierce and French diplomatic officials learned that a "voodoo doctor" onboard the Versailles had fomented a protest among the Martinican migrant laborers against the compulsory

[1] "Religion in Panama," *The Missionary Review of the World* XXX, no. 8 (August 1907): 630.

[2] Charles E. Magoon, "Translation of Cablegram Received at 8:45 p.m., October 2, 1905," in *Letter from the Secretary of War to the President Concerning the Charges Against the Isthmian Canal Commission Contained in an Article in the "Independent": A Weekly Publication* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1906), 59.

[3] Claude C. Pierce, "Statement of Dr. Claude C. Pierce, Quarantine Officer, of Colón," in *Letter from the Secretary of War to the President Concerning the Charges Against the Isthmian Canal Commission Contained in an Article in the "Independent": A Weekly Publication* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1906), 71.

smallpox vaccination.[4] Hoping to spark a diplomatic exchange, the Martinican workers requested to speak to the French Consulate and arrange a trip back to Martinique. The US Canal Zone physicians complied with the laborers' request and brought bringing the French Vice-Consul G. Bonhenry to discuss these matters with them. The Martinicans explained that they knew that an "unhappy fate" marked by racial discrimination, poor-quality food, deadly disease, and reduced wages awaited them in the Canal Zone. They, therefore, wished to return home under their protections as French subjects. Vice-Consul Bonhenry attempted to refute these claims about Canal Zone life.[5] However, when the Martinicans learned that the French would not repatriate them to Martinique, they organized a strike. They remained on board the Versailles for several days without food or water. During the strike, the Martinicans stressed that they suspected that US-American efforts to vaccinate each migrant arriving in Panama was simply part of a scheme meant to place "an inextinguishable mark" on each of their bodies. Among the passengers on board, fifty had contracted smallpox in the past and, therefore, did not require vaccination, according to Pierce. Nonetheless, even those inoculated passengers demanded to stay on board the Versailles and to return to Martinique.[6] Together, the Martinicans reasoned that, with this vaccination mark on their bodies, they could never repatriate to their homes at the end of their

[4] "Voodoo doctor" was the term employed by the journalist Poultney Bigelow. It was later reused by Governor Magoon of the Canal Zone when confirmed that there indeed were "voodoo practices" on board the Versailles.

[5] G. Bonhenry, "Copy of Letter Addressed on October 2 by the Vice-Consul of France, at Colón, to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Paris (American Section)," in *Letter from the Secretary of War to the President Concerning the Charges Against the Isthmian Canal Commission Contained in an Article in the "Independent": A Weekly Publication* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1906).

[6] Pierce, "Statement of Dr. Claude C. Pierce, Quarantine Officer, of Colón," 67.

labor tenure at the Canal Zone. The scar of the vaccine would curse them to stay in Panama, tolling away until their bodies finally crumbled from intense labor or deadly illness.[7]

Before joining the US Canal Zone's labor and biosecurity regimes, West Indian migrant workers found methods to demarcate their autonomy onboard the ship Versailles and stage a Black coastal rebellion at Colón's harbor. When appealing to the French empire as imperial subjects failed, they actively refused to submit to the rituals of arrival at a new empire's territory. Medical and police officials both remarked that the Martinican passengers refused to eat food or drink water but were armed with knives for self-defense.[8] Inside the Versailles, the Martinicans used the Canal Zone's quarantine rules to their own advantage. Canal Zone laws prohibited everyone, except essential port officers and the chief quarantine officer, from stepping aboard a quarantined ship when non-inoculated subjects were on board. Quarantined ships, like the Versailles, were required under isolation to fly a yellow flag from the foremast head from sunrise to sunset.[9] Knowing they were isolated, the Martinicans forged within the French steamship their own space under the veil of being biomedical threats. In this process of creating a new Black autonomous space, West Indians' own radical practices took possession in Colón and even within the US's medical and migration laws. There, they established as a traveling Black diaspora "what is to be valued, preserved, transmitted, inculcated, remembered," as David Scott

[7] William R. Scott, *The Americans in Panama* (New York: Statler, 1912), 12.

[8] "Statement of Captain of Police of Colón," in *Letter from the Secretary of War to the President Concerning the Charges Against the Isthmian Canal Commission Contained in an Article in the "Independent": A Weekly Publication* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1906), 66; Pierce, "Statement of Dr. Claude C. Pierce, Quarantine Officer, of Colón," 70.

[9] J. G. Walker, "Quarantine Regulations, Act No. 10," in *Laws of the Canal Zone, Isthmus of Panama, Enacted by the Isthmian Canal Commission* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1905), 77–78.

describes is part of the purpose of Black radical traditions.[10] Rather than cede to the mechanical operations of the US's vast construction project of the Canal and of its empire, the Martinicans voiced their own values of what constituted their freedom to health, mobility, and community.

Two days into the mutiny, on October 1, the Panamanian police forces from Colón and the US-American police of the Zone town of Cristobal charged at the Martinican passengers. Colón City and Panama City were not part of the US's Panama Canal Zone, per the 1903 Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty. Yet, the US enforced its sanitary regulations for the two Panamanian port cities. Furthermore, the ports themselves remained under US Zone jurisdiction, allowing the US to enforce maritime quarantine of passengers like those onboard the Versailles. Thus, at Colón's port, a combination of US Canal Zone Police and a separate Colón police force cooperated in trying to quell the mutiny. The security forces' sudden presence sparked the Martinicans to quickly flee from the Versailles, fearing for their lives. In turn, Panamanian and US-American police countered the rush of terrified Martinicans with clubs. The Canal Zone's governor alleged that "[n]o one was seriously injured."[11] Nonetheless, quarantine officer Dr. Pierce, French Consul Bonhenry, and Colón's police captain openly noted that the passengers leapt out of the ship into the water to avoid the policemen's flying clubs and bayonets. Once captured by quarantine boats in the harbor's waters, the Martinicans underwent medical inspections and began their quarantine on shore. After all, the Isthmian Canal Commission (ICC) still intended for the mutinous passengers to work in the town of Corozal for the Canal. In their reflections, Zone officials highlighted the "panicky action" from police.[12] They partially blamed the

[10] David Scott, "On the Very Idea of a Black Radical Tradition," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 17, no. 1 (40) (March 1, 2013): 1–6.

[11] Magoon, "Translation of Cablegram Received at 8:45 p.m., October 2, 1905."

[12] John Stevens, "Memorandum of Comments of the Chief Engineer of the Isthmian Canal Commission, on Article Written by Poultney Bigelow," in *Letter from the Secretary of War to the President Concerning the Charges Against*

mutiny's shaky conclusion on the French's role in negotiating with the Martinicans. However, they also explicitly blamed their unstable quelling of the mutiny on the involvement of "certain voodoo practices" that "any intelligent person knows, prevail more or less throughout the colored portion of the Tropics."[13]

For the Martinicans in Colón, the aftermath of the mutiny was marked by grief and uncertainty. The number of deceased or missing Martinican passengers remained unclear for them and for the US's recordkeeping. When US officials tried several times to count all the recovered passengers, they had little success in enumerating them. Dr. Pierce noted, "the men dodged and moved around and got behind each other, some standing up and others lying down, so that it was absolutely impossible to count them accurately."[14] Later that night, US quarantine officials found two West Indians weeping at the realization that they could not find their brothers. They were found clinging onto piles under a pier in attempt to recover drowned bodies in the harbor's waters. Medical officials pulled them away and sent them to a labor agent to begin with work at Corozal. Days later, the Canal Zone and Colón's security forces indeed recovered a passenger's drowned body, rumored to have been pushed overboard in the police's violence.[15]

## Purpose and Outline

To provide a historical backdrop of the mutiny that broke out in September-October in Colón, this study explores the history of religious and medical surveillance of West Indian

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*the Isthmian Canal Commission Contained in an Article in the "Independent": A Weekly Publication* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1906), 26.

[13] Stevens, 26.

[14] Pierce, "Statement of Dr. Claude C. Pierce, Quarantine Officer, of Colón," 70.

[15] Pierce, 70.

migrant laborers. Additionally, it seeks to uncover the radical strategies of resistance among West Indians in the Canal Zone facing these surveillance practices. This study finds that US Americans carried and collected anxieties about establishing their white, imperial enclave in the middle of the Black Caribbean world. It thus argues that US-Americans relied on both imaginary, discursive, and then physical, spatial demarcations between black, contagious spaces and white, sanitized spaces in the Canal Zone to provide a sense of white, imperial security for Zonians. For this aim, US-Americans relied on imperial, racial grammars built on ultra-Protestant and fin-de-siècle medical thought, as well as on creating a mobile, elastic geography of religio-medical surveillance in the Canal Zone.[16] Racial grammars and these vast medical spatial orders allowed US-Americans to direct their fears of living in the Black Caribbean toward the West Indian laborers in their midst, whom they associated with bodily ruination and the Afro-Caribbean religious occult. Thus, US-Americans articulated a vision of the modern overseas US empire in which blackness was a source of imperial insecurity, and thus, needed surveillance by imperial authorities in everyday life. This study also argues that, Meanwhile, West Indians resisted and circumvented these forms of racial surveillance by tapping into an intellectual heritage of Black Atlantic radical traditions. Through the interpretive powers of

[16] Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "The Invisible Weight of Whiteness: The Racial Grammar of Everyday Life in Contemporary America," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35, no. 2 (February 1, 2012): 174. I employ the term "racial grammar" here based on Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's discussion of racial grammars in the contemporary US: "if racial ideology furnishes the material that is spoken, argued, and transacted, racial grammar provides the 'deep structure', the 'logic' and 'rules' of proper composition of racial statements and, more importantly, of what can be seen, understood, and even felt about racial matters But these rules, like all rules, are transacted and negotiated so that ideological rule and order are always in tension and conflict" (174). Bonilla-Silva's approach contrasts with works like Caroline Knowles, *Race and Social Analysis* (London: SAGE, 2003), which define racial grammar as "the underlying web of social practices to which race gives rise" (202). Bonilla-Silva stresses that his concept of racial grammar is what allows a racial order, like that of the Panama Canal Zone, to exist and endure.

Obeah, migratory oral networks, and alternative spatial practices, West Indians found ways of escaping the physical and epistemic violence of the Canal Zone regime.[17]

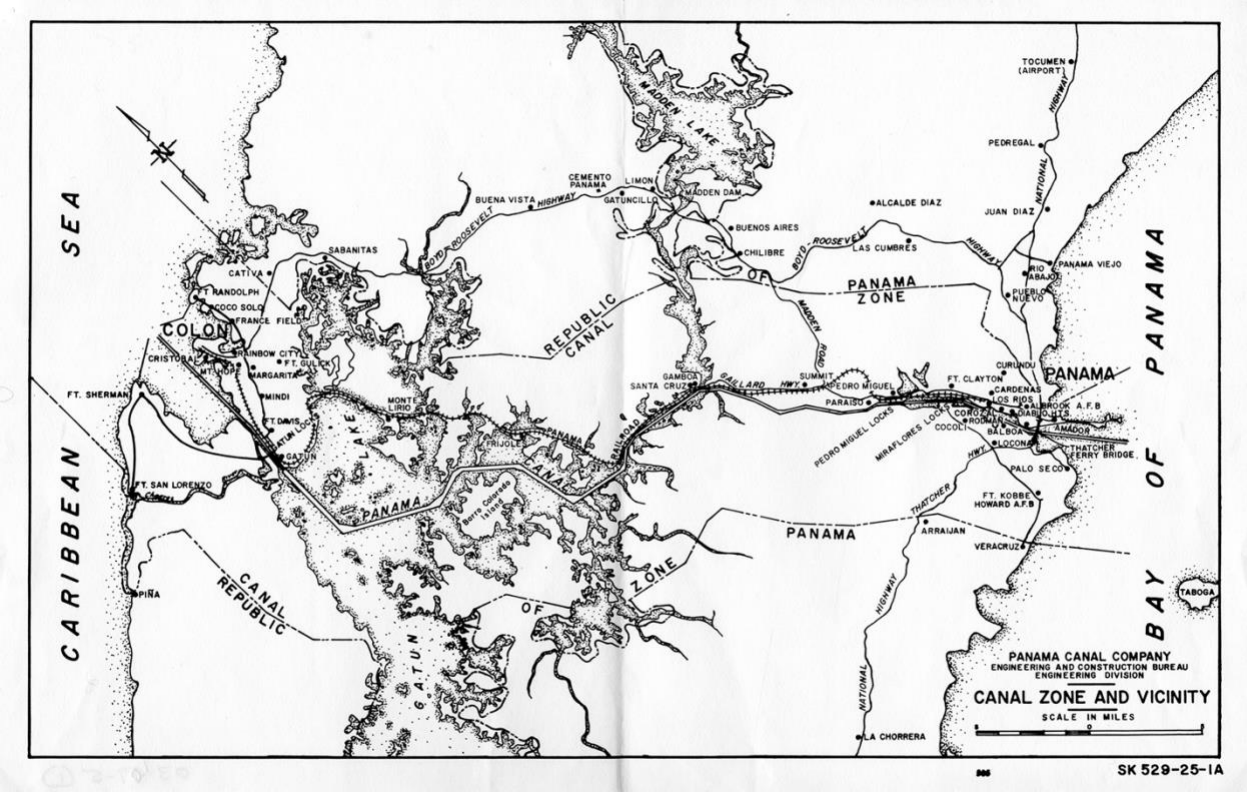


Figure 1-1. Map of the Canal Zone and Vicinity. Courtesty of the Pan Caribbean Sankofa Gallery, Panama Canal Museum Collection, University of Florida.

Tracing how the Canal Zone's racial grammars, anchored in religious and medical anxieties, developed in the Canal Zone can explain why the US authorities identified Vodou as a threat. Chapter 2, "Religion and Degeneration," reconstructs the Canal Zone's religious landscape from 1903 to the 1910s and shows how fiction, scientific theories, and local theologies

[17] Spivak refers to epistemic violence as "the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other." In my employment of the term, I define it as the subjugation of knowledges—local, minor, or "unscientific"—as part of a process to legitimize a colonial or otherwise modern form of domination. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 76. For a more concise definition, see Enrique Galván-Álvarez, "Epistemic Violence and Retaliation: The Issue of Knowledges in 'Mother India,'" *Atlantis* 32, no. 2 (2010): 11.

converged in forming the discursive, imaginary demarcation of the Canal Zone between sanitized white spaces and Black, unruly spaces. First, it examines how a Protestant hegemony emerged in the Canal Zone but with enduring fears of Afro-Caribbean, non-Christian religions in its midst. Combined with this fear of the occult was US-Americans' medical fears of tropical degeneration. The chapter argues, then, that the Canal Zone's religious fears of Obeah emerging from the tropics intellectually fused with scientific theories of the racial degeneration. Furthermore, it illustrates that US-Americans' conception of a secure, healthy Zone society rested on associating Black bodies, the tropics, and Afro-Caribbean spiritualities, and the tropics with deadly, degenerative diseases. To do this, the chapter consults periodical articles, US-American dime novels, and early histories of US-American Protestants in the Panama Canal Zone. Analyzing religious fears of Afro-Caribbean spiritualities allows us to better understand the reactions to the news of a "voodoo doctor" on board the Versailles. In addition to the mutiny being a threat to the Canal Zone's larger biomedical health, US-Americans also perceived the mutiny to be a subversive expression of spiritual power on behalf of the West Indians.

To understand the militarized response at the 1905 Colón mutiny, the third chapter examines the types of medical and religious surveillance in the Canal Zone. Chapter 3, "Frontiers of Surveillance," examines three types of sites of medical and religious surveillance in the Canal Zone: the hospital, the sick camp, and the labor camp. It argues that US religio-medical surveillance technologies maintained an elastic geography, constantly moving closer to West Indians' intimate, domestic spaces in order to allow for little autonomy space for Black religious and medical practices to flourish. To demonstrate this, the chapter consults the written memoirs of US-Americans, US Senate testimonies of US-Americans and West Indians, and the transcribed oral histories of West Indian laborers in the Canal Zone. It first argues that hospitals

in the Canal Zone operated as sites of biomedical treatment as well as religious practice and surveillance. Hospitals, like Ancon Hospital, became sites for US and Christian leaders to establish their epistemic authority over the realms of health and spirituality in the Canal Zone and in the US's empire. Next, sick camps also served as sites of religious surveillance and of more mobile medical treatment closer to multiple Canal Zone towns. I argue that the sick camp as a technology severed the community ties among West Indians at the heart of their popular health care. The third site, the West Indian labor camps, then became a site of surveillance with ICC regulations against folk healing, police violence, and frequent sanitary inspections by sanitary brigades. Analyzed together, these three sites of religious and biomedical surveillance illustrate the various, elastic forms that the Zone's security technologies took to suppress imagined, potential disruptions from West Indians—including those that occurred aboard the Versailles in Colón.

Chapter 4, "The Black Atlantic's Canal Zone," shifts our view of the Canal Zone as a white imperial enclave of the US to a peripheral but crucial nexus of the modern Black Atlantic world. The chapter presents this study's second major argument. That is, it argues that West Indians responded to the Canal Zone's surveillance and US-Americans' colonial discourse by revisiting centuries of radical Black Atlantic traditions. The chapter explores how the radical practices of Black placemaking and the memories of Caribbean-Atlantic slavery buttressed the September-October 1905 rebellion in Colón. In Panama and the Canal Zone, West Indians crafted their own spatial practices, especially in port cities and within labor camps, even under US-American surveillance.[18] An analysis of the written literature of Black diasporic writers

[18] Audra Simpson, "Consent's Revenge," *Cultural Anthropology* 31, no. 3 (August 9, 2016): 326–33.

reveals how an alternative, Black Atlantic spatial imaginings of Panama flourished among its West Indian laboring communities.

As a whole, this study provides builds a backdrop of the intellectual and cultural processes occurring during the US's Panama Canal construction. It does so by showing how the militarized violence that appeared in the 1905 Colón Harbor mutiny were not anomalous to the Canal Zone's history. It dispels any idea that Martinicans' tenacity and resistance to vaccination efforts are simply "bizarre" or "irrational" beliefs that cannot be examined through a historian's lens.[19] On the contrary, the heightened panic around Afro-Caribbean religions, tropical environments, and pathologized blackness were already embedded in the Canal Zone's cultural life. Likewise, it illustrates that Martinicans' rebellious acts in Colón Harbor emerged with them as inheritors of Black cultural and intellectual traditions from the transimperial Caribbean world.[20] Doing so show how West Indians' making of a Black Atlantic, multidiasporic Panama occurred also while the US was constructing its militarized and sanitized imperial enclave at the Canal Zone.

## Key Concepts and Backgrounds

The arguments in this study rely on several key theoretical concepts and historical processes that are worth mapping here. First, surveillance and security studies have grown in the

[19] See Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Regarding Method*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 40–42. Regarding bizarre religious, political, or scientific beliefs, Skinner wrote, "We must seek to surround the particular statement of belief in which we are interested with an intellectual context that serves to lend adequate support to it," rather than depending on the assumption of a historical agent's sheer irrationality (42).

[20] "Transimperial" refers to the interactions and movements between and across distinct empires among humans and non-humans. A transimperial historical approach, then, "seeks to discuss imperial competition, cooperation and connectivity not as separate phenomena but as entangled processes." Daniel Hedinger and Nadin Heé, "Transimperial History - Connectivity, Cooperation and Competition," *Journal of Modern European History* 16, no. 4 (November 2018): 430. For an overview of recent contributions to transimperial historiographies, see Kristin L. Hoganson and Jay Sexton, eds., *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 6.

last several decades among historians and sociologists. Among them, the concept of surveillance comprises of the monitoring of populations to govern or regulate their behaviors.[21] In a colonial context specifically, surveillance systematically functions through the social sorting of populations and through the formation of information states.[22] In his theorization of modern surveillance, Michel Foucault states that "sovereignty is exercised within the borders of a territory, discipline is exercised on the bodies of individuals, and security is exercised over a whole population."[23] Scholars of imperial security continue to turn to Foucault's argument that state security was comprised of the defensive preservation of the state through regulatory government reason and with the state "reading reality." [24] Thus, modern governments after "reading" threats can halt internal processes or enemies seen as threatening threatened to disrupt the state's functions.[25] In studies of US empire, historians have characterized US imperial rule as depending on "the link between benevolence and discipline…constructed through the practice of surveillance."[26] These conceptualizations allow us to see that surveillance practices aid in crafting and sustaining modern empires at their metropoles and their colonial satellites. Relying on this definition of surveillance and discipline within a colonial context, this study traces the

[21] John Gilliom and Torin Monahan, *SuperVision: An Introduction to the Surveillance Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 2.

[22] Robert Heynen and Emily van der Meulen, eds., *Making Surveillance States: Transnational Histories* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 5–6.

[23] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*, ed. Michel Senellart, 1st ed., Lectures at the Collège de France (New York: Picador, 2009), 11.

[24] James Louis Hevia, *The Imperial Security State: British Colonial Knowledge and Empire-Building in Asia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 6. See Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 289.

[25] Hevia, *The Imperial Security State*, 6.

[26] Vicente L. Rafael, "White Love: Surveillance and Nationalist Resistance in the U.S. Colonization of the Philippines," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 187.

development of US imperial disciplinary and security practices to the Panama Canal Zone in the 1900s and 1910s. This is exemplified in Chapter 2, which illustrates how the Canal Zone's surveillance of Afro-Caribbean migrants and of tropical environments constituted part of the development of the US's overseas security practices. In everyday Zone life, surveillance took the form of Christian clergy and policemen observing West Indian workers in hospitals and camp settings. Particularly, these clergy and policemen hoped to catch West Indians feigning sickness, practicing Afro-Caribbean folk healing, and transgressing sanitary regulations.

Diasporic Black radical traditions and fugitivity formed much of West Indians' responses to such surveillance practices in the Canal Zone and Caribbean. Tina Campt defines the concept of Black fugitivity by its "acts or flights of escape," "creative practices of refusal," and "nimble and strategic practices that undermine the category of the dominant."[27] Black fugitivity contains processes of disengagement that aim to disrupt a state power's illusion of control and the ideologies that rationalize systems of enslavement or restriction.[28] In Chapter 4, I elaborate that fugitivity formed part of the spatial practices of West Indians in and near the Canal Zone. In particular, Colón City and labor camps in Canal Zone towns became the sites of fugitive Black placemaking. Black social scientists and geographers define Black placemaking as "the ways that urban black Americans create sites of endurance, belonging, and resistance." [29] The practice

[27] Tina Campt, "Black Feminist Futures and the Practice of Fugitivity" (Lecture, Helen Pond McIntyre '48 Lecture, Barnard College, October 7, 2014). See also Manuel Barcia et al., "Fugitivity" (Roundtable, American Historical Association Colloquium Series, Virtual, February 1, 2021).

[28] Damien M. Sojoyner, "Another Life Is Possible: Black Fugitivity and Enclosed Places," *Cultural Anthropology* 32, no. 4 (November 18, 2017): 515–16.

[29] See Marcus Anthony Hunter et al., "Black Placemaking: Celebration, Play, and Poetry," *Theory, Culture & Society* 33, no. 7–8 (December 1, 2016): 32. For a transnational and borderlands examination of Black placemaking and fugitivity see Celeste Winston, "Maroon Geographies," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 0, no. 0 (May 4, 2021): 1–15.

of fugitivity and Black placemaking in the Canal Zone suggests the twentieth-century Panama Canal Zone remained part of a larger world of Black radical struggles, Black autonomous spaces, and counter-grammars that Africans and Afro-descendants crafted in the Caribbean living under various empires.[30] Identifying fugitivity in this history redefines the Canal Zone as more than a white satellite zone of US expansion. It was also a site for Black radical traditions that have endured since from the age of slavery into the neocolonial era.[31]

With most migrant laborers in the Canal Zone hailing from the British Antilles, Obeah formed part of the Black Atlantic's cosmologies and is thus an essential subject of this study.[32] Other Afro-Caribbean spiritualities present in this period include Vodou in the Francophone Caribbean, Regla de Ocha in Cuba, and Candomblé and Umbanda in Brazil.[33] Colonists and enslaved peoples came to associate these multiple Black Atlantic traditions with slave

[30] See Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). McKittrick also coins the term of the "ungeographic," a term used to describe the state of lacking geographic knowledge that is usually ascribed to Black people, especially Black women. It can also be used to describe a place that is unmappable and not capable of being "found" from white, Eurocentric epistemologies.

[31] The history of the Canal Zone, as a post-World War II site of anti-racist politics, has been further examined in Rebecca Herman, "The Global Politics of Anti-Racism: A View from the Canal Zone," *The American Historical Review* 125, no. 2 (April 1, 2020): 460–86. For space and performance allowing for alternative and multiple claims to sovereignty and power throughout twentieth-century Panama, see Katherine A. Zien, *Sovereign Acts: Performing Race, Space, and Belonging in Panama and the Canal Zone* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017).

[32] For statistics on the numbers and origins of West Indian migrant workers in the Zone, see Velma Newton, *The Silver Men: West Indian Labour Migration to Panama, 1850-1914* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2004), 80–87.

[33] For the colonial and early national histories of these religions in the circum-Caribbean, see Diana DeGroat Brown, *Umbanda: Religion and Politics in Urban Brazil* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Luis Nicolau Parés, *The Formation of Candomblé: Vodun History and Ritual in Brazil*, trans. Richard Vernon (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Henry B. Lovejoy, *Prieto: Yorùbá Kingship in Colonial Cuba during the Age of Revolutions* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2019); Matthew Pettway, *Cuban Literature in the Age of Black Insurrection: Manzano, Plácido, and Afro-Latino Religion* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2020).

insurrection and rebellion in the colonial Americas.[34] By the eighteenth century, Anglo-Caribbean colonists employed the term "Obeah" as a catch-all descriptor to identify all these Afro-Caribbean spiritual practices.[35] To avoid replicating terminological error, historians of Obeah avoid providing totalistic definitions of Obeah's spiritual tenets. Instead, most elect to study its discursive construction and criminalization under British colonial regimes. Although most workers for the US's Panama Canal construction were from the Anglophone Caribbean, this study explores both Obeah and Vodou's history in Panama and its Canal Zone. Because of more British Antilleans traveling to Panama than French Antilleans, Obeah might have been more prominent on the isthmus. [36] Nonetheless, the passengers on board the Versailles were from Martinique, and, thus, represent historical participants from the Francophone Caribbean. Thus, this analysis of Afro-Caribbean religious networks illustrates the connectivity between the Francophone, Anglophone, and Spanish Caribbean worlds.

Historians of Obeah and Afro-Caribbean religions are wary of identifying Obeah as either a closed doctrinal system with a "world religions" paradigm or as a totally decentralized system

[34] For the connection between slave rebellions and Afro-Caribbean spiritual practices, see Diana Paton, "Witchcraft, Poison, Law, and Atlantic Slavery," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (2012): 235–64; João José Reis, "Witchcraft and Slavery," in *Divining Slavery and Freedom: The Story of Domingos Sodré, an African Priest in Nineteenth-Century Brazil*, trans. H. Sabrina Gledhill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 126–72; Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2020).

[35] Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 145.

[36] For studies of Vodou in the French West Indies, see Leslie Gérald Desmangles, *The Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); John Savage, "'Black Magic' and White Terror: Slave Poisoning and Colonial Society in Early 19th Century Martinique," *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 3 (March 1, 2007): 635–62; Kate Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Imani D. Owens, "Beyond Authenticity: The US Occupation of Haiti and the Politics of Folk Culture," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 21, no. 2 (2015): 350–70; Celucien L. Joseph and Nixon S. Cleophat, eds., *Vodou in the Haitian Experience: A Black Atlantic Perspective* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016). See also Sara E. Johnson, *The Fear of French Negroes: Transcolonial Collaboration in the Revolutionary Americas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

of medical cures.[37] Instead, most scholars agree Obeah functioned as both a spiritual practice and a folk medical tradition, capable of both healing and afflicting strangers with tropical illnesses, perhaps more so than Vodou did.[38] Thus, for imperial colonial authorities, whispers of Obeah in colonies dangerously indicated efforts or intentions of Black subversion. They then suspected Black Obeah practitioners harnessed occult supernatural power with the intent of asserting their own autonomy against an empire's regime, colonists' health, and Christianity's spiritual authority.[39] As early as the eighteenth century, British anti-Obeah legislation characterized the practice as a supernatural power that Jamaicans harnessed to negatively affect the health or lives of other people.[40] Kate Ramsey and Lorraine Daston concur that, "[l]ike magic, imagination was characterized as an immaterial force or agency with the potential to harm or to heal."[41] For Christians in the Greater Caribbean for centuries, then, the imaginative power of Obeah and Vodou was capable of inflicting disproportionate harm against colonists from vengeful Afro-descendants subjects and slaves.

[37] Diana Paton, "Obeah Acts: Producing and Policing the Boundaries of Religion in the Caribbean," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 13, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 1–18; Toni Wall Jaudon and Kelly Wisecup, "Interview: Obeah's Cultural Politics – a Conversation with Diana Paton," *Atlantic Studies* 12, no. 2 (April 3, 2015): 253–54. For other challenges in studying Afro-Caribbean religions, see Stephan Palmié, *The Cooking of History: How Not to Study Afro-Cuban Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

[38] Kelly Wisecup and Toni Wall Jaudon, "On Knowing and Not Knowing about Obeah," *Atlantic Studies* 12, no. 2 (April 3, 2015): 130. On Vodou having less of a medical dimension than Obeah, see Londa Schiebinger, *Secret Cures of Slaves: People, Plants, and Medicine in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 119–23.

[39] Jerome S. Handler and Kenneth M. Bilby, *Enacting Power: The Criminalization of Obeah in the Anglophone Caribbean, 1760-2011* (Kingston, Jamaica: University Press of the West Indies, 2012); Justine S. Murison, "Obeah and Its Others: Buffered Selves in the Era of Tropical Medicine," *Atlantic Studies* 12, no. 2 (April 3, 2015): 144.

[40] Kate Ramsey, "Powers of Imagination and Legal Regimes against 'Obeah' in the Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century British Caribbean," *Osiris* 36 (June 1, 2021): 49.

[41] Ramsey, 51; Lorraine Daston, "Fear & Loathing of the Imagination in Science," *Daedalus* 134, no. 4 (2005): 22.

For this study of the Canal Zone and Panama, such Afro-Caribbean spiritual practices also emerged within the Canal Zone's religious and medical discourses. Rather than being a past relic of early modern Atlantic empires, this study reinserts Obeah and Vodou as formative parts of the origins of the US's overseas imperial security, religious ideologies, and spatial orders. For West Indians, on the other hand, Obeah and Vodou also linked them to a transimperial past of Afro-Caribbean culture and thought that existed for centuries.[42] Monique Allewaert has argued that Obeah in the modern Black Atlantic allowed for Black diasporas to develop "deft imaginings of the forms of power and agency that developed at the interstices between human and nonhuman life."[43] Afro-descendants could form "a tenuous and revolutionary alliance between tropical elemental forces and subaltern persons."[44] Obeah and other Black religious cosmologies offered West Indians in Panama a way to forge their own cultural interpretations of the body, personhood, and resistance.[45] More practically, Afro-Caribbean religious practices offered West Indians alternatives modes of understanding and managing their health and of maintaining diasporic social ties in the isthmus and throughout the Antilles. Yet, the presence of such Afro-Caribbean religio-medical practices in the Canal Zone had the power to provoke fear among US-Americans. They worried that Obeah practitioners' power to manipulate diseases, bodies, and the natural world could pose a threat to vulnerable white Americans in the tropics.

[42] For a similar approach with the Costa Rica under the United Fruit Company's tutelage, see Aviva Chomsky, "West Indian Culture and Religion in Costa Rica," in *West Indian Workers and the United Fruit Company in Costa Rica, 1870-1940* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 173–206. Trans

[43] Monique Allewaert, *Ariel's Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013). 7.

[44] Allewaert, 7.

[45] Allewaert, 107.

Furthermore, the existence of alternative healing practices threatened to erode the power of the US's biomedical authorities in its Canal Zone hospitals and camp sites.

The concepts of tropical biomedicine and degeneration theory as the US empire's technologies are also essential for this project. Generally, US-American imaginations depicted the tropical environment of the Caribbean as virulent, dangerous spaces.[46] In the late nineteenth century, US-Americans and Europeans visualized the Caribbean as a site for health regeneration, as "health resorts" in which they could flee from wintery weather of the Northern hemisphere.[47] However, even in the imagery of the tropical health resort, the Greater Caribbean continued to form part of colonial fantasy, packaged for the gaze and consumption of North American tourists.[48] Even in this sublime landscape, white tourists continued to maintain visual and epistemic mastery over the Caribbean's natural world. With the expansion of the US's empire into Panama, the isthmus's imagined disease, decadence, and tropical environment formed a new backdrop for US-American colonial anxieties in the 1900s and 1910s. Attempts to "tame" the tropical wilderness and to make the Canal Zone temperate became part of the US authorities' imperial organizational scheme. Massive sanitary campaigns in Latin America also concomitantly served to discipline and make colonial or state subjects out of local populations by

[46] Stephen Frenkel, "Jungle Stories: North American Representations of Tropical Panama," *Geographical Review* 86, no. 3 (1996): 317–33; David Ray Abernathy, "Bound to Succeed: Science, Territoriality and the Emergence of Disease Eradication in the Panama Canal Zone" (PhD diss., Seattle, WA, University of Washington, 2000); Paul S. Sutter, "'The First Mountain to Be Removed': Yellow Fever Control and the Construction of the Panama Canal," *Environmental History* 21, no. 2 (April 2016): 250–59; Marixa Lasso, *Erased: The Untold Story of the Panama Canal* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

[47] Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (London: Routledge, 2003), 60. See also Eric T. Jennings, *Curing the Colonizers: Hydrotherapy, Climatology, and French Colonial Spas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

[48] Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, 64.

treating non-white bodies as sites of contagion.[49] As a whole, colonial discourse on the tropics aided in forming frontiers between the domestic and the foreign in US imperial projects.[50] Thus, US-American representations of the jungle as unsecure, virulent, and Black space led US authorities to implement a racialized, imperial spatial configuration of the Canal Zone. As Chapters 2 and 3 will discuss, US-Americans regarded Christian and biomedical spaces as secured, domestic spaces. Meanwhile, they imagined Black living spaces and Panamanian jungles as dangerous sites for US-American spiritual and bodily health. Nonetheless, imperial cartographies rooted in concepts of security and contagion, were only one, albeit dominant, way of imagining the Canal Zone and the Atlantic. Chapter 4 examines alternative spatial imaginings of the Canal Zone's world crafted by its Afro-Caribbean communities as a reconceptualization of Panama's tropical and natural imagery.[51] The cultural and intellectual processes surrounding the 1905 Colón Mutiny consequently allows for a retheorization of modern US imperialism. The

[49] For a general, brief history of this, see Rafael Mantovani and Maria Cristina da Costa Marques, "Higiene como prática individual e como instrumento de Estado," trans. Tracy Miyake, *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos* 27, no. 2 (June 2020): 337–54. For the disciplining and colonial subjectifying power of tropical medicine, see Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Alexandra Minna Stern, "Yellow Fever Crusade: US Colonialism, Tropical Medicine, and the International Politics of Mosquito Control, 1900–1920," in *Medicine at the Border: Disease, Globalization and Security, 1850 to the Present*, ed. Alison Bashford (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2007), 41–59; Marc McLeod, "'We Cubans Are Obligated Like Cats to Have a Clean Face': Malaria, Quarantine, and Race in Neocolonial Cuba, 1898-1940," *The Americas* 67, no. 1 (2010): 57; Nicole Trujillo-Pagán, *Modern Colonization by Medical Intervention: US Medicine in Puerto Rico* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014). On colonial science and tropical medicine in Panama, see Paul S. Sutter, "Nature's Agents or Agents of Empire? Entomological Workers and Environmental Change during the Construction of the Panama Canal," *Isis* 98, no. 4 (December 1, 2007): 724–54; Sutter, "'The First Mountain to Be Removed': Yellow Fever Control and the Construction of the Panama Canal"; Alexandra Minna Stern, "The Public Health Service in the Panama Canal: A Forgotten Chapter of U.S. Public Health," *Public Health Reports* 120, no. 6 (December 2005): (1974).

[50] Ann Laura Stoler, "Interior Frontiers," in *Thinking with Balibar: A Lexicon of Conceptual Practice*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler, Stathis Gourgouris, and Jacques Lezra (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 117–39. On blackness as a border and in aiding in the construction of borders, see Fred Moten, "The Case of Blackness," *Criticism* 50, no. 2 (2008): 177–218.

[51] Similar reimaginings of Black imperial cartographies was examined in Amy Kaplan, "The Imperial Cartography of W. E. B. Du Bois," in *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 171–214. See also Zien, *Sovereign Acts*.

US's empire came to be shaped by not only modern US spatial orders, but by the radical traditions and transimperial connectivity of the modern Black Caribbean-Atlantic.

Table 1-1. Population of the Panama Canal Zone by Nationality in 1908

| Country | Adults and Children | Employed by ICC & Railroad |
|---|---|---|
| Republic of Panama | 11,407 | 535 |
| Jamaicans | 8,410 | 3,535 |
| United States | 6,937 | 4, 655 |
| Barbados | 6,483 | 5,625 |
| Spain | 4,371 | 3,801 |
| Martinique | 2,397 | 1,676 |
| Colombians | 2,271 | 296 |
| Saint Lucia | 1,273 | 452 |
| Italy | 810 | 762 |
| Antigua | 634 | 533 |
| China | 573 | 1 |
| Guadeloupe | 521 | 394 |
| Trinidad | 410 | 246 |
| Greece | 331 | 316 |

Source: "Census of the Canal Zone," and "Zone Population," *The Canal Record* (August 26, 1908), 412–13. The population of the US excludes its overseas territories, such as Alaska, Puerto Rico, and Hawai'i. Spain's population include the Canary Islands. The Canal Record also acknowledges that many West Indian children were enumerated as Panamanians, rather than subjects of their parents' countries of origins. The enumeration of Colombians and Panamanians after Panama's succession from Colombia also posed a challenge for census takers.

## Relevant Historiographies

With its examination of religion, medicine, and spatial practices in the Canal Zone, this thesis engages in dialogue with historiographies on US empire and religion, imperial anxieties and security, the Black Caribbean, and Black Panama. Historians of religion and of US imperialism regularly examine the role of Protestantism in the empire's overseas expansion.[52] In

[52] For a general review, see Sylvester Johnson, "Religion, Race, and American Empire," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Race in American History*, ed. Paul Harvey and Kathryn Gin Lum (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018), 19. See also William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar, and Connie Anne Shemo, eds., *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Heather D. Curtis, *Holy Humanitarians: American Evangelicals and Global Aid* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018). The larger history of the development of ultra-Protestant supremacy in tandem with Atlantic slavery and empire is examined at length in Katharine Gerbner, *Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

this scholarship, Protestantism usually arises in Latin American and Caribbean societies through the visits of US-American missionaries.[53] In recent years, scholars have also explored how Protestantism came to flourish among Latin American nationals "from below." In this interpretation, Protestantism was more than simply an instrument of dominance by US encroachers in the circum-Caribbean. Instead, it formed part of nations' promises of crafting their own state and religious institutions as part of a modern state-building project.[54] More generally, however, historians regard US Protestant missionaries as intermediaries of empire, even if they were unable to totally supplant the institutional power of the Catholic Church in the Spanish Caribbean. In Panama, however, the US's territorial control of the Canal Zone led to more permanent Protestant settlers coming to Panama, instead traveling missionaries. Thus, compared to other Protestant movements in the Caribbean, Protestantism in the Zone had a more permanent hold but still experienced anxieties and instability, due to US-American fears of Obeah and Vodou. This thesis reflects the importance of exploring the religious implications of the US territorial hold over the Black Caribbean for the field of empire studies. Namely, it delves

[53] Louis A. Pérez, Jr., "Protestant Missionaries in Cuba: Archival Records, Manuscript Collections, and Research Prospects," *Latin American Research Review* 27, no. 1 (1992): 105–20; Jason M. Yaremko, *U.S. Protestant Missions in Cuba: From Independence to Castro* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001); Winifred C. Connerton, "Working towards Health, Christianity and Democracy: American Colonial and Missionary Nurses in Puerto Rico, 1900–30," in *Colonial Caring: A History of Colonial and Post-Colonial Nursing*, ed. Helen Sweet and Sue Hawkins (Manchester University Press, 2015), 126–44; Antonio Sotomayor, "The Triangle of Empire: Sport, Religion, and Imperialism in Puerto Rico's YMCA, 1898–1926," *The Americas* 74, no. 4 (October 2017): 481–512; Christina Cecelia Davidson, "Redeeming Santo Domingo: North Atlantic Missionaries and the Racial Conversion of a Nation," *Church History* 89, no. 1 (March 2020): 74–100.

[54] James A. Baer, "God and the Nation: Protestants, Patriotism and Pride in Cuba, 1890–1906," *International Journal of Cuban Studies* 8, no. 1 (April 1, 2016): 74–96. For a larger critique of arguments that Protestant missionaries solely acted as agents of cultural imperialism, see Andrew Porter, "'Cultural Imperialism' and Protestant Missionary Enterprise, 1780–1914," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 25, no. 3 (September 1997): 367–91. Similarly, for a look at Catholicism's less examined role in fomenting U.S. empire-building, see Anne M. Martínez, *Catholic Borderlands: Mapping Catholicism onto American Empire, 1905-1935* (University of Nebraska Press, 2014); Benjamin Wetzel, "A Church Divided: Roman Catholicism, Americanization, and the Spanish American War," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 14, no. 3 (July 2015): 348–66; Katherine D. Moran, *The Imperial Church: Catholic Founding Fathers and United States Empire* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020).

into how Christian theologies, leaders, and followers participated in the US's unique conceptualization of its imperial sovereignty and security in the Panama Canal Zone in tandem with their fears of blackness.

This study also builds on a body of scholarship that explores how empires develop their ideologies of imperial security. Historians of the colonial Caribbean and Asia find that imperial authorities wrestled with the question of how to incorporate these diverse swaths of people.[55] The dilemma of understanding and producing legible, coherent knowledge on colonial populations was a cross-imperial challenge.[56] Historians of the British Empire, specifically, have identified imperial insecurity and colonial anxiety as causes for bursts of colonial violence against indigenous populations during the empire's era of high imperialism. Imperial authorities found that as they came to better manage a colonial territory, colonized subjects in turn learned how to subvert and bypass those methods of colonial rule.[57] Colonial authorities increasingly worked under the assumption of colonial populations purposefully making their cultural practices illegible to imperial officials. Thus, militarized colonial terror was often colonial officials' panicked responses to the indecipherable customs of colonized subjects.[58] In dialogue with these historians, this thesis illustrates that, in Panama, US-Americans' fear of the sights and

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[55] Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 287–90.

[56] Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London, UK: Verso, 1993), 73–110.

[57] Maurus Reinkowski and Gregor Thum, eds., *Helpless Imperialists: Imperial Failure, Fear and Radicalization* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 9.

[58] Kim A. Wagner, "'Treading Upon Fires': The 'Mutiny'-Motif and Colonial Anxieties in British India," *Past & Present* 218, no. 1 (February 1, 2013): 191. For other studies of imperial insecurity, see Mark Condos, "Introduction: Fear, Panic, and the Violence of Empire," in *The Insecurity State: Punjab and the Making of Colonial Power in British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 1–24; Anjuli Fatima Raza Kolb, *Epidemic Empire: Colonialism, Contagion, and Terror, 1817-2020* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

sounds of West Indian communities in the Canal Zone was rooted in their fear of the West Indians engaging in untranslatable, fugitive cultural practices. Anxieties over West Indians' religious devotions and medical contagiousness prompted US authorities to engage in visible, spatialized struggles to obtain knowledge and information on Black bodies and spaces. As Chapter 3 explores in detail, these struggles physically translated in the US Canal Zone's rituals of religio-medical and racial surveillance in the Canal Zone.

Scholarship on Black Caribbean-Atlantic has provoked scholars to retrace the parameters and borderlands of the Caribbean as a geographical region an cultural world. The transnational movement of Obeah, workers, ideas, and commerce often provoked the metaphor of the Caribbean as a region of fragmentation and chaos.[59] Problematization of the metaphor of chaos has since followed. Silvio Torres-Saillant notes that "when one thinks the Caribbean as 'islands,' one leaves languages, populations, and large chunks of the human experience of the region out of the story."[60] The history of the Caribbean world, thus, has started to expand beyond the reification of the region's islands in themselves. The study of oral networks, Afro-Caribbean religions, and labor migration between Panama and the Antilles prompts a reconsideration of the traditional geographic models of "centers" and "peripheries" when constructing the Black Caribbean as a system. Already, colonial historians of the Caribbean, in particular, have highlighted the need to show how traditional "peripheral" sites in the Caribbean are often where

[59] For a classic example of this argument's formulation, see Antonio Benítez Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, trans. James E. Maraniss, 2nd ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

[60] Silvio Torres-Saillant, "The Hispanic Caribbean Question: On Geographies of Knowledge and Interlaced Human Landscapes," *Small Axe* 20, no. 3 51 (November 2016): 36.

the processes of building and sustaining an empire are most unequivocally visible.[61] Relying on these retheorizations of US imperial geographies, this thesis centers Panama and the Canal Zone as an intersection for Afro-Caribbean diasporas, as well as imperial landscapes, technological infrastructures, and disciplinary regimes.[62]

The transimperial, multidiasporic nature of the Caribbean has also led to a redefining of the relationship of historical pasts and collective memories, especially among its Afro-descendant subjects. Dixa Ramírez places emphasis on the subjective, experiential histories that emerge from its histories: the Caribbean is a site of repetition, rehearsals, and hauntings that cascade across the region's time during and after imperial reigns.[63] Scholars of African diasporas also highlight that significant historical memories, like those of slavery or colonial occupations, can be "memorialized" within the religious practices like Vodou and Obeah.[64] These pasts, then, can be activated through religious rituals, making these religious cosmologies also alternative forms of reckoning with history for their practitioners.[65] By studying how multiple nations of migrants contended and survived the US's developing imperial hold in Panama, this thesis

[61] See Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda," in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1–56.

[62] Julie Greene, "Entangled in Empires: British Antillean Migrations in the World of the Panama Canal," in *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain*, ed. Kristin L. Hoganson and Jay Sexton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 222.

[63] Dixa Ramírez, *Colonial Phantoms: Belonging and Refusal in the Dominican Americas, from the 19th Century to the Present* (New York University Press, 2018), 6. On rehearsals and repetitions of Black insurrections, see Jeremy Matthew Glick, *The Black Radical Tragic: Performance, Aesthetics, and the Unfinished Haitian Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

[64] Andrew H. Apter and Lauren H. Derby, eds., *Activating the Past: History and Memory in the Black Atlantic World* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), xvi.

[65] Apter and Derby, xvi. On Vodou as a history-making practice, see also Colin Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

uncovers how West Indians faced historical reckonings with the Caribbean's imperial pasts and presents. Acknowledging the hauntings of imperial "ghosts" and tapping into memories of Atlantic slavery, West Indian migrants' history in the Panama Canal Zone shows that epistemic struggles over religion and medicine became the grounds of Black diasporic resistance when facing racial violence, bodily illness, and social displacement.

The effort among Caribbean historians to tie the Canal Zone to the larger Black Caribbean is one with which this work finds itself in dialogue. Among the first attempts to frame the Canal Zone as part of the Black Caribbean was Michael Conniff's 1985 *Black Labor on a White Canal* with his attention to the social histories of West Indians in lieu of traditional US diplomatic history.[66] He and other scholars highlight how, by the late twentieth century, declines in French and British Caribbean sugar industries produced economic crises for workers in the West Indies Unstable wages and unemployment— coupled with droughts, epidemics, and hurricanes—brought a Francophone and Anglophone African diaspora to Panama's shores as contract laborers.[67] Once in Panama, they found Black Panamanians spoke Spanish and maintained nationalist ties, even while enduring racism from the Canal Zone's racially segregated institutions. More scholars have emphasized the multiplicity of Black histories in the Canal Zone. Sonja Stephenson Watson found that the Canal construction's migration waves reveal the cultural tensions existing between Panama's Afro-Hispanic and its migrant West Indian circles.[68] Transimperial, intercolony migration in the Caribbean remained an integral part

[66] Michael L. Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal: Panama, 1904-1981* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985).

[67] Newton, *The Silver Men*, 13–16.

[68] Sonja Stephenson Watson, *The Politics of Race in Panama: Afro-Hispanic and West Indian Literary Discourses of Contention* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2017), 3.

of Panama and the region's larger history.[69] Thus, scholars of the Caribbean have analyzed the transnational migratory networks that exist between Panama and the Antilles. Even while writing large narratives of the Canal's construction that focus on diplomatic and political histories, discussion of how Black migration in the Caribbean was necessary for the US's engineering project remains unavoidable.[70]

In particular, scholarship on Black sovereignty and cultural autonomy in the Canal Zone has started to look at spatial practices as a critical component. In the 1990s, Roy Bryce-LaPorte has provided an initial look at Black agency and "counterculture" in the Canal Zone during the 1950s, pushing back against the idea of West Indians being lazy or "docile" in the Canal. More recently, Katherine Zien has introduced spatiality as worth examining in Black histories of Panama. She finds that West Indians used performance to generate alternative understandings of sovereignty, to construct their own social space, and to conjure fictive worlds of their own that unsettled the US's imperial exceptionalism—especially by the mid-twentieth century.[71] The Canal Zone's towns since then have been reinterpreted as locales of unique modernities in the isthmus, despite the US's narrative of the ICC's architectures introducing modernity to the isthmus.[72] In these towns, West Indian women also crafted their own social worlds and

[69] Charles V. Carnegie, *Postnationalism Prefigured: Caribbean Borderlands* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

[70] Newton, *The Silver Men*; Kaysha Corinealdi, "Envisioning Multiple Citizenships: West Indian Panamanians and Creating Community in the Canal Zone Neocolony," *The Global South* 6, no. 2 (June 6, 2013): 87–106; Olive Senior, *Dying to Better Themselves: West Indians and the Building of the Panama Canal* (Kingston, Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press, 2014); Greene, "Entangled in Empires."

[71] Zien, *Sovereign Acts*, 15–16.

[72] See Lasso, *Erased*.

autonomous realms of labor.[73] This thesis engages with this scholarship by investigating the how West Indian communities found ways to challenge disciplinary regimes and religio-medical hegemonies of the Canal Zone through acts of refusal and fugitivity. Challenging the narrative of the Canal Zone being a white enclave of homogenous, orderly medical and religious domains, this thesis expands on how Black Atlantic imaginaries permitted West Indians to circumvent the punitive, racialized spatial orders of the Zone.

## Methodologies and Sources

This thesis draws on three general types of primary source documentation: official state documents, popular US-American texts, and West Indians' oral and literary sources. US official government documents and popular informal sources reveal how both lay ICC authorities and major Protestant leaders constructed a hegemonic religious discourse within the Zone. Public health reports from the ICC's, US War Department memorandums, and the *Canal Record* newspaper provide a window into US-Americans' racial and religious attitudes in the Zone. In particular, the ICC laws and reports allow for a glimpse into the portrayal of Black and indigenous subjects within the Canal Zone's colonial discourse. Together these documents reveal how racial grammars shaped the security technologies that US-Americans believed ensured their safety and future as settlers in isthmus.

The role of US-Americans' colonial imagination is critical in the infliction of epistemic and physical violence. The extremes of colonial fictive thinking and imperial fantasies can be most palpable in US-American's cultural texts. As Michael Taussig notes, such texts "functioned

[73] Joan V. Flores-Villalobos, "'Freak Letters': Tracing Gender, Race, and Diaspora in the Panama Canal Archive," *Small Axe* 23, no. 2 (2019): 34–56; Joan Flores-Villalobos, "Gender, Race, and Migrant Labor in the 'Domestic Frontier' of the Panama Canal Zone," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 99 (ed 2021): 96–121.

to create through magical realism a culture of terror that dominated both [the colonized and colonizers]."[74] To demonstrate parallel development of racial grammars of security in colonial statecrafts' texts and within popular mentalités, this thesis examines oral histories with West Indians, missionary periodicals, West Indian and US-American novels, and US-American memoirs. These sources illustrate how the Canal Zone society's racial ordering and anxieties permeated everyday life. Thus, it suggests that the US imperial authorities' violence had its grounding in the larger anxieties and fantasies of the Canal Zone's settlers. A paired analysis of these two forms of sources—official and popular—enables us to see both state archives and popular texts "as condensed sites of epistemological and political anxiety rather than as skewed and biased sources." Both forms of US-American texts from the Canal Zone then represent "transparencies on which power relations were inscribed and intricate technologies of rule in themselves."[75]

In its approach to Chapter 4, this thesis consults West Indians' fictional short stories to study their subjective experiences and search for flashes of their interlocutory power. Citing Édouard Glissant, historian Stephan Palmié observes that "[t]here exist pasts the reality of which we cannot deny but that we may never find ourselves able to evidence unless we 'reevalu[ate our] conventions of analytical thought.'"[76] In navigating the silences in traditional US archives and the subalternity of exploited West Indian laborers, this study locates the histories of West

[74] Michael Taussig, "Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing," in *On Violence: A Reader*, ed. Bruce B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 507. For a discussion on dime novels, see David Kazanjian, "The Dime Novel," in *The Oxford History of the Novel in English*, ed. Priscilla Wald and Michael A. Elliott (Oxford University Press, 2014), 273–88.

[75] Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[76] Stephan Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition*, 1st Edition (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2002), 9.

Indian workers by reconstructing the larger epistemic fields of the twentieth-century Black Atlantic that they inhabited. During the early-twentieth century, transnational Afro-Caribbean literature flourished and portrayed the colonial infrastructures present in postcolonial characters' lives. By examining literature as primary sources then, Chapter 4 builds on the methodologies of Rukmini Bhaya Nair, David Kazanjian, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Edward Said, who have argued for more use of the literary close reading methodology that "draws on, moves elsewhere, but [does] not precisely refute empirical research."[77] Thus, my analysis of Black spatial practices in the Canal Zone relies on close readings of Eric Walrond and Claude McKay's writings, which allows us to understand how Black Atlantic imaginaries thrived among the Canal Zone's West Indian migrant communities. As Aaron Kamugisha recently said most concisely, "Caribbean literary history *is* intellectual history."[78] Rather than seeking to reconstruct the individual lives of any particular West Indian subject, the chapter reconstructs what alternative worlds, spaces, and social grammars that circulated among those West Indians in the Zone. Thus, Chapter 4's methods in exploring Black placemaking practices in the Canal Zone makes use of West Indians' fleeting narrations and visual imaginings in literary texts to capture their engagement with a larger Black Atlantic world in Panama.[79]

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[77] Rukmini Bhaya Nair, "The Pedigree of the White Stallion: Postcoloniality and Literary History," in *The Uses of Literary History*, ed. Marshall Brown (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 159–86; David Kazanjian, "Freedom's Surprise: Two Paths Through Slavery's Archives," *History of the Present* 6, no. 2 (2016): 134–35. Regarding Edward Said's approach, I refer specifically to Said's original conceptualization of contrapuntal reading practices. See Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 66.

[78] Aaron Kamugisha, "The Promise of Caribbean Intellectual History," *Small Axe* 25, no. 1 (2021): 51–52.

[79] The term "imaginary," as I employ it here, is most concisely explained in Charles Taylor, "What Is a 'Social Imaginary'?" in *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 23–30. He writes that a social imaginary is "much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode." A social imaginary is "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (23). The term,


Figure 1-2. Bird's-eye view of the Panama Canal by Gilbert Hovey Grosvenor and National Geographic Society (1912). Map reproduction courtesy of the Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center at the Boston Public Library.

## Contributions

Literary scholars have most thoroughly and continuously inserted Panama as part of a Black Caribbean.[80] In contrast, historians of US foreign relations have traditionally emphasized the Canal Zone's history as a white, satellite locale for US empire-building.[81] Only recently have historians begun to focus more on practices of Black transnationalism within the Canal Zone,

however, was first developed by Cornelius Castoriadis in his *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998). It has also been further theorized further by Jacques Lacan and Arjun Appadurai.

[80] See Rhonda D. Frederick, *"Colón Man a Come": Mythographies of Panama Canal Migration* (Lexington Books, 2005); Jennifer Brittan, "The Terminal: Eric Walrond, the City of Colón, and the Caribbean of the Panama Canal," *American Literary History* 25, no. 2 (2013): 294–316; Louise Walsh, "Dracula and Tropic Death," *Caribbean Quarterly* 64, no. 3/4 (September 2018): 521–43; Imani D. Owens, "'Hard Reading': US Empire and Black Modernist Aesthetics in Eric Walrond's Tropic Death," *MELUS* 41, no. 4 (December 2016): 96–115; Watson, *The Politics of Race in Panama*.

[81] Julie Greene, *The Canal Builders: Making America's Empire at the Panama Canal*, 1st ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2010).

with particular attention to the era after the Canal construction's end in 1914.[82] Contributing to these efforts of cultural and intellectual historians of the Canal Zone, this study aims to further insert the Zone and its West Indian communities as protagonists in a history of Afro-Caribbean action and thought. It provides a look at how the processes of Caribbean transnational traditions continued but took a particular shape in the Panama Canal Zone during the construction period. Particularly, it centers the roles that Black Atlantic religious cosmologies and medical vulnerabilities played in the lives of West Indian migrants. Rather than only render West Indians in the Canal Zone as docile subjects, they also provided West Indians with the necessary pools of shared meaning and counter-grammars to challenge imperial structures of surveillance.

Exploring the history of religious and medical surveillance, this study provides insights that allow scholars of both fields to retheorize histories of modern medicine and religion in the era of the US's new empire.[83] Studies by historians of colonial Latin America have highlighted how African diasporas constantly recreated alternative healing knowledges in the early modern Americas.[84] Yet, historians of twentieth-century medicine in Latin America tend to focus on the creation of vast public health architectures and tropical medicine institutions. This study hopes to show how former African diasporic medical epistemologies still circulated and formed part of

[82] Carla Burnett, "'Are We Slaves or Free Men?': Labor, Race, Garveyism, and the 1920 Panama Canal Strike" (PhD diss., Chicago, IL, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2004); Jonathan David Warner, "'If Anything Else Remains, Let That Also Be for the Negro': Race, Politics, Labor, and the Rise and Fall of West Indian Black Internationalism, 1914-1945" (PhD diss., Bloomington, IN, Indiana University, 2016); Herman, "The Global Politics of Anti-Racism"; Flores-Villalobos, "Gender, Race, and Migrant Labor in the 'Domestic Frontier' of the Panama Canal Zone"; Corinealdi, "Envisioning Multiple Citizenships."

[83] See Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963).

[84] Londa Schiebinger, *Secret Cures of Slaves: People, Plants, and Medicine in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017); Pablo F. Gómez, *The Experiential Caribbean: Creating Knowledge and Healing in the Early Modern Atlantic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Bethan Fisk, "Black Knowledge on the Move: African Diasporic Healing in Caribbean and Pacific New Granada," *Atlantic Studies* 18, no. 2 (April 3, 2021): 244–70.

the US's imperial spaces. Thus, the story of US imperial expansion cannot only be formulated as the advancement of Western biomedicine to the Caribbean. This study suggests that the history of US expansion must also be read as the recirculation of alterative, Afro-Caribbean medical practices in the circum-Caribbean. Furthermore, it illustrates the connection between religious beliefs or fears and the US's scientific and public health accomplishments.

In a similar vein, the history of Afro-Caribbean religions provoking cultural panics in US imperial enclaves provokes a reconsideration of the relationships of religion and empire. This study demonstrates how Obeah and Vodou and US preoccupations thereof played major roles in its more permanent enclave in Panama as well. Protestant settlers' religious fears and superstitions around Afro-Caribbean spiritualities came to shape the development of the US's definitions of security and sanitation. Protestantism formed part in shaping US imperial ideologies, as other historians have highlighted. However, Afro-Caribbean religions and their representations also came to affect the US's visualization of its empire and its religious institutions abroad. Reinterpreting the histories of both imperial medicine and religion in the early twentieth century, then, highlights the importance of increased historical sensitivity to the asymmetric articulations of Black intellectual heritages within US imperialist's vast intellectual and cultural projects. In concurrence with what historians of science have argued, the dichotomy between religion and science is unstable.[85] Panama's history of religio-medical surveillance highlights how religious worldviews and superstitions aided in building the foundations of Western science. More specifically, Obeah and Vodou shaped the formation of US medical

[85] For a look at this argument, see Gary B. Ferngren, ed., *Science and Religion: A Historical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017. Works on religion and science's construction of human origins include David N. Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); Terence Keel, *Divine Variations: How Christian Thought Became Racial Science* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018).

knowledge and imperial power, rendering US empire partially an artifact of the Black Caribbean's intellectual currents.

Together, exploring the Canal Zone's history of religio-medical surveillance and imperial insecurity refines the field's larger understanding of modern US empire in the twentieth-century Black Caribbean. As other scholars of Panama have noted, the Canal Zone became the site of defining the territorializations of the US's overseas empire.[86] Within studies of empire more largely, the Spanish-American War and the period of early twentieth century served as a major period of US empire-building in its Caribbean Basin.[87] This study expands on this by demonstrating how religious and medical discourse served as a medium for imagining the US-American domestic and, in contrast, the "untamed" spaces of Panama. However, these discourses were also grounds for resisting US empire. The history of the Black Caribbean—and its intellectual heritages like Obeah and Vodou—came to collide and fuse with the US overseas empire's early formation in the circum-Caribbean. Both Black Atlantic imaginaries and white US imaginaries come to the forefront in a study of the US's territorialization of the Panama Canal Zone. This history thus ends with Panama's Black Atlantic shaping the history and culture the US's new empire much more than the US settlers of the Canal Zone had originally feared.

[86] Zien, *Sovereign Acts*; Abernathy, "Bound to Succeed"; Walter LaFeber, *The Panama Canal: The Crisis in Historical Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[87] David Healy, *Drive to Hegemony: The United States in the Caribbean, 1898-1917* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); Michel Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream: Nicaragua under U.S. Imperial Rule* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Alan McPherson, *The Invaded: How Latin Americans and Their Allies Fought and Ended U.S. Occupations* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

# CHAPTER 2
# RELIGION AND DEGENERATION

During the 1905 Colón Mutiny aboard the Versailles, what caused US authorities to fear the presence of Vodou as a subversive element, and why did US-Americans continue to fear Vodou for years later? How did the Canal Zone's society scientifically and religiously justify the fear of Afro-Caribbean communities and their religious cosmologies? This chapter answers these questions by analyzing the history of Protestant Christianity, the fear of bodily degeneration in the Canal Zone, and the imperial fictions in a popular dime novel. Relying on missionaries' periodicals and Zonian Church groups' publications, this chapter argues that US-Americans visualized sources of spiritual danger and biomedical insecurities through frameworks of scientific racial degeneration and religious fears about Afro-Caribbean spiritualities. These intersecting and converging frameworks allowed US-Americans to develop and employ racial grammars that, in turn, discursively demarcated the Canal Zone between secure, sanitized spaces and Black, unruly spaces. US-Americans' spatial imagining of the Canal Zone and of the US's empire, then, was largely predicated by their stark position as a "white" enclave in the Black Caribbean.

This chapter first demonstrates that US-Americans imagined the Christian Canal Zone strip as a secure, sanitized space and as appropriate for US-American spiritual and bodily health. The US federal government's funding of the Canal Zone's chapels and churches allowed US-Americans to construct the Zone as an enclosed, safe geographical space sitting in contrast with the rest of Panama and the Caribbean's darker, tropical geography. The integrity of a well-formed, moral Christian society was at the heart of its imperial security as a developing empire. During US-Americans' aim to create this Protestant enclave, they associated Panama, as part of the Black Caribbean, as a site to where practitioners of Afro-Caribbean religions traveled for

spiritual training. In response, US-Americans still tried to "contain" the international image of Panama and the Canal Zone. In official accounts, they characterized West Indians as Christian devotees who found solace from the harsh world of the Canal's labor. Furthermore, the lack of any official law in the Zone prohibiting Obeah or Vodou in the Zone also led to a nonrecognition of Black Atlantic religions in the Canal Zone. US-Americans, then, hoped to manufacture a public imagery of the Zone as a white, Christian world in the making of their empire.

The second section then examines how US-Americans drew on preexisting racial and bodily sciences to articulate their fears of Afro-Caribbean religions and the tropical Caribbean world's degenerative properties on white bodies. The Canal Zone's religio-medical discourse characterized West Indians as tropicalized subjects with little ontological differences with the virulent tropics of Panama's natural Caribbean ecology. Likewise, US-Americans characterized Afro-Caribbean religions as a religio-medical threats that West Indians that harvested from the tropical earth. Both the religious fears and scientific racial theories that US-Americans carried with them fused to provoke a further pathologizing of Black bodies. Americans who theorized Black West Indians' physiologies as incompatible with modern US biomedicine shared a similar framework with the overseas Protestants that viewed Afro-Caribbean religion as subversive to human bodies and colonial societies. The Canal Zone became a space where these frameworks fused and concomitantly treated Black bodies and cosmologies as foreign contagions.

The third section examines the imperial fictions and depictions of West Indians that employed such imperial racial grammars on medicine, race, and religion. Such fictions discursively demarcated the Canal Zone between white sanitized space and Black, virulent spaces, while also showing the vulnerability and exploitable porosity of such racial boundaries. Within this imaginative act of demarcation, West Indians refused to remain on the other side of

an imagined frontier in the Canal Zone. In these imperial fictions, US-Americans cultivate a model of the US-American subject as civilized but nonetheless vulnerable to foreign, tropical contagions.[1] Meanwhile, Afro-Caribbean peoples were seen as abhuman being and religio-medical conspirators infiltrating US, white domestic spaces. To do this, this study examines a publication of the dime novel *Diamond Dick, Jr*. that portrays the Canal Zone's secret battles against Afro-Caribbean religions' subversion of the Zone's white domestic life and its larger spatial order. Imperial fictions and short stories, such as the dime novel, permitted that epistemic murk emerge in the Canal Zone. In other words, narratives such as these allowed for US Americans to conjure their own cohesive portrayals of the Canal Zone and thus produce "an unstable interplay of truth and illusion… [as] a phantasmic social force."[2]

This chapter paints a portrait of the religious and bodily anxieties that US-Americans generated in Panama, which shaped how they would come to spatially organize the Zone. In doing so, this chapter converses with scholars, like Stephan Palmié, who note how discourses of Caribbean modernity also were shaped by the so-called unmodern religious traditions—all within a single Atlantic cultural matrix.[3] US-Americans' Protestant thought conjured an imaginary landscape of the Canal Zone as a US domestic that they needed to safeguard from the Black Caribbean's contagious elements and bodies.[4] In doing so, interactions and fears of Black

[1] For questions on imagined frontiers in relation to colonialism, see Stoler, "Interior Frontiers."

[2] Michael Taussig's notion of epistemic murk is when fictitious portrayals of "savagery" and of the other results lead to a suppression or erasure of indigenous or subaltern interpretations of reality. In other words, fictitious imaginings of the colonized savage leads to that hegemonically becoming the new socially new colonial reality. Michael Taussig, "Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing," in *On Violence: A Reader*, ed. Bruce B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 507.

[3] Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists*.

[4] Kaplan states that the domestic "relies structurally on its intimate opposition to the notion of the foreign. Domestic has a double meaning that links the space of the familial household to that of the nation, by imagining both in opposition to everything outside the geographic and conceptual border of the home." See Amy Kaplan, "Homeland Insecurities: Reflections on Language and Space," *Radical History Review*, no. 85 (Winter 2003): 82–93. See also

Caribbean epistemologies and cultural practices came to form the white Canal Zone's intellectual and theological life.

## Building A Protestant Canal Zone

In this period of the US's "new" overseas empire, the question of religion was central with the construction of US imperial outposts in the early twentieth century.[5] The Protestant fervor toward the Panamanian isthmus had its earlier origins in the US's colonial projects. Twentieth-century overseas Protestant expansion evolved from US-American missionaries' religious expansionism in the North American Frontier West. Under the ideologies of industrial capitalist growth and Anglo-Saxonism, US military forces waged war against indigenous nations, with Anglo Americans hoping to eradicate the "savagery" of indigenous US-Americans for civilizational progress.[6] In the process, some indigenous US-Americans even perceived Protestantism a religious system designed to destroy their cultures and traditions, with some even turning to Catholic missionaries as a safer alternative from Anglo-Protestant encroachers.[7] Within the nineteenth-century US, Christian supremacism and settler-colonialism became part of the expanding US's pedagogy and cultural projects toward indigenous groups became intricate parts in structuring the future of US imperialism.[8] Following the Spanish-American War, this Protestant and Anglo-Saxonist fervor spread outward. Projects to transplant US-American

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Ronald Harpelle, "White Zones: American Enclave Communities of Central America," in *Blacks and Blackness in Central America: Between Race and Place,* ed. Lowell Gudmundson and Justin Wolfe (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 307–33.

[5] Katherine D. Moran, "Beyond the Black Legend: Catholicism and U.S. Empire-Building in the Philippines and Puerto Rico, 1898-1914," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 33, no. 4 (Fall 2015): 28.

[6] Conor J. Donnan, "Kindred Spirits and Sacred Bonds: Irish Catholics, Native Americans, and the Battle Against Anglo-Protestant Imperialism, 1840–1930," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 38, no. 3 (Summer 2020): 3,6.

[7] Donnan, 12.

[8] Johnson, "Religion, Race, and American Empire," 63.

Protestantism in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia surged.[9] Expansionist efforts subsequently were taken up by other members US-American society. Nurses, pedagogues, and missionaries traveled abroad to promote Protestantism, believing in the modernizing and whitening effects that Protestant conversions could have in the Black Americas.[10]

US Protestants missionaries believed that the creation of a morally healthy white US enclave in Panama depended on preserving the moral, religious characters of its settlers and visitors. In March 1906, Bishop T. B. Neely wrote to the *Zion's Herald*, "The American Methodist Episcopal Church as the First American Protestant Church to occupy the Isthmus [of Panama]. It had a right to be there and, as an aggressive, pioneer church, it ought to be there first."[11] The expansion of Protestantism to the Panama Canal Zone occurred in tandem the US empire's political and economic expansion following the Spanish-American War. Once in Panama, ICC officials aimed to construct the Canal Zone's "moral architecture" filled with respectable entertainment, religious institutions, and recreational activities for US-Americans.[12] In this process, religious organizations and local denominations, like the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), became vital assets for the US government in safeguarding the moral and religious structure of the Zone from the vice they imagined in Panama.[13] More largely, the US's

[9] Yaremko, *U.S. Protestant Missions in Cuba*; Susan K. Harris, *God's Arbiters: Americans and the Philippines, 1898-1902* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). For attention to Hawai'i during this period of US imperialism, see Seth Archer, "Remedial Agents: Missionary Physicians and the Depopulation of Hawai'i," *Pacific Historical Review* 79, no. 4 (November 1, 2010): 513–44.

[10] In the Dominican Republic, British and US-American Protestant missionaries hoped to transform the country from being a Black one into a "Latin" country, for instance. See Davidson, "Redeeming Santo Domingo."

[11] T. B. Neely, "Panama: Dominant Tongue. Can Americans Live on the Isthmus? The Religious Conditions First American Protestant Church Property in the City of Panama," *Zion's Herald* (American Periodicals Series II, March 7, 1906), 482.

[12] Zien, *Sovereign Acts*, 41.

[13] See Zien, *Sovereign Acts*.

ensuring of Protestantism's spread in Latin America was seen as a larger politico-cultural process of bringing "liberal democratic institutions" to Spain's culturally backward colonies.[14] Religion and its intermediators remained necessary geopolitical actors for the US in establishing a lasting cultural hegemony in a country like Panama surrounded by the Black Caribbean's multiple non-Christian spiritualities and Latin America's Roman Catholic institutions.

Figure 2-1. Ancon Hospital's chapel. Source: Osborne, *Panama: The Isthmus, the Canal, the Church*.

At the very early beginnings of the US's reign of the Canal Zone, some of US-Americans' anxieties in Panama lay in the fact that they had scarce chapel infrastructure. To address this, lay US-Americans looked to hospitals, especially Ancon Hospital, as sites of worship within their own Christian mapping of the Canal Zone. Generally, missionaries and settlers in the US's colonial territories regarded hospitals as special sites for spiritual, material, and political uplift. In hospitals abroad, US-Americans saw the possibility of science and religion

[14] Sotomayor, "The Triangle of Empire," 482.

working together to achieve a particular form of human progress in US colonies.[15] In Panama, Ancon Hospital and other hospitals had their chapels serve as sites for US-Americans' weekly religious activities. With the renovation of Ancon Hospital in the early 1900s, the ICC constructed a Protestant and Catholic chapel within the hospital. Sunday mornings at 10:00 a.m., an Episcopalian congregation filled the Protestant one. Canal Zone residents of all walks of life filled the room for their weekly religious services, even if they had no other intention of visiting Ancon Hospital: "doctors, nurses, judges, lawyers, army engineers, clerks and ladies, representatives of all the official and American society being present," according to visitors.[16] After sermons and worship, congregants expressed jubilation while other Canal Zone residents received their confirmation rites.[17] This was not exclusive to Ancon Hospital, however. For chaplains and priests at this time, other hospitals became their headquarters where they hosted religious gatherings. Baptist Rev. S. Moss Loveridge, for example, established his religious services at Culebra Hospital. In addition to offering more mobile services along the Canal Zone line, ministers like Loveridge also held services at the hospitals near Canal working sites.[18] Hospitals became centers of religious integrity and cohesion, as well centers of biomedical work.

[15] Ellen Walsh, "'Called to Nurse': Nursing, Race, and Americanization in Early 20th–Century Puerto Rico," *Nursing History Review* 26, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): 143.

[16] Edward W. Osborne, *Panama: The Isthmus, the Canal, the Church* (New York: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, 1908).

[17] Osborne, 12.

[18] Loveridge was an African American Baptist pastor; as Katherine Zien notes, this still stoked animosities between him and West Indians when he attempted to provide reading rooms and gathering spaces for silver-roll employees. Tensions and animosities between African Americans, Panamanian Afro-Hispanics, and West Indians was not uncommon in the Canal Zone. See Zien, *Sovereign Acts*, 64. For more on conflicts among Panama's various Black diasporic groups, see Watson, *The Politics of Race in Panama*.

As hospitals and chapels shared spaces, the religious sanctification of modern medicine developed in the Canal Zone's hospitals. In the Canal Zone, the symbols of Christianity and salvation fused with those of western biomedicine and ICC sanitation efforts. Biblical miracles of healing became comparable to the modern acts of disease eradication in the Canal Zone. Medicine, disease, and death infused themselves into Canal Zone Christians' local theologies and became a part of the very religious ceremonies and materiality of the chapel. From the start, the name of Ancon Hospital's Protestant chapel was St. Luke, the disciple whom St. Paul in the New Testament referred to as "the beloved physician" for caring for other ailing apostles. Women who led the charge in organizing the worship services in their religious communities sought to further emphasize St. Luke's role as a Christian healer. In December of 1907, Episcopalian woman congregants also formed an altar guild under the full name of "the Guild of St. Luke the Beloved Physician."[19] Furthermore, the windows of Ancon Hospital's chapel were decorated in memorial to those hospital patients who had died of tropical fevers. Above the altar of the St. Luke's was a triple window of stained glass "dedicated to the memory of employes [*sic*] of the Isthmian Canal Commission who lost their lives by yellow fever."[20]

Nonetheless, the building of permanent religious buildings remained part of the US empire's spatial vision of building a productive, stable liberal society in the middle of an otherwise unruly Black Caribbean basin. From the US's early beginnings in administrating the Canal Zone, the US federal government allocated monetary funds for the Zone to construct stable places of Protestant worship that were easily accessible to ICC employees. In 1905, the US government started stationing US-American chaplains in different towns in the Canal Zone

[19] "Social Life of the Zone," *The Canal Record, Vol. 2*, December 11, 1907.

[20] "Social Life of the Zone."

to foment a Protestant dominion throughout the small strip of land. The US government paid roughly one hundred dollars to these chaplains as part of their salary. For the time being, most of these chaplains held religious services in the Canal Zone in temporary or makeshift buildings.[21] The Canal Zone, the chaplains, and the church congregants experienced the rebuilding of their church's very foundations—physically and metaphorically—as they settled in the Canal Zone. In this period, missionaries and settled chaplains in the Canal Zone detailed rough experiences with changing living locations. At first, missionaries and chaplains endured harsher conditions in their first years of work in Panama and the Zone. In the Panamanian port city of Colón, US-American Presbyterians began evangelizing by 1906 with its local headquarters in a tent "under conditions totally unsuited to the climate."[22] The following year, a "portable chapel" was built in New York and then shipped to Colón with enough seats for 300 congregants, rooms for gymnasium activities, Bible studies and social gatherings."[23]

By roughly 1907, the ICC started funding the construction of permanent structures to serve as Protestant chapels within these various towns What US-American settlers casually referred to as "ICC chapels," various Protestant chapels appeared in the different major towns along the Zone, including Ancon, Culebra, Balboa, Corozal, Empire, and Gatun. In these construction projects, no specific Protestant denomination dominated the isthmian religious world. Founder of the Canal's Union Church, M. J. Steckel, remarked that by 1907 he was already acquainted with roughly four ministers of different denominations working in the Canal

[21] Robert H. Rolofson, *Christian Cooperation at the World's Crossroads* (The Union Church of the Canal Zone, 1950), 66.

[22] "A Portable Church for Panama," *The Missionary Review of the World* XXX, no. 3 (March 1907): 221.

[23] "A Portable Church for Panama," 221.

Zone.[24] He identified them as a Southern Baptist, a Wesleyan, a Northern Methodist, and a Presbyterian, each of which held their respective worship services within different Zone towns. Steckel noted that, at first, each minister hoped to build their own churches independently with funds collected from the US's mainland. Nonetheless, the Canal Zone's Protestant Christianity began to coalesce as a single religion with little sectarian differences within it. In the late 1900s and early 1910s, talk ensued among Protestants in these Canal Zone towns of unifying their churches and of erasing denominational lines. By 1914, when the Canal's construction was finally completed, US Congress officially incorporated "the Union Church of the Canal Zone" within its overseas territories.[25]

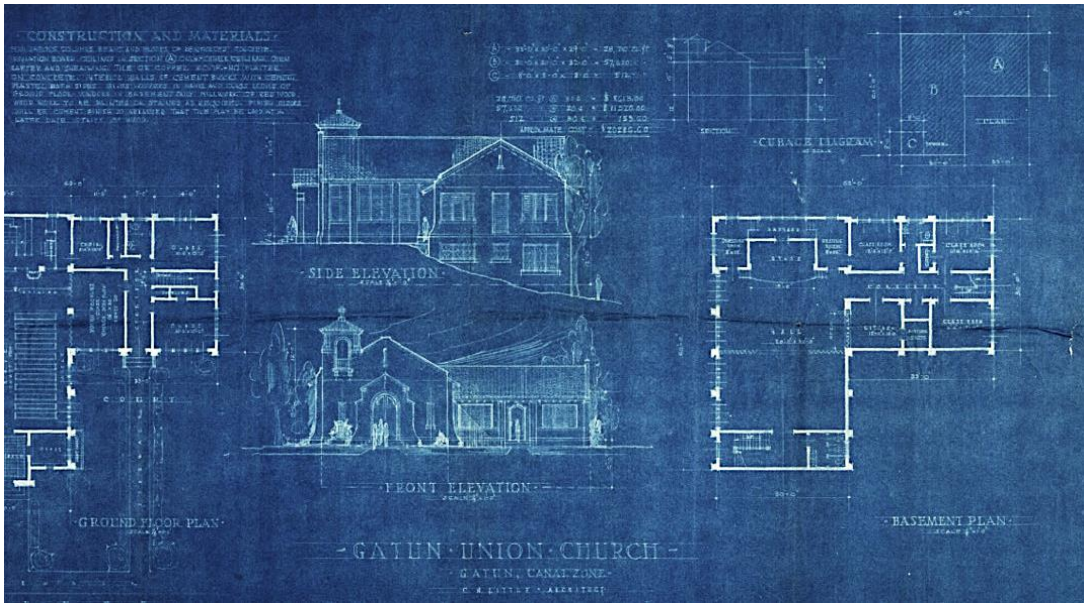


Figure 2-2. Blueprint of Gatun Union Church, Gatun, Canal Zone. Created by architect C. N. Little. Courtesy of the Panama Canal Museum Collection, University of Florida.

[24] Rolofson, *Christian Cooperation at the World's Crossroads*, 67–68.

[25] "Constitution of the Union Church of the Canal Zone (1914)," in *Christian Cooperation at the World's Crossroads*, by Robert H. Rolofson (The Union Church of the Canal Zone, 1950), 73.

Aware of their position in Latin America and the Caribbean, US Protestants in Panama remained defensive of their community from Catholics' attempts to prevent Protestantism's further expansion. In constructing their chapels and religious spaces, Protestants sought to set themselves apart from the older Catholic institutions outside of the Canal Zone. US missionaries interpreted Catholics' resistance as further justification for their evangelical work in Panama. In 1915, the Baptist missionary, Rev. S. M. Loveridge sent materials collected in Panama overseas to other Baptists in the state of Georgia and the US South alerting them of this. Namely, he shared letters he intercepted among Panamanian Catholics that urged other Catholics to not attend the 1916 Congress of Christianity in Panama. A Panamanian Bishop, whom the authors of the Baptist periodical *The Home Field* simply referred to as "Guillermo," wrote:

> [I]n the opinion of the bitter anti-Catholics of the United States we continue to be dumped into the darkness of barbarism and ignorance. By the way, we may state that they are partly right, for we are in complete ignorance as regard the Protestantism, for which we fervently thank God.[26]

In response to Bishop Guillermo, the authors of *The Home Field* simply replied that it was indisputable that Latin America needed the presence of Protestant evangelical missionaries. The words of the Panamanian "Romanist," they wrote, would surely only encourage more Baptists in the US mainland to pursue religious work abroad in sites like Panama. In their position as evangelizers in early twentieth century Panama, US Protestants began to conceptualize their work as being a struggle, but noble one, against Catholicism's flimsy hold on the circum-Caribbean. In visualizing their Protestant enclave, missionaries and settlers adopted a defensive position against external objectors and existential threats to their spiritual mission. In doing so, they casted "Latin" nations' Catholicism as a stubborn source of religious emptiness

[26] "Panama Priest Assails Proposed Religious Congress," *Our Home Field* XXVI, no. 11 (November 1915): 21.

and an obsolete colonial relic in the Caribbean. Yet, in contrast, they pointed to Afro-Caribbean religious practices that actively but subterraneously circulated near and in Panama as the more active, existential threats to their religious stability.

With the large presence of Black and non-white migrants in Panama's port and Canal Zone cities, US Protestants also had to begin to account for non-Christian religious circles in their midst in their Zonian theologies. Despite the presence of missionaries like Rev. Loveridge in Panama, Protestant periodicals and leaders continued to characterize the isthmus as a site of religious depravity and immorality. In his 1917 report, the US-American missionary Sam Inman described the state of morality outside of the Canal Zone, equating all forms of amusement and diversion in fun with destruction and alleging that the Roman Catholic Church in Panama remains "connected commercially with vice."[27] Speaking to missionaries seeking to establish a Pan-American Protestant mission, Inman harkened the need for a robust Protestant Church in the region to develop a voice strong enough "to speak against it."[28] Despite the proliferation of Protestant groups in the Zone, Inman portrays Protestantism as needing usurp the epistemological emptiness that Roman Catholicism produced among Latin America. Ultimately, much of Inman and other missionaries' conception of non-Protestant religions in Panama stemmed from a belief that these assemblages of non-white, foreign religions could —in the case of Catholicism, stunted the human progress and the moral state of the US's neighboring nations. In establishing their Protestant enclave, missionaries and settlers adopted a defensive position against external objectors and existential threats to their spiritual mission. In doing so, they casted "Latin" nations' Catholicism as a stubborn source of religious emptiness in the Caribbean.

[27] Inman, *Christian Cooperation in Latin America*, 56.

[28] Inman, 56.

During this period of racial segregation in the Zone, even several Protestant chapels for West Indian Protestant congregations appeared in the Canal Zone.[29] Colored Young Men's Christian League (CYMCL) clubs for West Indian workers to find refuge from their decaying moral conditions of the isthmus nearly formed.[30] West Indians became parishioners for various Protestant denominations and found comfort in their services. One worker recounted why they flocked to religious services in this period: "That's the reason we all use[d] to go to Church more regular than today, because in those days you see today and tomorrow you are a dead man. You had to pray everyday for God to carry you safe, and bring you back."[31] Yet, as scholar Roy Bryce-Laporte has noted, West Indian families and individuals attended multiple, different churches in Canal Zone area in a syncretic manner.[32] Some churches for West Indians also included hybrid practices or evolved into less orthodox sects and cult groups, even among those in the majority that identified as Protestant.[33] For US-Americans accustomed to Jim Crow policies, the racial segregation of religious worship services remained necessary.[34] Thus, in the Canal Zone there persisted an imagined border of blackness that was meant to separate white religious practice and thought from those of West Indian devotees.

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[29] Zien, *Sovereign Acts*. For studies on Black Protestantism in the circum-Caribbean, see Edward T. Brett, *New Orleans Sisters of the Holy Family: African American Missionaries to the Garifuna of Belize* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012); Christina Cecelia Davidson, "Black Protestants in a Catholic Land: The AME Church in the Dominican Republic 1899–1916," *NWIG* 89, no. 3/4 (2015): 258–88.

[30] On the history of the CYMCL clubs, see Zien, *Sovereign Acts*, 63–64.

[31] Amos Park to IHS, "Isthmian Historical Society Competition for the Best True Stories of Life and Work on the Isthmus of Panama during the Construction of the Panama Canal," Letter, 1963, Museo Afroantillano de Panamá.

[32] Roy Simon Bryce-Laporte, "Crisis, Contraculture, and Religion among West Indians in the Panama Canal Zone," in *Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean: Eastern South America and the Caribbean*, ed. Norman E. Whitten and Arlene Torres, vol. 1 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 108.

[33] Senior, *Dying to Better Themselves*, 280.

[34] Senior, 282.

Previous scholarship on the Panama Canal has illustrated that West Indian laborers came to embrace the solace that Christian chapels and worship services offered.[35] This historiographical assumption of West Indians' wholly Protestant devotion has had a long reign. As early as the 1920s, Episcopalian Bishop Reverend James Morris of the town Las Cascadas, observed and wrote, "The West Indians are a church-going people, and I am glad to report that in our missions I have found them entirely loyal, happy in their relationship with the American Church."[36] West Indian acceptance of Protestant spaces in the Canal Zone was indeed a familiar phenomenon, perhaps because of earlier British efforts to bring Anglican Christianity to the West Indies. However, the historical narrative of total Protestant devotion among West Indians in the Panama Canal Zone erases some of the historical realities of West Indian silver employees. The few Catholic clergymen present in the Canal Zone reported that West Indians displayed little interest in matters of Christian religion, not even as a source of solace from hardships.[37] Based on memoirs and fictitious prose, other white settlers in the Canal Zone seemed to be aware that not all West Indians were Protestant devotees either.

The US-Americans in the Canal Zone themselves perhaps are those who disrupted such an enduring historical narrative the most. Despite having Protestant chapels, services, and

[35] Newton, *The Silver Men*.

[36] Department of Missions and Church Extension, "Under Four Flags: The Work of the Bishop of the Panama Canal Zone," *Bulletins of the Presiding Bishop and Council of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, no. 13 (1921): 4.

[37] Robert Swain, "A History of the American Vincentian Fathers in Panama," *Vincentian Heritage Journal* 3, no. 1 (January 1, 1982): 11. Additionally, the assumption that all West Indians were of Protestant faith fails to consider Francophone West Indians, such as Martinicans, who were frequently of Roman Catholic faith. In the nation-state of Haiti, furthermore, affiliates of Vodou spiritual work did not turn toward Protestant churches until roughly the 1940s due to Catholic priests' campaigns against Vodou imagery and objects—despite Protestant missionaries in the area arguably having a more rigid opposition to non-Christian spiritual work among Haitians. See Karen Richman, "The Vodou State and the Protestant Nation: Haiti in the Long Twentieth Century," in *Obeah and Other Powers: The Politics of Caribbean Religion and Healing*, ed. Maarit Forde and Diana Paton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 268–87.

ministers at their reach, US-Americans expressed fear of continuing to live among non-Christians in Panama. US-Americans suspected West Indian employees and families employed Obeah and Vodou to form nefarious schemes, breed immorality, and subvert white health and safety. For Protestant Americans, these Afro-Caribbean spiritual practices—primarily derived from West and Central African traditions—did not represent legitimate religious or theological frameworks for alternative practice. They, instead, were frameworks that permitted West Indians living in a white, Anglo society to form amorphous cults that bred immorality and harm against white domestic life. Ironically, Black cosmologies did come to form part of a theology and lore of the Canal Zone—or "Zonelore."[38] In Zonian theologies, Afro-Caribbean religions were represented—but included nonetheless—as dark elements that aimed to subvert "the principles of Christ's Kingdom on the Canal Zone."[39] In constructing a white, Christian society in the Canal Zone, US-Americans identified that they needed to defend their spiritual health and Canal Zone moral life from the hidden threats of Obeah and Vodou in the Black Caribbean.

When contending with Obeah and Vodou, US-Americans' efforts to decipher and decode Obeah spiritualities in early theological texts, memoirs, and dime novels produced racial stereotypes that ultimately led to the criminalization of laboring West Indians in Panama. This cultural process of stigmatizing Obeah and Vodou also affected the US's imperial culture.[40]

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[38] The term appears and its first documented coinage was in Rolofson, *Christian Cooperation at the World's Crossroads*.

[39] "Constitution of the Union Church of the Canal Zone (1914)," 73.

[40] On how imperialism affects US culture, see Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005). For the methodology of placing "metropole" and "colony" within the same analytical framework, see Stoler and Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony"; Kathleen Wilson, ed., *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Michelle Burnham explains this multidirectional cultural transformation, stating that representations of Obeah hoped to transform the spiritual practice into a decipherable feature of the colonial landscape through "a variety of scientific, cultural, and textual strategies that, in their efforts to turn incomprehension into certainty, end up revealing far more about their own assumptions than they do about those that govern obeah itself."[41] The intellectual failure of colonial intellectuals, scientists, and rulers to translate and dominate knowledge over Obeah ultimately undergirded the criminalization of the spiritual practices. In colonial societies, authorities came to view Obeah as "a material practice and a contagious discourse" that infected the tropics and whose practitioners deliberately sought to weaken the health of colonists. Indeed, Obeah in the Anglophone Caribbean became a cultural force that ensnared religious and medical fears of white settlers just as much as a material practice among Antilleans. In the Anglophone Caribbean, colonists spoke of Obeah through similar terms, as though it were indeed a disease that could be transmitted across populations and fracture European empires in the tropics.[42]

In the Panama Canal Zone, a sanitary framework of "cleaning up" had been adopted for those concerned with the unspoken spiritual intentions of West Indians, like in other Caribbean locations.[43] Yet, the stigmatization and policing of Afro-Caribbean spiritual practices did not receive publicized attention, remaining a quiet practice of US imperial security instead. As noted previously, laws were passed in the Canal Zone that would indeed recognize "anti-modern," non-Christian spiritualties like Obeah and Vodou's presence in a modern, US enclave. Outright

[41] Michelle Burnham, "Obeah's Unproductive Bodies: A Response to 'Obeah: Knowledge, Power, and Writing in the Early Atlantic World,'" *Atlantic Studies* 12, no. 2 (April 3, 2015): 235.

[42] J. Alexandra McGhee, "Fever Dreams: Obeah, Tropical Disease, and Cultural Contamination in Colonial Jamaica and the Metropole," *Atlantic Studies* 12, no. 2 (April 3, 2015): 180.

[43] On "cleaning up" Vodou in US-occupied Haiti, see Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law*, 130. Republican Cuba's history of regarding *brujería* as a social contagion is also examined in Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists*.

displays of punishments that frequently occurred in locations like colonial Martinique and Jamaica contradicted goals of the US Canal Zone governance to create imagery of an orderly, militarized space and a depiction of the US's imperial accomplishments.[44] In other words, the US government's public displays of violent punishment against a transgressor of a law were not the strategies that the Canal Zone government adopted in its quelling of Christian practice.

Instead, the Canal's officials focused primarily on orchestrating an image of the Zone as a US satellite and buffer zone in the Black Caribbean by constructing white, sanitized spaces settlers. Images of whiteness, then, were meant to overshadow images of blackness and Caribbean tropicality. One Zonian wife, Rose Van Hardeveld, described this approach: "The authorities realized that the only way to counteract these evils [in Panama City and Colón City] was to bring to Panama the wives and children of those men who were accustomed to their American homes."[45] By funding the ICC chapels, the settlement of Christian families, and US missionaries, the Canal Zone's officials hoped to institute an image of the Canal Zone as a homogenous, cohesive Christian enclave. In the words of Dr. E. C. Dargan, a Southern Baptist theologian, the Panama Canal Zone was meant to not only be a national or imperial symbol; the Zone was meant to become "the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ."[46] Silencing any images and rumors of Obeah spiritual practices in the Canal Zone was a critical component in constructing this "kingdom."

[44] John Savage, "Slave Poison/Slave Medicine: The Persistence of Obeah in Early Nineteenth-Century Martinique," in *Obeah and Other Powers: The Politics of Caribbean Religion and Healing*, ed. Maarit Forde and Diana Paton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 153. See Zien, *Sovereign Acts*, 40–42.

[45] Rose Mahr Van Hardeveld, *Make the Dirt Fly!* (Hollywood, CA: Pan Press, 1956), 22–23.

[46] E. C. Dargon, "Dr. Dargan Speaks on Cuba and Panama," ed. Victor I. Masters, *Our Home Field* XXI, no. 11 (June 1910): 14.

## Fearing Spiritual and Bodily Degeneration

The US's approach to their fears of Obeah in Panama depended first on constructing a sanctified image of the Canal itself and defending it as a self-contained body from existential harm and overseas criticism. The Canal Zone's officials and settlers worked to construct a visual understanding of the Canal in the US-American imaginary as a singular organism, an enclosed body.[47] The Protestant theology of the Canal Zone allowed for US-Americans to visualize it as a sense of a utopic, self-regulating system that they had birthed on the Caribbean's isthmus through sheer US-American cultural efforts. On the other hand, the Caribbean's system of circulating spiritual thought and oral networks acted as a source of disruption for US-American's ideal image of the Panama Canal Zone.

Despite efforts to construct a totally Protestant Canal Zone, US-Americans could not control the reputation that the isthmus obtained through word-of-mouth in the Caribbean Basin. Among communities in Cuba and Jamaica, Panama came to represent a key nexus in the migratory Afro-Caribbean religious network of knowledge, especially in the Anglophone Caribbean. At its most efficient circulation, Obeah in particular allowed for Anglo-Caribbean peoples to engage in what Lara Putnam called a "decentralized conversation over human access to supernatural power."[48] Even while migrating through the Greater Caribbean, Obeah

[47] The metaphor of a society or state as a human body remains important to reflect on in colonial histories. Susan Sontag wrote that "Even more than comparing society to family, comparing it to a body makes an authoritarian ordering of society seem inevitable, immutable." Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*, 1st ed. (New York: Picador, 2001), 94.

[48] Lara Putnam, "Rites of Power and Rumors of Race: The Circulation of Supernatural Knowledge in the Greater Caribbean, 1890–1940," in *Obeah and Other Powers: The Politics of Caribbean Religion and Healing*, ed. Maarit Forde and Diana Paton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 243. On the mobility of West Indian Obeah practitioners in Costa Rica, also see Aviva Chomsky, "West Indian Culture and Religion in Costa Rica," in *West Indian Workers and the United Fruit Company in Costa Rica, 1870-1940* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 173–206; Lara Putnam, *The Company They Kept: Migrants and the Politics of Gender in Caribbean Costa Rica, 1870-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

practitioners shared knowledge through their circulation of mailed letters—some of which were confiscated by colonial police.[49] Among accused Obeah practitioners being tried in Jamaica's courts, Panama was often cited as a place of former residence. A police officer, much later in 1934 Jamaica, claimed that an arrested and fined Obeah practitioner had told him he learned the spiritual practice while living in Panama earlier in his life. Now he could "cure, he could kill, he could give jobs" through the religious work he learned in Panama.[50] Regardless of whether the individual in question truly practiced Obeah, these fears of spiritual harm in Jamaica fit within a larger network of Obeah— and its colonial criminalization—in the Caribbean. Through word of mouth and as late as the 1930s, Panama continued to hold a transnational reputation as a site for practicing and spreading Afro-Caribbean spiritual work.

Within the US-administered Canal Zone, suspicion of Obeah's presence in the Caribbean led US-Americans to demarcate a racialized spatial difference between the Canal Zone and ungovernable Black spaces. Missionaries, settlers, and Zone officials reconceptualized the US's Canal Zone as a refuge against the sin of the outside tropics and of need of defense. A source of possible disruption to this refuge, West Indians were represented as sources of contamination and Black disorder that, nevertheless, thrived and spread within Panama's tropical ecology. Both the natural ecology and West Indians were framed as dangerous enough to the spiritual and biomedical security of the Canal Zone, warranting a containment like that of yellow fever and malaria. Matters of early Canal Zone security then amounted to contain the tropics from pouring into white American society and from Obeah proliferating within Panama's ecology.

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[49] Diana Paton, "Obeah Prosecutions from the Inside," in *The Cultural Politics of Obeah: Religion, Colonialism and Modernity in the Caribbean World* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 213.

[50] "Mechanic Fined £12 10/ on Charge of Practising Obeah," *Kingston Gleaner*, January 9, 1934.

Expressing this fear in a 1907 issue of the *Missionary Review of the World*, US-American missionaries asserted that "[m]ost of those who go to the Canal Zone seem to be inoculated with the virus of irreligion."[51] In their pathologizing of the non-Protestant, but especially the non-Christian, US-American missionaries also sought to amplify their social role in the newly created Canal Zone society as rectifiers of Panama's widespread moral transgressions. Missionaries in Panama described their evangelical work to "rescue the individuals and build lighthouses to reveal the danger points" present in Canal Zone society.[52] At a fundamental level, their work was framed as the preservation of the Zone's Protestant integrity and as defenders against internal sources of harmful disruption. But to justify Protestant leaders' enhanced role in the Zone's life, US-Americans produced writings and speech that featured the image of the West Indian Obeah-man and the Caribbean tropics as progenitors of deadly diseases. Those two features, then, became essential parts of the Zone's Christian theology and its imperial anxieties.

The fear of Afro-Caribbean religious practice occupied a nearly permanent space within the imagination of Canal Zone Americans, even decades following the Canal's construction. Writing in the 1940s and 1950s, Canal Zone resident Robert H. Rolfson described the role of Vodou and Obeah in the Zone's early formation. He starts by describing Panama's colonial origins, noting that "with the first slaves came voodooism, which for uncounted centuries had struck fear in the hearts of the Negroes' ancestors deep in the African forests." Rolfson implies, then, that Panama primordially arose as a colony or settlement with voodooism imported from Africa and then naturalized in the isthmus's land in the Black Caribbean:

> This crude cult, with all its murderous mystery, flowered in Panama's jungles until recent decades. According to an educated and trusted West Indian it lingers

[51] "Religion in Panama," *The Missionary Review of the World* XXX, no. 8 (August 1907): 630.

[52] "Religion in Panama," 630.

> today in diluted form. He asserts that in the capital city alone there are twelve "meeting houses" for Voodoo fanciers, with a number of full-time missionary promoters. Of course, zombies are no longer created, nor are murders committed by the enemies of the doomed, but ghosts of such evil ones are said to walk in the eerie darkness of the hysteria-dominated meetings.[53]

Protestant missionaries and leaders were not alone in seeing Obeah and Vodou in Panama's Canal Zone as a virulent but natural contagion originating from the tropical darkness. To an extent, colonial discourses that demonized Black bodies and epistemologies germinated more widely among the larger, lay population of Zone society. US-American settlers living in the Canal Zone articulated the stigma of Black West Indian workers in the Canal Zone through the language of anti-paganism and in Obeah's cultural proximity to the continent of Africa in their popular discourse. Representing Panama in the Black Caribbean as a site of breeding disease and animalistic immorality, these sources of primitive wilderness and diabolical disorder became a common rhetorical practice for US-Americans. For instance, upon his arrival to Panama, the ICC engineer Jan Hardeveld mailed letters to his wife Rose, where he detailed his horror at witnessing the isthmus's natural life. He provides profuse mentions of the darkness of the tropics with malicious creatures and harm hailing from the very earth. He described the deep darkness of Panama as full of "unearthly noises" coming from every site: "thick croaking, hoarse bellowing, and strange squeaks and whines leaped at me from the blackness" that sounded all like "the howling of demons."[54] West Indians' invisibility in their labor camps at night and their "chanting festivities" frightened Rose the most. "They seemed ghouls," Rose remarked. "You could hear

[53] Rolofson, *Christian Cooperation at the World's Crossroads*, 31.

[54] Hardeveld, *Make the Dirt Fly!*, 10.

them but never see them unless there was a bright enough moonlight and then one could see them weaving like ponderous shadows in and out among the houses and down the tracks."[55]

Carrying fears of degeneration with them, US-Americans regarded the isthmus' natural, Caribbean environment as a force capable of ruining their physical and spiritual health alike. Much like the Canal itself, degeneration theory began as a French product before transforming into a transnational social and medical anxiety.[56] Subscribing to degeneration theory's principles in their everyday anxieties, US-Americans maintained a nostalgia for "a unitary and securely bounded human subjectivity" in fear of a "fragmented and permeable" abhuman subject."[57] Although US doctors in Panama were reportedly unconvinced by degeneration theory in the 1900s, fears of bodily deterioration still circulated among US-Americans in the tropics, despite US government officials assuring US-Americans of the decency of the Canal Zone's living conditions. Upon her own arrival to the Canal Zone, Rose stated that she feared for her life and the lives of her children, believing in the possibility of their bodily degeneration as white US-Americans living in the Caribbean tropics. In her memoir, she described the darkness of Las Cascadas as being made up of slimy, hairy monsters that one could only find in nightmares.[58] Rose Hardeveld's judgments of her US-American neighbors also exhibited the fears of degeneration that developed among other US-Americans upon arriving at the isthmus. She

[55] Hardeveld, 49.

[56] For an overview of degeneration theory, see J. Edward Chamberlin and Sander L. Gilman, eds., "Degeneration: An Introduction," in *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), ix–xvi; R. Huertas, "Madness and Degeneration, Part I. From 'Fallen Angel' to Mentally Ill," *History of Psychiatry* 3, no. 12 (December 1992): 391–411.

[57] Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3.

[58] Hardeveld, *Make the Dirt Fly*!, 9.

remembered observing one of her neighbors in Las Casacadas and her nearly naked children in dismay: "She talked like an American, but her skin was yellow and taut. The little boys' teeth protruded from their pale lips, their abdomens were painfully distended, their knees knobby. Oh, dear! I thought as I looked at my round-cheeked rosy babies. I wonder how long it will be until we look like that?"[59]

US concerns the integrity of white human bodies and health consequentially occurred alongside the US Canal Zone discourse likening of West Indian's bodily physiology to that of tropical viruses. Black bodies and physiologies, in the public health discourse, came to represent as lifeforms irreconcilable to US biomedicine. In the war against Panama's epidemics, West Indians were framed as necessary and natural casualties of said war. While tropical air and wildlife could threaten West Indians, US-American medical discourse depicted sanitized spaces as deleterious to tropicalized West Indians' health. One *New York Times* article in 1906 explained to its readers that West Indians in the Canal Zone had lived over multiple generations in cramped huts and crowded rooms with no fresh air. Therefore, their lungs developed to be especially susceptible to changes in temperature and exposure to fresh air while quarantined in the Canal Zone. Colonel William C. Gorgas, Chief Engineer John Stevens, and Canal Zone Governor Charles Magoon all agreed that this "cramped" lung capacity caused West Indians to fall ill in when living at the US's Canal Zone. "Sanitation and cleanliness are proving fatal to the West Indian negroes," the *New York Times* explained to its readers.[60] Blackness and Black bodies, then, were depicted in the Panama Canal Zone as having the same weakness to sanitary

[59] Hardeveld, 28.

[60] "Sanitation Kills Negroes," *New York Times*, July 17, 1906.

measures as the viruses and animals that those measures were designed to combat.[61] The headline for the *New York Times* indicating some sort of scientific mismatch occurring between the effects of modern tropical medicine and the physiological reactions of Black workers was meant to highlight the abnormality of the Black body. In turn, white bodies and physiologies retained the same "securely bounded human subjectivity" that Black West Indians thereby lacked.[62] When US-Americans draped this same framework of sanitization and disease eradication over their religious and spatial affairs, they consequentially framed West Indians and blackness as similar existential threats to the Canal Zone's collective health.

US-Americans' imagining of the Canal Zone's geography, in turn, evolved under the weight of these religious anxieties, biomedical fears, and racial theories. Fears of tropical lifeforms and disease infesting sacred and domestic sites of US-American life in the Canal Zone also pervaded settlers' fears. In particular, they feared that the imagined border between white civilized society and the tropical darkness was weakening, growing in its porosity. As a result, they imagined more tropical lifeforms diffusing into the temperate Zone. Like the Hardevelds, the Parkers were another family of settlers in the Canal Zone. Elizabeth Parker arrived in the Zone in 1907, after her fiancé Charlie had already settled there for work. In a letter to Elizabeth before her journey by ship to Panama, Charlie wrote her a letter describing how the Zone's religious authorities sought hoped to exterminate the disease and mosquitos that had infested their holy spaces and sacred objects:

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[61] Histories on the medicalization and pathologization of blackness, especially during the age of slavery, include Andrew S Curran, *The Anatomy of Blackness: Science & Slavery in an Age of Enlightenment* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); Rana A. Hogarth, *Medicalizing Blackness: Making Racial Difference in the Atlantic World, 1780-1840* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Stefanie Hunt-Kennedy, *Between Fitness and Death: Disability and Slavery in the Caribbean* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020).

[62] Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, 3.

> Forget what said my last letter. Can't bring you down this pest hole. Yellow Fever, Malaria, even Bubonic Plague have broken out Panama. Last week, one [of] the officials returned from vacation. bringing his bride. Now he's a widower! She died of Yellow Fever within three days. We've been fumigating wholesale. Sulphur fumes permeate everything. They even found mosquitoes in the Holy Water! The Sanitary Department had quite a run-in with the Bishop.[63]

Years later into their stay at the Canal Zone, Charlie and Elizabeth held a drastically different perception of the isthmus's wildlife. In their new impressions, there was a newfound faith in the imaginary barriers and the security measures that the ICC erected against the tropical wilderness. In Elizabeth's memoirs, she described how, as Gatun Lake's waters rose with the filling and near completion of the Canal, the jungly life of Panama's natural environment physically receded from her view. Thus, her and her husband's anxieties on life in the Zone dwindled somewhat. Elizabeth marveled at the Canal's technology to ensure this temperate life. She first briefly notes that police patrols were needed to drive Panama's "natives" away from the Canal's infrastructure and back to the hills. She added, "And back to the hills fled all tropic life. The monkeys, the tapirs, the snakes, the weird insects, even the lazy sloths, all fled to the hills… Only the might hardwood trees remained…ghostly reminders of a once-teeming jungle."[64] By 1914 with the completion of the Canal, the spatial reorganization of the Canal Zone and the disappearance of jungle spaces provided to US-Americans a sense of relief in their spatial security. Although US-Americans did begin to feel secure enough to venture into some forest spaces to look at animal life or for picnics, they lived most of the Canal construction years with fear of unmitigated animal life. By the early 1910s, Elizabeth Parker remarked to herself that

[63] Elizabeth Kittredge Parker, *Panama Canal Bride: A Story of Construction Days* (New York: Exposition Press, 1955).

[64] Parker, 81–82.

even then "the Battle of the Insects," a term she facetiously coined, was still raging in Panama.[65] The militarized language of eradicating disease and of halting of the jungle from pouring over into white Canal Zone society, then, infiltrated the everyday speech of US-Americans concerned for their spiritual health and bodily integrity.

Figure 2-3. Balboa Union Church picnic in 1922. Courtesy of the Panama Canal Museum Collection, University of Florida.

## Imperial Fictions and Collapsing Boundaries

Like their fears of Panama's jungles, US-Americans authored and read fictitious narratives that portrayed West Indians and Afro-Caribbean religious practices as contagious threats to US-American security. In their theological imagination, US-Americans explicitly saw Afro-Caribbean religions as unsanitary, unruly, and as conveniently located and endemic to jungly spaces specifically, like those in Panama. In their US-Americans' colonial discourses, both Panama's jungles and West Indians' religious practices served as sites of religious and later

[65] Parker, 67–68.

spatial alterity. By the 1900s, US-American settlers and missionaries assigned non-Christian spiritual practices as a degenerative force and one that had the possibility of spreading if left uncontained. As a result, the liminal edges between white, sanitized spaces and the unruly, Black spaces of the unruly Panamanian tropics remained an open sore for US-Americans' sense of security. Within the lore of Canal Zone society, venturing outside of the parameters of the sanitized, tamed spaces opened the door for risks against the health and lives of white men, women, and children.

Religious fears of the Black, Caribbean body and of religious and medical threats crossing the racial boundaries of the Canal Zone began to permeate the literary imagination and colonial fantasies of Canal Zone Americans. The serialized dime novel titled *Diamond Dick, Jr*. featured a special issue in 1908 in which the dangers of Obeah to white society in the Canal Zone were exposed to readers. Dime novels, such as *Diamond Dick, Jr.*, thrived on depicting scenes of US white settler-colonialism, with depictions of indigenous North Americans as antagonists in captivity narratives.[66] The writers of *Diamond Dick, Jr*., then continued this traditional of creating imperial fictions by extending their work to Panama's isthmus in the Caribbean. Instead of reading another tale of an indigenous North American casting terror over white heroes, the dime novel's casual readers had the opportunity to read one in which a gang of West Indian Obeah-men terrorized white settlers in the Panama Canal Zone.

The white protagonist, Diamond Dick, does not have to wait long until coming across the dangers of the Panamanian tropics after exploring the Greater Caribbean's waters. While navigating the world of the Panama Canal Zone, Diamond Dick and his writers offer readers a melodramatic encounter with the West Indian "voodoo" work. In the story, readers witness Meg

[66] Kazanjian, "The Dime Novel," 277.

Mallory, the daughter of a major coordinator of the Canal's construction, sitting at home safely behind a mosquito screen waiting for her father to return. With shiny eyes and razor-sharp teeth that resembled those of a saw, Ilma—the daughter of a notorious West Indian voodoo king—joins Meg in her home. She shows Meg a charm that she purchased moments ago at the "swamp." The charm—a mass of black wool and a bean tied together with a string—was meant to make all of Ilma's wishes became a reality: to "kill dem you not like, and bring to you dem that you want."[67] Mention of voodoo made Meg shudder and brought to her a horror and terror that remained with her the rest of the night. She later recalls her father stating he opposed the voodoo practices that proliferated among the West Indian canal workers for how such practices provoked criminality and immorality. This trouble, in particular, consisted of Black canal construction workers pretending to be sick to secretly gather to cast incantations together, conduct human sacrifice, steam and kill babies, eat human flesh, and perform orgies in the dark recesses of the jungle. Meg remarks that Ilma's father had been a major provocateur of these "troubles" and someone whom the Canal Zone government had wanted to deport from the isthmus. Having learned his "voodoo" practices in Jamaica before arriving in Panama, Ilma's father remained in Panama by "hiding in the swamps lest the bloodhounds of the law of the Canal Zone should get him."[68]

The story takes a dangerous turn when the two girls leave the safe, domestic space of Meg's home for what later becomes framed as Ilma's home: the jungle. Ilma lures Meg into the

[67] "Diamond Dick in the Canal Zone, or Varola, the Voodoo King," *Diamond Dick, Jr., the Boys Best Weekly*, April 18, 1908, 5.

[68] "Diamond Dick in the Canal Zone, or Varola, the Voodoo King," 11. I place "voodoo" in quotes, since it would be more likely that a Jamaican laborer in the Canal Zone would practice Obeah instead of Vodou. Vodou was more prevalent in the Francophone Caribbean, like Haiti, whereas entire portions of Jamaican legislation were dedicated to outlawing Obeah work.

nighttime swamp and jungles by telling her, with a "strange fire flashing in [her] black eyes," that Meg's father is sick and dying in "the swamp."[69] In the wilderness, fear begins to overwhelm Meg, and she begs Ilma for them to return. Ignoring her, Ilma maliciously grabs and drags her further along the swamp. They arrive at a West Indian labor camp populated with small fires and huts. When Ilma lets out a wild scream, a band of Black men emerges from the shadows. Meg identifies one man as the most primitive of them all: a large one in tattered clothes, knotted hair, and razor-sharp teeth like Ilma's. Meg immediately knows that he is Ilma's father, the voodoo king. Knowing that Ilma's father was a deportable criminal in the eyes of her own father, Meg also suspected that all the West Indians in the camp were "criminal negroes, hiding in the swamps with this old voodooist." The morning after her kidnapping, Ilma's father nearly kills Meg with a knife with the intent of adding her blood to his "witch's broth." He is stopped when Diamond Dick, the blond-haired hero, saves Meg by shooting the voodoo king with his revolver.[70]

The story of the Canal employee's daughter nearly dying under the knife of a voodoo king in West Indians camps reflected that the jungles, Black spiritual practices, and West Indian spaces represented sites of insecurity and danger for US-Americans. In imagining their growing empire from the US, US-Americans reading about such a dime novel likely formed their own colonial reality of what the dangers were in the US's imperial terrains. *Diamond Dick, Jr.* the dime novel portrayed US-American lives in danger of Black Caribbean lifeforms in its new territorial space as an empire. Portraying their new imperial enclave in need of defense, then, aided US-Americans in their intellectual and cultural labor of including the Canal as part of the

[69] "Diamond Dick in the Canal Zone, or Varola, the Voodoo King," 10.

[70] "Diamond Dick in the Canal Zone, or Varola, the Voodoo King," 11.

US's geography.[71] Obeah and Vodou were hidden but internal, nonetheless, to Panama's spiritual, virulent environment in the Caribbean. Venturing into the swampy, darker terrains dominated by Black workers, thus, was to enter the realm of ungovernable and virulent danger to human life and civilization. Obeah and Vodou were not simply forms of spiritual ephemera in the Canal Zone, moreover. In the dime novel, Afro-Caribbean ritual objects, living spaces, and new social hierarchies formed among the West Indians hidden in the remote jungles. Rather than simply a passing threat to Canal Zone life, Obeah and Vodou represented permanent threats embedded in the US's new enclave, precisely because of its ecological location in the Caribbean. For the most part, these "threats" remained out of sight and out of mind for Canal Zone residents, allowing white residents like Meg to lend trust to nearby West Indians like Ilma. Yet, West Indians' mobility in social and physical spaces in the Canal Zone was represented as calamitous as diseases spreading into new bodies.

Fears of spiritual and medical threats crossing racial border lines and infesting domestic, white spaces in the Canal Zone are also evident in the dime novel's narration. Although Meg thought she was safe behind the mosquito screen as a barrier in her father's home, religio-medical threats to her life still seeped through. The West Indian girl, Ilma, remained behind the screen until Meg cordially invited her to chat in the night, despite how terrifying Ilma appeared to Meg. The crossing of Ilma over Meg's mosquito screen that evening was a crucial moment in the story. Represented in a fashion similar to mosquito-borne diseases infiltrating into screened homes, West Indians' cultural and physical mobility left uncontained was thought to be deadly for otherwise vulnerable white residents in the Canal Zone. Despite the measures taken to protect

[71] On this notion on the connection of security and constructing the homeland, see Amy Kaplan, "Homeland Insecurities: Reflections on Language and Space," *Radical History Review*, no. 85 (Winter 2003): 85.

the Canal Zone's white subjects from religious and biological contagions, they remained vulnerable to the influence of Black Caribbean spiritual work even when remaining indoors and even with West Indians, like Ilma, appearing innocuous at first. US-Americans imagined that—much like the Panama's jungles and mosquitos invading the Canal Zone's spaces—Obeah and Vodou's spiritual influence could also slyly stretch into their domestic, safe zones. Even with the efforts to sanitize and reorganize the Canal Zone's ecology, US-Americans carried with them imperial anxieties about their position in a Black Caribbean Panama.

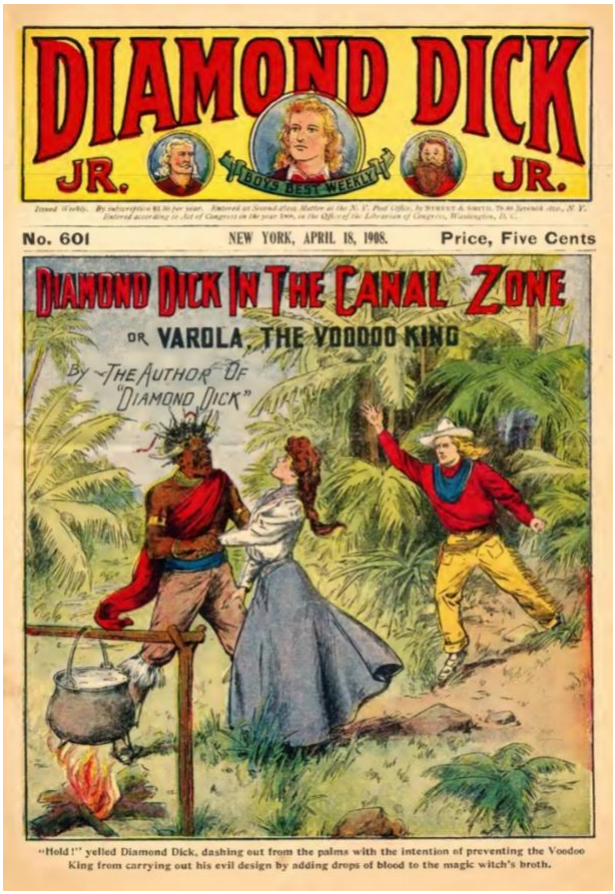


Figure 2-4. The illustrated cover of the dime novel "Diamond Dick in the Canal Zone, or Varola, the Voodoo King." Courtesy of and digitized by the Digital Pulp Preservation Group. Pulp Magazine Collection, Internet Archive.

## Conclusion

Sights of the dense jungle, unfamiliar noises at the dead of night, and a formidable number of Black foreign laborers produced a sense of constant spiritual and bodily threat among the US-American Protestants. In contrast, the settlement of Protestant devotees and ICC chapels along the Canal line was meant to provide a domestic space in which US-Americans could construct a local Christian cultural hegemony: a safe interior enclosed away from the dangers of Black cosmologies and Panama's tropicality. From there, Christian Americans could safely voice their persistent state of unease and anxiety in creating a Christian enclave amidst the virulent Caribbean tropics. In their official narrations, religious and medical authorities constructed an image of the Canal Zone as a protected, enclosed system of US efficiency, capable of fending off tropical pathogens, immorality, and racial unruliness.

Despite Protestantism quickly becoming the dominant religious tradition of the Canal Zone, representations of amorphous pools of contagion and nefarious religious practices threatening US Protestantism persisted. At the same time, US-Americans' colonial imaginations viewed the dangers of tropical jungles, disease, and of the occult as intersecting at the West Indian's body. Thus, because their conception of the Canal Zone's security of the Canal Zone rested along the lines of avoiding the unsanitary and un-Christian, their fear of Black bodies, religions, and spaces then fed directly into their understanding of imperial security. Specifically, fear of the abnormality of Black men and women's bodies and of the degeneration of white bodies led to Canal Zone members fearing for their health in Panama, having doubts of the strength of their security measures against foreign contagions.

The dime novel's fictionalized portrayals of Afro-Caribbean cults—particularly in *Diamond Dick, Jr.*—relied on presenting not only the tropics and West Indians as dangerous, but also Black Caribbean religions. A fear of an uncontained, secret network of Obeah and Vodou

cults in Panama's Canal Zone came to represent threatening to the lives and well-being of young girls, like Meg, but also to the larger life of the Canal Zone. During these acts of fictitious thinking, the imaginatively demarcated secure and insecure zones along the Canal Zone are shown to be in their most vulnerable state. US-Americans, then, concluded that the imaginary boundaries separating the US-American domestic from existential threats could collapse under the incomprehensible, mysterious spiritual and infectious forces. Like the British colonists in the Antilles for centuries before, US-Americans believed that Afro-Caribbean religions constituted a spiritual and biological threat but also a danger to larger colonial and racial regimes.

The merging together of racial scientific discourses and ultra-Protestant religious discourses served US-Americans in visualizing empire from their homes in the Canal Zone. In response, they came to develop their new understandings of their own collective and individual safety overseas in Panama. Throughout the construction of the Canal, US-Americans were fearfully aware that they were building their imperial enclave in the Black Caribbean world and intellectual systems. The specters of Afro-Caribbean spiritualities in the Canal Zone shaped and planted seeds in US-Americans' visualization of their imperial security and geography. As the next chapter explores, these notions of imperial security and insecurity shaped how the Canal Zone's authorities physically surveilled and disciplined its West Indian communities

# CHAPTER 3
# FRONTIERS OF SURVEILLANCE

What structures anchored the US's militarized violence when it responded to word of Martinicans' Afro-Caribbean religion and medical resistance on board the Versailles in September-October of 1905? Conversing with the works of imperial geographies of intimacy and surveillance, this chapter traces how the ICC brought to life US-Americans' biomedical and religious fears of Afro-Caribbean religions through their surveillance of West Indians in the Panama Canal Zone.[1] Frantz Fanon once argued that military barracks and police are what mark colonial frontiers and dividing lines.[2] In addition to this, the Canal Zone's surveillance relied on the work of religio-medical workers to carry out rituals of security in its operations of discipline and security. These processes of surveillance produced what Eyal Weizman calls an "elastic" or "anarchic" geography.[3] In other words, what constituted the medical, spiritual, and racial frontiers of the Canal Zone between US-Americans and West Indians constantly shifted. A frontier requiring policing could one day be at a work Canal site and the next day could pierce through the more intimate, less visible spaces of West Indians in the Canal Zone. Part of the US's enforcement of its overseas imperial security rested on the everyday struggle over and

[1] See Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006). I am also in dialogue with a subset of studies on the Panama Canal Zone that explore medical surveillance and disciplinary regimes. See John Lindsay-Poland, "A Platform for Control: Interventions and Army Doctors, 1865-1925," in *Emperors in the Jungle: The Hidden History of the U.S. in Panama* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 11–43; Benjamin D. Weber, "The Strange Career of the Convict Clause: US Prison Imperialism in the Panamá Canal Zone," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 96 (November 2019): 79–102.

[2] Frantz Fanon wrote, "The colonial world is a world cut in two. The dividing line, the frontiers are shown by barracks and police stations. In the colonies it is the policeman and the soldier who are the official, instituted go-betweens, the spokesmen of the settler and his rule of oppression." See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 2002), 38.

[3] Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation (*London: Verso, 2017), 6–7.

policing of West Indians at these elastically shifting frontiers that could cut through public and intimate spaces in the Zone.

This chapter elaborates that, within the Zonian imagination, the demarcations of secure and insecure spaces depended as much on religio-medical metaphors as on physical spatial policing. Consulting official ICC sanitary reports, Zone newspaper articles, US Senate testimonies, and written oral histories, this chapter examines three domains of biomedical and spiritual mitigation in the Zone: the hospital, the sick camp, and the labor camp. Christian ministers, policemen, and medical authorities recognized spiritual immorality and West Indian maladies as interwoven threats to the security of Zone life. US authorities responded by organizing parallel evangelical and sanitary campaigns. In their part, sanitary crewmen and medical officers saw their professional work as decontaminating and rebuilding of an insolvent tropical territory. Likewise, religious ministers saw their work as ensuring the salvation of West Indians from contagious, dark spiritualism and their immoral characteristics it sowed. A study of the hospital, the sick camp, and the labor camp provides us with an understanding of how fears of West Indian bodies and religions shaped how the US mapped itself overseas in developing its empire—both intellectually and spatially—with each site serving as a new frontier against disorder and unknown intents.

First, this chapter demonstrates that Zone hospitals acted as sites where US-Americans of varying spiritual and biomedical authorities sought to enforce the empire's medical hegemony and surveil Black laborers' religious and medical habits. Rather than have West Indians return to the healing traditions of Obeah and other Afro-Caribbean spiritual practices, Canal Zone authorities aimed to medically treat West Indian bodies and health from the perspective of the burgeoning discipline of tropical disease prevention. Receiving treatment at a place like Ancon

Hospital compelled West Indians to dispose of any epistemological commitment to Afro-Caribbean religio-medical practices. Religious ministers and workers frequently passed through the hospital spaces to take note of the religious habits of West Indian patients and of whether they were feigning illness.

The next section of the chapter examines the sick camp as a site of increasing mobility in biomedical policing, as well as a measure of the ICC to disrupt traditional, community-centered health care among West Indians. The sick camp and the labor camp were segregated spaces for Canal laborers, where they often experienced a loss over the control of the treatment of their bodies and medical autonomy. Here, they experienced similar forms of religious and medical surveillance from visiting religious workers and from Christian physicians, having them confront questions and fears of death they might have. Furthermore, the sick camp allowed doctors to come and go, while sick laborers remained confined to the camp until allowed to leave. Naturally, laborers experienced bouts of social isolation and a mixture of traumatic emotions from witnessing closely the pain and deaths of others. In the process, some sick laborers experienced a loss of community and the level interdependency within their folk medical traditions. However, they also found ways to escape the strict biomedical regime's that the sick camp embodied.

Also a "camp" setting, the labor camps in which West Indians lived maintained them be under watchful eye of policemen even when they were not ill. Under the surveillance of policemen on horseback, West Indians in labor camps enjoyed little freedom to be idle or transgress religio-medical norms. Activity at nighttime remained restricted, especially after sundown. Because US-Americans associated the nighttime darkness with the spread of tropical diseases and occult practices, the surveillance of policemen ensured that West Indians could not

serve as vectors of venereal diseases and spiritual harm in nearby white residential areas. With under curfew in a labor camp and days passing without social contact, these spaces functionally restricted the bodily mobility and social ties of West Indians. Working with knowledge of West Indians vast social ties that ranged across and even beyond the Canal Zone, the ICC's construction of these spaces aided in suppressing the potentiality of Black disorder and rebellion.

Part of the labor camp's design, the mobile sanitary brigades and their disruption of Black domestic spaces became strategies of constantly moving and reinforcing the racial frontiers of the Canal Zone. Threats to Canal Zone security then constantly shifted from the isolated depths of the jungle to the living quarters of a single West Indian bachelor. By investigating and entering the intimate spaces of Black laborers, furthermore, the sanitary brigades also confiscated from West Indian communities any ease of creating their own domestic spaces. Rather than a home, the labor camp represented a site of scientific fieldwork for the ICC's sanitary efforts. The mobility of the brigades as biosecurity apparatus reveals to us that Zone authorities were aware of how the Panamanian isthmus remained a hybridized and diasporic global locality, despite its imagery of order and white modernity. To combat this, they constructed multiple spaces and mobile apparatuses that allowed the Canal Zone government to West Indians' seeming religious and cultural liminality.[4] The elasticity of the medical and religious surveillance practices ultimately reflected the fears of the US's Canal Zone society in their position as a white enclave in the Black Caribbean-Atlantic. These spatial orderings by

[4] The definition of liminality I rely on here is that of Victor Turner: "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions." See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 95.

medical and imperial intermediaries then shows how reigning control over even intimate space became a manner through which US imperial authorities sought to produce their own security.

## The Hospital

The tradition of hospital care serving as religious rehabilitation and charity, as they did in the Canal Zone, has its historical precedents and parallels in earlier Latin America and Europe. As Fabiola López-Duran has shown, hospital spaces and urban architectures in modern Latin America acted as collective apparatuses to promote the scientific cultivation of a productive human society.[5] The unveiling of these architectural plans in cities like Buenos Aires in the late-twentieth century were rooted in the realization of Lamarckian eugenic thought in the Americas. One can also trace back the charitable rehabilitation of the human individual to Renaissance-era Europe. Humanist artists and architects in early modern Italy described hospitals as a type of religious military camp in which spiritual soldiers waged battles against devils and sin.[6] The initial theological attachment of Christians to the hospital as a site of their own spiritual work dates back to St. Augustine's metaphorical portrayal of Christ as a physician that cured man of spiritual diseases, drawing parallels between sin, immortality and bodily ailments.[7] During colonial and modern Latin American history, hospitals continued to serve as grounds for religious and medical authorities to struggle for legitimacy over each other.[8] Thus, the work of

[5] Fabiola López-Durán, *Eugenics in the Garden: Transatlantic Architecture and the Crafting of Modernity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 115–16.

[6] John Henderson, "Healing the Body and Saving the Soul: Hospitals in Renaissance Florence," *Renaissance Studies* 15, no. 2 (2001): 189.

[7] Henderson, 192.

[8] On religion and medical knowledge in colonial-era Latin America, see Martha Few, *For All of Humanity: Mesoamerican and Colonial Medicine in Enlightenment Guatemala*, 1st ed. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015); Paul Ramírez, *Enlightened Immunity: Mexico's Experiments with Disease Prevention in the Age of Reason*, 1st ed. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018). For attention to medical care and religion in modern-era Latin America, see Manuella Meyer, "'Of Grand Intentions' and 'Opaque Structures': Managing the Hospício Pedro II during Brazil's Second Empire (1852–90)," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 89, no. 4 (2015): 733–60; Teresita

Protestant clergy the Canal Zone's hospital wards was not a wholly unprecedented phenomenon in the history of hospitals. Nonetheless, their presence in hospitals within the Panama Canal Zone's landscape of Protestants seeking to establish a hegemony over Afro-Caribbean and Catholic traditions rendered the hospital into a new tool of governance in the twentieth century for US imperialists.

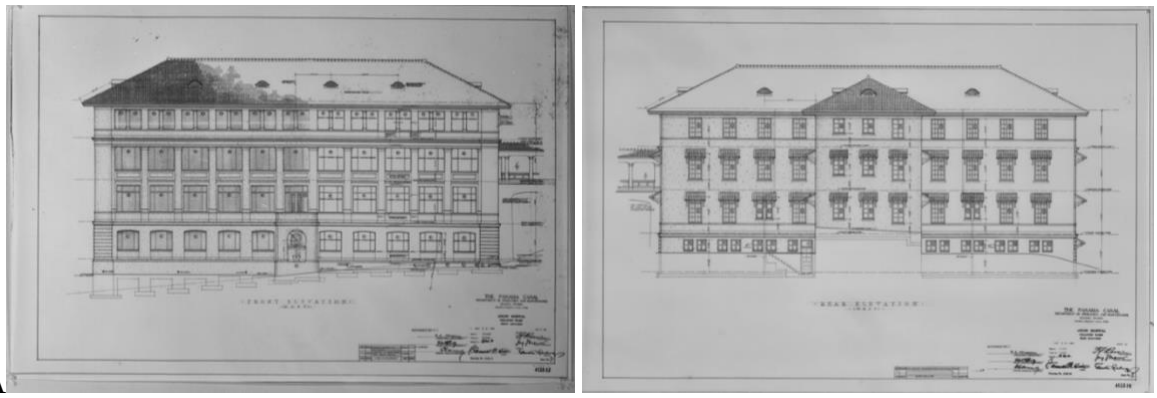
A B

Figure 3-1. Architectural drawings of Gorgas [previously Ancon] Hospital's Isolation Ward 1917. A) Front elevation of the Isolation Ward. B) Rear elevation the Isolation Ward. Source: The Engineering and Planning Office, Panama Canal Commission, Balboa, Republic of Panama. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

With the lack of sufficient medical infrastructure during the French and early US the canal construction eras, clerical figures played a medical role in the Zone. They often had some medical training or found themselves present and working in the Zone's hospitals, especially in their chapels and in their wards. Prior to traveling to Panama, Rev. Loveridge took lessons at the London Homoeopathic Hospital to learn skills for his own "self-preservation" and to aid ill people in Panama.[9] Before the US's rule over Panama's Canal Zone, Loveridge often visited

Martínez-Vergne, *Shaping the Discourse on Space: Charity and Its Wards in Nineteenth-Century San Juan, Puerto Rico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999); Raúl Necochea López, "Gambling on the Protestants: The Pathfinder Fund and Birth Control in Peru, 1958–1965," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 88, no. 2 (2014): 344–71.

[9] S. Moss Loveridge, *Panama Padre*, ed. John M. Loveridge (Totton: Lumix, 1995), 44.

individual patients sick with smallpox, dental problems, insomnia. Reflecting on this time spent, Loveridge remarked, "My prestige as a prophet went up."[10] The religious dimension of his medical work can be seen by how Rev. Loveridge healing of ill Panamanians and West Indians also led to their religious conversion and by how other ministers even distributed anti-Malaria tonics to their congregants.[11] Rev. Loveridge came to notice what previous missionaries in the Caribbean had learned: namely, that medical care was the most effective way of introducing Protestant Christianity to new people.[12] When visiting the home of a couple stricken with Hansen's disease, Rev. Loveridge stated that: "My visit bore fruit in the couple expressing a desire to be married and, better still, to enter upon a Christian life."[13] The early origins of the Canal Zone's work of physical healing, then, intertwined with that of Christianization and spiritual healing.

After the US's acquisition of the Canal Zone, hospitals became the first sites where US-Americans exerted Protestant hegemony. Since the French era of the Canal in the mid-nineteenth century, French Catholic clergy were the majority in the Canal's religious and medical affairs. The French Catholic effort in the Panama Canal project was led by the French Sisters of Charity,

[10] Loveridge, 46.

[11] See B. A. Samuel, "Vino Tonico Wintersmith Is 'Panama's Powerful Protector against Fever and Malaria,'" *The Colón Starlet*, August 2, 1904. Rev. B. A. Samuel described how he distributed a malaria tonic among many sufferers in Panama, including a Barbadian carpenter who had been suffering for a year with the disease. "With reluctance," the carpenter took the bottle, his health improved enough for him to work within one of the US's banana companies. He wrote as well that he was determined to distribute the medicine to all his parishioners. The tonic's news spread primarily through word-of-mouth among various US Christian clergymen in Costa Rica and Panama.

[12] See Walsh, "Called to Nurse," 142.

[13] Loveridge, *Panama Padre*, 46. For history on Hansen's disease and the Panama's leperseriums, see Gorgas, *Sanitation in Panama*, 256–59; Eunice Richard, "Palo Seco En Histórica Etapa: Programa de Rehabilitación y Nuevas Drogas 'milagrosas' Culminan 62 Años de Labor Médica," *The Panama Canal Review En Español*, May 1969, 24–25; Enrique Chaves Carballo, "La Revista Médica Del Canal de Panamá," *Lotería: Revista Cultural*, no. 508 (June 2013): 53.

who administered L'Hopital Notre Dame du Canal, and Vincentian missionary priests who established parish work in the construction camps.[14] At the time, up to only one to two trained medical physicians supervised the religious sisters as they kept L'Hopital functioning with the help of a few Black maids and orderlies.[15] Lacking proficiency in Spanish, many of the sisters initially struggled to communicate in the hospital wards. Moreover, most had no former professional training in medicine or nursing, but they ran the hospital with a sustainable level of efficiency, according to US-American chroniclers later.[16] US-Americans by 1904 stated that they were mildly impressed by the state of L'Hopital Notre Dame du Canal, sized the structure for the effort of the American Canal's construction, and finally renamed it Ancon Hospital.[17]

Following Panama's independence and the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty, Catholic figures traditionally found in L'Hopital began departing the structure, with Protestants and biomedical physicians replacing them. Because of the lack of permanent chapels, as discussed in Chapter 1, Zone hospitals transformed into vital spaces for chaplains and priests to hold regular services and gather new congregations. On the other hand, the Catholic French Sisters of Charity remained in Panama but with significantly reduced roles in the Zone hospitals. The Sisters faced pressures from settling US-Americans to depart from the hospitals. Instead of working within Ancon Hospital then, the French Sisters worked outside of the Zone in "modernizing" the Republic's Santo Tomas Hospital. When professional US-American nurses arrived in Panama, even the

[14] Swain, "A History of the American Vincentian Fathers in Panama," 45–46.

[15] William C. Gorgas, *Sanitation in Panama* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1915), 226.

[16] "Seventy Five Years of Medical Service," *The Panama Canal Review*, November 1957, Diamond Jubilee Supplement edition, sec. Construction Days: Ancon Hospital, 1904–1914, 3.

[17] The Nursing Staff, "Ancon Hospital, Panama," *The American Journal of Nursing* 5, no. 12 (September 1905): 882.

US's Sisters of Charity in the Zone slowly withdrew from its hospital spaces as well. The US-American sisters stayed in Panama too but not to work in Ancon Hospital. They emulated their French counterparts and continued working as nurses outside the Zone, where sanitary conditions were struggling to improve for Panamanians.[18]

With the authorization of the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty, lay professional nurses came to replace the role of the Catholic sisters.[19] During the Canal Zone's early formation, particularly before 1906, Catholic clergy's role as physical and spiritual healers in Ancon Hospital's wards waned. Colonial tropical medicine came to dominate the treatments doctors administered in Ancon Hospital instead. As John Lindsay-Poland has illustrated previously, European racial theories that physicians carried with them to the Canal Zone shaped the medical science that they practiced in hospitals like Ancon Hospital.[20] In their medical occupations, army doctors—including Colonel William C. Gorgas—reported all scientific and pathological data in Departments of Sanitation and Health publications methodically along categories of race and color. At the more granular level, medical army doctors used phrenological measurements of deceased West Indians skulls in autopsy reports to justify the unequal labor policies that the Canal Zone government was drafting.[21]

Despite their exclusion from the Canal Zone's medical practices, US Catholics did not become an equally subordinated and pathologized religious minority as West Indian Vodou or Obeah practitioners did. In the Canal Zone's Protestant hegemony, Catholic clergy were not

[18] Daniel Hannefin, *Daughters of the Church: A Popular History of the Daughters of Charity in the United States, 1809-1987* (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1989), 176–77.

[19] Hannefin, 176.

[20] Lindsay-Poland, "A Platform for Control," 35.

[21] Lindsay-Poland, 35.

entirely stripped of their spiritual authority. In fact, Ancon Hospital's chapel eventually featured Catholic services for hospital visitors. From the beginning of the US's administration of the Zone, hospitals served as larger social grounds for contestation but also negotiation of religious power among Catholic clergy and newly arrived Protestant authorities. Much like the landscape of chapels merging into a "united church" in the Canal Zone, the religio-medical surveillance of patients was a trans-denominational effort. In the Zone, this distribution of religious demographics in its hospitals allowed for healing and health to transform into a primarily white, Christian domain of biomedical practice in contrast with Afro-Caribbean religio-medical traditions.[22]

The attitudes of some hospital workers, including those religious ones, characterized West Indians and other patients as potential targets for evangelization efforts, seeing as the ICC officials saw moral health as tied to the larger health of the Zone. For example, Rev. Loveridge no longer needed to make the frequent home visits after the US's concentration of hospital-based medicine to US-trained doctors' purview. Instead, he became the chaplain of Culebra's hospital in August of 1905. As a chaplain, he led religious services every day, conducted funerals, and wrote letters to the sick patients in Culebra Hospital's roughly 100 beds. He also "made rounds" within the hospital to speak to as many patients as possible. In his memoir, he described his attempt to converse with as many ethnically and linguistically diverse patients as possible: "I often carried both gospels and tracts in as many as six different languages, for we had not only English-, Spanish-, and French-speaking patients in the wards, but often Italians, Greeks and

[22] For a history on the struggle over medical authority among biomedical professionals and popular healers in modern Latin America, see Steven Palmer, *From Popular Medicine to Medical Populism: Doctors, Healers, and Public Power in Costa Rica, 1800–1940*, 1st ed. (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2003); Anne-Emanuelle Birn, "Healers, Healing, and Child Well-Being: Ideologies, Institutions, and Health in Latin America and the Caribbean," *Latin American Research Review* 40, no. 2 (May 16, 2005): 176–92. For a general account, see Waltraud Ernst, ed., *Plural Medicine, Tradition and Modernity, 1800-2000* (London, UK: Routledge, 2014).

occasionally even Chinese, as well as representatives from other lands."[23] The seemingly benevolent work of Rev. Loveridge and other religious workers regarded the ill patients as also spiritual patients. Rev. Loveridge's memoir speaks to how religious workers viewed these laborers as also in need of moral and spiritual betterment while lying in the hospital cots. Surely, part of Rev. Loveridge's work was to provide comfort to the suffering patients, but such efforts also transformed hospital wards into a site of religious work aimed at non-Protestant and non-Christian ailing patients.

With hospital wards acting as small, ephemeral contact zones, religious authorities needed to develop strategies that encouraged patients to still recognize them as authorities of spiritual health and salvation. [24] In his memoir, Rev. Loveridge remarks that the diverse populations within hospitals proved to be a challenge in his evangelizing work. Yet, the physical and emotional vulnerability of the injured, sick workers in hospitals allowed him to sway them with his many, multilingual religious tracts more easily. Religious ministers, then, were aware of Ancon Canal Zone's position in the midst of the Black Caribbean-Atlantic. Ancon Hospital acted a locality containing diverse languages and cultures, but a common experience of anguish and bodily ailments among its patients. Accommodating these multiple languages and appealing to that common suffering, ministers had some success. Frequently, it was to Rev. Loveridge whom ill workers in Culebra hospital asked for mercy in their moments of physical and potentially emotional agony. One Chinese migrant pleadingly tried to tell Rev. Loveridge that he thought he was a good man, loved God, and tried to be a good person. Others laying on their sickbeds, Rev.

[23] Loveridge, *Panama Padre*.

[24] A contact zone is a "space of imperial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict." Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 8.

Loveridge confessed in his memoir, "unburden their hearts to [him] and confess to having committed almost every known sin, short of murder itself, and whose consciences gave them no rest."[25] In these situations, hospital chaplains like Rev. Loveridge appeared to patients on the brink of death as a spiritual mediator over the suffering of the Canal Zone's harsh conditions. While the hospital was a place for newfound tropical biomedicine to establish its power, it too was a place for Protestants in their overseas work to flex their own authority over the hearts and minds of the Canal's international labor force.

Nonetheless, a few local Panamanians and European laborers who were hospitalized at Canal Zone facilities objected to the presence of religious clergy roaming the wards. This ire was most prominent among Panamanian and Spanish atheists and anarchists. In a local Colón newspaper, Panama-based anarchists described the Christian authorities working in Ancon Hospital as "black crows who cover the beds of agony of those [patients] lying there in search of rest and relief from their pain with their mantle" and "vampires who smell all; they control, and stain and prostitute everything."[26] When US-American clerical figures approached them in hospital wards, Spanish patients cried out that they were atheist in order to not have to hear or see passages from the Bible.[27] The work of the conversion of sickly patients into faithful Christians, then, was not always a successful task. Yet, in Rev. Loveridge's written memoir,

[25] Loveridge, *Panama Padre*, 109.

[26] Carbajal Atiza, "Ancon Hospital," *El Único*, October 12, 1911.

[27] Loveridge, *Panama Padre*, 111. Loveridge claims that Spanish patients were more likely to hear about the Bible from Protestant figures rather than from Roman Catholic clergy who visited. Among Spanish laborers, especially those affiliated with anarchist circles in the Caribbean, revulsion toward Catholicism was common as part of their critique of modern moral orders under conservative political regimes. Yet, it remains unclear whether they were also curious and enamored by Protestantism to the degree that Loveridge alleges.

there remains a constant scrutiny of the level of immorality and atheistic attitudes among the sickly, working-class patients that lay in the hospital's cots.

In turn, these contestations for religious and medical power within the walls of the ICC hospitals caused for some West Indians to identify the hospital as a site of coercive, foreign colonial technologies. The hostility between ill West Indians and medical professionals emerged from of a larger struggle for control over West Indian's health and treatment. The ICC hospitals at this time were racially segregated and often overflowing with countless cases of injuries and tropical disease infections.[28] In these environments, West Indians saw doctors' treatments as forms of bodily restriction and an exploitation of their vulnerability within a foreign, white institution. Even when employed under the rhetoric of benevolent progress and cleansing, public health technologies in the Canal Zone nonetheless became sources of terror and confusion for West Indians. These terrifying moments could partly be due to the larger Canal Zone's discourse depicting West Indians as contagions of disease and degeneration. Physicians and nurses organized West Indians to segregated wards and providing them little explanation regarding their treatments materialized from the larger Canal Zone discourse depicting West Indians as contagions of disease and degeneration. In colonial medicine, as Frantz Fanon notes, the colonized patient is rendered silent while the physician falls back on the clinical examine, "thinking that the body would be more eloquent" than the patient's narration of their own body and health history.[29]

As more West Indians began experiencing treatments at the ICC hospitals, they circulated warnings about the ICC hospitals' dangers. Albert Peters, a Bahamian canal laborer who lived in

[28] Senior, *Dying to Better Themselves,* 148.

[29] Fanon, "Medicine and Colonialism," 126.

Colón, recounted his terrifying experience with an orderly during his malaria treatment. Before being sick, he had rumors about the hospital from others: "It was a saying around town that when you are poorly they screen you around and the doctors cut to see what is really wrong. As sick as I was I said to myself no operating on me."[30] In Colón Hospital, he wanted no one to operate on him and was covered by a mosquito screen.[31] An orderly approached Peters' bed to remove his pajamas and place him on a rubber sheet, without explanation to Peters. Alarmed and terrified, Peters remained "stark naked on the bed, but ready for action." When the orderly returned with a towel and basin to cover Peters' face with it, Peters "drew up [his] two feet and let him have it straight to the chest." The orderly fell back, knocking down the mosquito screen. Peters demanded the orderly explain what he was doing. A nurse then entered and explained that the orderly was simply trying to reduce his fever. Peters had believed that the orderly was actually trying to put him to sleep so a doctor could cut him.[32] Another hostile encounter occurred among a Jamaican man with chronic bouts of malaria interviewed by a US journalist. When asked why he did not go to the hospital for treatment, he answered, "I did try, sir, but the doctor just talked harsh to me and gave me some medicine and told me to go 'way!" The man, bedridden in his home, had his wife tending to him and his fever instead.[33]

[30] Albert Peters to IHS, "Isthmian Historical Society Competition for the Best True Stories of Life and Work on the Isthmus of Panama during the Construction of the Panama Canal," Letter, 1963, Museo Afroantillano de Panamá.

[31] At this time, the ICC required that mosquito screen surround and isolate all tropical disease patients. Damage or removal to screens was punishable with fines of up to 100 *balboas*. See *Sanitary Rules and Regulations for the Cities of Panama and Colón in the Republic of Panama* (Mount Hope, CZ: ICC Press, Quartermaster's Department, 1913), 13–14.

[32] Peters to IHS, "Isthmian Historical Society Competition."

[33] Poultney Bigelow, "Our Mismanagement at Panama," *The Independent* LX, no. 2979 (January 4, 1906): 14.

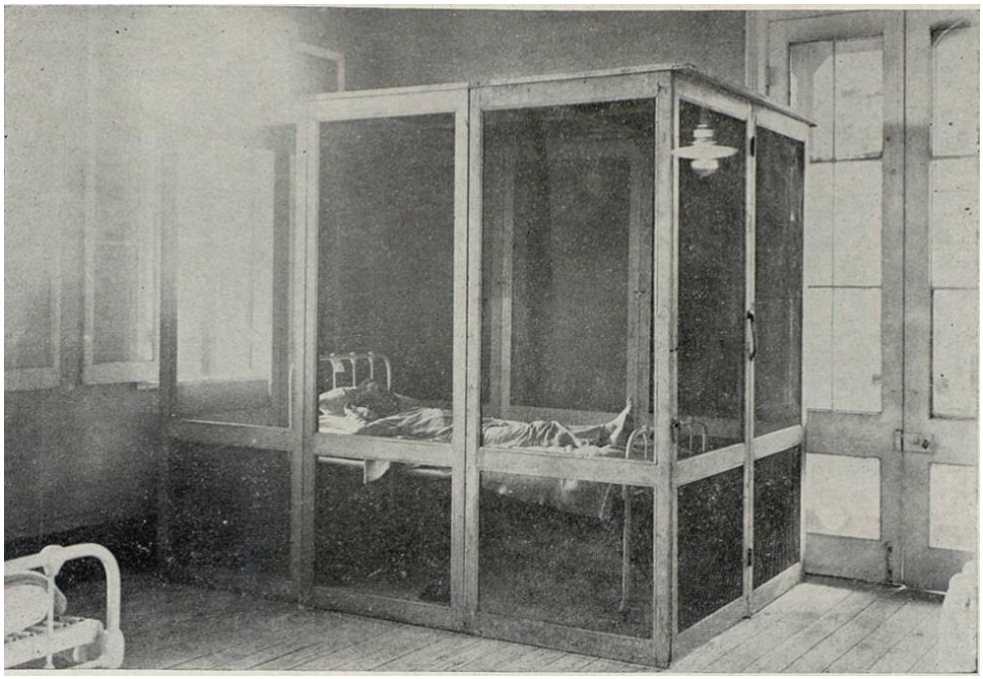

Figure 3-2. Photograph of yellow fever patient at Ancon Hospital kept in an isolated cage to prevent contact with other patients. Panama Canal Museum Collection, University of Florida.

The fear and surveillance experienced in ICC hospitals of caused some West Indian to conclude that such distress was not worth a visit. Yet, the major aims of the Hay–Bunau-Varilla Treaty was to eradicate all contagious spread of tropical diseases. Thus, managing disease through legitimate avenues, rather than through subterranean folk remedies, was at the heart of the ICC's plan to ensure biomedical security for US settlers. In the ICC's Department of Health reports, there are close to no references to the Afro-Caribbean botanico-medical practices or local indigenous knowledges that would have been present in Panama, erasing subaltern medical epistemologies from the Canal's public transcript. Nonetheless, US-American authorities were aware that West Indians evaded admissions into hospitals, preferring at-home bedrest and folk remedies. Some concocted their own botanical cures to common illnesses or imported folk pharmaceutical products from their home countries, as I discuss further in Chapter 4. In response, the ICC stressed the need to enforce their own epistemic authority in the realms of

isthmian medicine. Throughout the construction period, all employees of the ICC, regardless of race or nationality, were promised affordable medical attention in American hospitals—but only in Canal Zone hospitals. The ICC emphasized that they not only encouraged ill employees to receive medical treatment in hospitals but that these were the only legitimate avenue to ensure the larger biomedical security of the Canal Zone They reasoned that "[i]t is proposed to care for the sick in the hospitals in all cases of serious illness. The patients not only receive better care in the hospitals than they could elsewhere, but the special precautions taken at the hospitals to prevent the spread of disease by insects safeguard the public health."[34] Yet, West Indians continued to secretly resort to bed rest in their own quarters and with their own medical knowledges, fearing the hospital as only a place of further bodily suffering and hostile patient-physician encounters.[35]

These same modernized hospitals in the Canal Zone also served sites of religious work for US-Americans with attempts of spiritually assessing and converting ailing West Indians and foreigners.[36] Christian clergymen who roamed the wards of the Canal Zone's hospitals or made the hospital chapel their home regarded the hospital as a site of religious work and transformation. Thus, Canal Zone hospitals became a place for US-American biomedical professionals and Protestant ministers to exert their authority over diverse swaths of patients. West Indians, in turn, viewed visits to the hospital as fearsome with its coercive technologies and

[34] ICC, *Letter from the Secretary of War, Transmitting the First Annual Report of the Isthmian Canal Commission, December 1, 1904* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1905), 51.

[35] Harrigan Austin to IHS, "Isthmian Historical Society Competition for the Best True Stories of Life and Work on the Isthmus of Panama during the Construction of the Panama Canal," Letter, 1963, Museo Afroantillano de Panamá.

[36] Later iterations of surveillance and disciplinary power outside the US-governed Canal Zone are explored further in Ezer Vierba, *The Singer's Needle: An Undisciplined History of Panamá* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

cultural disconnects, preferring in some cases to stay home and concoct their own remedies. The evasion of the ICC hospital among West Indian laborers was a reality of which ICC authorities learned early during the Canal's construction era. The challenge of bringing medical care required that Canal Zone authorities remake the mobility and geography of its medical power. As the rest of this chapter explores, the hospital as a unit would become a permanent structure surrounded by multiple pervasive and more mobile clinical sites and apparatuses in the Canal Zone.

## The Sick Camp

Before arriving to Ancon Hospital, the same Bahamian Albert Peters recalled that his first "hospital visit" surprised him when he discovered the hospital consisted of "a row of Army tents and the beds army cots."[37] Despite the multiple numbers of hospitals the US government built along the Canal Zone for ICC employees, the sheer volume of ill or injured patients still managed to overwhelm the hospitals and its dispensary stations. As a result, the US government had to resort to makeshift sick camps to accommodate patients. Already by 1905, the sick camp became the more frequent site for medical care in the Canal Zone in the town of Paraiso, with the ICC describing them as serving "for the immediate care of sick employes [*sic*] until their removal to the hospital."[38] Most of these camps were designed as provisional structures. Some even had the fortune of being disbanded for patients to all find care in formal hospitals, as had occurred in the district of Gorgona in March of 1908.[39] Nonetheless, the sick camp was the medical space where most West Indian laborers went to for their immediate care. The sick camps

[37] Peters to IHS, "Isthmian Historical Society Competition," 1963.

[38] P. O. Wright, "Commission Buildings," *The Canal Record, Vol. 1*, December 25, 1907, 134.

[39] William C. Gorgas, "Health Report for March," *The Canal Record, Vol. 1*, December 25, 1907, 261.

distributed along the Canal Zone had a steady population of roughly 5,000 white patients and 11,000 Black patients all year round. They, therefore, became an engrained part of the Zone's spatial arrangement since its early years of occupation.

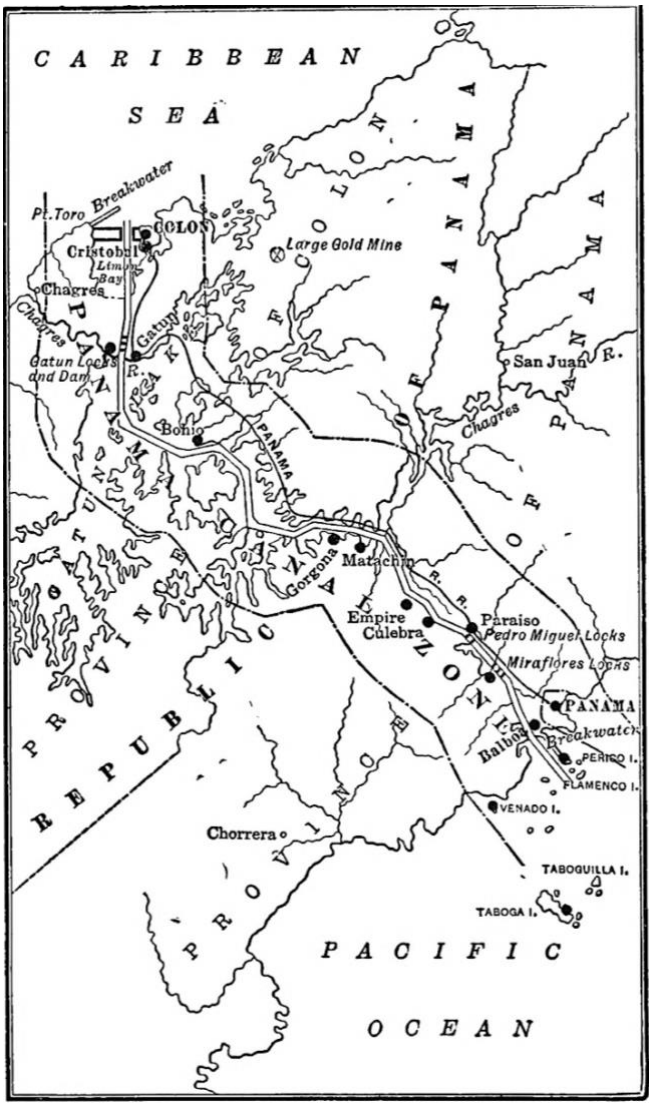


Figure 3-3. Map of the Panama Canal Zone, showing hospitals, dispensaries, and camps of the Sanitary Department. Source: Gorgas, *Sanitation in Panama*.

More generally, "the camp" as a spatial unit has been part of the US's imperial infrastructure in the Caribbean for much of the twentieth century. Its architects often have justified its existence under the guise of benevolent humanitarian aid. Historians studying "the

camp" have describe it as a zone of exception and as spatial articulations of colonial violence.[40] The camp—with its hastily assembled infrastructure and dual temporality of being an indefinite but non-permanent home for the colonized—produced a common sense of emergency among the military and the displaced alike. Many of these camps functioned as isolated, atomized zones of isolation, where many medical treatments and corporal surveillance occurred through coerced violence outside of the law.[41] Into the early twentieth-century, the camp as a tool of imperial governance formed part of the Canal Zone's repertoire of biomedical rule as well.

In the Canal Zone, "the camp" was a space with which West Indian laborers became acquainted soon after arriving at the isthmus and before the official start of their labor tenure. Governor Charles E. Magoon of the Zone authorized the construction of detention camps outside of Panama City and Colón City. That is, the ICC instituted detention camps in the port cities through which West Indian laborers and other travelers landed in the Panamanian isthmus, sometimes unvaccinated. These maritime quarantine camps allowed, in addition, for the Canal Zone government to "collect" all non-inoculated individuals living in the cities of Panama and Colón. Unvaccinated individuals would then be held in these camps "to be detained in such camps so long as may be necessary."[42] Encampments, then, were an essential organizing unit of Canal Zone society's security, especially when attempting to govern and manage multiracial, highly mobile populations.

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[40] Andreas Stucki, "'Frequent Deaths': The Colonial Development of Concentration Camps Reconsidered, 1868-1974," *Journal of Genocide Research* 20, no. 3 (September 2018): 305–26.

[41] Ann Laura Stoler, "A Deadly Embrace: Of Colony and Camp," in *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 82. See also Neel Ahuja, "Refugee Medicine, HIV, and a 'Humanitarian Camp' at Guantánamo," in *Bioinsecurities: Disease Interventions, Empire, and the Government of Species* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 169–93.

[42] ICC, *Minutes of Meetings of the Isthmian Canal Commission 1905: Oct/Dec* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1908), 23.

Once living and working in the Zone, West Indian employees frequently had to first admit themselves into sick camps before being considered for hospital care. Those sick camps, much more numerous than hospital were connected to Zone towns. The transportation of sick laborers of color in the Canal Zone—away from their construction site—to one of the Canal Zone hospitals presented a challenge to Zone administrators. To relieve the need to coordinate transportation, sick camps in every town allowed Zone authorities to maintain control of the physical geography of ill laborers.[43] Nonetheless, those who went to the sick camp were not those on the so-called "gold roll." White ICC employees and other gold-roll workers typically received treatment in their own quarters if they did not admit themselves to one of the Canal Zone's hospitals. White employees also frequently went to private medical practices to receive medicine or were told to employ sick leave to remain at home for a day of work.[44] According to ICC Department of Health reports, more Black patients of West Indian origins were housed in the sick camps than in the hospitals, rendering the sick camp a site for where racial difference in the Zone was constructed as well.

The configuration of the sick camp as a transitory zone between illness and health rendered it into a place of warped sense of West Indians' health and bodily autonomy. During his own stay at a sick camp, Albert Peters' experiences were marked by a sense of detachment from the rest of the Zone's communities and urban life. On his first day, Peters remembers witnessing the man in the cot next to him die, which brought to Peters regretful memories of his parents in Nassau begging him to not go to Panama for work with his friends. After five days of "mostly living on quinine," Peters recovered from his ailment. He left the sick camp to resume work with

[43] "Caring for the Sick," *The Canal Record, Vol. 2,* April 14, 1909.

[44] "Caring for the Sick."

his friends—only to know that all of them, with whom he had traveled from Nassau to Panama, had left Tabernilla. Within the camp's tented walls, time felt frozen for Peters, with collective visions of the future and shared memories of the past becoming truncated. Just as the aim of ICC's designing of the sick camp was a shortening of time and space for medical care on the isthmus, a shortening of time and spatial awareness became part of West Indians' experiences, too. More specifically, the West Indian attained a sense of feeling divorced from his social circles and ties outside the camps walls. Part of the technology of the sick camp, then, was to have the worker to see sanitary discipline as a bond between their bodies and the ICC's physicians and not tied to a mobile West Indian diasporas' healing community.[45] In doing so, the ICC aimed to prevent workers from constructing their own community-based medical networks, with only US physicians gaining the authority to read and treat their bodies. Under the modern medical treatment, the atomization of West Indians bodies, ironically, was for their integration into a larger system of public health efforts to eradicate tropical disease.

For West Indian cultural ties, the protocols of Canal Zone physicians led a further loss of the community dimension present in Afro-Caribbean folk medicine and group rituals. As Rose Van Hardeveld highlighted in her memoir, weeping and wailing were common among West Indian communities following the death of a friend or loved one. Community care and rituals remained a cultural tradition in Panama even after migration and the scattering of West Indian diasporas, as was the case with the mourning Martinicans near Colón pier after 1905 mutiny. Because of the frequency of deaths in the Canal's construction, the sound of wailing became commonplace to hear even from the nearby white homes in the Canal Zone. One day, Rose Van

[45] Michel Foucault made a similar observation on the transition between medical epistemes, causing the physician's gaze to objectify and individualize patients' health. See Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 1991).

Hardeveld was walking near sanitary structures, when she saw that physicians were transporting an injured and dying worker to a hospital. The doctors were dreading the arrival of West Indian laborers. Then, a group of five Black women approached wailing and weeping, having heard of the injured laborer's probable fate of death. The physicians tried to push the wailing women away, prohibiting that they follow them to the hospital.[46] The US medical system in the Zone then sought to suppress any participation or presence of other West Indians in their treatment of an individual West Indian subject. The mobility of Canal Zone medical care was meant to handle all matters over a West Indian worker's body, labor, and leisure.

Despite restrictions from physicians, workers continued to exercise control over their own health and treatments, accepting and rejecting medical treatments as patients. Although Peters eventually recovered from his malarial episodes at the camp, other ill West Indian laborers sometimes left the sick camps and medical dispensaries with more health issues and more skeptical of the camp's treatments. Entering these medical spaces for West Indian laborers, who already faced dangers and hardships in their everyday working life, was seen as too risky. The use and abuse of quinine was a common medical experience in the sick camps and dispensaries. Harrigan Austin, another West Indian laborer, remarked that some attending nurses and doctors did not have enough training and knowledge to know how to treat "a sick human being."[47] Much like in the larger hospital, the same cultural disconnect and lack of dialogue between the colonial doctor and the colonized subject played out in the smaller spaces of the sick camp.[48] For

[46] Hardeveld, *Make the Dirt Fly!*, 50.

[47] Austin to IHS, "Isthmian Historical Society Competition," 1963.

[48] On a general theorization on modern colonialism's shaping of unequal medical encounters, see Fanon, "Medicine and Colonialism," 121–46.

instance, West Indians critiqued doctors' dependence of quinine in their anti-malaria measures, noting it provoked new and more severe health problems they had not had before. In *Sanitation in Panama*, Colonel William C. Gorgas noted that laborers in the Canal Zone were required to take quinine daily to prevent epidemics and ensure worker productivity. The workers, nonetheless, sometimes refused to take the daily quinine. At sick camps and dispensaries, workers would throw the quinine out of windows, in one case causing a doctor's roaming pet turkey to grow ill from after consuming the medicine.[49] Overconsumption of quinine caused deleterious effects among Zone laborers as well; for example, excessive consumption supposedly led to deafness among the sick laborers. Peters remarked that "quinine was prescribed until many persons couldn't even hear when the engineer blew the engine whistle to get the off the railroad track, and many were killed."[50]

Despite the brevity of the doctor's work shift in the camp for the day, physicians visiting the silver-roll employees at camps also assessed the ill workers' individual spiritual health. West Indian laborer J. A. Williams reported that he developed a fever while working on the bank of the Chagres River during the Canal's construction. A doctor sent Williams to a nearby sick camp, but not before asking if Williams feared God. When Williams replied "yes," the doctor informed Williams that he would most likely die from his developing fever. At the sick camp, Williams waited for the train to arrive and then take him to Ancon Hospital for further treatment.

In this case, like the hospital that Williams later visited, the sick camp also acted as a space of religious surveillance.[51] Acting also as spiritual mediators before ailing patients, doctors

[49] Gorgas, *Sanitation in Panama*, 221–23.

[50] Austin to IHS, "Isthmian Historical Society Competition," 1963.

[51] J. A. Williams to IHS, "Isthmian Historical Society Competition for the Best True Stories of Life and Work on the Isthmus of Panama during the Construction of the Panama Canal," Letter, 1963, Museo Afroantillano de Panamá.

assessed the state of laborers' spiritual health in addition to their physical health. In physical examinations of patients, the two forms of health became almost indistinguishable from one another. In this period, the physical vulnerability of laborers allowed for this form of total biomedical and religious intervention on the part of the physicians briefly visiting the sick camp. However, this form of surveillance also occurred outside of the sick camp within the silver quarters and labor camps that healthy and unhealthy laborers made their homes in alike.

The sick camp, a more portable and easily constructed site for medical care, spearheaded the work of medical authorities in pushing the Canal Zone government's frontiers of religio-medical surveillance closer to West Indian spaces in towns. Even for workers who did not have the desire or the resources to visit a large hospital like Ancon, the sick camps diffused and render elastic the ICC's surveillance into the work sites of West Indian laborers. In the process, sick camps resulted in usurping the community health ties among West Indians with the authority of modern US biomedical professionals. These measures by the ICC were practices of ensuring West Indians did not slip away from the epistemological cohesion of the Canal Zone's biomedical regime Yet, as the experiences of laborers and the observations of US doctors illustrated, laborers still found ways to evading and circumventing these infrastructures. In their memories, they critiqued the sick camps' reproduction of US physicians' medical power over West Indians. As another form of a camp will illustrate, even more mobile means of epistemological policing further shifted the US's elastic frontiers of health surveillance into West Indians' very homes.

## The Labor Camp

Within their sanitary rules, the ICC regarded anything that was a threat to life or human health to be a "nuisance" and as a justification for fining or arrest.[52] Examples of these kinds of existential threats included overcrowded buildings and cellars, buildings with poor ventilation, or buildings with poor lighting. Any local non-US-American residents found creating or contributing to "nuisance" risked facing a fine between five to fifty *balboas* for each day contributed to the nuisance in question.[53] To find cases of nuisances, health officers had the power to enter the properties and homes in Panama City and in Colón City, the city that West Indian communities most heavily inhabited. If necessary, health officers were allowed to call on the local Panamanian police forces for additional help in inspecting property, both public and private.[54] Residents in the Canal Zone and the Republic of Panama were also offered monetary rewards if they reported a case of untreated yellow fever in their midst, which would allow sanitarians to trace the original source of the contagion. Throughout the Canal Zone, sanitary brigades or sanitation crews were tasked with "clearing bush" and sanitizing areas from providing breeding grounds for mosquitos, primarily to protect the gold-roll workers' health.[55] Sanitary workers often are depicted in photographs placing oil or setting ablaze marshes where mosquitoes bred. Yet, acting as intermediaries between the ICC and intimate spaces of Canal

[52] *Sanitary Rules and Regulations*, 7.

[53] *Sanitary Rules and Regulations*, 7.

[54] *Sanitary Rules and Regulations*, 8.

[55] Sanitary brigades are not unique or exclusive to Panama or the Canal Zone. They also appeared in other Latin American countries during the early twentieth-century, as sanitarians began to harness more state-building power. For an example of revolts against sanitary brigades in a similar act of anti-vaccination violence in Brazil, see Jeffrey D. Needell, "The Revolta Contra Vacina of 1904: The Revolt against 'Modernization' in Belle-Époque Rio de Janeiro," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 67, no. 2 (1987): 233–69; Lilia Moritz Schwarcz, *The Spectacle of the Races: Scientists, Institutions and the Race Question in Brazil, 1870-1930*, trans. Leland Guyer (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999).

Zone life, the sanitary crewmen also enforced ICC regulations within US-Americans, Panamanians, West Indians' homes.[56]

Figure 3-4. Sanitary squad cleaning Panama City. Source: Bishop, *Panama, Past and Present*.

Sanitary brigades allowed the Canal Zone's government to extend its range of medical surveillance across the varying town sites and districts of the Zone's geography. In the process, these biomedical practices in Panama also produced a distorted rendering of the West Indians' bodies and domestic spaces in an invasive manner. One instance of the sanitary brigade's mobility and inspection of residents' bodies was in November of 1904. A sanitary brigade approached a group of twenty-eight schoolboys and sixteen schoolgirls at the nearby town of Bohio. The brigade drew blood from the forty-four children to detect any malarial specimen in their body. Twenty-nine of them tested positive. For ten days, medical officers examined the

[56] Senior, *Dying to Better Themselves*, 150–51.

twenty-nine children's bloodwork and gave them six grains of daily quinine. [57] The frontiers of medical officers and sanitary brigades then stretched into new, formerly ungoverned spaces and entangled different individuals, including children. The elasticity of these medical frontiers was made possible primarily by the mobility of medical officers and sanitary crewmen to travel across various terrains in the Zone. The unequal production of medical knowledge then was not reserved to the laboratories of Ancon Hospital. Children's routes to school, labor camps, and the Canal's ditches themselves also could quickly transform into sites of scientific fieldwork.

Through medical officers' experiments, labor camps transformed into places for US-Americans' scientific data collection, thereby treating Black living spaces as disease reservoirs and grounds for experimentation. Silver-roll employees' living quarters consisted of barracks or former railroad sleeping cars. In most cases, ICC regulations already heavily restricted West Indians' freedom of movement and activity in these quarters. As Olive Senior has noted, West Indians slept in over-crowded spaces where a single individual with pneumonia could infect everybody surrounding them.[58] Camps were often attached to or in the outskirts of Canal Zone town along with makeshift huts and bungalows in zones that European visitors described as a "half-jungle life with its freedom."[59] Bachelors' barracks usually house up to 80 men in open walls meant ventilation and screens to deter mosquitoes. In these settings, men often lacked privacy and grew frustrated by their neighbors' noises.[60] They also lived under strict curfew at night and faced loitering charges if they did not have the lodging ticket that wardsmen usually

[57] William C. Gorgas, *Report of the Department of Health of the Isthmian Canal Commission for the Month of November 1904* (Panama: ICC Press, 1905), 15–16.

[58] Senior, *Dying to Better Themselves*, 154.

[59] Senior, 228–29.

[60] Senior, 230–31.

distributed at the ICC mess halls during dinner.[61] The new tickets distributed daily was to ensure that silver-roll workers were eating the ICC's food and thus maintaining their labor productivity. However, it was also a tool of monitoring the mobility and movement of West Indians, whom the ICC regarded as disorderly and troublesome, by making sure they were in authorized spaces and not cooking dinner elsewhere.

The ICC's characterization of Black labor camps as unruly and disorderly informed sanitary health workers' perspective as they held experiments. The latter saw labor camps as sites of untranslated tropical medical knowledge they needed to harvest. As a result, US medical surveillance's medical frontiers sometimes extended into the very homes of West Indians. In the construction period, experiments were not totally uncommon practices from the Department of Sanitation to understand the spread and infection of tropical diseases. Some experiments involved inoculation trials with live animals, like mules, dogs, rats, and guinea pigs—not human subjects.[62] However, because US medical officers knew significantly less about malaria than yellow fever in their eradication campaigns, they needed further data on how it spread through mosquitos in swamp areas. In trying to decipher this epidemiological mystery, medical officers came to identify the ailing West Indian homes and bodies as the primary vectors of contamination. Medical officers frequented the labor camps where West Indians lived. There, they collected samples of *anopheles* mosquitoes, trapping the specimen in the patients' temporary quarters. In this process, US medical officers rummaged through patients' possessions

[61] Aaron Clarke to IHS, "Isthmian Historical Society Competition for the Best True Stories of Life and Work on the Isthmus of Panama during the Construction of the Panama Canal," Letter, 1963, Museo Afroantillano de Panamá.

[62] For descriptions of animal experiments, see William C. Gorgas, *Report of the Department of Sanitation of the Isthmian Canal Commission for the Month of May 1912* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1912), 41–42.

on suspicion of mosquitoes residing within the patients' belongings.[63] In some cases, they also measured how quickly mosquitos traveled from labor camps to a lamp located outside their barracks. The medical officers conducted these experiments by placing a tent along the circumference an imaginary circle around a barrack with adult laborers.[64]

In these scientific incursions and in the architectural construction of West Indian homes, the ICC imagined diseased and non-diseased people in labor camps as ecologically indistinguishable from one another and as deliberately undermining sanitation efforts. Even the objects in the West Indians' possessions in these camps were seen as inseparable from the swarm of mosquitoes, as sanitarians frequently rummaged through residents' belongings in searches for mosquito specimen. Eroding the humanity of West Indians in the camps, the data collection that occurred for several years in the Canal Zone allowed for a decrease in malaria but also a disintegration of the West Indian's personhood. Working on the behalf of the ICC, these brigades suspected West Indians had a natural proclivity to subvert sanitation efforts. Thus, sanitary brigades' inspections of in West Indian homes were also acts of information gathering from state intermediaries. Furthermore, while designing the architecture of these barracks, ICC architects suggested that they anticipated that laborers might damage mosquito screens of silver-roll structures by accident or by will alike.[65] The construction of labor camps was intended to reinforce frontiers of racial difference and blackness. But the way in which these labor camps became liminal edges of the Zone's biomedical security still disturbed US-Americans. Much like the fictionalized characters in popular novels had, Americans feared that West Indians living

[63] William C. Gorgas, *Report of the Department of Sanitation for the Month of August, 1909* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1910), 60–61.

[64] Gorgas, 60–61.

[65] Wright, "Commission Buildings."

along these edges of US jurisdiction were engaging in unsanitary practices and breeding disorder.

Defending the Zone from any disruptions in the labor camps, ICC surveillance power diffused among various ICC authorities: policemen, firemen, ministers, and sanitarians. The power to monitor the sanitary and moral lifestyles of West Indians became a shared authority among religious actors, medical inspectors, and policemen alike. Policemen, in particular, maintained frequent surveillance as "watchmen" over the camps to prevent idleness among ill workers and prevent sexual promiscuity among women in the Zone. In one case, a West Indian laborer named Aaron Clarke remembered a particular police officer, Mr. Smith, who tracked down workers who were sick or described as "lazy" to arrest and jail them. One day, Clarke and his friend Arnie were walking in search of new jobs. When they heard a whistle blow, they turned and saw a policeman on horseback approaching them. The policeman approached Arnie and asked him if he was working, to which Arnie responded with a "no." After that day, the last Clarke heard of Arnie was news that he was serving a thirty-day sentence in Gatún's jails.[66] In the Canal Zone, idleness among workers like Clarke and Arnie represented possibilities of criminality as well as biomedical, religious transgression. In another case, Harrigan Austin, a laborer at the Canal Zone in 1905, briefly described the struggles over pluralized medical knowledges in living quarters. He recalled that workers who sought to use their own healing remedies and skip work in their labor camps "would be brutalized and carried to jail."[67]

Police presence in the labor camps became essential in restricting the spread of venereal diseases as well, with Zone discourse constructing West Indian women as vectors of these

[66] Clarke to IHS, "Isthmian Historical Society Competition," 1963.

[67] Austin to IHS, "Isthmian Historical Society Competition," 1963.

diseases.[68] Restriction of their mobility to attend work, usually as laundresses and maids, was regularly enforced within the labor camps. When testifying for a US Senate investigation on ICC corruption allegations, Martinican women collectively testified that watchmen were frequently stationed at their camps and allowed no one to enter the camp during the evening. All candles, lights, and otherwise noticeable activity were prohibited after roughly 9:00 p.m.[69] For both women and men of West Indian descent, US-Americans saw any idleness or unproductive behavior as possibilities of laborers intending to disturb public peace and to defy US biomedical authority on healing—much in the same way that *Diamond Dick, Jr.* claimed idle West Indians dabbled in Vodou and Obeah. The nighttime, when West Indians tended to wind down from the day's work by playing music or cooking food on open fire, then was a moment that watchmen especially enforced ICC's restriction over its silver-roll workers.

Much like in the hospitals and sick camps, clergy made frequent appearances in labor camps to study the moral state of West Indians and their families. Testifying for the US Senate, Archdeacon of the Church of England in Panama, Samuel Purcell Hendrick, claimed he spent frequent time visiting Zone towns and camps populated with workers from the Railroad and the Canal. In addition, a Roman Catholic priest, Father G. Laridan, for three years, provided religious services in towns and camps for the Canal laborers. While doing this work along the

[68] Martinican women were particularly portrayed by US government officials are intentionally travelling to the Zone for sex work and to spread venereal diseases to white men. See Neel Ahuja, "Medicalized States of War: Venereal Disease and the Risks of Occupation in Wartime Panamá," in *Bioinsecurities: Disease Interventions, Empire, and the Government of Species* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 71–99; Joan V. Flores-Villalobos, "Colón Women: West Indian Women in the Construction of the Panama Canal, 1904-1914" (PhD diss., New York University, 2018). This is in contrast with the role and depiction of white women in the Canal; see Paul Woodrow Morgan, "The Role of North American Women in U.S. Cultural Chauvinism in the Panama Canal Zone, 1904-1945" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2000).

[69] U.S. Senate, "Investigation of Panama Canal Matters. Hearings before the Committee on Interoceanic Canals of the United States Senate in the Matter of the Senate Resolution Adopted January 9, 1906. Vol. 1," § Committee on Interoceanic Canals (1907), 2007.

Canal Zone, he reported that he also inspected the moral character of Martinican laborers in their living quarters. He frequently visited their living camps, assessing the ill laborers on sick leave and thought to be on bed rest.[70] Priests and pastors visited and observed the routines of West Indians. The clergymen were initially concerned in noticing that West Indians sometimes left Panama to visit their home countries before returning to the Canal Zone. Most of the time, West Indians travelled to provide financial support to their overseas families. However, Christian clergy feared that West Indians used these frequent migrations to orchestrate immoral and rebellious escapades. Much like the police and military acting as intermediaries on behalf of the Canal Zone government, religious clergy also engaged in acts of information gathering and surveillance under the suspicion of inherent Black criminality and abnormality.

Precisely because the homes of West Indians were encampments, the US Canal Zone authorities saw the labor camps as disposable and easy to tear apart, if needed. Rather than constitute domestic spaces, in the same way that the gold-roll labor quarters represented, labor camps were reduced to replaceable infrastructure. A 1905 a bubonic plague epidemic exemplified this thinking in the Canal Zone town of La Boca. In their response, the ICC instituted stricter quarantine rules, the fumigation of buildings, the extermination of rats and mice, and the additional stationing of police officers around La Boca. After a month of extensive anti-epidemic measures, US-American authorities lifted quarantine when no more cases of the bubonic plague were reported in La Boca. Yet, when a laborer from Barbados, thought to have been bitten by a rogue flea, fell ill with the bubonic plague several weeks later, US-American took even more drastic actions. The laborer had been living in a labor camp with 300 other men

[70] U.S. Senate, 940.

at the time. Sanitary officials burnt down the building that the sick laborer had lived in and other nearby barracks in the camp. After this, no more cases were reported.[71]

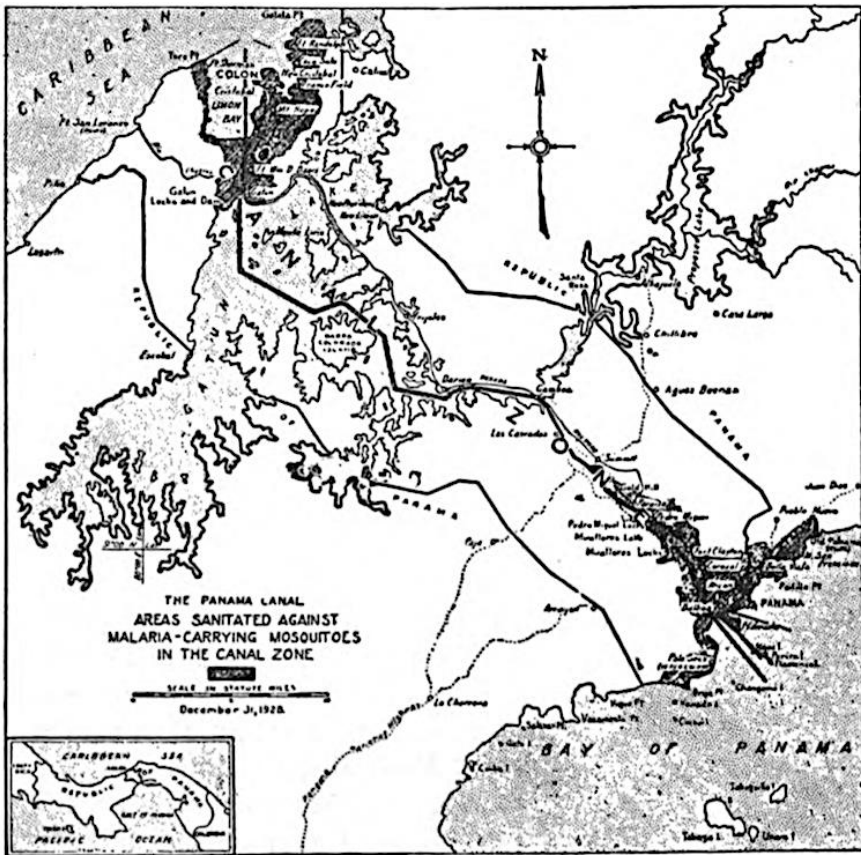


Figure 3-5. Map with canal spaces that are considered "sanitized" shaded dark in the Canal's two terminals, with unshaded areas without anti-mosquito work by October 1928. Source: James Stevens Simmons, *Malaria in Panama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1939).

Labor camps in towns' outskirts served as places to contain Black populations in the white enclave of the Canal Zone, but they still generated fears of imperial insecurity in the Zone. While providing these segregated quarters for West Indians, the ICC and US-Americans came to see these dense living quarters as liminal, border spaces of disorder and for multiplying tropical diseases that risked spilling contagions over into white spaces. As a result, ICC officials viewed

[71] Loveridge, *Panama Padre*, 102.

the labor camp as a site requiring surveillance from spiritual, medical, and police authorities. In the process, West Indians continued to face invasive policing technologies from the ICC in their own homes. These practices of racial and religio-medical surveillance, in turn, produced the constant shifting of the US's medical frontiers, while further hardening its racial borders and separating its white Zone life from a pathologized blackness.

## Conclusion

As religio-medical authorities navigated labor camps, sick camps, and hospitals in the Canal Zone, religious and medical surveillance of Black communities in the Canal Zone became common practice. The colonial insecurities in the Canal Zone produced a discursive demarcation of US security through the construction of everyday imperial racial grammars that portrayed Blackness as a threat to Canal Zone society's spiritual, biomedical, and physical security. Subsequently, US-Americans built a physical demarcation of a geography of security. In this geography, Black and tropical spaces became seen as liminal frontiers that needed policing and containment. In turn, the ICC constructed facilities and technologies that allowed police, clergy, and sanitary crewmen to mediate and assess the moral, bodily vulnerabilities of West Indians. After gathering information and data, they could consequentially curb the physical mobility of West Indian laborers, if needed. As the next chapter explores at length, West Indian laborers formed strategies and networks to respond to these imperial technologies. In doing so, they maintained and contributed to a history of Black Atlantic spatial practices and, thus, survived and circumvented the Canal Zone surveillance structures

# CHAPTER 4
# THE BLACK ATLANTIC'S CANAL ZONE

> So history is spread out beneath this surface, from the mountains to the sea, from north to south, from the forest to the beaches. Maroon resistance and denial, entrenchment and endurance, the world beyond and dream.[1]
>
> –Édouard Glissant

What caused the Martinicans' fear of the smallpox when they arrived at Colón in September 1905? Why did they resist the US medical power by occupying a ship and striking? This chapter argues that West Indians in the Canal Zone area confronted the Canal Zone's surveillance practices through radical acts of Black placemaking and by drawing on a rich intellectual heritage of the Black Atlantic. In the Americas, Black placemaking appears as Black subjects "creat[ing] sites of endurance, belonging, and resistance" when faced with colonial or racist domination.[2] In Panama specifically, West Indians' memories of Atlantic slavery, transnational networks in the Caribbean, and Obeah and Vodou's conceptual tools became the necessary foundations for West Indians to engage in placemaking. In doing so, they produced a subterranean process of melding US-dominated Canal Zone societies to the modern Black Atlantic world. As other scholars of West Indians in Panama have examined, West Indians forged their own cultural spheres in the Zone, despite exclusion and discrimination from both US-Americans and Panamanians.[3] Examining a Black Atlantic Canal Zone's cultural and

[1] Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash, 3rd ed. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 11.

[2] See Hunter et al., "Black Placemaking," 32. They also argue that "black sociability is rooted in physical and virtual spaces that are remade into black places through claims and practices of endurance, along with a healthy dose of verse, song, and poetry" (33).

[3] For a general overview of the scholarship on West Indians' cultural and diasporic histories in Panama, see Claudia Milian and Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo, "Introduction: Interoceanic Diasporas and The Panama Canal's Centennial," *The Global South* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 1–14. Other works that explore this include Corinealdi, "Envisioning Multiple Citizenships"; Sharika Crawford, "Panama Fever: Colombian Fears of Secession on San Andrés and Providencia Islands, 1903–1913," *The Global South* 6, no. 2 (June 6, 2013): 15–38; Zien, *Sovereign Acts*. For early

epistemic history allows us to understand how the "voodoo doctor" and alternative religio-medical authorities endured during the Colón 1905 mutiny and within West Indians' religious imaginaries in Panama.

To study Black fugitivity and placemaking in the Canal Zone, the examination of Afro-diasporic literary works—particularly *Tropic Death* by Eric Walrond—is crucial. In studying subaltern individuals in Afro-Latin America, David Kazanjian echoes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in calling for an "exercise of the imagination" by historians to generate a "kind of thinking that is askew from the empirically verifiable, a thinking that draws on, moves elsewhere from, but does not precisely refute empirical research."[4] Approaching Black literary works as primary sources allows for an engagement in this imaginative exercise by viewing literature as an archive of West Indian texts that the ICC's archives would not preserve. Rukmini Bhaya Nair has also noted that "literature exposes the interiors of history and brings point of view, subjectivity, to bear on brute fact."[5] For subaltern historians and literary critics, Nair argues that historians can view literature from a postcolonial perspective as type of a subhistory.[6]

In addition to literary works, the sources for this chapter consist of US War Department correspondence, Canal Zone sanitary laws, newspaper articles, and West Indian oral histories. Despite these sources centering white Zonians' voices, there do indeed exist flashes of West Indian agency in the newspaper articles and War Department letters, but they consist of mostly fragments overshadowed by US diplomatic and colonial discourses. When paired with other

approaches of highlighting Black diasporas' history in the Panama Canal's construction, see Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*; Watson, *The Politics of Race in Panama*.

[4] Kazanjian, "Freedom's Surprise," 134–35.

[5] Nair, "The Pedigree of the White Stallion," 163.

[6] Nair, 170.

devices of historical analysis, like literary narrations, however, these fragments aid in reconstructing the historic Black Atlantic imaginaries present in the Canal Zone. This approach allows us to shift the perspective of a document's author, like a governor or diplomat, to that of a dominated, subaltern subject. From there, spatial and historical contextual knowledge can aid in filling the gaps or silences of the traditional archive.[7] Thus, combining traditional historical sources and literary sources, this chapter illustrates how West Indian migrants found ways to practice subversive acts of Black placemaking in the Canal Zone. The "epistemic murk" that US-Americans' novels and memoirs produced on Black religiosity and health then can clear up momentarily.[8] For a moment, we can see how West Indians in the Canal Zone imagined themselves, the Zone, and the larger Caribbean.

The first section of this chapter discusses how a collective memory of struggles over the Black body during the age of Atlantic slavery's formed part of Martinicans' pool of interpretive tools and shared metaphors when confronting the ICC's religio-medical regime as modern echo of former landscapes of slavery.[9] The second section establishes how such similar shared meanings and discursive tools for survival permeated through the Greater Caribbean. It finds that Obeah practices and laborers' oral networks traveled throughout Caribbean, leading to Martinicans on the arrival to Colón to develop their own cautionary judgments of the Canal

[7] On this method, see Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 4. Other historians of the colonial Caribbean who employ similar methods to find subaltern agency in colonial archives include Pablo F. Gómez, *The Experiential Caribbean: Creating Knowledge and Healing in the Early Modern Atlantic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); David Wheat, *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 1570-1640* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Jane Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

[8] Taussig, "Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man, 507.

[9] On the plantation landscape and spatial orders of slavery, see Dale W. Tomich et al., *Reconstructing the Landscapes of Slavery: A Visual History of the Plantation in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021).

Zone's labor and medical regime.[10] The final section concludes by investigating how these shared hermeneutical tools, radical spatial imaginings of the Caribbean world, and practices of Obeah spirituality allowed for other West Indians already in the Canal Zone to articulate resistance, confound colonial authorities, preserve their autonomy in the Canal Zone. They did so by reinterpreting the spatial orders of the Caribbean, subverting the US's official mappings of the Canal Zone by keeping its Afro-Caribbean networks and histories alive. This chapter decenters the US's imperial security power in the Canal Zone. It reexamines the Canal Zone not as only an enclave of imperial power and technological innovation but as also a space that West Indians integrated into of the Black Caribbean-Atlantic world.

## Memories of Unfreedom

White Americans' historical memories of white nations' other global imperial campaigns also marked how they perceived their Black neighbors in the Canal Zone, as well as themselves. Walking about Panama, US-Americans fantasized about walking in the steps of former imperial conquerors in Panama's historic ruins. The Zonian Elizabeth Parker remembered saying to her husband, "You know, Charlie… I wonder what the old conquistadors and pirates of the Spanish Main would think the Isthmus now."[11] In a similar allusion to shared imperial pasts, Rose Hardeveld, the wife of the US engineer that arrived in the Canal Zone, employed the term "fuzzy wuzzy" to describe the Black women whom she encountered in the isthmus. Originally, the term was coined by the British in nineteenth-century Africa and made popular by a Rudyard Kipling

[10] Similar oral networks among Afro-descendants in the Caribbean during and prior to the Haitian Revolution. See Julius S. Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (London, UK: Verso, 2018). Scholars are exploring the endurance of these oral networks across vast temporal scales. Among them are those scholars of slavery featured in the forthcoming issue of *Slavery & Abolition* dedicated to the histories of maritime marronage.

[11] Parker, *Panama Canal Bride*, 59.

poem. In imagining the Canal Zone's history and their part in it the Canal Zone, US-Americans drew on the Canal Zone's imperial histories: Henry Morgan's seventeenth-century sacking of Panama and the nineteenth-century partition of Africa.

In contrast, US-Americans in the Canal Zone by the late 1910s came to believe that West Indians lacked such a functioning historical consciousness. In their memoirs and essays, US-Americans rarely wondered out loud if their West Indians neighbors had memories of the history of empires and slavers in the Caribbean. Rather, they fully theorized that West Indians lacked a psychological capacity equal to those of US-Americans. In the late 1910s, Bishop George A. Miller drafted a psychological profile of the average West Indian man in Panama. He wrote that US-American observers who sought to analyze the West Indian man found "he does not understand himself."[12] According to Bishop Miller, he was too busy with work, partaking in the plantation and Canal labor of Panama, to engage in any deep, reflective analysis of himself: "He has enough other things to occupy his attention."[13] Furthermore, because of the cultural differences between West Indians and African Americans in the United States, Miller argued against classifying the two Black diasporic groups in a single group. He instead sought to distinguish West Indians as their own separate racial subcategory of man with their own psychological qualities.[14]

On the other hand, West Indians' own descriptions of Canal Zone life show us that West Indians indeed saw themselves as inheritors of Atlantic and imperial histories. West Indians were

[12] George A. Miller, *Prowling About Panama* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1919), 198.

[13] Miller, 198.

[14] On the study of Man and Human as a racial project and construction, see Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337.

not filled with a psychological and historical amnesia but rather were imbued with a historical consciousness as living subjects in the twentieth-century Caribbean. Immediately noticeable instances of this include documented West Indians' documented interactions with indigenous Panamanians in the 1900s construction era. At the colonial ruins in Santa Cruz and Portobelo, indigenous Panamanians recounted their collective, popular memories of the Caribbean's colonial histories, as West Indians listened. In one encounter, West Indians and other Canal laborers listened intently to indigenous storytellers talk about Vasco Núñez de Balboa's crossing of Panama in the sixteenth century, making visual use of the old anchors on display in relating this history.[15] Even in their brief moments of leisure, West Indians were made aware and incorporated the histories of imperial conquests and crossings in the circum-Caribbean. However, it is worth noting they obtained this historical knowledge not from the traditional US-American, Western epistemic regime of history, but rather from indigenous Panamanians who shared their collective memory that had been passed down across generations.

In addition to learning about imperial and indigenous pasts in Panama, West Indians carried their own inherited historical memories from the Black Caribbean. Laced within Afro-Caribbean religious cosmologies were traces and allusions to the history of enslavement and racial terror of the Middle Passage. Haitian Vodou and Brazilian candomblé spiritual practices, for example, purposefully provoked recollections of the Middle Passage by having novice practitioners lie together and bind themselves with chains, echoing the bodies of enslaved captives decades prior.[16] Like those practitioners, West Indians in the Panama's Black Atlantic,

[15] See Clarke to IHS, "Isthmian Historical Society Competition," 1963.

[16] J. Lorand Matory, "Free to Be a Slave: Slavery as Metaphor in the Afro-Atlantic Religions," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 37, no. 3 (January 1, 2007): 415–16.

collective memories of slavery might have served as valuable metaphors in their Atlantic imaginaries. Migrant travelers in the Black Caribbean and Atlantic worlds employed language on slavery as metaphors to articulate their critiques of life in the neocolonial, twentieth-century Caribbean. They used the interpretive tools of their memories of slavery to articulate their Afro-diasporic conceptions of their personhood and power, as well as their fear and horror in the Zone. In one case, the laborer Harrigan Austin, who first landed in Colón in 1905, worked among carpenters in repairing the living quarters. He and the others worked for roughly 80 cents a day with wage hours cut if they refused to work in the rain. Among the primarily West Indian workers, a white foreman stood watch to supervise them, even though he had little to no knowledge of directing a carpenter's ring. In describing this life of harsh labor, Austin wrote:

> Indeed to some degree it was some sort of life of semi-slavery, and there was none to appeal to, for we were strangers and actually compelled to accept what we got, for in any case of an argument we would have to shut up, right or wrong; And the bosses or policemen or other officials right or wrong could be always winning the game, and those men who had chances of filling those positions were generally of the dominating type who tried to bring others into subjection for their fame.[17]

With the lack of legal protection from the French and British governments in the Antilles, migrants like Austin lacked the official language and interpretive tools to express their labor grievances. Thinking back to ancestors' experiences with similar unjust labor regimes allowed workers like Austin to develop the language needed to express their frustrations among each other. With this shared repository of memories and symbols, West Indian workers had the chance to develop their own social grammars, knowing well that their listener might understand what they meant.

[17] Austin to IHS, "Isthmian Historical Society Competition," 1963.

Even before the official start of their labor, West Indians came to perceive the Canal's construction effort as echoes of New World's enslavement from the moment they stepped foot on the isthmus. During the 1905 mutiny at Colón's harbor, maritime quarantine regulations required that all arriving travelers to be vaccinated if they did not bear a recognizable scar of their own.[18] The chief quarantine inspector also had the authority to physically examine each passenger's body prior to their entry into the isthmus's workforce.[19] Such medical authorities could quarantine and detain passengers they found to be ill on a separate ship that no one in the isthmus could enter under any circumstances. In more extreme cases, passengers too ill or seriously disabled were deported back to their homes in the West Indies, as they were not deemed incorporable into the Canal Zone society's labor force and body politic.[20] A look at how the Atlantic slave trade left traces in the memories of West Indians can explain how quarantine detention, mandatory vaccinations, deportations, and medical examinations within the US empire's transit zones provoked protest among twentieth-century West Indians.

Cultural and economic practices that historians trace back to the age of slavery continued serving as tools for West Indians when they navigated everyday life in the Canal Zone. Racial, gender, and economic attitudes were one type of cultural artifact that seeped through post-emancipation generations. As Joan Flores-Villalobos notes, women's revulsion against "half-caste" babies as physical reminders of sexual assault against Black women remained a part of some West Indian women's attitudes toward the white children for whom they cared. West Indian women's selling of goods in the streets through informal street sales was another tradition

[18] Scott, *The Americans in Panama*, 12.

[19] Walker, "Quarantine Regulations, Act No. 10."

[20] Theodore Roosevelt to William H. Taft, "Instructions from the President," Letter, 1905, First Annual Report of the Isthmian Canal Commission, December 1904.

among enslaved women dating back to the eighteenth-century Antilles and continued among their descendants in the Canal Zone. Because of the poor food that the Canal Zone provided for its Black labor force, women's informal food markets allowed alternative sources of sustenance for the West Indian communities.[21] When the food at local or US commissaries were too expensive or the food at ICC kitchens too unsatisfactory, West Indians formed their own local food economies that centered women's labor power and creative recourses. Many of the same cultural beliefs and economic practices that allowed prior enslaved generations to survive, then, also provided West Indian informal avenues to improve their daily lives in the Canal Zone.

Most relevant to the history of the 1905 Mutiny in Colón, the slave trade's codification of human bodies in the Atlantic world more largely also remained a part of West Indians' histories that haunted their imagination. Theoretical scholarship on blackness and the surveillance of Black people in recent years have focused on interpreting what these corporeal acts over enslaved people's bodies signified. Most notably, theorist Simone Brown identifies the branding of enslaved Africans in the Atlantic world as an early form of racial surveillance. Brown does this by drawing on Frantz Fanon and Paul Gilroy's discussions on the processes of "epidermalization," through which Black bodies become "objects among objects."[22] Branding became empires' ritual of corporeally identifying which Black captives were best for labor and reducing them to commodified items of exchange. On the other hand, those captives that slavers deemed less profitable and better suited for death, were also branded with an inscription of "a slow, premature death on Black skin."[23]

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[21] Joan V. Flores-Villalobos, "West Indian Women in the Panama Canal Zone, 1904-1914" (Bachelor's thesis, Amherst, MA, Amherst College, 2010), 51–52.

[22] Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 91.

[23] Browne, 97.

The South Atlantic and Caribbean Basin served for centuries as the central zones for these slaving rituals on Black bodies and skin under the jurisdiction of Iberian empires. Historian Sherwin Bryant notes that "social death [among enslaved people] relied upon the living processes of imperial governance. It relied upon marking, constitution, and governance of non-European bodies for the elaboration of imperial power."[24] One of the ritualistic procedures was the slavers' *visita de sanidad* in present-day Colombia's Cartagena, in which they attempted to "read" and physically examine the bodies of enslaved Africans before placing them on the slave market. In this system of medical observation, the Black body served as a signal of whether a Black captive was incorporable into a colonial slave society. The body's displayed signs—body art, smallpox scars, teeth, and mysterious lines—were meant to be a legible source of colonial knowledge on the person's bodily constitution.[25] After inspections, the branding of enslaved Black people on their right arm or breast converted the Black body into an object of royal power by serving as a perpetual sign of their belonging to an overseas empire. It was also an effort for slavers to create some sort of control over slaves' mobility, temporally and spatially.[26] These processes of surveillance over the bodies of Black captives and travelers, that lasted over centuries, would have formed part of the Black Atlantic imaginaries still circulating around the twentieth-century Panamanian isthmus. These *visitas* and brandings culminated from bouts of

[24] Sherwin K. Bryant, *Rivers of Gold, Lives of Bondage: Governing through Slavery in Colonial Quito.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 51.

[25] Michael Angelo Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

[26] Bryant, *Rivers of Gold, Lives of Bondage*, 81.

racial anxieties preset in colonial-era Colombia and Panama, as well as centuries of dehumanization of the Caribbean's Black diaspora.[27]

Figure 4-1. The S.S Ancon arriving at Cristobal with 1,500 laborers from Barbados set to work on the site of the Panama Canal. Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica Digital Collection.

For twentieth-century West Indians, similar medical inspections and epidermal markings continued to reduce the Black migrant into a conquerable text in the twentieth century. New empires and nation-states continued to encode political and social signifiers onto their bodies prior to labor tenures commencing. Later in the early twentieth century, Haitian, Jamaican, and Puerto Rican migrants continued to receive medical examinations upon their arrival to new

[27] Bryant, *Rivers of Gold, Lives of Bondage*, 73–74. See also Linda Newson and Susie Minchin, *From Capture to Sale: The Portuguese Slave Trade to Spanish South America in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

imperial jurisdictions but also came to receive compulsory vaccinations.[28] In neocolonial Cuba, vaccination and machete scars on migrant workers' bodies showed to employers and other migrants the history of harsh work conditions and state regulations that any laborer might have endured from the late 1890s to roughly the 1930s.[29] Knowledge of vaccinations serving as new ceremonies of arrival onto the Caribbean islands, thus, continued to circulate and spread among migrants in the Greater Caribbean.[30] Although most Afro-Caribbean migrants in the twentieth century traveling for contractual labor, collective memories of enslavement in the circum-Caribbean provided migrant laborers arriving at ports like Colón with postcolonial hermeneutical resources to protest their integration into yet another violent racial order.[31]

Noting that US neocolonialism echoed former forms of Iberian imperialism in the circum-Caribbean allows us to analyze West Indian perspectives that ultimately puncture through the US's own triumphalist narratives of its biomedical and labor regimes.[32] The passengers aboard the Versailles in late September of 1905 stated that they refused to receive the inextinguishable mark of the vaccine, as they suspected that they then would not be able to return home to the Antilles. Thus, for the Martinicans participating in the mutiny, memories of

[28] Matthew Casey, Empire's Guestworkers: Haitian Migrants in Cuba during the Age of US Occupation (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 57.

[29] Casey, 1.

[30] See Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[31] In her theorization of hermeneutical justice and injustice, Fricker defines hermeneutical resources as a group or community's "shared tools of social interpretation." Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6.

[32] With this approach, I take inspiration from Macarena Gómez-Barris's study of how alternative, "submerged" human and non-human perspectives disrupt extractivism's visual representations of the South American rivers. Macarena Gómez-Barris, "A Fish-Eye Episteme: Seeing Below the River's Colonization," in *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 93.

epidermal and bodily markings continued to form part of modern empires' repertoires of controlling and governing its populations.[33] For Martinicans, the smallpox vaccination as a ritual of landing on the Panamanian isthmus under the US's imperial rule echoed previous ceremonies of arrival in colonial territories during the age of slavery and conquest. Although the vaccination was not the same as a painful branding of an enslaved captive, they nonetheless regarded the US's application of its medical technologies as a form of placing control and management over their bodies.

The Versailles also represented a state of suspension and liminality for the passengers fearing to step land on the isthmus. Katherine McKittrick notes that ships in the transatlantic slave trade were sites of Afro-diasporic subjects' struggle for spatial freedom. In a similar light, Olaudah Equiano had described the slaving ship as a site of suppression, Black death, and grief. The materiality of the ship "in part disguised human terror."[34] Part of the Atlantic world's systems of violence, the ship across time became an object insulating the fears and sicknesses of unfree makers of empire, but also a site of knowledge production. During the age of slavery, this would consist of outright captivity and the materiality of the ships: the vermin, pathogens, and its shifting physical environment overwhelming the passengers.[35] The marshy waters of the colonial Caribbean also would have been thought of as a source of spreading leprosy, yaws, and other racialized diseases.[36] In the post-emancipation Caribbean, economic vulnerability and a dire

[33] Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 3, 287–90.

[34] Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, The African, 1789*, chap. 2; McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xi–xii.

[35] Sowande M. Mustakeem, *Slavery at Sea: Terror, Sex, and Sickness in the Middle Passage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016), chap. 3.

[36] Kristen Block, "Slavery and Inter-Imperial Leprosy Discourse in the Atlantic World," *Atlantic Studies* 14, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): 14.

search for wages replaced outright forced captivity. However, when enduring quarantine detention within a ship in Panama's harbors, the materiality of the ship could still produce shared experiences of restrained mobility and unfreedom among West Indian migrants. Under 1904 sanitary laws, all passengers on vessels like the Versailles were to be under quarantine, until the Chief Quarantine Officer declared them free of disease. The ship was marked with a yellow flag from its foremast during sunrise to sunset until the officer did so. Furthermore, no one was allowed on the ship during its quarantine, not even to feed or give water to the subjects onboard. In the ship, for a period of up to thirty days, the passengers could remain in a state of limbo and surely distress.[37] As a part of the US quarantine rituals and medical technology, the ship and the waters of Panama's shores continued to serve as a part of US empire's performance of power over migrant subjects, as the ocean did during the age of slavery.[38]

In fictionalized accounts of ship journeys and landings to the Panama Canal Zone, fear of the journey remained noticeable in the depicted reactions of West Indian migrants. Eric Walrond's story of "Tropic Death" tells the story of a Barbadian boy, Gerald Bright, traveling to the Canal Zone with his mother.[39] The two were hoping to travel to Panama from Barbados to reunite Gerald with his father, a leprosy-stricken laborer at the Canal Zone who forgot to send money back home to his wife and children. Primarily autobiographical, Walrond's story

[37] Walker, "Quarantine Regulations, Act No. 10," 77.

[38] On the ocean as a colonial terror, see Keith Albert Sandiford, *Theorizing a Colonial Caribbean-Atlantic Imaginary: Sugar and Obeah* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 35.

[39] Walrond was born in British Guiana but spent his childhood in Panama until age 20 with his father working in the Canal Zone. Emblematic of the Black diaspora, Walrond also lived in Barbados, Paris, New York, and London. On his relationship to Panama, Walrond said that he was "spiritually a native of Panama" owing his "sincerest allegiance to it." See Arnold Rampersad, "Introduction," in *Tropic Death*, by Eric Walrond (New York: Liveright, 2013), 17. For a look at Walrond's mother's journey here more closely, see Flores-Villalobos, "Colón Women," 1–2.

highlights the rough and uncertain journey in the Caribbean Sea for the nine-year-old boy. His mother's fear of the ship's officials, their fear of sharks following the ship, and the sight of a red streak of fish's blood following the boat for days provoked terror during much of the ship's voyage to Panama.[40] Much of the enslaved but circulating knowledges of their ancestors came to inform how West Indians later imagined and feared their journey to and lives in Panama in the 1900s and 1910s.

Figure 4-2. Detail of a stereograph depicting a sunset and four boats in the Caribbean Sea as seen from Colón, Panama in 1906. Courtesy of the Panama Canal Museum Collection, University of Florida.

In traversing the Caribbean Sea and in working at the Canal, popular memories of slavery allowed West Indians to articulate their dissatisfaction with the US imperial regime. Once working on the Canal, West Indians workers also relied on these hermeneutical resources to critique the US's labor regimes when they could not invoke their rights as imperial British or French subjects. Part of this included holding a collective memory of the Black body being an objectified commodity and a decipherable, readable text within the imperial domains of the

[40] Eric Walrond, "Tropic Death," in *Tropic Death*, by Eric Walrond, ed. Arnold Rampersad (New York: Liveright, 2013), 161–91.

Atlantic slave trade. Once working in Panama, another metaphorical allusion to the history of Black enslavement was the images of the ship as a liminal site between humanness and animality, between life and death, and between home and danger. Looking to imperial pasts, then, allowed for Black Caribbean migrants to articulate in a collective manner the fears of bodily harm and death that enveloped them in the Canal Zone.

## Afro-Caribbean Oral Networks

Among their hermeneutical resources, West Indian laborers relied on the transnational circuit of oral knowledge and Obeah practices in the circum-Caribbean. As part of the West Indians hidden transcript, warnings on the harsh living conditions in the Panama Canal Zone circulated among former and future contract workers. As James Scott has noted, subordinate groups learn to develop a variety of tools to take part anonymously but proactively in "spirit possession, gossip, aggression through magic, oral networks, anonymous threats and violence, the anonymous letter, and anonymous mass defiance."[41] West Indians' subterranean oral networks in the Panama Canal Zone in the 1900s contained rumors, warnings, and collective shared memories of slavers' domination. However, it was also a subterranean transcript that extended far beyond the Panamanian isthmus and into the rest of the Greater Caribbean.

During the 1905 Colón mutiny, the passengers of the Versailles told the US-American, French, and Panamanian officials that other West Indian laborers aboard the ship informed them that the living conditions in the Zone were horrific. Indifference on the part of the ICC to supply laborers on tenure with food, poor medical care, and habitation conditions were "of the darkest

[41] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 140.

color" in the canal, according to the rumor.[42] Hearing the laborers' claims, an agent of Versailles' French steamship company attempted to convince the protesting laborers that the rumors were false, but he reported that they dismissed his attempts of persuasion.[43] Panama's reputation as overrun with smallpox, yellow fever, and malaria had already been circulating among families and labor networks in the West Indies, often in the form of warnings directed at young men desperately searching for work. Albert Peters from Nassau, Bahamas, recounted that when he told his parents of his plans to go to Panama for the Canal, they shared with him warnings of the trip: "My parents were against the idea," he wrote. "They told me about the Yellow Fever, Malaria and Small pox that infested the place."[44] He recounted that during his stay at the hospitals and sick camps of the Zone, the warnings of his parents kept returning to his mind.[45]

Among some of the warnings that circulated in the Caribbean was the poor-quality food that the ICC provided to its Black employees. The rumor of poor quality food and kitchen spaces as assuredly among the those that the Versailles' company and Canal Zone authorities hoped to dispel among the Martinican passengers. Nonetheless, Mr. Jacob E. Markel, a US-American commissary contractor in Panama, described how meals for West Indian laborers were dumped in large kettles "and cooked up, stirred up just the same way that we do for our hogs out on the farm." Markel noted that "[t]he only difference I could see between the way they fed those

[42] Bonhenry, "Copy of Letter Addressed on October 2 by the Vice-Consul of France, at Colón, to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Paris (American Section)."

[43] M. Leca, "Statement of the Agent of the Steamship Company," in *Letter from the Secretary of War to the President Concerning the Charges Against the Isthmian Canal Commission Contained in an Article in the "Independent": A Weekly Publication* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1906), 59–59.

[44] Peters to IHS, "Isthmian Historical Society Competition," 1963.

[45] Peters to IHS.

negroes and the way I feed my hogs is that the food was put on a tin plate instead of in a trough."[46] The US Senate's investigations found that the poor food provoked a riot among West Indian laborers in the streets in April of 1905, a few months before the Versailles mutiny at Colón's harbor. In April, roughly two hundred Jamaican workers demanded to return home after eating poor quality, stale food during much of their stay. When they threatened to kill a US-American foreman, Panamanian police forces intervened with a level of violence that even US officials remarked was excessive.[47]

The US Senate investigation and Markel's testimony confirmed Canal Zone's poor living conditions that West Indian laborers later recounted they endured. During 1904 and 1905, food, medical supplies, and equipment remained in perpetual scarcity in the Canal Zone, due to the ICC's headquarters being in Washington, DC, and not near Panama. Food became an expensive luxury for West Indian laborers, as local commissaries often hiked prices up for essential goods. Common food items distributed from the ICC's kitchens in 1907 included bread, porridge, poorly cooked rice, rough roast beef, beans, potatoes. West Indians were dissatisfied by the lack of vegetables present in their diets, but Canal Zone policemen often arrested those who spoke out against this. In their oral histories, West Indians also claimed that those who could not afford the other, more expensive food sometimes died of starvation in the middle of Colón's streets.[48] Furthermore, in the racially segregated kitchens, West Indians were not given tables and chairs:

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[46] U.S. Senate, "Investigation of Panama Canal Matters. Hearings before the Committee on Interoceanic Canals of the United States Senate in the Matter of the Senate Resolution Adopted January 9, 1906, Providing for an Investigation of Matters Relating to the Panama Canal, Etc." (1907), 1296.

[47] Gustave Anguizola, "Negroes in the Building of the Panama Canal," *Phylon* 29, no. 4 (1968): 355.

[48] Albert Banister to IHS, "Isthmian Historical Society Competition for the Best True Stories of Life and Work on the Isthmus of Panama during the Construction of the Panama Canal," Letter, 1963, Museo Afroantillano de Panamá.

Some had to find a makeshift spot or stand outside of the kitchen to eat their meals. Knowledge of these conditions circulated through formal oral networks, but also within written news reports in the Caribbean. Soon, newspaper readers in Jamaica became aware by April of 1905 of the poor food quality and living conditions in the Canal Zone.[49] As a result, knowledge and discussion surrounding this revolt likely formed part of the travelling oral knowledge that reached the men aboard the Versailles months later. The outrage surrounding the later September-October mutiny in Colón also later "made a deep impression thruout [sic] the West Indies," according to journalist Poultney Bigelow.[50]

Oral knowledge traveling in the circum-Caribbean with migrating laborers, then, allowed workers to engage in and share among each other strategies for Black radical acts of refusal. Within this network of loosely circulating knowledge and accumulative memories of slavery, West Indians in events like Colón's 1905 confrontation engaged in repetitions of the Black insurrections that shaped the Black Atlantic's history.[51] After the April protest, another smaller band of laborers in Colón refused to work in the Canal Zone in May. In their grievances to the British Consulate, the 50 Bahamian laborers protested that they had to "work in mud swamps, that their huts are not fit to live in and that their food is unsatisfactory."[52] Like the Martinicans emulated months later, the Bahamian workers also reached out to the British Consulate as imperial subjects to present their complaints and request repatriation to Nassau. For Afro-Caribbean guestworkers facing US imperial labor exploitation, invoking their status as imperial

[49] Newton, *The Silver Men*, 135–37.

[50] Bigelow, "Our Mismanagement at Panama."

[51] See Glick, The Black Radical Tragic, 6.

[52] "Refuse to Work on the Panama Canal," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 10, 1905.

subjects to French or British colonial governments through formal diplomatic channels was a crucial method.[53] Nonetheless, these imperial governments frequently did not provide much legal aid to these workers by emphasizing their contractual labor agreement to Canal authorities. Months later in September, the Martinicans onboard the Versailles received a similar response from the French Consulate. When invoking their rights as imperial subjects proved unhelpful, West Indians relied on more drastic practices that they drew from a larger Black radical tradition. Refusal to eat, refusal to disembark, and eventually refusal to stay on-board Versailles when met with charging soldiers: these tactics of West Indian resistance constituted stagings of revolt with the aim of protecting themselves from the exploitative technologies of an additional colonial regime.[54]

Although historical narratives of the Canal's construction focus on the "pull" and dire need for Black laborers to travel to the Canal Zone, Black laborers also sought to leave the Panamanian isthmus to return to friends and family in the Caribbean. One Black laborer in the Canal Zone spoke to a US-American journalist about his unhappiness and desire to return to Jamaica. The journalist Poultney Bigelow described the man speaking to him as "a sick man [who] could walk with difficulty, his system weakened by malarious fever."[55] The unnamed laborer stated that the last steamship from Panama to Jamaica was filled with four hundred other Jamaican workers who were disgusted by the state of infrastructural and sanitary affairs in the Canal Zone. Other steamships heading back to Jamaica with disgruntled migrants had up to 800

[53] For more on this, see Robert Whitney and Graciela Chailloux Laffita, "'Are We British Subjects of His Britannic Majesty or Objects?': British Subjects and the 'Right to Have Rights,' 1920–1950," in *Subjects or Citizens: British Caribbean Workers in Cuba, 1900–1960* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2013), 40–77.

[54] Glick, *The Black Radical Tragic*.

[55] Bigelow, "Our Mismanagement at Panama," 10.

passengers, like the Royal Mail Steamer, Orinoco, in October of 1905.[56] All were returning to their homes with similar impressions of the US authorities deceiving them. The laborer explained that, in his experiences, he had found that the Canal Zone was unfit for living, that he was being paid less than what was promised, and that he would often go weeks without his promised wage. In his exposé against the Canal Zone, Bigelow remarked a ship of at least 400 dejected Jamaican laborers set sail from Colón every day. Bigelow himself hopped aboard one of these steamers and traveled to Jamaica. There, he chatted with the Governor of Jamaica, Sir Alexander Swettenham, and the Chief Justice, Sir Fielding Clarke, about the Canal project and its damning reputation. Both confirmed to Bigelow that they also had heard of the abject labor conditions in the isthmus driving away Jamaican contract laborers.[57]

The white violence that US-Americans inflicted against West Indians was also discussed in the Caribbean laborers' oral networks. A Scotsman in Colón's ports told Bigelow that, days prior to his arrival, a white man attacked a Black laborer for refusing to loan him his horse. In self-defense, the Black man shot the white man with his revolver, which landed him a criminal conviction of manslaughter. Meanwhile, the white man afterward faced no charges. Similarly, another Barbadian laborer endured the angry yelling of a white foreman who refused to let the laborer end his shift at work and pay him. The laborer was desperately begging the foreman for his wages, so that he could pay his passage back to his home in one of the Caribbean islands aboard a steamer. The foreman let loose angry racial slurs against the Barbadian, who then punched him out of frustration before running away in fear of punishment. Nonetheless, police

[56] "Laborers Quit Canal," *New York Times*, October 12, 1905.

[57] Bigelow, "Our Mismanagement at Panama," 10–11.

forces captured the Barbadian laborer before an American judge placed him in jail for ten days.[58] News of these events circulated within the Canal Zone, and as the flow of travelers to Colón's ports ebbed and flowed, so too did the news of such racial violence.

Figure 4-3. West Indian Canal Zone employees and families leaving Panama in return for the Antilles. Source: Bigelow, "Our Mismanagement at Panama."

At the same time, transnational circuits of cautionary testimonies in the Caribbean aided in preserving the Black Caribbean's network of Afro-Caribbean spiritual practitioners, especially as they intended to evade legal persecution. As Julie Greene notes, Caribbean workers of the Canal relied on their physical mobility to evade the surveillance of the Canal Zone government.[59] This remained just as—if not more—true for those affiliated with Obeah and Vodou work. West Indians came to perceive Panama as a site for learning Obeah and for work but not one of

[58] Bigelow, 12.

[59] Julie Greene, "Moveable Empire: Labor, Migration, and U.S. Global Power During the Gilded Age and Progressive Era," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 15, no. 1 (January 2016): 13.

permanent residence. As discussed in Chapter 3, several years after the end of the construction, George Washington Pitt, a Jamaican mechanic, was arrested on the charge of practicing Obeah that he had learned in Panama.[60] Panama, as well as Cuba and Jamaica, represented a key node in the migratory Obeah network in the Caribbean and Central America. At its most efficient circulation, Afro-Caribbean religions allowed West Indians to engage in a "decentralized conversation over human access to supernatural power."[61] Even while migrating through the Greater Caribbean, Obeah practitioners shared knowledge through their circulation of mailed letters, some of which were confiscated by colonial police in the British Antilles.[62] Alternative knowledges, particularly those produced within Afro-Caribbean spiritual practices, continued to circulate, partly for the sake of self-preservation for workers facing precarity and danger frequently.

Whispers of those dangers of the Canal Zone's public health infrastructure also formed part of the cautionary chain of West Indians' health networks. As a result, West Indians were inclined to depend on folk medical treatments and religious healing even with the Canal Zone's medical sites. As noted in Chapter 3, the Bahamian worker Albert Peters had heard from other individuals in the Canal Zone the doctors' proclivities to cut patients open without much justification.[63] With the inordinate frequency that West Indians went to the Canal Zone's hospitals, they more than likely recounted their experiences—good and bad—with the hospital's personnel and technologies. Most West Indians traveling to the Canal Zone had not been

[60] "Mechanic Fined £12 10/ on Charge of Practising Obeah," *Kingston Gleaner*, January 9, 1934, 24.

[61] Putnam, "Rites of Power and Rumors of Race," 243.

[62] Paton, "Obeah Prosecutions from the Inside," 213.

[63] Peters to IHS, "Isthmian Historical Society Competition," 1963.

formerly hospitalized in the Antilles, and especially not in hospitals the size of Ancon.[64] Warning each other of the unfamiliar and unpleasant experiences of the Canal Zone's large, segregated hospitals, some West Indians developed alternative routes for treating common maladies in the Canal Zone.

West Indians' use of traditional healing practices allowed for West Indians in Panama to maintain some autonomy and to preserve their transnational Afro-Caribbean knowledge networks. As Olive Senior notes, Afro-Caribbean religious healing allowed workers in Panama to appeal to spiritual dimensions to aid in their healing and health on the isthmus. On the isthmus, they employed locally grown plant life, herbs, and oils to create folk medical treatments. Because the ICC's mosquito campaigns tended to prioritize sanitizing white spaces in the Canal Zone, Black labor camps and properties sometimes lacked mosquito screens or proper fumigations. Confronting deficiency in public health assistance, one West Indian wrote that: "The first four years Malaria was to its heights, with just a few doctors and very little medicine, most of us had to refer back to the old reliable West Indian home remedies."[65] West Indians developed a mixture of kerosene and coconut oil to keep mosquitos and other flies away from them.[66] While localized practices flourished, so too did transnational corporate projects in providing folk medicine. West Indian entrepreneurs, like P.A. Benjamin manufactured folk medicine in the Antilles, which then were purchased for use in the Panamanian isthmus.[67]

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[64] Senior, *Dying to Better Themselves*.

[65] Castilla M. Weeks to IHS, "Isthmian Historical Society Competition for the Best True Stories of Life and Work on the Isthmus of Panama during the Construction of the Panama Canal," Letter, 1963, Museo Afroantillano de Panamá.

[66] Joseph Brewster to IHS, "Isthmian Historical Society Competition for the Best True Stories of Life and Work on the Isthmus of Panama during the Construction of the Panama Canal," Letter, 1963, Museo Afroantillano de Panamá. Senior, *Dying to Better Themselves*, 156.

[67] Senior, 156.

Among them included treatments for other illnesses that the US's tropical disease eradication efforts neglected to reduce, such as asthma and the common cold. However, pills were also available for treatment of malarial fever in this transnational pharmaceutical market.[68] As Elizabeth Pérez has argued, micropractices in folk religious traditions sustained religious and social formations among scattered Afro-Caribbean diasporas, even during tumultuous times.[69] In Panama, Afro-Caribbean religious micropractices through West Indian medical cures produced a continued cultural cohesion between communities in the Canal Zone and their homes in the Antilles.

A part of the dynamic cultural network between the Antilles and Panama was the migrant laborers' changing identities but enduring epistemologies. The arrivals of Afro-Caribbean religious practitioners and believers from Panama, usually carrying more wealth after their labor tenure, caught Jamaican nationals' attention in the 1910s. In written literature, the pompous traveling migrant laborer is often manifests as the figure of the "Colón Man," who returns home with money, pompousness, and ruder behavior.[70] Among Antillean communities, the Colón Man represented an exceptional case among the returnees from the Panama Canal Zone. Most other laborers, on the other hand, returned to Jamaica after giving up most of their wealth with little in return.

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[68] "Wonderful Cures," *Colón Starlet*, March 12, 1904, 4.

[69] Pérez defines Black Atlantic religious micropractices as "routine and intimate sequences of operations that can be broken down into more minute units of activity" and that are usually "carried out at the fringes and in the gaps of ceremonies such as divination sessions, rites of consecration, and drum feasts." Elizabeth Pérez, *Religion in the Kitchen: Cooking, Talking, and the Making of Black Atlantic Traditions* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 9.

[70] Scholars note that the Colón Man was an expression of hyper-masculinity and an aesthetics of excess. See Frederick, *Colón Man a Come*.

In Jamaican writer Claude McKay's book, *Banana Bottom,* one of the workers that returned did so with riches. Nonetheless, the rest of the community noted those who had been traveling to Panama since the 1880s came back with nothing more than "fever, smallpox—everything but the real thing."[71] Among the Canal workers, spaces in the Canal Zone, like silver-roll clubhouses, fostered a sense of Black cosmopolitanism among them.[72] As Katherine Zien argued, West Indians' social lives outside the Zone and Colón's unsegregated entertainment venues aided them in forming Black identities in Panama's isthmus.[73] Despite clashes with Afro-Panamanians and US Black Americans, West Indian workers who returned to the Antilles often spoke with less of a British accent and dressed more like US-Americans. These cultural transformations among West Indians in the Canal Zone rippled back into the communities of their home countries, like Jamaica or Barbados.

Some West Indian contract workers who returned also retained religio-medical credence that linked them to the Black Atlantic, with some even still engaging in Obeah's quotidian micropractices. Among the few workers that returned to Jamaica from Panama persistently remained believers of Obeah, too. In McKay's portrayal of Jamaican life at this time, a former migrant, named Tack Tally, frequented the village Banana Bottom's Obeahman to protect himself from evil curses and to request charms.[74] Adherence and credence to Obeah practices, even while having formal ties to the Catholic or Protestant Churches, then, became a silent phenomenon in the Canal Zone's world and its traveling laborer population. In his own stories,

[71] Claude McKay, *Banana Bottom*, 1st ed. (New York: Mariner Books, 1974), 66.

[72] Zien, *Sovereign Acts*, 77.

[73] Zien, 78–81.

[74] McKay, *Banana Bottom*, 134.

the Afro-Caribbean writer Eric Walrond casually weaved such characters into his narrations: a Seventh Day Adventist who celebrates seeing the success of an Obeah practitioner's hex on a white colonist and a West Indian mother whose family attends a Plymouth Brethren Church, who whispers gospel hymns at home, but secretly attends Colón's Catholic masses on Sundays.[75] New syncretisms emerged in and traveled from the Canal Zone, eventually reaching to other sites in the greater Caribbean. In these cases, Afro-Caribbean spiritualities and transnational oral knowledges wove a vast network of subterranean Black Atlantic resistance that spread from Panama to the Antilles. Obeah and Vodou thus grew to represent more than simply a religious practice. Afro-Caribbean spiritualities formed the very tools of a larger anti-colonial epistemology and praxis in early twentieth-century Panama.

## Black Placemaking and Seascapes

Much of Afro-Caribbean literature in this period formed a canon of works provides readers a glimpse of alternative Black spatial practices in Panama among West Indians, which I characterize as Black placemaking. Black placemaking, in this specific case, refers to the creation of new sites of belonging and resistance among Black West Indians when facing the US's occupation in Panama. It also includes West Indians' reorientation of what the Canal Zone's spatial arrangement was from the perspective of its Black laborers from below. In contrast with the Canal Zone's elastic geographies of surveillance and policing examined in Chapter 3, Black placemaking in the Canal Zone allowed for Black sociability and resistance to endure even when living in racially segregated, surveilled spaces. The rest of this chapter consults the short stories of the British Guiana-born author Eric Walrond to study these Black spatial practices. As the intellectuals behind the journal *La Trouée* noted in US-occupied Haiti in

[75] Eric Walrond, "The Wharf Rats," in *Tropic Death* (New York: Liveright, 2013).

1927, "Literature is the cry of a people who want to say what boils within them."[76] In exploring Eric Walrond's works paired with other sources, this chapters explores how fugitive acts of escape from police violence, religious syncretism in silver-roll labor camps, and reinterpretations of the Atlantic Ocean emerged from West Indians' alternative spatial practices in Panama.

Despite Canal Zone towns' racial segregation, West Indians formed their own spatial relations in labor camps and cities like Colón that disrupted Zone authorities' surveillance practices.[77] In his literature, Eric Walrond highlights that West Indians fugitively produced routes and paths of escape police violence in the West Indian-dominated city of Colón. In Walrond's story "Subjection," a West Indian water carrier named "Ballet" is hunted down by a US-American Marine, who seeks to punish him for crying out against the soldier's beating of a young Black boy. The Marine chases Ballet through Colón before shooting him three times, killing him. During Ballet's chase, Walrond narrates the thoughts that must have occurred to those witnessing this case: "Nothing for a black boy, probably a laborer, or a water boy, to do a hide and seek with a tipsy marine," testifying to how common these eruptions of racial conflicts in Colón and other towns among military men and Black laborers were.[78]

During his flight from the Marine's violence, Ballet uses his own spatial knowledge of the Black neighborhoods and town sites in Colon to his advantage. He briefly escapes the terror of the Marine by running into the huts, tool sheds, and nearly entering the dense interior of the Panamanian jungles for his own survival. In the story, Circuits of oral knowledge and counter-mappings of the isthmus among vulnerable Black workers became an essential survival tactic as

[76] Maryse Condé, "Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer," *Yale French Studies*, no. 97 (2000): 152.

[77] For more on the racial segregation of Canal Zone towns, see Zien, *Sovereign Acts*, 40–53; Lasso, *Erased*.

[78] Eric Walrond, "Subjection," in *Tropic Death* (New York: Liveright, 2013), 110.

well. Near the sea, a fellow laborer approached Ballet, warning him not to go to work today since the Marine was searching for him. The chase through Colón illustrates the type of subterranean recourses and fugitivity that West Indians in Panama developed to challenge imperial authorities. Alternative visualizations of the dense, stratified terrain of Colón momentarily aided Walrond's fictionalized character before his death. West Indians' alternative visualizations from the ground of a town like Colón, therefore, offered them innovative modes of resistance, albeit limited ones.[79]

Walrond's depiction of Colón contrasts with that of US-American accounts; however, there are a few points of consensus between their divergent perceptions of the port city. The West Indian-dominated city of Colón often was the target of critique by US-American settlers and journalists. Rev. S. Loveridge, the priest who held services frequently at the Culebra Hospital, described Colón when he first landed on the isthmus after leaving Britain at age twenty-three:

> Colón in those early days was anything but an attractive place, with its old wooden wharves, its dilapidated shops and shanties all made of wood and roofed with corrugated iron and provided with narrow verandas on which all the family cooking was usually undertaken. The whole town had a very tumbledown appearance; the railway ran down the middle of the main street and, after a tropical downpour, the native buggies drawn by half-famished ponies, often sank up to their axles in the mud and water.[80]

Yet, Rev. Loveridge also echoed Walrond's view of Colón by later describing it as a cosmopolitan town populated with West Indians, Chinese shopkeepers, Panamanian and Jewish store-runners, US-Americans, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Cubans, Italians, and Spaniards. With

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[79] Fugitive landscapes is a notion elaborated best in Raymond B. Craib, *Cartographic Mexico: A History of State Fixations and Fugitive Landscapes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). Craib defines it as a phenomenon in which natural land appears to state officials as "more than merely unknown" and seeming almost fugitive, as if it were an accomplice in a larger conspiracy undermining their cartographic efforts (57).

[80] Loveridge, *Panama Padre*, 9.

such a heterogeneous population, he heard half a dozen languages filling the streets of Colón. For visitors and residents of the city, the city was a small world that contained smaller but rich and complex cultural worlds.[81] Outside of Colón, Canal Zone towns also reflected a cosmopolitan nature due to the ethnic diversity and vices of the towns. The scholarship of Emily Davidson previously argued that the towns in the Zone were spaces "portrayed as the home and playground of an international proletariat: a liminal space of tenement houses, international shops, restaurants, cantinas, and brothels where people fell prey to the vices of capitalism and the seduction of interracial sex."[82] In effect, each canal town functioned as small contact zones littered along the Canal Zone for global and Caribbean diasporas, but also as a quintessential global locality of the modern world.[83]

Walrond's stories also explore how the spatial unit of labor camp, originally established to restrict the mobility of West Indians, became a site of growing cultural sharing, syncretism, and Black sociability. In his story "The Wharf Rats," Walrond depicts life among those in the Canal Zone who came from "those coral isles in the Caribbean ruled by Britain, France, and Holland" to build the Canal. He described the seclusion of Black West Indian communities whom he said "were herded in boxcar huts buried in the jungles of the 'Silver City.'"[84] His description of their homes echoes that of Rev. Loveridge: they lived in "murky tenements" and

[81] On Colón as a hub for immigrants and multiculturalism, see Marixa Lasso, "Nationalism and Immigrant Labor in a Tropical Enclave: The West Indians of Colón City, 1850–1936," *Citizenship Studies* 17, no. 5 (August 2013): 551–65.

[82] Emily Frances Davidson, "Canal Memories: Race, Space, and the Construction of Modern Panama" (PhD diss., University of California, Davis, 2013), 98.

[83] For an extended argument on Canal Zone towns containing cultural richness and "modernity," see Lasso, *Erased*.

[84] Walrond, "The Wharf Rats," 67.

in Coco Té they lived in smelting cabins.[85] Nonetheless, it contrasts with portrayals of Black life in US-American dime novels, like *Diamond Dick, Jr*. Walrond hardly portrays West Indian workers living in rows of palm-thatched huts in the "gloom of the tropical, swampy forest," as those texts did[86] In reality, the palm-thatched hut was most likely what US-Americans saw indigenous and rural Panamanian communities continued to construct as homes even after 1904. Even while Walrond sometimes satirically alluded to US-American stereotypes of the Caribbean world in his prose, he maintained a degree of realism when narrating domestic West Indian life in Panama.[87] For the most part, Walrond's Canal Zone mirrors the photographs and worker testimonies that depict West Indians living in old box car bodies and former military barracks.

Figure 4-4. A construction camp for Railroad employees assembled out of old box car bodies then used as living quarters, 1910. Courtesy of the Panama Canal Museum Collection, University of Florida.

[85] Walrond, 67.

[86] "Diamond Dick in the Canal Zone, or Varola, the Voodoo King," 7.

[87] An example of this is the scene of young West Indian men diving for coins that US-Americans threw in the ocean, which he portrays in Walrond, "The Wharf Rats" and which I further discuss below.

Particularly, Walrond's portrayal of West Indian Canal Zone sociability depicts it flourishing the most during the nighttime hours in the Zone. From the perspectives of West Indians, the reality of the night contradicts colonial anxieties found in US-American memoirs and novels. US-Americans feared the night as a time of unmediatable danger needing policing. Walrond, in contrast, describes nighttime among the West Indians as a time when sounds came alive, and the Panama's tropical landscape was transformed into a terrain for articulating and sharing power. Those finished working at the Canal's ditch would hum music, play guitar or piccolo, and dance to the sound of chants "for obeah." Walrond describes the Obeah in the camps as "a heritage of the French colonial [that] honeycombed the life of the Negro laboring camps."[88] At the same time, Walrond describes the West Indians' sharing legends to one another through oral storytelling. The frequency and familiarity of the storytelling in these labor camps formed part of what Walrond called "a sort of Negro Koran" among the West Indians. To the US-Americans living nearby, like Rose Van Hardeveld, the sounds of the chanting appeared diabolical, demonic, and frightening to hear at night. Dual religious traditions—one strictly US-American Protestant and one Black Atlantic—reveal to us readers the possibilities for entirely different perceptions of what might constitute a dangerous space or a safe, domestic space in Panama.

The same story of "The Wharf Rats" further offers glimpses into West Indians' alternative imaginings of natural power and physical, coastal environments. The story ends with a shark emerging from the ocean's water to kill two West Indian boys—Philip and Ernest—who were diving into the water searching for gold coins that US-American tourists had thrown from a cruise ship. Maffi, a Trinidadian girl who resented Philip for leering at another girl, was

[88] Walrond, 67.

humming an Obeah chant that caused the shark to leap out of the water to kill them. On the other hand, in his autobiographical story "Tropic Death," Walrond portrays the thought of "sleepy sharks" following the ships between Barbados and Colón terrifying the maritime passengers.[89] Yet, in "Wharf Rats," Maffi's gaze at Colón and the isthmus rendered the Atlantic Ocean not as a source of racialized terror but also a source of imagined power for herself as an Obeah practitioner.[90] Whereas Gerald Bright and his mother feared the ocean while leaving Barbados, Maffi as an Obeah practitioner brings to life an alternative imagining of the ocean's power from Colón's coasts. In this Black Atlantic imaginary, supernatural manipulation of the material world allowed for Black migrants facing dispossession and servitude at various moments in history to infuse their own conceptions of power and gain into their surroundings.[91]

Even while portraying Obeah's radical possibilities in the Black Caribbean-Atlantic, Walrond still demonstrates that Christianity continued shaping daily life in the Canal Zone's West Indian labor camps and in Colón. Feuds between Obeah practitioners and Christian emerged in Colón, Walrond illustrates in "Wharf Rats." On more than one occasion, a West Indian might have questioned Obeah's veracity as a religious tradition. For West Indians, this skepticism could have represented a form of cultural betrayal. At first, Walrond depicts Obeah in the silver-roll labor camps in the Zone's outskirts as producing an asymmetric counterhegemony against the Zone's Protestantism. He writes that "to question the verity of the *obeah,* to dismiss

[89] Walrond, "Tropic Death."

[90] In Atlantic and Caribbean studies, a recent school of slavery scholars have begun to explore how waterscapes, like the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea, aided enslaved and maroon Africans form their meanings of freedom. This is in contrast with portrayals of the ocean that have it represent racialized terror, frequently found in slavery narratives. See the special issue on maritime marronage in *Slavery & Abolition* (forthcoming, Aug. 2021).

[91] For more on this process occurring during the colonial era of the Caribbean-Atlantic, see Sandiford, *Theorizing a Colonial Caribbean-Atlantic Imaginary*, chap. 2.

or reject it as the ungodly rite of some lurid, crack-brained Islander was to be an accursed pale-face, dog of a white."[92] In other words, Obeah practitioners in and around the Zone saw Obeah as a form of providing cohesion to West Indians. To doubt Obeah, then, resembled a betrayal of one the key roots of the Black Caribbean-Atlantic moral order. Walrond shows that Obeah-men did not hesitate to attack these kinds of inquisitors with a machete or to burn a pyre of Maubé bark or green Ganja weed at their doorsteps. In bringing to life this vicinity in Colón, Walrond goes as far as to describe the settlement as containing its own "colony of Negroes enslaved near the *obeah*."[93] Readers might come across this and believe that Obeah played its role as a hegemonic discourse in these West Indian diasporic societies.

Nonetheless, a pluralism of mixed religious practices circulated within the labor camps. Walrond's depiction, then, suggests that even the West Indians who identified as orthodox Protestant devotees might have submitted credence to the spiritual powers of Obeah, Vodou, and other Afro-Caribbean religions. The main protagonists of "The Wharf Rats" were a family originally from Saint Lucia, whose mother secretly attended Colón's Catholic Church instead of the city's Protestant Church. The existence of the Saint Lucian family in Coco Té, in sum, represented "a thrust at the omnipresent *obeah*," even if their children showed reluctance in going to Christian church meetings.[94] The framing of the silver-roll labor camp spaces in the outskirts as a pure counterhegemonic space of Obeah is not totally accurate, even if it was what Obeah practitioners seemed to narrate in the labor camps. Religious secrecy and syncretism continued to grow in the labor camps, with the anti-colonial articulations of Obeah practices in

[92] Walrond, "The Wharf Rats," 68.

[93] Walrond, 68.

[94] Walrond, 69.

the labor camps intertwining with remnants of Catholicism and Protestantism.[95] Rather than Black religious life in the Canal Zone's labor camps being a homogenous body of practice and thought, flashes of characters' religious idiosyncrasies in Walrond's stories show otherwise. A circulation of overlapping, clashing, and sometimes subterranean practices defined West Indians' religious landscapes in the Zone.

A   B

Figure 4-5. Church Church in Colón, Panama. A) Interior view. B) Exterior view. Source: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions*, vol. LXXX (New York: Church Missions House, 1915).

With his subtle theorizations of West Indian life in Panama, Walrond's short stories also provide a glimpse into the practices of Black placemaking in the Canal Zone. Black placemaking in the Canal Zone occurred when West Indians spatially developed their own sites of resistance and spatial imagining of the larger Zone. As evident in both US-American and West Indian observations, the Canal Zone's towns and quarters contained dueling geographies: a geography of domination by the US authorities and a counter-geography conjured by Black subjects, like Ballet as he ran to avoid a US Marine in the story "Subjection." Cultural geographer Katherine

[95] My theorization of Afro-Caribbean religious syncretism contrasts with that which depicts African practitioners unconsciously and passively absorbing Catholic religious symbols and "saints". Rather, syncretism here echoes more with Andrés Pérez y Mena's anti-Eurocentric theorization, where Afro-Caribbean practitioners consciously and strategically incorporate European symbols for their African religious traditions to survive in the New World. See Andrés I. Pérez y Mena, "Cuban Santería, Haitian Vodun, Puerto Rican Spiritualism: A Multiculturalist Inquiry into Syncretism," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37, no. 1 (1998): 15–27.

McKittrick notes that white epistemologies commonly characterize Black diasporas in the Americas as "ungeographic," or as unable to produce geographic knowledge and spatial practices of their own.[96] Within the US's vision of policing and surveillance, West Indian communities are placed by force within a hierarchical spatial ordering that emphasizes and re-assert their racial difference. The surveillance of leisure, sickness, and religion explored in Chapter 3 led to the restriction of Black temporal and spatial freedom and, more generally, of Black life.

Black placemaking developed through body-spatial struggles of the Panama Canal Zone region. These spatial practices allowed for West Indians to employ the Black Atlantic's intellectual repertoire as a epistemology of resistance against the US's new forms of imperial bondage. In effect, alternative spatial mappings of the US's organization of Black life disrupted and obfuscated the gaze of the US's imperial surveillance of Black communities. In the modern Black Atlantic's Canal Zone, West Indians in the twentieth century continued to engage in real and imaginary contestations of space. From the US's official perspective, these spaces are seen only to harbor the dispossession and criminalization of Black subjects. In contrast, Black countergeographies and acts of Black placemaking allowed West Indians to challenge the US's spatial organization of the Canal Zone, thus, against the racial order embedded within Canal Zone space.[97]

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[96] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, 5, 121. McKittrick notes that "the ungeographic is a colonial fiction" (5). She adds that "the dispossessed black female body is often equated with the ungeographic, and black women's spatial knowledges are rendered either inadequate or impossible" (5). The ungeographic space can also be linked to spaces that are frequently thought of as unhabitable, such as underwater or maritime spaces (130).

[97] McKittrick, 121–122. McKittrick draws this analysis from Sylvia Wynter's analysis of Black geographies. See Sylvia Wynter, "Afterword: Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/Silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman,'" in *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*, ed. Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990), 355–70. For Wynter's discussion on Glissant, see Sylvia Wynter, "Beyond

Rather than view the ocean as a site of past empires' colonial terror or as a site of modern commercial networks, West Indians employed Afro-Caribbean religious interpretations of aqueous spaces in reimagining the Canal Zone's Black Atlantic geography. The Chagres River in Walrond's narrations becomes a part of the urban geography as much as the tenements and cabins. Likewise, the Atlantic Ocean itself forms as a major identifying landmark for the story's West Indian protagonists. As Paul Gilroy and Katherine McKittrick emphasize, Afrodiasporic communities' cultural worlds were often rooted in their position along the Atlantic Ocean as a site of political struggle.[98] Similarly, Édouard Glissant referred to the river as that which links the mountains—what he calls "the repository of Maroon memories"—to the sea.[99] The ocean materially became a part of diasporic West Indian migrants' imagined geography, even beyond their journey via steamship across the sea. From Panama's shores, the ocean became an integrated part within a twentieth-century Black Atlantic's imaginary. Within the colonial matrix of the transatlantic slave trade, slavers and captives alike perceived the ocean space as sites of racialized terror. Particularly, the sharks swimming within the Atlantic Ocean, following slave ships, were used by slavers to taunt and terrorize African captives.[100] Human and non-human forms, then, had interacted in asserting terror and exerting violence over living and deceased

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the Word of Man: Glissant and the New Discourse of the Antilles," *World Literature Today* 63, no. 4 (1989): 637–48.

[98] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, 121–22.

[99] Édouard Glissant quoted in Wynter, "Beyond the Word of Man," 638.

[100] Marcus Rediker, "History from below the Water Line: Sharks and the Atlantic Slave Trade," *Atlantic Studies* 5, no. 2 (August 2008): 285–97; Mustakeem, *Slavery at Sea*, 2, 86, 124.

captives' bodies.[101] Instead, in Walrond's narration, sharks and oceans form part of the twentieth-century meanings of freedom and resistance in the larger Black Atlantic imaginary. For West Indians who saw the ocean, Colón's waters had the power to inflict revenge and harness power for themselves even when facing loss or irremediable injustice. The character Maffi's view of the Atlantic Ocean's power and who can cast authority over it produces an alternative seascape.[102] Maffi's authority over the ocean, for a moment, overshadowed the imperial authority of the US's quarantine laws, commercial interests, and geopolitical ideologies define the ocean less. From an Obeah-inspired West Indian perspective, the view from Colón includes a seascape scattered with different sources of Black radical traditions even under US occupation.

Even for West Indians who did not practice Obeah or Vodou, the ocean represented an opportunity to flee from the US regime's violence and return home to the Antilles. Bigelow in his article for the *Independent* noted that "each ship leaving the Canal Zone has been freighted with negroes abandoning high wages."[103] At times, West Indian contract laborers saved their money once in Panama and spent their weeks of working looking forward to the chance of hoping back onto a steamer. With luck, a West Indian laborer might seize the right timing and head back home. Yet, the malaria-afflicted man with whom Bigelow chatted explained why he had not returned: he could only afford the trip as a "decker" and another 400 desperate

[101] I came to this analysis largely inspired by Jason de León's description of a modern-day deportation hybrid collectif in *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015).

[102] On waterscapes acting as spaces for the flourishing of African diasporas' cultures in the Atlantic world, rather than as empty spaces, see Kevin Dawson, *Undercurrents of Power: Aquatic Culture in the African Diaspora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018). In colonial settings, Africans were able to "physically and intellectually colonize these [aquatic] spaces" (143).

[103] Bigelow, *Our Mismanagement in Panama*, 11.

passengers had already filled the Leyland steamer.[104] Furthermore, if we were to take the US War Department accounts to be fully accurate retelling of the 1905 Colón mutiny, this alternative rendering of the Caribbean seascape still shines through. Even for the Martinicans occupying the Versailles in 1905, US and French witnesses remarked seeing some of the passenger leap off the steamship into Colón harbor's waters to avoid the charging US forces' bayonets and batons.[105] For a fragment of a moment, the water lying just before the Canal Zone's regime of power offered a moment of escape in a desperate search for freedom from further imperial bondage.

## Conclusion

Antillean writers' literary depictions of the Canal Zone and its workers offer a look at the alternative representations of Black life within US empire. West Indians' bodily-spatial relations and alternative cartographic renderings of the Zone disrupted some of the US's epistemic and cultural hegemony over the Caribbean world. In their texts, Walrond and McKay did not sanitize Obeah of the harm and violence it indeed could produce, as Maffi's revanchism mostly clearly illustrated.[106] Obeah and other West Indian cultural strategies formed part of a modern Black Atlantic imaginary that extended to and continued to flourish beyond the Panama Canal Zone during the 1900s and 1910s.

Within this imaginary was a collective memory of enslavement in the Caribbean. Flashes of and fragments of these collective memories became a part of the shared conceptual tools that

[104] Bigelow, 10.

[105] Bonhenry, "Copy of Letter Addressed on October 2 by the Vice-Consul of France, at Colon, to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Paris (American Section)."

[106] The portrayal of Obeah as only a source of spiritual good, with little description or analysis with its potential for spiritual or physical harm, had been a running issue in scholarly literature. For a critique of this, see J. Brent Crosson, "What Obeah Does Do: Religion, Violence, and Law," in *Experiments with Power: Obeah and the Remaking of Religion in Trinidad* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 43–45.

workers from the Antilles employed to critique the Canal Zone's harsh labor regime. Memories of the natural world's role in generating terror also appeared in how West Indian migrants articulated their fear of maritime travel and coastal life in Panama. Sharks, the ocean, and the ship as a site of confining biopower continued to serve as symbols of racial terror to a degree but were also transforming into symbols of imaginable power and freedom. Allusions to these familiar sights, sounds, and sensations in and around Panama remained a part of West Indians' construction of similar, shared experiences as migrants in Panama.

Whether a "voodoo" doctor truly led the September-October 1905 rebellion in Colón or not remains unknown for now. Still, like Obeah and Vodou, memories of slavery and Black placemaking provided West Indians the tools to kindle a mutiny and form part of the history of Black resistance and radicalism in the Atlantic. Beyond those few days of rebellion, West Indians in Colón also found subtle ways of interrupting the dominance of US-American imperial racial grammars by producing their own Black Atlantic hermeneutical resources. Despite the collapse of the Versailles mutiny, Martinican contract laborers managed to disrupt the tranquil mirage of US spatial order and militarized efficiency in 1905 Panama. Life in the Canal Zone continued to articulate acts of spatial resistance, fugitivity, and creative reimagining of the Atlantic. Black placemaking and religious practices permitted a remapping of the Atlantic—its vast ocean, natural world, and dense coastal cities—as a seascape laden with power that Black subjects living under modern empires could harness. In the rest of the Canal Zone, while the ICC organized the architectural modernization of Panama, West Indian laborers disoriented the Canal Zone's official visualizations of its empire in the Atlantic—individually and as diasporic communities. As such, the condensed silver quarters and tropical, littoral nature shifted from mere spaces of contagion and danger into sites of reversing and rethinking freedom and power.

# CHAPTER 5
# CONCLUSIONS

The 1905 Colón mutiny ended with the Martinican strikers undergoing quarantine and the compulsory smallpox vaccinations against which they had resisted. The violence of the Canal Zone and Panamanian police intended to disperse the bonds that tied the Martinicans agitators together and to quell the outburst of Black radical action near the Canal Zone. Yet, with the weeping of brothers and comrades near Colón's harbor the same night, the mutiny's violent finale only furthered cemented the social ties and sense of labor solidarity within the West Indian diaspora in and around Panama. After the mutiny, the same processes of religio-medical surveillance, ultra-Protestant chauvinism, and racial discrimination continued to reign in the Canal Zone and its port cities during of the Canal's construction. Yet, similar acts of acts radical resistance would also continue to multiply and evolve through the imaginative creativity of the Black Atlantic of which Panama was a part for the remainder of the Canal Zone's history.

This study aimed to demystify the cultural and intellectual processes that underpinned the 1905 Colón mutiny by deconstructing the seemingly opposing worldviews of the Black Atlantic and of the US empire. To fully understand the mutiny as a historical event, rather than as a historical aberration, required reconstructing the revolt's multiple contextual backdrops. Studying the multiple strands of medical and religious thought that persisted in the Zone during the canal's construction reveals that US authorities struggled to contain medical and religious pluralism in its twentieth-century imperial project. In doing so, this study demonstrates that the heterogeneous and subaltern worlds within Canal Zone also shaped the epistemic and cultural discursive fields of the Zone. With US federal government money and military assets, Canal Zone authorities had the upper hand in installing Protestant and Western biomedical institutions in the Canal Zone. Nonetheless, the chapters in this thesis each illuminate that these

territorializations of US power were predicated on colonial anxieties and consequentially met with West Indians' alternative orderings of Black isthmian society. As a result, the Canal Zone's intellectual artifacts remained, in part, shaped by the fac that the US's enclave was surrounded by a lively, highly mobile Black Atlantic cultural system.

Chapter 2 introduced how Protestant Christian thought within the Panama Canal Zone justified US expansionism in the isthmus by classifying Afro-Caribbean religions and West Indian spaces on the isthmus within imperial racial grammars. US-Americans' colonial anxieties in the Canal Zone were predicated by fears of religious decadence, epidemiological ruin in the Canal Zone's tropics, and the pathologization of blackness and proximities to Africa. Anxiety and suspicions of the secret Obeah practitioners in the Panamanian isthmus figured part of these anxieties. Combining impressions of white Protestant superiority and Black religious and medical abnormality, US-Americans employed racial grammars that discursively organized West Indians, Panamanians, and white Americans within different, imagined boundaries of the Canal Zone. Thus, early Zonian theologies did not totally obscure the existence of Afro-Caribbean cosmologies. Rather, the specters of Afro-Caribbean religious practices and tropical environments actively shaped these theologies. Through these processes, US-Americans constructed for themselves their notions of biological and spiritual security wholly from their position in a US enclave enmeshed in the Black Caribbean.

Next, Chapter 3 examined three spaces in the Canal Zone to explore how US-Americans' colonial anxieties over Black religions, bodies, and spaces shaped how the Zone's spatial surveillance practices materialized. Navigating these sites, medical and religious authorities held concerns on Black irreligiosity, folk medical healing, and labor agitation. To enforce its medical authority, Canal Zone authorities developed an elastic geography of religio-medical surveillance,

allowing them to bring the frontiers of their medical authority closer to West Indians. The first site of the chapter's study was the hospital. At Ancon Hospital especially, medical and religious authorities both hoped for Protestantism and tropical biomedicine to usurp the epistemic hold that Afro-Caribbean healing traditions had on West Indians. Like the hospital, sick camps were also locations that religio-medical workers frequented to surveil West Indians more efficiently by bringing clinical care closer to Canal Zone towns. However, these were also sites where West Indians experienced loss of community ties in managing their health. Similar processes then occurred at the third site: the labor camp, where medical workers shifted their frontiers of medical surveillance as close as possible to West Indian intimate spaces and very bodies. Surveillance in the form of police guards, strict curfews, and more visitations from religious clergy solidified US security practices in the Canal Zone on the assumption of West Indians acting as reservoirs of disease. The imperial infrastructures of the US's health security, therefore, was constructed from US fears of Back contagions.

Lastly, Chapter 4 offered historical theorizations on the alternative, radical spatial practices of West Indians in the Canal Zone in response to these surveillance practices. Instead of demarcating the isthmus between lines of safe versus unsafe or tropical versus temperate, West Indians reconceptualized the isthmus's physical geography within Black Atlantic perspectives and placemaking practices. For this aim, consulting Afro-Caribbean literary works proved important for understanding West Indians' perspectives of the Canal Zone of which white-dominated publications and archives in the Canal Zone silenced. The chapter elucidated how collective memories of Atlantic slavery among Afro-Caribbean workers in the Canal Zone formed part of their hermeneutical resources. That is, remembering slavery as a perpetual struggle over the autonomy and ownership of Black bodies permitted for West Indians to draw

comparisons to enslavement in their denouncements of the Canal Zone's labor exploitation. Other hermeneutical tools that West Indians employed in the Canal Zone traveled among various Caribbean sub-groups in the region via transnational oral networks and shared religious frameworks of Obeah and Vodou. To gaze at the Canal Zone through the frameworks of Obeah or Vodou permitted West Indians to adopt a radically different perceptions of Panama's urban space and natural geography. Rather than view the Canal Zone as solely as satellite enclave in the US's burgeoning imperial geography, West Indians continued to view the Canal Zone and cities like Colón as part of a Black Atlantic world. From creating different mental maps of cities like Colón to practicing Obeah openly in the night despite labor camps' nightly curfews, West Indians then were able to reclaim spaces as sites of Black fugitive agency in the US-occupied Panamanian isthmus.

Beginning and continuing from these early years of the twentieth century, the Canal Zone's history of Black Atlantic religious imaginaries and insurrectionary traditions ultimately connect the Zone—traditionally seen as a white, US enclave—intimately with the greater Black Caribbean.[1] Prior to the isthmus's Black radical action in the form of labor organizing in the late 1910s and 1920s, Black workers already began challenging US imperial practices in everyday life.[2] West Indian laborers' maintained the ties and networks laced throughout the Black Caribbean, bringing the affective and cultural forces of the Antilles into the inner mechanics of the US's growing empire. In particular, Black placemaking practices testify to how West Indians integrated the US's new colonial enclave into a seascape of centuries of insurrection and struggle

[1] For more on the highlighting Black histories in the Central American isthmus, consult Lowell Gudmundson and Justin Wolfe, eds., *Blacks and Blackness in Central America: Between Race and Place* (Duke University Press Books, 2010).

[2] See Burnett, ""Are We Slaves or Free Men?"; J. A. Zumoff, "Black Caribbean Labor Radicalism in Panama, 1914-1921," *Journal of Social History* 47, no. 2 (December 1, 2013): 429–57; Warner, "If Anything Else Remains, Let That Also Be for the Negro."

against alternating modes of bondage. West Indians produced lived theorizations in their daily lives, upsetting the US's imperial geography and narrations of the Canal Zone's histories. Their cultural struggles for agency in the Zone and Panama resulted in a revisiting of their larger Black Atlantic intellectual heritage together. In the process, they forged a space for the Canal, a modern imperial artifact, within their imaginary annals of Black Caribbean life. Then, while the US empire attempted to discipline and police them, the West Indian laborers themselves managed to tame and weave the US's modern empire into their Black Atlantic geography.

Even after the completion of the Panama Canal, the Black Caribbean continues to haunt empires and national governments for the remainder of the century. The criminalization of Afro-Caribbean spiritual work and folk healing practices continued within occupied lands and experimental governments. In Cuba, practitioners of Regla de Ocha, Regla de Monte, and Vodou faced persecution and throughout the twentieth century. Particularly in Revolutionary Cuba, communist state authorities continued to accuse practitioners of Santería with "promoting consciousness that was not only false but of a lower human order."[3] Haiti, too, continued its legal persecutions of Vodou practitioners, most notably during the US's occupation of the country after 1915.[4] In Panama, Afro-Caribbean religious practices still flourished silently. After the Canal's completion, some West Indian migrant laborers stayed in Panama, finding employment in other industries within the Canal Zone or in the Republic of Panama. In the isthmus today, Santería remains "actively and silently practiced" on the isthmus by an enduring community of

[3] Lillian Guerra, "*Poder Negro* in Revolutionary Cuba: Black Consciousness, Communism, and the Challenge of Solidarity," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 99, no. 4 (November 1, 2019): 712. See also Margaret E. Crahan, "Cuban Diasporas: Their Impact on Religion, Culture, and Society," *Religion, Culture, and Society*, 2003, 37–54; Bret Sigler, "God, *Babalawos*, and Castro," in *Capitalism, God, and a Good Cigar: Cuba Enters the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Lydia Chavez (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 207–21.

[4] Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law*.

practitioners.[5] Christians on the isthmus today, including Panamanian Catholics, continue to stigmatize Afro-Caribbean religions like Santería as "Satanic" and cruel for its use of animal sacrifices. In response, followers of Panama's Santería defend their practices from laws prohibiting animal sacrifices, often returning a critical, provincializing gaze toward Western Christianity's animal-human relations. One contemporary Panamanian practitioner remarked, "It's funny because every time we eat the chicken, or beef, or pork, you first have to kill [the animal]. And even though it's silly, it's also a ritual."[6]

After the completion of the Canal in 1914, US overseas imperial authorities continued to represent Obeah and Vodou as cultural justifications for interventions or occupation. Two instances of this occurring are the US's military occupation of Haiti in 1915 and its military invasion of Panama in 1989. During the occupation of Haiti, US Marines justified the indiscriminate killing of Haitians by claiming the Haitians had attempted to offer the Marines up to Vodou gods and attempted to eat their organs.[7] Following the arrest of Panamanian dictator General Manuel Antonio Noriega in 1990, US-American news broadcasts emphasized that Noriega prayed to "voodoo gods" and kept voodoo artifacts in his office, including a bucket of blood, a collection of cow tongues, and other voodoo talismans.[8] Afro-Caribbean religions and the fears surrounding them, therefore, continued to appear in the US's diplomatic histories even after the 1905 Colon Mutiny. Throughout the century, they have remained a part of the US

[5] Carlos Miguel Patterson, "Yoruba, una religión que se practica en Panamá de manera activa y silenciosa," *Panamá América*, March 29, 2013, sec. Tema del Día. When discussing Cuba, I place "Santería" in quotations, as scholars have noted that practitioners in Cuba and the US view the term as derogatory and prefer the terms "La Regla de Ocha" or "Lucumí". Twenty-first century Panamanian practitioners continued to use the term "Santería." See Mena, "Cuban Santería, Haitian Vodun, Puerto Rican Spiritualism," 18.

[6] Patterson, "Yoruba, una religión que se practica en Panamá de manera activa y silenciosa."

[7] Alex Goodall, "Zombies, Cannibals and Werewolves," *History Today*, no. 3 (March 2021): 15. See also Renda, *Taking Haiti*.

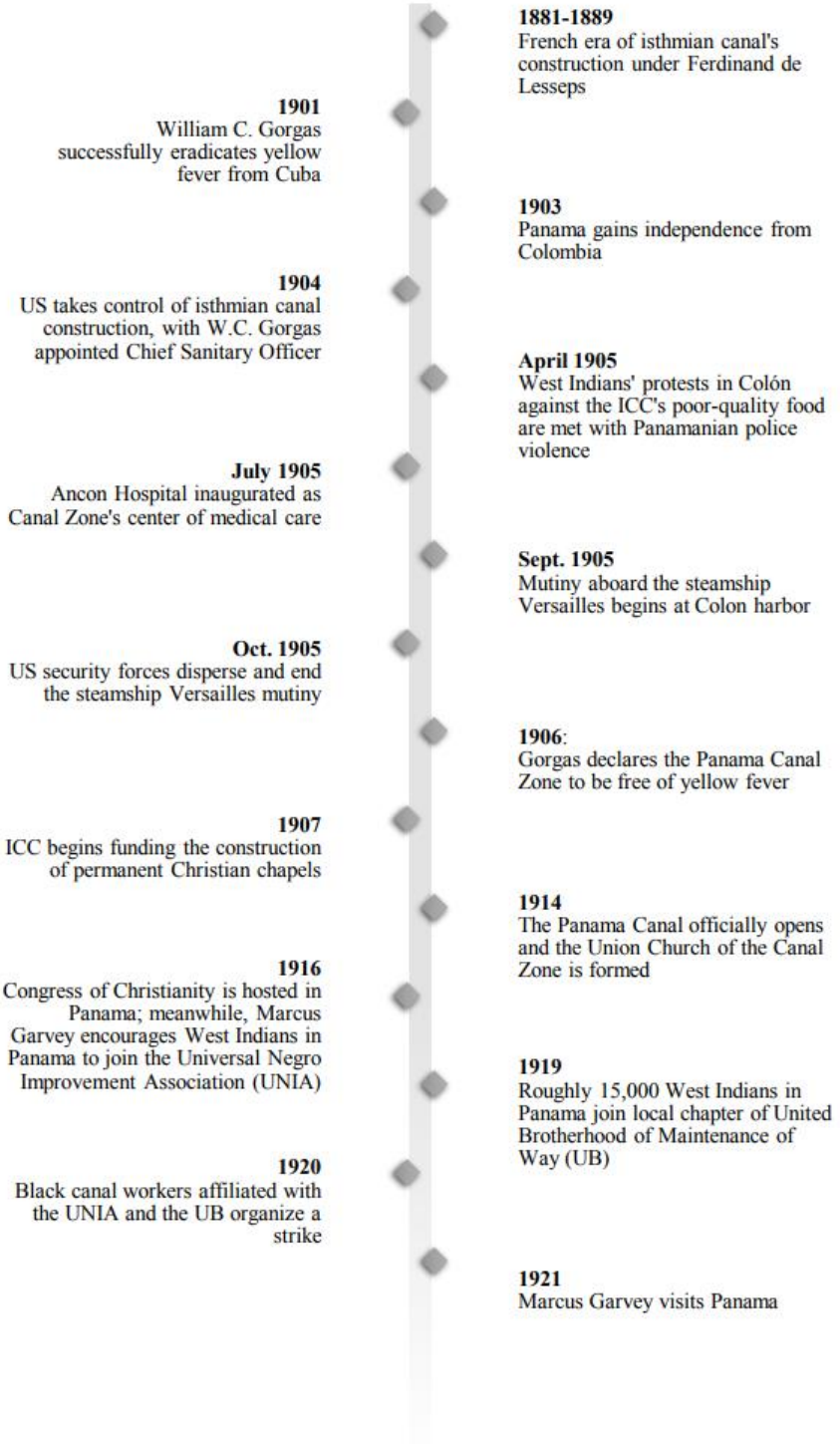
[8] John P. Bartkowski, "Claims-Making and Typifications of Voodoo as a Deviant Religion: Hex, Lies, and Videotape," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37, no. 4 (December 1998): 562–63.

empire's living history in the Caribbean world. These histories, thus, require that historians continue to question why moral panics and religious abjection over Afro-Caribbean spiritual practitioners persist the way they do even into the Cold War era's conflicts. This thesis's examination of these panics occurring in the 1900s and 1910s, therefore, opens avenues for further research on how Black Atlantic religions, as well as Christian religious anxieties, contributed to the formation of imperial policies and philosophies in Latin America for remainder of the century.

With its examination of the epistemic anxieties in the Zone, this study forms part of a larger scholarly effort to understand the origins and cultural artifacts of the US's nascent overseas empire. Much like other imperial excursions in Africa and Asia, episodes of fear, uncertainty, and anxiety among settlers in the Canal Zone that shaped the US's understanding of its imperial security. Security apparatuses in the Canal Zone found its roots in Protestant hegemony, sanitized spaces, and overt rituals of surveillance. In Panama specifically, these security practices took the form of the Canal Zone's campaigns to contain the tropical diseases, tropical jungle spaces, and the policing of the Afro-Caribbean spiritualities in the Zone's outskirts. Rather than notions of imperial security and surveillance solely having roots on solely US efficiency and rational sciences, the origins of the US's imperial infrastructure abroad had roots in its own vulnerability as a geopolitical and sociocultural orchestration. Furthermore, its development of security practices was porous and shaped by the very cultural elements that they had hoped to contain and eliminate. Thus, the history of US-Americans and West Indians epistemic and bodily struggles in the 1900s and 1910s contributes to our understanding of the unstable but also creolized materialization of the US's imperial designs abroad.

What lent to the US empire's bouts of violence in the 1905 Colón mutiny and in much of its rule of the Canal Zone was its stark setting surrounded by Black Caribbean epistemologies and traditions that preceded its nation and empire for centuries. Like other empires before it, the US empire found itself entrenched within a complex Black Atlantic system in the modern Caribbean. As a result, the discursive construction of the Canal Zone's spaces—the oceanic seascape, labor quarters, and medical structures —became a point contestation between US imperial power and the fugitive power wielded by Afro-Caribbean laborers. It remains true that the Canal's construction remains in the US's historical imagination as a feat of Western technological prowess. Yet, for the West Indian laborers who dug the canal, the engineering project represented moments of radically reclaiming urban, tropical, and oceanic spaces through alternative epistemologies. In the process, West Indians' intellectual and cultural presence reminded white US-Americans, and readers of this history today, of the US empire's position stitched into a Black Caribbean-Atlantic geography.

APPENDIX A
TIMELINE OF THE CANAL ZONE'S HISTORY,1903–1921



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# BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Marianne Quijano was born in Panama City, Panama. During her childhood, she grew up in Panama, Puerto Rico, Spain, and the US and learned to appreciate the history of all four countries. From 2015 to 2019, she attended Texas A&M University at Corpus Christi, where she earned a bachelor's degree in History *summa cum laude* and developed her interests in Latin American history. In the Fall of 2019, she began her graduate studies in Latin American & Caribbean History at the University of Florida. Her writing has been featured in the *NACLA Report on the Americas* and *Alpata: A Journal of History.* She plans to continue her doctoral studies and to develop a dissertation at UF.