Introduction

A peculiar incident took place in Cuba in 1944. David Nathan, from Trinidad and Tobago, proclaimed the first anniversary of a pan-Caribbean nationalist "Dominion Government." This suggested the independence of the British Caribbean colonies, from Trinidad and Barbados to Jamaica and the Leeward and Windward Islands. A handbill in Spanish declared the "First Native Government of these territories since the beginning of European invasion to America in 1492," and that "No longer should we be afflicted when foreigners call us colonial subjects." The "Caribbean Dominion," according to the document, was approved by King George VI, the British monarch, and the governments of New Zealand and the United States. Signed by the "Caribbean Dominion Assembly of the Inter Caribbean Labor Party," the handbill included a photograph of the "First Congress of the representative workers," which took place in Camagüey, Cuba, on May 20, 1943, and highlighted the presence of British representatives. Nathan's initiative seemed to have been well received by Cubans in Camagüey, where the "Caribbean Dominion" flag was displayed during the Labor Day parade.[1]

How did this happen? How exactly did Cuba become the place from where a pan-Caribbean independence from Britain came to be declared, in Spanish? This otherwise isolated story encapsulates the trans-territorial connections emerging out of the experience of black British Caribbean migrants in Cuba during the first half of the twentieth century. By the

[1] Flysheet, "Caribbean Dominion," in National Archives, United Kingdom, Foreign Office Papers (hereafter NA, FO) 371/38075; Sir George Ogilvie-Forbes to Anthony Eden, London, May 8, 1944, NA, FO 371/38075, AN 1936.

FIGURE 0.1 "Caribbean Dominion" flysheet.
Source: NA, FO 371/38075.

1940s, when Nathan made his bold statement in the context of the Labor Day celebrations, four decades of British Antillean migration to Cuba had brought together the Cuban and Caribbean working-class histories in connection with Britain and the United States. This book tells that history; one of more than 140,000 British Caribbean migrants who traveled to Cuba and lived there from 1898 to 1948, experiencing instances of pan-ethnic and labor solidarity, but more often virulent antiblack racism and discrimination. They arrived to Cuba from different British colonies in the region, and from places like Costa Rica and Panama, shaping a "circum-Caribbean migratory sphere."[2] David Nathan's advertisement contains, or hints at, many of the aspects surrounding the history of British Antilleans in Cuba contained in this book.

First, there is a border-crossing experience that transcends the conventional political, colonial, and linguistic divisions of the Caribbean. This obviously includes migration and the presence of British Antilleans in Cuban territory, but also cross-labor solidarities through interisland alliances and their inclusion in the Labor Parade in Camagüey. Language barriers were crossed, with a handbill produced in Spanish. Nathan's 1944 border-crossing initiative was not in a vacuum; while living in Guantánamo in 1938 he joined forces with Trinidadian activist Arthur Cipriani favoring the struggles of British Caribbean workers against the "abuses of the capitalist class." He claimed to have the endorsement of workers in the colonies as well as those "residing in foreign countries" such as Cuba.[3] That is the pan-Caribbean setting behind the story of British Antilleans in Cuba.

Second, and constantly present in the history of British Antilleans in Cuba (and also in the handbill), are the empire and its representatives: the "English Commissioner" and the "Consulate General." In the announcement, the British Empire is portrayed in contradictory fashion, as the colonial empire from which Nathan's "Dominion Government" seeks emancipation, but also as the source of official sanction with King George VI's approval of the flag. The endorsement is also conveyed through the photograph in the handbill, in which the representatives are accompanied by more than two dozen British Caribbean workers (including at least two women). This apparent contradiction between allegiance to the empire and contesting its authority will be examined in this study.

[2] Putnam, *Radical Moves*, 3–5.
[3] Bolland, *On the March*, 199. According to Bolland, before 1944, Nathan had sent an earlier declaration of independence to the US.

Third, the handbill indicates the existence of interisland alliances among British Antilleans as workers, but also unity against specific (British) and general (post-1492 European) colonialism in the region. Along with the contradictions highlighted above, this book will discuss the multiple ways in which British Antilleans challenged British colonial authority. Moreover, British Caribbean migrants were the driving force behind the success of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in Cuba. This organization provided a platform against the manifestations of antiblack racism that were part of the long history of European colonialism.

Finally, while the rationale for US inclusion in Nathan's flyer is not explicit, it signals to its ubiquitous presence in Cuban and Caribbean history. During the period covered by this book, the United States made four full or partial military interventions in Cuba and was involved in the island's commercial and political affairs in multiple ways. Also, US corporations owned many of the sugar plantations where the British Antilleans worked, and Jamaicans and Eastern Caribbean islanders had diverse interactions with North Americans in their roles as sugar managers and employees, as plantation security, or as members of US military forces deployed in the island. The twentieth-century Cuban plantation society provided the context for the alliances mentioned above, but also for divisions among British Antilleans and the inevitable tensions between local and foreign workers that unfolded in Cuba.

The history of British Antilleans in Cuba opens windows into different interconnected fields and historiographies, including Cuban history, the history of Caribbean migrations, Afro-Caribbean diaspora studies, and re-examinations of the British Empire, all framed in the context of the "American century."[4] Such a scope is certainly challenging, even daunting. Yet not engaging with the wider connections embedded in the experience of British Caribbean migrants would only replicate a nationally framed Cuban history and conceal the processes that make this history sociologically relevant. By examining events in local Cuban settings, patterns of regional migration, and North Atlantic connections with the United States and Britain, the book highlights key features of Cuban, Caribbean, and African diaspora studies. Below, I will discuss some important themes that are present throughout the book, and refer to the major players

[4] Williams, *From Columbus to Castro*, 419–442.

involved in them. This will set the scene for the chapters that follow and the scholarly context in which this book inserts itself.

THE AFRO-CARIBBEAN DIASPORA AND CARIBBEAN MIGRATION

Writing from the perspective of the Caribbean experience in Britain in the 1990s, Stuart Hall discussed the issue of "Caribbean identity." He stated that those "who have completed the triangular journey back to Britain" and "speak of the emerging black British diaspora" have been "twice diasporized." In Hall's narrative, it was only after being "wrenched from their own cultures" in Africa for insertion in "the colonizing plantation relations of slavery" that people of African descent in the Caribbean migrated – this time voluntarily – to the British imperial center to become the "black British diaspora."[5] Over the geometric image of the triangular trade generally identified with the work of Eric Williams, Hall superimposed the people of African descent who moved through two lines of that triangle: first, from Africa to the Caribbean, and second, to Britain after World War II.

For all that conveys about the larger history of the African diaspora, the triangular image obscures segments of people who moved elsewhere outside the triangle, departing from its vertices and branching off from the sides. These segments include thousands of men and women of African descent and their offspring who, after experiencing colonial slavery, gained their freedom in their respective nineteenth-century Caribbean locations and migrated mostly to Hispanic territories in Central America. These people became "diasporas" *before* they or their descendants proceeded to Britain. Prior to the postwar migrations to Britain stressed by Hall, Afro-Caribbean peoples were already diasporized – literally dispersed – as migrant workers around the Caribbean and beyond. They became part of what Michael Gomez identified as the "widespread circumventions of the African-descended."[6] This includes tens of thousands of black British Antilleans who built railways and the Panama Canal in Central America, worked in the banana plantations of Costa Rica and Nicaragua, and labored in the "American sugar kingdom" of the early twentieth-century Hispanic Caribbean. In other words, something (or many things) happened between the Caribbean vertex of

[5] Hall, "Negotiating Caribbean Identities," 6–7. [6] Gomez, *Reversing Sail*, 162.

Hall's triangle and the British one, as segments of traveling people scattered throughout the Caribbean.[7]

This intra-Caribbean dispersion takes place in Lara Putnam's "circum-Caribbean migratory sphere," which includes Cuba, the setting for David Nathan's opening anecdote. For her, early twentieth-century episodes of intra-Caribbean migration were influential in the development of black internationalisms and understandings of race and nation that shaped both parallel and subsequent politics in other sites, including previous and future migrant "homes."[8] Our knowledge of the histories – and movements – at that Caribbean vertex of the larger triangle become central for our understanding of subsequent experiences of Caribbean peoples in other destinations. It is during that historical period, often eclipsed by the larger triangular narrative of the later "black British diaspora," that migration acquired new significance for those living in the region.[9] It was, as Putnam suggests, "a turning point in the imagining of the African diaspora."[10]

For blacks in contemporary Britain with roots in the region, the Caribbean is not only, as Hall put it, "the first, the original and the purest diaspora," the initial destination of forced dispersion from Africa.[11] The Caribbean is also a place of dispersion in and of itself, constituted by its own internal migrations and the mobility of its people at a crucial historical juncture in which people of African descent tasted (and tested) freedom. It is not surprising that those regional episodes of mobility appear, at times discretely, in the works of Caribbean writers in Britain, from C. L. R. James and George Lamming to Andrea Levy and Caryl Phillips. The century after the emancipation of slavery in the British Caribbean (1838–1938) was characterized by unprecedented levels of human movement within and outside the Caribbean. Both the quantity and spread of this mobility are staggering. Considering only the British Caribbean colonies, a conservative estimate suggests that nearly half a million people – possibly more – moved from one place to another in those hundred years. The outward movement from Barbados between 1861 and 1921 has been estimated at 103,500.[12] Barbadians moved everywhere: northbound to islands like Antigua and Santa Cruz, and

[7] Giovannetti, "Migración en las Antillas," 545–613. [8] Putnam, *Radical Moves*, 7–8.
[9] Thomas-Hope, "The Establishment of a Migration Tradition," 66–81; Patterson, "Migration in Caribbean Societies," 106–145.
[10] Putnam, *Radical Moves*, 234. [11] Hall, "Negotiating Caribbean Identities," 6.
[12] Roberts, "Emigration from the Island of Barbados," 275.

southbound to Trinidad and Tobago, British Guiana, and Suriname, even reaching as far as Brazil.[13] There was also the westward migration to the Panama Canal.[14] Windward and Leeward Islanders migrated to the southern Caribbean, but also went to Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, and Central America to work in mining and agricultural enterprises.[15] Jamaicans moved to virtually every Central American republic in the tens of thousands, working in railway construction, banana plantations, and the French and US efforts to build the Panama Canal. They went also to the Dutch Antilles, and even crossed to the Pacific, to build a railway in Ecuador.[16] In addition, more than 100,000 British Caribbean migrants moved out of the region to the United States in different capacities.[17] This is, by all accounts, a dispersed population. The movement to Cuba constitutes part of that dispersion – an important one – that occurred just before the mass transatlantic migration invoked by Hall.

More than problematizing the triangular diasporic image, the experience of black British Caribbean migrants in Cuba can help us rethink scholarly understandings of diaspora. If we take, for example, Robin Cohen's list of common features of diaspora and hold it up to the experience of British Antilleans in Cuba, challenging questions emerge.[18] For example, in the chapters that follow, it will be evident that black Caribbean migrants had a "troubled relationship" with their host society (Cuba), where they were perceived as outsiders, and treated as such. But given that British Antilleans displayed allegiance to the British Empire as well as strong ties to their islands of origin, one could ask, were they

[13] Roberts, "Emigration from the Island of Barbados," 252; Lowenthal, "The Population of Barbados," 453–455; Greenfield, "Barbadians in the Brazilian Amazon," 44–64.

[14] Richardson, *Panama Money in Barbados, 1900–1920*; Newton, *The Silver Men*; Greene, *The Canal Builders*; Senior, *Dying to Better Themselves*.

[15] Richardson, "Freedom and Migration in the Leeward Caribbean, 1838–48," 391–408; Richardson, "Human Mobility in the Windward Caribbean, 1884–1902," 301–319; Chinea, *Race and Labor in the Hispanic Caribbean*; del Castillo, *La inmigración de braceros*; Myers, "Post-Emancipation Migrations and Population Change in Dominica: 1834–1950," 87–109; *Report of the West India Royal Commission*, 50.

[16] Proudfoot, *Population Movements in the Caribbean*, 79; Newton, *The Silver Men*; Greene, *The Canal Builders*; Allen, "Twentieth Century Migration from the English-Speaking Caribbean"; "Ecuador," *Jamaica Times*, December 8, 1900, 5; "Ecuador," *Jamaica Times*, January 26, 1901, 2; "Ecuador," *Jamaica Times*, February 1, 1901, 14; "Ecuador: The Long Looked For Report," *Jamaica Times*, March 22, 1901, 7; "From the Sea to Quito: The Railway in Ecuador," *Jamaica Times*, September 9, 1900, 5.

[17] Proudfoot, *Population Movements in the Caribbean*, 88; Hahamovitch, *The Fruit of Their Labor*; Hahamovitch, *No Man's Land*; James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*; Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations*.

[18] Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 17.

dispersed from multiple "homes" or from one single empire? Did they see their intra-Caribbean dispersion as part of a larger history as sons and daughters of Africa or as "subjects" of the British Empire? Did memories of either possible "homeland" (Africa and Britain) crystalize through their involvement in churches, organizations like the UNIA, British imperial organizations, or the game of cricket? To confront Cohen's features more directly, which of their possible "homes" (Africa, Caribbean islands, or British Empire), if any, had their "collective commitment" or held their idealizations while being dispersed? To what reasons can we attribute any "strong ethnic group consciousness" emerging among the migrants while in Cuba? Was that consciousness in response to the antagonism and "lack of acceptance" by the Cubans? Or was it because of a "common cultural and religious heritage" as people of African descent or as British subjects? Or was it both? This book offers evidence that contributes to our understanding of the intra-Caribbean diaspora. Much like the Afro-Cubans and African Americans studied by Frank Guridy, the migrants in this study did not use the term "diaspora," yet they did engage in diaspora-making actions and generated trans-territorial connections that forged a common history.[19] In many ways, that history relied upon pan-Caribbean connections like those stressed by Nathan's initiative, but also through organizations such as the UNIA.

THE CUBAN NATION AND ITS BLACK CARIBBEAN OUTSIDERS

To understand why British Antilleans had a troubled relationship with Cuba, their host society, we need to know more about the Cuban society in which more than 140,000 black British Caribbean migrants landed. What historical and ideological factors contributed to its national formation, and in what ways? What was happening during the four decades of Cuban history in which these migrants participated? How can one make sense of the racial, ethnic, and national politics they encountered – and triggered – upon their arrival? The reception afforded to black migrants in Cuba and their marking as racial and ethnic others should take into account both the long nineteenth-century background before mass migration took place and the multiple events and processes that unfolded as they lived in early twentieth-century Cuba.[20]

[19] Guridy, *Forging Diaspora*, 4–7. [20] Holt, "Marking," 1–20.

The nineteenth-century background includes what scholars have labeled the "black fear" in Cuba or the "terrified consciousness" of the Caribbean.[21] While the slave plantation economy thrived, colonial authorities and Creole elites lived on edge, concerned about an uprising by the enslaved, an invasion of foreign blacks, or a combination of both. The Haitian Revolution and independence in 1804 gave strength to those anxieties, which intensified with events in Cuba such as the Aponte (1812) and Escalera (1844) conspiracies.[22] The Baptist War (1831–1832) and the Morant Bay Rebellion (1865) in Jamaica, and the narratives around them, also contributed to racial fears, antiblack feelings, and the obsession with racial balance in Cuba.[23] This "terrified consciousness" in the Caribbean was then parallel – and complementary – to the beginning of the idea of Cuba as racially "white," which was advanced by some thinkers in the nineteenth century.[24]

The struggle for independence in Cuba between 1868 and 1898 witnessed its share of racial paranoia. The fact that enslaved workers were freed during the Ten Years' War (1868–1878) and the growing participation of blacks and mulattoes as the conflict escalated to its final war (1895–1898) heightened the concerns of Spanish colonial authorities. The brewing racial unity within the independence struggle was met by, and had to contend with, Spanish colonialist representations of insurgents as black savages and characterizations of their movement as racial war.[25] The "specter of racial strife," Louis Pérez Jr. has noted, also existed among observers in the United States who were concerned about the racial composition of the insurgency.[26] One relevant aspect of the social construction of the black fear is that during the independence conflict Afro-Cuban

[21] Duharte Jiménez, *Seis ensayos de interpretación histórica*, 83–94; Maingot, "Haiti and the Terrified Consciousness of the Caribbean," 53–80; Camacho, *Miedo negro, poder blanco*.

[22] Paquette, *Sugar Is Made with Blood*; Childs, *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba*.

[23] Conde de Alcudia [Antonio de Saavedra y Jofré] to Captain General of Cuba, May 25, 1832, Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Asuntos Políticos (hereafter ANC, AP), leg. 35, File 36; Miguel Tacón, "Circular," January 3, 1835, Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Gobierno Superior Civil (hereafter ANC, GSC), leg. 1641, no. 82521; Bruno Badan to Domingo Dulce, government of Cuba, October 28, 1865, Archivo, Servicio Histórico Militar, Ultramar, Cuba, Asuntos Políticos (hereafter SHM, U-C, AP), leg. 90 (roll 24), November 1865; Domingo Dulce to Excellency Minister of State, October 30, 1865; SHM, U-C, AP, leg. 90 (roll 24), no. 3 [October 1865].

[24] Saco, *Paralelo entre la isla de Cuba y algunas colonias inglesas*, 17; Saco, *Mi primera pregunta*, 6–7. See Opatrný, "El estado-nación o la 'cubanidad'," 321–416; and Portuondo Zúñiga, *José Antonio Saco*, 161–166.

[25] Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*. [26] Pérez, *The War of 1898*, 14, 29.

independence leader Antonio Maceo was connected with – and lived in – Jamaica and Haiti, Caribbean territories associated with blackness and revolt that eventually became the source of migrant labor.[27]

The Cuban reception of British Antilleans has to consider the historical background described above, but also the social and political developments taking place as they arrived en masse on Cuban shores. The period from 1898 to 1948 was not lacking in disruptive events and processes: revolts, political and military interventionism, economic and market woes, and two world wars were all unsettling for the Cuban social and political landscape and influenced the sugar industry where most migrants labored. For most of the early Republican era, Cuban politics were dominated by two political parties, Conservative and Liberal, both with links to the struggle for independence.[28] After 1902, with foreign investment dominating the economy, local politicians concentrated on gaining access to state power. Elections acquired tactical importance, domestic turmoil was not uncommon, and political revolts turned into a tool to manipulate electoral outcomes. The Liberal Party revolted against Tomás Estrada Palma's re-election in 1906, triggering US military intervention and the eventual provisional government until 1909.[29] The Liberals took power in 1910 with José Miguel Gómez as president, only to have its main political challenge in the Partido Independiente de Color (PIC, Independent Party of Color). The PIC's black and mulatto leadership demanded equality and their "rightful share" within the Cuban nation-state, but Afro-Cubans were generally perceived as threats to the ideas of a white nation. Moreover, as Aline Helg has argued, Cuban blacks were framed as the source of fears tied to, among other things, foreign blackness and rebellion. Accused of divisionism and racism, as well as outside influence from Haiti and Jamaica, the PIC was thwarted from participation in electoral politics. They organized a revolt in 1912, and Gómez crushed it with full force, killing thousands of blacks and militants in the process.[30] Gómez's display of state violence and power did not favor the Liberal Party, and Conservatives won in 1912, with Mario García Menocal having two consecutive terms as president until 1920. His long tenure did not go without turmoil. The Liberal Party led a revolt known as "La Chambelona" during the 1917 elections, one that – as will be

[27] Zacaïr, "Haiti in His Mind," 47–78. [28] Ibarra, *Cuba, 1898–1921*.
[29] Lockmiller, *Magoon in Cuba*.
[30] Helg, *Our Rightful Share*; Portuondo Linares, *Los independientes de color*.