Ultimately Other-ed: The Transnational Development of Racial Discourse in Ecuador and the Black Subject

Thesis

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Abstract

Anti-Black racism in Ecuador affects the everyday life experiences of Afro-Ecuadorians. The United Nations 2011 “Year of Afro-descendents” campaign against anti-Black racism globally provides an opportunity for the Ecuadorian state to address anti-Black racism in Ecuador. However, how has the Ecuadorian state historically produced meanings of race and nation that have contributed to contemporary anti-Black racism? Ultimately Other-ed: The Development of Transnational Racial Discourse in Ecuador and the Black Subject analyzes the early twentieth century development of Latin American racial discourse in a transnational context by analyzing the work of three public intellectuals. Through the works of Jose Vasconcelos, Benjamin Carrión and Fernando Ortiz, we can see the transnational operation of a regional racial ideology with different national articulations for the Black subject. The thesis draws upon racial formation theory in order to understand the impact of Ecuadorian public intellectual, Benjamin Carrión, on rearticulating the meanings of race and nation. The thesis also shows the impact U.S. racial discourse on Latin America as a result of U.S. imperial aggression throughout Latin America during the early twentieth century. Through a close examination of the foundations of anti-Black racism by the Ecuadorian state, a more critical understanding of contemporary efforts against anti-Black racism by the state can be reached.
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# Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... ii

Vita ................................................................................................................................. iii

Introduction .................................................................................................................... 1

Section I: Rearticulating Race in Ecuador during the Early Twentieth Century: Theoretical Perspectives and Socio-historical Context ............................. 11

Section II: Jose Vasconcelos: Forefather of Mestizaje as a Racial Project ... 23

Section III: Benjamin Carrión: An Ecuadorian Articulation of Mestizaje ... 34

Section IV: Carrión and the Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana ...................... 44

Section V: Mestizaje Counterpoint: Fernando Ortiz and Cuba ...................... 53

Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 57

Bibliography ................................................................................................................ 62
Introduction

In Ecuador today, and throughout the Americas, racial discrimination and anti-Black racism affect Afro-descendants and state and local actors are responding. For example, a 2004 study in Ecuador found that “Afro-Ecuadorians were the most discriminated against [among other ethnic groups], with 44% reporting having experienced racial discrimination in the past year, most often occurring on the street (63%), in their neighborhood (38%), aboard public transportation, i.e., buses (37%), and in government offices (36%)” (Hooker 283). The institutional and quotidian racism present in contemporary Ecuador reflects centuries-old social and state processes that have contributed to such entrenched discrimination. In response, in 2010 and 2011 Afro-Ecuadorian social movements have organized action under the pretext of local and international campaigns. These state driven campaigns seek redress of past and current anti-Black discrimination in Ecuador and throughout the African Diaspora. However, in order for the state to address contemporary racism, which is deeply embedded in Ecuadorian society, there must be a thorough examination of how notions of race and nation have been historically produced by the state and abetted by important national cultural figures. This essay contributes to an understanding of contemporary Afro-descendant racial exclusion and racism in terms of the formation of a transnational racial discourse in the encounter between Latin America and the ideas and practices of the United States.

Anti-Black racism today affects the African Diaspora, owing to a historical legacy. The development of anti-Black racism in Ecuador did not occur within a
vacuum. The regional influence of public intellectuals throughout Latin American nations contributed to Ecuador’s national articulation. In addition, inter-regional influences such as U.S. imperialism also contributed to the development of racial discourse in the state formation of Latin America. Given this transnational context for the development of racial discourse and anti-Black racism, a contemporary campaign against Afro-Ecuadorian anti-Black racism operates transnationally.

The contemporary transnational context for Afro-Latin American struggle is represented in the 2011 United Nations’ “Year of Afro-descendents” initiative and subsequent Afro-descendent exchange between Ecuador and the U.S. During this year, member states of the UN are encouraged to engage in efforts to address Afro-descendent discrimination. For example, Secretary-General of the UN, Ban Ki-Moon, stated in 2010 that this campaign should promote Afro-descendent’s, “full integration into social, economic and political life, and at all levels of decision-making” (“UN urges”). In Ecuador, Afro-Ecuadorian Minister of Peoples, Social Movements and Citizen Participation, Alexandra Ocles, organized a conference to commemorate the UN’s declaration in December of 2010. Ocles, who has been an activist fighting for Afro-Ecuadorian collective rights prior to her official role in President Correa’s administration, discussed the importance of the event “to raise the public awareness that illustrates the African population, and build alliances between social movements of African descendants nationwide and internationally” (Ocles). For example, U.S. actor and international activist, Danny Glover, was invited to the conference, in addition to other Afro-descendent activists from across Latin America, and contributed to a proposal entitled, “The Perspective of Cultural Democracy in the Context of Latin American and
Caribbean Integration” (“La celebracion”). Danny Glover, a founding activist for the first Black Studies program at San Francisco State University in 1968, works with *TransAfrica Forum*, an NGO with pan-African roots and mission. The work and experiences of Glover and other international Black activists who have been involved in Afro-descendent social movements against racial discrimination in various national contexts contribute to Ocles’ efforts in Ecuador for racial equality and full integration. Therefore, transnational exchange of Afro-descendent experiences and strategies within racist societies take place today under the 2011 UN campaign.

This essay focuses on the early twentieth century as a foundational and transformative period for the transnational formation of national racial categories in Ecuador and the U.S. that impact Afro-descendants today. Since the U.S. issued the Monroe Doctrine in the early nineteenth century, which warned against European imperialist aggression in the Americas, Latin America has been viewed in constant comparison with their northern neighbors. This sentiment is reflected in the independence era writings of Venezuelan leader Simon Bolivar, and later in the nineteenth century, that of Cuban revolutionary, Jose Marti. Their anti-U.S. and anti-imperialist rhetoric contributed significantly to a Latin American regionalism and nationalism in response to U.S. military, economic and political aggression. Bolivar and Marti both wrote on the region’s cultural distinction from the U.S. in terms of race. Following the independence of many Latin American nations in the nineteenth century, U.S. economic and political influence in Latin America intensified during the early twentieth century. The intensification of U.S. interests in Latin America fomented a nationalist movement whereby nations begin to articulate and imagine themselves
culturally and aesthetically in contradistinction to the U.S. Embedded in the cultural influence of the U.S. in Latin America is a racial discourse marked by U.S. Jim Crow and segregation. Themes of modernization and progress socially, politically and economically permeated the agenda of Western nations during this period, and Latin America relied on the work of leaders and public intellectuals in fashioning these ideas to their national and regional contexts. The epistemological groundwork for national ideologies of race come from the influential writing of Latin American public intellectuals that are in conversation with each other through their efforts of establishing national unity and modernization.

In order to understand the Black subject in Latin American epistemologies of race, this essay makes intertextual sense of mestizaje in and around the writings of three Latin American public intellectuals during the early twentieth century in their regional and national contexts. Mestizaje, best translated as “miscegenation” in English, represents a racial ideology explaining the bio-cultural and aesthetic blending of supposedly pure racial categories in Latin America. Significant to this discussion is how Latin American public intellectuals imagined the Black subject within their cultural texts that promoted mestizaje as a trope for the nation. National unity, modernization and cultural distinction from the United States, among other motivations, informed their vision of cultural citizenship. Furthermore, mestizaje “underscored the affirmation of cultural identity as constituted by "national character" (lo cubano, lo mexicano, lo brasileino, etc.)” and also ecuatorianidad (Ecuadorianess) that defines the limits and essence of “lo ecuatoriano” (Martinez-Echazabal 21).
Therefore, the intertextuality of *mestizaje* in the work of Jose Vasconcelos, Fernando Ortiz and Benjamin Carrión, in Mexico, Cuba and Ecuador, will provide primary source material for the investigation of the transnational formation of racial ideology in three Latin American national contexts. Questions of interest will be how these authors employ the Black subject in their national conception of *mestizaje*? How is the meaning of race redefined in terms of a hybrid national identity? What does the interplay and emphasis of certain racial categories signify about the position of the Black subject? These questions and others will prove useful for a textual analysis of *mestizaje*; however, a more theoretical approach as to the importance of their works as Latin American public intellectuals to state formation and anti-Black racism will offer more insight as to how these authors impact contemporary conceptions of race.

In order to effectively analyze the formation of transnational racial discourse in Latin America and the U.S., this essay draws on *racial formation theory*, as coined by Michael Omi and Howard Winant. Omi and Winant define *racial formation* as “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (Omi and Winant 55). With regard to the cultural writings on *mestizaje* by public intellectuals, we can see a determined effort to transform the meaning of racial categories in the formation of regional and national ideologies. In addition, drawing upon *racial formation theory*, we can view the epistemological work of public intellectuals’ racial discourse on state institutions as a *racial project*. Omi and Winant describe a racial project as “simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines” (Omi and Winan 125). Mestizaje works as a racial project,
because it functions to “mediate between discursive or representational means in which race is identified and signified on the one hand, and the institutional and organizational forms in which it is routinized and standardized on the other” (Omi and Winant 60). The prolific writing of Benjamin Carrión in Ecuador and the establishment of the Casa De La Cultura Ecuatoriana (Ecuadorian House of Culture) in 1944 represent the epistemological foundation of notions of race and citizenship that result in institutional and quotidian racism. Ecuadorian leaders and society approached his work with enthusiasm because it often legitimated their social and political standing. By looking at the transnational context during the early twentieth century for nation-state formation, and the role of race and the African subject in notions of cultural citizenship and progress, the contemporary transnational context for anti-Black racial discrimination and Afro-diasporic movements can be better understood.

In addition, this essay seeks to understand how mestizaje, as a signifying process for race developed transnationally, and also how white supremacy is central to the development of both Latin American and United States racial discourses. Using the aforementioned texts, this section will discuss the fixity and fluidity of categories of race that produce representations that are both self-evident and uncertain. Stuart Hall’s discussion of race as a “floating signifier” informs this analysis of the function of mestizaje. In addition, Charles Mills’ discussion of the racial polity and the centrality of white supremacy to state formation over the past five hundred years in The Racial Contract will allow for a transnational focus. For example, Mills asserts that “Globally, the Racial Contract effects a final paradoxical norming and racing of space, a writing out of the polity of certain spaces…” (Mills 413). Thus, these theorists will help in
understanding how white supremacy ultimately informs U.S. and Latin American racial discourses and that they must be transnational in scope for understanding their development during the early twentieth century.

Emphasis on the impact of transnational racial discourse for Afro-descendants is a timely addition to scholarship in Black Studies that seeks to include the diversity of Black experience throughout the African Diaspora. By analyzing the impact of U.S. racial discourse on the development of Latin American articulations of race, we can better understand the regional and national development of the African Diaspora. However, the term “African Diaspora” often carries an ambiguous meaning, therefore this essay understands that “Diaspora work seeks deeper explorations into the social, psychic, political, cultural, and economic meanings of black movement, as well as the interrelationships diasporans maintain among themselves…” (Vinson 7). The anti-racism work of Ocles and Glover represent contemporary interrelationships between the African Diaspora in Ecuador.

This essay contributes to Black Studies scholarship because it seeks to understand the transnational development of racial discourse that impacted the Afro-Ecuadorian struggle for self-determination that continues today. In addition, scholar Ben Vinson comments on the paucity of Afro-Latin American research generally stating that, “apart from Brazil, there were limited attempts to bridge the evolving diasporic discourse in Black Studies with emerging Latin American research on blackness” (Vinson 11). The development of social, political and academic concept of Pan-Africanism of the 1960’s and even analyses of Marcus Garvey’s contribution to notions of an “African Diaspora” have tangentially engaged Afro-Latin America. Finally, research on Afro-Latin America
offers a unique terrain for further theorizing the African Diaspora due to “the shifting nature of Latin America’s blackness [that] makes for more ambiguous, less linear relationships with the Diaspora than can be encountered in other regions, particularly the United States” (Vinson 9). The Latin American public intellectuals critiqued in this essay each engage in an early twentieth century national and regional transformation of the meaning of race, racial mixture and Blackness.

The essay is divided into five sections that work to understand the impact of these racial discourses on anti-Black racism in Ecuador. The first section discusses the socio-historical context in which public intellectuals wrote, highlighting U.S. imperialism and the political and economic instability that characterized most Latin American nations during the early twentieth century. In addition it provides helpful theoretical perspectives for understanding state formation and the operation of mestizaje as a racial project such as Omi and Winant. The second section discusses the importance and influence of Jose Vasconcelos’ 1925 La Raza Cosmica on the development of Latin American discourse on race and nation. This section also focuses on the Black subject in his discourse and how it is imagined in contradistinction to the U.S. The third section analyzes Benjamin Carrión’s 1928 Los Creadores de la Nueva America in relation to Vasconcelos for their shared ideology of racial mixing. Significantly, the Black subject in Vasconcelos and Carrión are positioned differently in terms of race and nation. The fourth section offers a counterpoint to the mestizaje of Vasconcelos and Carrión because Fernando Ortiz’ 1947 Cuban Counterpoint offers a Cuban articulation that places Blackness more centrally in the nation. Finally, a fifth section relates how the racial discourse development by Carrión and other Latin American intellectuals becomes institutionalized in the creation
of the Ecuadorian House of Culture in 1941. This section brings the foundational work of state racial projects during the early twentieth century to the contemporary through the legacy of Carrión and his institution.

The work of Latin American public intellectuals in the formation of national notions of race and citizenship that contribute to contemporary Afro-descendant discrimination cannot be underestimated. The efficacy of mestizaje as a racial project and trope for Latin American national identities speaks to the transformative and influential power of public intellectuals. Afro-Latin American contemporary struggles against institutional and quotidian racism stem from an understanding of race in Latin America proudly promoted by national educators like Jose Vasconcelos, Benjamin Carrión and Fernando Ortiz. While focusing within one national context can illuminate local racial formations, this essay is concerned with the transnational context of racial formation throughout Latin America and the United States during the early twentieth century. The three countries and cultural texts selected represent three distinct iterations of mestizaje in the culturally different topographies of Central America, the Caribbean and the Andes. These three regions comprise a pan-Latin American sentiment of unity reflected in the writers that should also be seen in distinction from each other. The UN 2011 Year of Afro-descendants seeks to redress racial discrimination across the Americas and African Diaspora. A prominent anthropologist of contemporary Ecuador describes the Afro-Ecuadorian as the “Ultimate Other” within Ecuadorian society as compared to the racial and cultural discrimination against other groups (Rahier 12). This essay will analyze the cultural and state foundations of Latin American racial discourses during the early twentieth century in relation to Blackness in order to understand how Afro-
Ecuadorians become an “Ultimate Other”. If *mestizaje* is understood as a racial project by the state during the early twentieth century that negatively effected Afro-descendants, then we must be critical of contemporary state engagements with race as in the case of the state–sponsored work of Alexandra Ocles.
Section I- Rearticulating Race in Ecuador during the Early Twentieth Century: Theoretical Perspectives and Socio-Historical Context

“Race” is but one of many markers of difference and value in Ecuadorian society. Depending on the context, the meaning and cultural capital, race changes over time and space. For Afro-Ecuadorians racial markers of difference have historically been conceived and expressed by the Ecuadorian state in ways that marginalize their presence in the nation. The struggle of contemporary Afro-Ecuadorians against racism reflects centuries old colonial and state processes that impact the meaning and value of Blackness. In Latin America during the early twentieth century, the meaning of race was contested and transformed in a transnational context. Latin American state formation during this time rearticulated racial categories responding to great political, economic and social change. This section provides the socio-historical context and theoretical perspectives necessary to understand the impact of this rearticulation of race in Ecuador. Following this discussion in the next section, an analysis of several Latin American public intellectuals, such as Jose Vasconcelos, Benjamin Carrión and Fernando Ortiz will enable me to show their crucial contribution to the racial reconfiguration of the region and their respective nation-states. In order to understand contemporary Afro-Ecuadorian struggle against anti-Black racism in Ecuador, this discussion will examine the role of the state and public intellectuals during this transformative period for the meaning of race and nation.
Public intellectuals produced texts on national culture that contributed to education and the definition of race and state. The development of state power depended on a definition of national culture and citizenship according to the cultural texts of elite public intellectuals. During this time, nations across Latin America constructed a regional and national identity in order to promote state development and modernization. Specifically, the collective impact of these intellectuals on the Latin American nation of Ecuador represents “the discursive production and ideological rationalization of modern state power” in terms of race (Goldberg 5). Firstly, their rhetoric operated transnationally, negotiating concepts and philosophies of race and nation throughout their cultural texts. Secondly, U.S. imperialism impacted this development through cultural penetration resulting from economic, political and military aggression. Thirdly, mestizaje offers an ideology that paradoxically implies universal inclusion, while at the same time excludes non-whites and especially Blacks that takes advantage of the polysemic nature of race. The development of ideas of race and nation in Ecuador depended on endogenous as well as exogenous texts and intellectuals.

The influence of U.S. racial discourse under U.S. Imperialism in Latin America during the early twentieth century impacted the development of Latin American states and the meaning of race simultaneously. Driven by the demand for raw materials such as rubber, cacao and bananas, U.S. investment in Latin America intensified. Through military, economic and political aggression, U.S. culture and racial discourse impacted Latin American state development. For example, the 1920 drop in world cacao prices indebted Ecuador severely to U.S. banks as a result of defaulted loans (Pineo). In addition, the construction of a railroad from Guayaquil to Quito was funded by U.S.
banks in order to integrate the Ecuadorian economy and increase export extraction (Clark). Similar imperialist aggression fomented a national and regional movement in Latin America for cultural distinction from the U.S., led by public intellectuals. However, before analyzing the racialized rhetoric of their texts, this section seeks to provide several theoretical considerations regarding the position of Blackness in their works that contribute to the development of racial state formation.

State power defined national character and identity via certain racial essentialisms under what can be termed “racial projects”, as understood in racial formation theory. Michael Omi and Howard Winant offer a theoretical framework for understanding the interplay of state formation and racial categorization. Originally in a study of U.S. racial formation, they explain “racial formation” as the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (Omi and Winant 55). In the context of Latin America during the early twentieth century, racial categories were created and inhabited since European contact in 1492, continuing throughout colonialism and independence. Racial projects historically essentialized representations of Blackness, Indigeneity and Whiteness under colonial rule through systems of classification termed castas or “breeds” in Ibero-America, which viewed racial mixture as contamination with a concept of racial purity termed “limpieza de sangre” or “’cleanliness of blood” (Katzew 38). As a result, sharp racial categories and hierarchies were constructed that limited social mobility and denoted social standing in the colony. However, the early twentieth century represents a crucial moment in which state racial projects across the region operated to transform racial categories, in response to various external and internal forces. Facilitating this shift in the racial configuration of Latin America, nation-states
utilized a racial project that provided them, “with a tool for reinterpreting the mixture of peoples and cultures not as contamination or dilution, but as a felicitous conjoining of forces and characteristics” (Miller 15). The ideology of mestizaje, developed by public intellectuals and the state, operated as a tool for Latin American states to rearticulate colonial discourse on race during this transformative era.

The idea of race as an inherently polysemic signifier allows us to view the development and rearticulation of mestizaje as a racial project more clearly. The various meanings of race and racial mixture over time and space indicate the changing racial configuration and transformation that state projects produce. For example, Stuart Hall’s discussion of race as a “floating signifier” understands race as a language and thus the semiotics analogy explains how race is relational and not essential (Hall 8). Hall’s analysis urges us to understand what processes have facilitated major shifts in the meaning of race, as its meaning is ever sliding. Therefore, we can view mestizaje as a racial project developing regionally in the formation of racial configurations specific to Latin America. The rearticulation of national and regional meanings of race from colonial understandings of racial mixture as contamination, to celebrating miscegenation as optimistic and providential, represents a shift in what race signifies according to the nation. Mestizaje is often understood as a regional phenomenon in Latin America, however, the polysemic nature of race would indicate that intraregionally in the Caribbean, Central America and the Andes race signifies similar but different meanings. This essay helps to underline the intraregional diversity of certain articulations of mestizaje
The ambiguous character of race in the context of the nation-state presents challenges for racial projects that attempt to transform racial categories into the catch all concept of *mestizaje*. Analyzing race exclusively as a social construct misses the materiality of what *mestizaje* attempts to explain with its ideology of bio-cultural blending. In the Latin American situation, understandings of race have been socially constructed, yet “the social concern is with common biological descent, *even when the markers are primarily cultural*” (Van den Berghe 59). The interplay between socially constructed notions of race and visual cultural markers of descent complicate essentialized notions of race. For example, in his discussion about *mestizaje* in Latin America, anthropologist Norman Whitten observes a longue durée of “racial fixity and racialized intercultural fluidity” (Whitten18). For Whitten, the “longue durée” of racial fixity represents the centuries old lumping together of diverse indigenous and African communities into the racial categories of “lo indio” and “lo negro”, “Indian” and “Black”. However, the creation of these racial categories is accompanied by an intercultural fluidity of miscegenation, accounted for in the ambiguous ideology of *mestizaje*. Therefore, the creation of fixed racial categories historically attempted to account for the visible intercultural blending, especially in Latin America. The ambiguous character of race as socially constructed and biologically determined speaks to Whitten’s observation of racial fixity and fluidity as especially characteristic of Latin America today and historically.

In Ecuador today, certain racial categories exist along color continuum termed *blanqueamiento* or whitening that signifies social stratification or the opportunity for upward mobility. For example, the elite Latin American public intellectuals addressed in
this project comprise part of an elite racial category in the “blanco-mestizos” or white-mestizo. Today, *blanqueamiento* refers to “mechanisms of acculturation such as the education system, the bureaucracy, mass media…” that advocate whitening socially and biologically that for indigenous groups symbolizes migration from the countryside to the city (Mora 36). This concept and the accompanying shift in ethno-racial identification that it signals results from the Eurocentric logic inherent in *mestizaje*. For Afro-Ecuadorians, *blanqueamiento* and *mestizaje* positions Blackness at the bottom of Ecuadorian society. For example, anthropologist Norman Whitten has constructed a diagram to help visualize this concept and the various ethno-racial categories it constructs.

![Mestizaje Triangle](Image by Norman E. Whitten, Jr.)

As demonstrated by the pyramid, *blanco*, or pure white, is located at the top. Next fall the categories of *mestizo* and *mulato*, terms which are representative of the mixing of white with Indigenous and black groups.
The location of Ecuador, as a small nation in the Andes of South America, impacts the unique articulation of *mestizaje*. The sharp regional topography of Ecuador presents significant challenges to racial projects that promote a homogenous national identity. For example, Ecuador is geographically marked by the different modes of production of its Pacific coastal area, Andean highlands and Amazonian rainforest. These three regions also differ ethno-racially. Indigenous groups dominate the Amazonian region whereas the Andean highlands where the capital of Quito is located has historically been populated by mestizos, white-mestizos and indigenous peoples. Afro-Ecuadorians are mostly located in the coastal provinces and especially the province of Esmeraldas. The complex regionalism of Ecuador complicates state efforts toward national consolidation, however through *mestizaje* one can observe a racial spatial order in effect.

Afro-Ecuadorians are imagined in certain spaces in Ecuadorian society and significantly not in the capital city of Quito. Describing the paradoxical relationship between space and race, Mills writes, “the white raced space of the polity is in a sense the geographical locus of the polity proper” (Mills 50). Drawing on this perspective, the highland capital of Quito is imagined as a place absent of Blackness. In Ecuador, “the two ‘traditional’ regions of blackness…[are] the province of Esmeraldas and the Chota-Mira Valley…” (Rahier 22). The Chota-Mira Valley, near the border with Colombia, and Esmeraldas, located on the Pacific coast, become regions defined by their Blackness and vice versa. In opposition, Quito is the central locus for the nation geographically and metaphorically. For example, the Ecuadorian House of Culture was strategically placed in Quito because of the symbolic location for Ecuadorian nationhood.
The actual historical record for Afro-Ecuadorians represent two different locations and trajectories. The first inhabitants of the Chota Valley of African origin are said to have been brought to the region by Spanish slave traders from what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola in 1575 (Pavón 2005). About 100 years later, Africans from Colombia were brought to the Chota region by the Jesuits, a sect of Spanish Catholic Priests, to serve as slaves (Walsh 2007). The abolishment of slavery throughout all of Ecuador took place in 1851 (Pavón 2005). The coastal province of Esmeraldas is the site where, “Different groupings seized their freedom in the north and south of the province after fortuitous shipwrecks, intermarried with indigenous people, became the dominant force in the Emerald Province and resisted all attempts by the Spanish military and the Roman Catholic Church to subdue and subvert them” (Whitten 370). This historical legacy has defined the province of Esmeraldas as a refuge for runaway slaves (maroons) historically and differs from the chattel slavery experienced by the other large concentration of Afro-Ecuadorians to the north of the country in the Sierra region called the Chota Valley. Taking into account the history of these two regions among the diversity of cultures in Ecuador, a homogenizing ideology like mestizaje must account for the Black presence, whether by inclusion or exclusion.

Mestizaje, as a homogenizing ideology of hybridity legitimates racial and regional heterogeneity in the nation. Ecuador’s racial heterogeneity or pluralism was, “considered by many politically counterproductive in the face of Latin America’s move toward refurbishing the nation-state” in a particular intellectual, economic and political climate during the early twentieth century (Martinez-Echazabal 38). Latin American nation-states viewed heterogeneity as a threat to the homogenous representation that facilitates state
control. In terms of representation, “Heterogeneity is definitively placed outside the state, excludable in virtue of being the antithesis of homogeneity, of state belonging” (Goldberg 10). Thus, the work of public intellectuals in fashioning a fictive national identity through their writing and service to the nation-state, a homogenizing process can be observed. The public intellectuals critiqued in this essay respond to the racial and cultural pluralism of their distinct national contexts using mestizaje as a homogenizing trope for the nation.

Homogeneity in the ideology of mestizaje operates through fashioning “the mestizo” as the fictive ethnicity of the nation and region. Mestizaje produces as a fictive ethnicity, “the mestizo” via the process of racial mixture that subsumes essentialized racial categories. The terms of national belonging reside with the “mestizo” as an embodied fictive ethnicity. For Afro-Ecuadorians who identify or are identified as Black, then the terms of citizenship and belonging do not apply. The transnational development of mestizaje and the construction of the “mestizo” across national borders to define Latin America as a region, can be understood as a “nationalist internationalism” (Goldberg 133). Producing a homogenous fictive ethnicity for the region, the “mestizo” in mestizaje then defines Latin America against the inter regional negotiation of race and nation with the United States.

The Ecuadorian national context is an example of how a Latin American state racially reconfigured their population in terms of a homogenous hybrid identity in the ideology of mestizaje. In Latin America, “and particularly in Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia—the terms mestizaje and mestizo/a refer exclusively to racial mixings involving Europeans and Indians (Rahier 45). While this may be due in part to indigenous groups
accounting for nearly forty percent in the Andean region, Afro-descendant groups have existed in albeit smaller percentages historically in the region as well (Miller 119). However, contrasted to Latin American nations in the Caribbean and Central America that tend to incorporate an Afro-descendent presence more centrally in constructions of mestizaje, Ecuador’s articulation recognizes Blackness consistently as an outside imported element. This feature of Ecuadorian mestizaje distinguishes it as a racial project articulated in relation to a discourse that produces the Black subject as “ultimate” Other.

In order to conceptualize the transnational development of racially configuring discourses that persistently aggrieve Afro-descendants and non-white populations, a perspective of global White supremacy proves helpful for theorizing the impact of mestizaje and the work of Latin American public intellectuals. Racial formation theory understands mestizaje as a racial project transforming the meaning of race and reinscribing social hierarchies: The question however is to the benefit of whom? Using social contract theory, Charles Mills recognizes White supremacy as a global political system, “a particular power structure of formal or informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights and duties” (Mills 3). Mills places the work of racial projects since Columbus in 1492 in a global context marked by White supremacy and the norms that accompany its expression and practice. The work of mestizaje in normalizing the hierarchical social dynamics of Ecuador after colonial rule and independence, reinscribes White domination and non-white subjugation. The public intellectuals critiqued in this essay contribute significantly to this reinscription because, “Intellectuals write about what interests them, what they find important…silence constitutes good prima facie evidence
that the subject was not of particular interest” (Mills 94). The relative silence of the Black subject in the elite discourse of *mestizaje* in Ecuador signals a silencing of their historical presence and contribution to the nation-state. While *mestizaje* should be seen as a powerful racial project of the state, oppositional racial projects by Afro-Ecuadorians were produced for example in a literary tradition.

The literary works of Afro-Ecuadorians like Nelson Estupinan Bass and Adalberto Ortiz represent racial projects oppositional to the state that show black agency during the twentieth century. Both writers engage issues of anti-Black racism and invisibility in Ecuadorian society through their Black protagonists. For example, Ortiz writes *Juyungo* in 1943 that intertwines race, class and color in Ecuador with the eponymous protagonist’s “much touted thirst for justice has less to do with social class than with a man acting heroically out of his own pride in himself and lineage” (Jackson 43). Ortiz’ work is important because he is envisioning a prideful Afro-Ecuadorian consciousness in the face of a state that imagines Blacks as an unthinkable in the nation. In addition, Bass writes *When the Guaycanes Were In Bloom* in 1954 that takes place during the Liberal Revolution that pitted Coastal elites against Highland elites. The novel depicts the “catch-22” that Afro-Ecuadorians found themselves in when choosing to fight for liberal or conservative elites. Neither conservatives nor liberals in the novel fulfill their promises to the Black protagonists. The experiences of Afro-Ecuadorians depicted in these novels represents an oppositional racial project in the incorporation of Black experience with the nation. However, in effect this oppositional racial project reflects Duboisian double consciousness because they do not belong, while at the same
time they do. Afro-Ecuadorian writers such as Ortiz and Bass expressed this paradox in their works among others.

Given these theoretical perspectives, an analysis of the Black subject in the work of several Latin American public intellectuals illuminates their function in reconfiguring transnationally meanings of race derived in ways that impact Afro-descendants today. The unique articulation of *mestizaje* in Ecuador historically, drives contemporary forms of anti-Black racism in Ecuador. *Mestizaje* operates in Ecuador, as throughout Latin America, by articulating a “fictive ethnicity” via a national ideology that, “makes it possible for the expression of a pre-existing unity to be seen in the state…” (Balibar 164). In the case of *mestizaje* in Ecuador, the pre-existing unity expressed and conceived around the blending of Indigenous and European elements functioned to the exclusion of the Black subject. These theoretical considerations help in understanding “how the commitment to homogeneity shaped race, as a modern project of state conception and practice” (Goldberg 5). The Latin American public intellectuals’ cultural texts will further articulate this point in my following analysis of racial dynamics and the Black subject.
Section II- Jose Vasconcelos: Forefather of *Mestizaje* as a Racial Project

During the early twentieth century, Jose Vasconcelos provided a model for other Latin American public intellectuals writing on race and nation. Public intellectuals in Ecuador, Chile and throughout Latin America utilized the foundational work of Mexican educator, politician and writer, Jose Vasconcelos. Significantly, in his work Vasconcelos claims a spiritual, philosophical and scientific process of racial mixing that distinguishes Latin America. Starting with Jose Vasconcelos’ *La Raza Cosmica* in 1928, a new generation of influential public intellectuals began producing cultural texts that were to represent, preserve and promote the national culture and identity of Latin America during this era of modernization and national consolidation (Echazabal 1). Vasconcelos, and others following his lead, express a prophetic attitude of racial and cultural progress towards the multicultural milieu of their nations and region in terms of whiteness and whitening. Given the tripartite cultural influence in most of Latin America (Indigenous, African and European), these writers imagined hybridity. This section provides a literary analysis of *La Raza Cosmica* in order to contextualize the importance and influence of Vasconcelos. His discourse on the Black subject is reflected in the works of other public intellectuals.

Public intellectuals like Jose Vasconcelos, who wrote on national culture and identity, determined the content and direction of education. Vasconcelos’ direct involvement in Mexico’s national education as Minister of Education from 1920-1924, comes only after the position is created following the Mexican Revolution. For example,
the Revolution caused “considerable restructuring of society…Northern Mexico…witnessed many battles that brought to it physical destruction, economic disruption, and displacement of population” (Martinez 107). Growing up in Piedras Negras, Mexico and attending grade school in Eagle Pass, Texas, Vasconcelos was very familiar with the impact of the revolution in borderlands area between the U.S. and Mexico (Martinez 103). The uncertainty of national unity allowed writers like Vasconcelos to write authoritatively about the cultural and racial composition of Mexico. The allure of Vasconcelos’ philosophy on race, nation and Latin America, depicted in La Raza Cosmica, became a viable racial project for the state via education.

The interconnection of ideas on race amongst these writers operated transnationally in Latin America as a region and also in the imperialist impact of U.S. racial discourse in the early twentieth century. Of specific interest in this essay is the use of the Black subject in the work of three Latin American public intellectuals, Jose Vasconcelos, Benjamin Carrión and Fernando Ortiz writing in Mexico, Ecuador and Cuba, respectively. They each represent three distinct nations and regions within Latin America that speak to their inclusion/exclusion of the Black subject in their local expression of mestizaje. The ideology of mestizaje expresses itself in subtle and direct ways that impact how a nation relates to its Afro-descendent populations during the early twentieth century. Part of my analysis of their works is the persistent definition their nation’s culture against that of the U.S. and thus, the racial discourse of segregation and Jim Crow. Below I will discuss how they each imagine the African subject differently in their national and regional iteration of mestizaje, yet are in conversation with each other as a region united against US. cultural hegemony. The terms of national citizenship and
belonging were redefined and reoriented from their categorist colonial iteration into a nationalist ideology of hybridity termed *mestizaje*.

Jose Vasconcelos comes to national relevance following the instability of the Mexican Revolution in the early twentieth century. In order to galvanize the nation during political turmoil, “The Mexican Revolution, in 1910, …adopted ‘mestizaje’ as the national ideology operating on a significant oxymoron: it was mixture that became the emblem and the image of … an homogenous nation of mixed people, the purity of the impure” (Mignolo 320). The Mexican Revolution represented a transformative moment for the nation. The promotion and rebuilding of the nation-state after the revolution operated the ideology of *mestizaje*. Also contributing to Mexican state instability was the long history of U.S. presence in Mexico’s economic and political affairs. For example, at times during the revolution the U.S. occupied the Mexican port of Veracruz, owned twenty seven percent of land, and had significant military and economic interests in the outcome (109 Gonzales). This moment of U.S. intervention in Mexico is but one of a long relationship between the two nations. Mexican self-determination and stability necessarily entailed negotiating a tenuous relationship with the U.S. Vasconcelos’ writings respond to the need for a strong and united national identity in the face of an ever growing U.S. presence. His background in education in combination with his nationalist philosophy positioned Vasconcelos well to contribute to Mexico’s national education.

Jose Vasconcelos’ role as a diplomat and Minister of Education for the Mexican government positions him well to write authoritative texts on national and regional culture in Latin America. Jose Vasconcelos (1882-1959) served as Minister of Education
from 1921-1924, traveling throughout Latin America and the United States in this
capacity and promoting reforms in literacy and education (Bonnett 29). In his official
role, Vasconcelos was concerned with the teaching and education of the nation during his
state visits and interaction with educators in other Latin American nations. For example,
a 1922 diplomatic mission to Brazil and Argentina allowed Vasconcelos to “witness the
suppression of the Black element firsthand” in Bahia (Miller 33). Therefore, through his
travels in Brazil as a Mexican diplomat, Brazilian racial discourse impacts his perspective
on racial mixing for the region. In addition, Vasconcelos reflects on his perspective of
Argentina, when he lauds it as being the most European of any Latin American nation
because of its strong European heritage(Vasconcelos 24). Vasconcelos’ position as
Minister of Education provided him with the regional insight to write on racial mixture in
various national contexts. It is with these experiences in hand that he invited future
Chilean Minister of Education, Gabriela Mistral to collaborate on ideas of education at
the national level.

Vasconcelos invited Chilean educator, Gabriela Mistral, during this time to aid
him in starting a national education system (Fiol-Matta 496). Vasconcelos’ invitation to
Mistral begins a network of Latin American public intellectuals concerned with national
education. Later, they both would inspire Ecuadorian public intellectual, Benjamin
Carrión, to undertake similar projects in Ecuador. The goal was to produce an informed
and effective national education system for post-revolution Mexico and Latin America.
They both valued the importance of education and to them, “mestizaje essentially meant
marshaling a cultural notion of “unity” in the service of an integrationist agenda”. (Fiol-
Matta 495). For a country like Ecuador that has historically dealt with sharp regional
division and an ethno-racial plurality, the integrationist vision of Vasconcelos and Mistral allow mestizaje to be utilized by nations throughout Latin America. Mistral later became the first Latin American writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1945 and contributed to similar national education projects in other Latin American countries, following Vasconcelos’ lead. At this time Vasconcelos and Mistral represent the beginnings of a network of elite public intellectuals throughout the region that facilitate similar educational reform projects. As the first Minister of Education since the Mexican Revolution, Vasconcelos’ experiences and connections throughout Latin America inform his approach to writing La Raza Cosmica, and the kind of proscriptive and providential tone he intends to invoke.

Vasconcelos wrote La Raza Cosmica in 1925. In his influential book he developed a powerful trope of racial mixing to be embraced by Mexico, as a nation, and Latin American, as a region. It is important to note that the writing of this book came one year after his service as Minister of Education, with the intended audience being his nation of Mexico, but also his region in Latin America. Through an ideology of racial mixing, Vasconcelos attempts to legitimate and distinguish the region in a positive and progressive context. For example, he opens his text stating, “The central thesis of this book is that the various races of the earth tend to intermix at a gradually increasing pace, and eventually will give rise to a new human type, composed of selection from each of these races already in existence” (Vasconcelos 1). Vasconcelos begins by presenting the racial mixing of fixed races as a universal given. According to Vasconcelos, “…the White, the Red, the Black and the Yellow” are the four base fixed racial categories that he observes intermixing in Latin America. (Vasconcelos 34). These divisions reflect
historical Spanish *casta* categories as well as early twentieth century positivism, Darwinism and other theories that promoted pseudo-scientific studies on race.

During the early twentieth century, an increase in the production of texts on racial positivism and eugenics by European and American authors led Latin Americans authors to respond oppositionally. Both eugenics and racial positivism espoused pseudo-scientific theories and classifications of races that were to explain the intelligibility, behavior, personality etc. of an individual based primarily upon their phenotypical race. Ultimately these seemingly pseudo-scientific, yet highly influential studies reinforced notions of white supremacy through their over valuation of Western culture and characteristics. For example, the American historian and anthropologist, Madison Grant’s 1916 popular book, *The Passing of the Great Race*, espoused a “Nordic theory” that viewed Scandinavian culture as the root of the diffusion of civilization across the globe (Spiro 167). Thus, in these theories, the racial mixture of Latin America represented an aberration to notions of racial purity that stratified race with Whiteness at the top of the hierarchy. In opposition, Vasconcelos valorizes Latin America for being far ahead of the curve, viewing miscegenation as providential, compared to other nations and regions, especially the United States and Europe. His philosophic rhetoric interweaves politics, biology and aesthetics in his ambiguous redefinition of the meaning of race in Mexico and Latin America through mestizaje. Latin American political and economic instability coupled with U.S. Imperialist hegemony play a significant role in Vasconcelos’ racial discourse for Latin America.

Vasconcelos’ rejection of U.S. imperialism is central to his philosophy and logic in the racial ideology of mestizaje. An antagonistic relationship between the U.S. and
Latin America in the political and economic sectors enters the cultural and aesthetic in Vasconcelos’ rhetoric. For example, in order to distinguish the new age of the cosmic race from the racial ideology of United States imperialism Vasconcelos writes, “The Yankees will end up building the last great empire of a single race, the final empire of White supremacy” (Vasconcelos 20). Vasconcelos chooses the perjorative “yankee” to describe the United States as an empire of white supremacy and racial purity. He also views his text as marking a transition in global politics in which empires of white supremacy, that dominated the Americas since the fifteenth century, are coming to an end in the face of the new racial order of the future and Latin America. The white supremacy embedded in his racial discourse on mestizaje through the valorization of European progress and characteristics becomes obfuscated by the aesthetic distinction that marks Latin America visually from the U.S. Whereas the racial discourse of the U.S. views miscegenation generally, and especially of Latin America, as contamination and pejorative, Vasconcelos valorizes miscegenation as superior distinction via his redefinition of the meaning of race.

The seemingly subtle work of mestizaje in legitimating and reinscribing White supremacy operates through Vasconcelos’ contradistinction to the image of U.S. white supremacy. White supremacy to Vasconcelos represented the violence and image of segregation of the United States. To him, the U.S. rhetoric of racial purity and separation was something Latin America could not emulate and therefore provided him an opportunity to affirmatively distinguish the region from the U.S. Therefore, Vasconcelos viewed mestizaje as an ideology of race and nation that did not incorporate U.S. white supremacy but nonetheless maintained a Eurocentric notion of racial superiority.
With Euroexistence representing progress, civilization and superiority and non-whites representing savagery, backwardness and inferiority, a racial hierarchy can be seen. And while the “cosmic” amalgamation of these racial stocks represents the “mixed character” of the nation, those non-white elements remain undesired in the national project of modernization and progress. *Mestizaje* as an ideology of white supremacy transformed “the terms of public discourse so that white domination is now conceptually invisible” (Mills 117). In Vasconcelos’ reconfiguring of the terms of race in Latin America, he normalizes the valuing of whiteness and thus reinserts white supremacy and racial hierarchies based upon race. As a racial project then, *mestizaje* functioned to normalize racial inequalities while seemingly rejecting white supremacy in relation to the U.S. Without the U.S. racial project of Jim Crow segregation and hypodescent, Vasconcelos’ argument for a homogenous and harmonious “mixed nation” loses validity in its rejection of white supremacy.

Vasconcelos imagines Latin American racial discourse in contradistinction to that of the U.S. via its proposed “all inclusive” ideology of racial mixing that “neutralizes” the racial conflict synonymous with U.S. Jim Crow segregation. For Vasconcelos, U.S. racial conflict and riots are evidence of the backwardness of the U.S. approach to dealing with their non-White populations. A desire to maintain racial purity via segregation, informed by a U.S. Black/White paradigm, creates societal unrest that legitimates Vasconcelos’ rhetoric of providential miscegenation in the Latin American context. For example, Vasconcelos observes that “North Americans have held very firmly to their resolution to maintain a pure stock, the reason that they are faced with the Blacks…We have very few Blacks, and a large part of them is already becoming a mulatto population”
(Vasconcelos 26). This idea is crucial for the notion of ‘invisibility’ expressed by Afro-Latino populations throughout the twentieth century to today. Vasconcelos identifies “the Blacks” as a problem that the U.S. grapples with because their policy of segregation prevents undesirable miscegenation from occurring. In contrast, Latin America has no Black problem because there are no Blacks, only racially mixed persons that embody the national character of Latin American nation-states. The “mestizo” product of mestizaje that defines Vasconcelos’ Latin American nation excludes Black as an essentialist category of demarcation through its incorporation. Here, Blackness serves as a marker of different white supremacist epistemologies on race that both devalue and marginalize Blackness. Whether in the U.S. with Jim Crow segregation or in Latin America with an “exclusive ideology of inclusion”(Stutzman 45).

Therefore, Vasconcelos’ writing on how the Black subject figures into Latin American racial discourse is crucial to understanding how public intellectuals throughout the region contribute to this ideology in their national contexts. He views racial mixing in Latin America as increasingly spontaneous and “in contrast with the inflexible line that separates the Blacks from the Whites in the United States, and the laws, each time more rigorous, for the exclusion of the Japanese and Chinese from California” (Vasconcelos 19). Vasconcelos criticizes U.S. racial discourse for its attempt to maintain racial purity via segregation while at the same time lauds the diminution of Blacks via his assimilationist model embodied in mestizaje. What both discourses share is the devaluation of Blackness as an unwanted characteristic for national identity. The U.S. deals with its Black population through attempts to maintain separation and prevent miscegenation at all costs, whereas Vasconcelos promotes Latin America as an aesthetic
and social contrast via the assimilation of Blackness, however with *blanqueamiento* (whitening) as the progressive goal in this process.

Vasconcelos depends upon stereotypical notions of fixed Blackness and Indigeneity in his articulation of *mestizaje*. Vasconcelos warns against the exclusion of Blackness or Indigeneity in Latin America, referencing U.S. racial conflict as a result of exclusion. However, Vasconcelos cites stereotypical contributions for non-white groups in his vision of discourse on *mestizaje*. Among other expressive contributions, Vasconcelos writes “The infinite quietude is stirred with the drop put in our blood by the Black, eager for sensual joy, intoxicated with dances and unbridled lust” (Vasconcelos 22). In this quote, Vasconcelos incorporates the Black subject in terms of dance, happiness and hypersexuality. While he imagines these as positive contributions to “la raza cosmica”, they actually represent stereotypes that were thought to be innate among Afro-descendents. The essentialization of Black expression as “unbridled” and therefore untamed or uncivilized positions Blackness as inferior to European civilized whiteness. In addition, Vasconcelos describes the stereotypical contributions of indigenous and Black populations. For example, he writes, “The Indian, by grafting onto the related race, would take the jump of millions of years that separate Atlantis from our times, and in a few decades of aesthetic eugenics, the Black may disappear…” (Vasconcelos 32). This is a primitivist perspective of Indigenous peoples as remaining static and frozen in the past as compared to the technologically, socially and, through Vasconcelos’ providential ideology of racial mixing, *biologically* advanced race of Whites. Through essentialist representations of the Indigenous element in *mestizaje* as backward and the African element as innately more expressive, Vasconcelos constructs a demand for
notions of progress and advancement through the contribution of Whiteness and whitening.

*La Raza Cosmica* represents a seminal text for the development of *mestizaje* as a racial project throughout Latin America. The text and his direct connection to the state via education served as a blueprint for Latin American public intellectuals to adopt. In the face of U.S. imperialist aggression, Vasconcelos intended his reconfiguring of the meaning of race to operate transnationally across Latin America. Therefore, his 1925 edict on *mestizaje* must be viewed in its transnational context as a template for Latin American public intellectuals to promote nationalism on a regional scale. However, the diverse ecological and ethnic landscape of many Latin American nations forced intellectuals to map Vasconcelos’ vision to their unique contexts.
Section III- Benjamin Carrión: An Ecuadorian Articulation of Mestizaje

In this section, a critical analysis of Benjamin Carrión’s discourse on *mestizaje* shows how he imagined Blackness as peripheral to the Ecuadorian nation. Through his direct engagement with Vasconcelos in his 1928 book, *Los Creadores de la Nueva America* (The Creators of the New America), Carrión articulates race and ethnicity in terms of the nation. The ideology of *mestizaje* proposed by Vasconcelos incorporates all racial categories, whereas through Carrión we can see a more exclusive concept of racial mixing. A literary analysis of *Los Creadores* explains how Carrión contributed significantly to the promotion of a national culture that privileges indigenous and White heritage, while marginalizing Ecuador’s Black heritage.

In Ecuador, the development of mestizaje as a nationalist expression of culture and citizenship comes primarily from the prolific work of Ecuadorian public intellectual, Benjamin Carrión. Benjamin Carrión (1898-1979) was an important critic, writer and educator from the southern highland province of Loja, who contributed greatly to the sociology of culture and literary tastes of twentieth century Ecuador (Robles 118). Like Mistral and Vasconcelos, Carrión’s life work involved education at the national level, however, operating from an Ecuadorian and Andean perspective that is responding to Vasconcelos’ pan-Latin American vision. Significantly, in 1944 Carrión oversees “the creation of the Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana (Ecuadorian House of Culture), a state entity in charge of forging and promoting national culture” (Cervone 102). The *Case de la Cultura Ecuatoriana* (CCE) represents the culmination of Carrión’s writing on
national culture in a museum-like institute that embodies ecuatorianidad (Ecuadorian-ness) via various exhibits, events, and educational functions. In order to understand Carrión’s vision and mission for the CCE this section analyzes his discourse on race and nation in Los Creadores. A critical reading of Carrión’s first publication in 1928 offers insight as to how Vasconcelos’ writing and vision impacted an Ecuadorian articulation of mestizaje and the role of the Black subject within it.

Carrión’s prolific texts reflect an emphasis on indigenous culture and history to define the character of the nation. The valorization of indigenous culture in the context of the nation represented an early twentieth century movement that reflected Vasconcelos’ philosophy and texts. For example, as a movement during the early twentieth century, “indigenismo was aimed precisely at the incorporation of indigenous peoples to that national culture” (Clark 203). This idea can be seen in Carrión’s later texts such as Atahualpa. Carrión writes Atahualpa in 1934 that chronicles the life of the last Incan emperor, born off the coast of Ecuador, and whose capital was Quito and not the better known Incan city of Cusco in modern-day Peru. The former Incan ruler represents Carrión’s participation in Ecuadorian indigenismo that incorporated indigeneity as foundational to the nation-state.

Carrión’s text is divided into four sections that each expound upon a different Latin American author’s contribution to pan-Latin American national education projects. According to Carrión, the creators of the New America are Jose Vasconcelos, Manuel Ugarte, F. Garcia Calderon y Alcides Arguedas of Mexico, Argentina, Peru and Bolivia respectively. Including Mistral’s prologue, the writers and educators of Latin America represented in Carrión’s text comprise part of an intelligentsia of public intellectuals
concerned with the redefinition of race and culture. Through Carrión, they are in conversation with each other, negotiating through their texts, the meaning of racial categories in terms of national character and regional unity. Their collective discourse represents a transnational network of national educators sharing ideas and concepts on race and nation. This section is concerned with Carrión’s discussion of Vasconcelos and how the Black subject of La Raza Cosmica enters Carrión’s Andean perspective on mestizaje.

Gabriela Mistral writes the prologue to Los Creadores de la Nueva America and she praises the regional unity espoused by Carrión in this engagement with four prominent Latin American public intellectuals. Just four years after working with Vasconcelos in Mexico, Mistral invokes his call for a regional Latin American identity in her praise for Carrión. For example, Mistral asserts that Carrión “already thinks of our America united and the prejudice that is praise for foreigners doesn’t occur to him” (Carrión 9). Mistral’s acknowledgement of Carrión’s regional engagement is significant because it signals a consistent trend amongst public intellectuals to demarcate themselves regionally and primarily in terms of race. U.S. imperialism and racial discourse also served to unite Latin America in contradistinction racially and culturally during this publication. However, discourse on mestizaje and the Black subject by Carrión, Jose Vasconcelos and Fernando Ortiz differ at the national level while still subscribing to mestizaje as a regional epiphenomenon. The significance of their regional and national discourse on race is important for the impact these public intellectuals had on the direction of national education and culture.
Mistral explicitly highlights the role of Carrión, Vasconcelos and others writing on national culture as charged with the education of the nation, primarily through their discourse on mestizaje. Their desire for Latin American redefinition requires an educational component to instruct their populations of how to properly view themselves in the face of U.S. imperialism and other global processes. For example, Mistral highlights the place of Whiteness and indigeneity writing:

“By right they should be the Secretary of Education of their countries, doing all that they can, curing the race with the book and forming in educational exchange of his civil consciousness, rightly returning to the White, working with the mestizo and organizing the Indian” (Carrión 10).

In this quote, Mistral views the work of Carrión, Vasconcelos and herself as “curing the race” from a primitive and non-modern racial milieu via their educational texts that will promote and produce the Vasconcelian “cosmic race”. The racial milieu of Latin America that is being redefined in the early twentieth century connotes a pejorative and backwards image of Latin America, produced by U.S. hegemony. In addition, Mistral reinforces an indigenous/white binary in her construction of the mestizo at the end of the quote, especially when she states that the Indian will organize civil consciousness. The centrality of whiteness and indigeneity in her conception of the mestizo places Blackness on the periphery of national consciousness. Mistral and Carrión are both writing from an Andean perspective on mestizaje that excludes Blackness from the concept of a mestizo nation, which defines Latin America. Mistral’s contribution is significant because she would come to international acclaim being the first Latin American to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1945.
Carrión exalts Vasconcelos for his philosophy and vision in his first section on the author entitled “The Civilizer and Constructor”, in which he positions Vasconcelos as the first of four maestros or teachers of Latin America. Described by Carrión as an instructive model for national education, Vasconcelos is significant for the transnational extension and interpretation of mestizaje as a pan-Latin American trope for nationalism. Each of the four Latin American authors Carrión comments on are important, yet Vasconcelos comes first as he is seen as the forefather of mestizaje as a national project. For example, introducing the importance of Vasconcelos’ project Carrión writes, “Vasconcelos, as Gabriela Mistral would say… in his march towards the conquest of the future for the ideal, he does not have time to look backward” (Carrión 28). The ideal future to Vasconcelos is the “mestizo” as the future universal and homogenous “cosmic race” unique to Latin America. Using the Spanish conquest of the Americas as metaphor, Vasconcelos is described as taking on a similar civilizing mission that must produce a modern future. Also this quote shows Carrión’s direct engagement with Mistral and Vasconcelos as he views all three contributing to the “conquest” of the future through their national projects. Carrión’s view of La Raza Cosmica as “leaving the past” for an ideal and universal future for Latin America speaks to transformative context for Latin American nations in which he is writing.

Carrión explicitly aligns his philosophy and discourse on racial mixing with Vasconcelos. Praising their shared ideology, Carrión relates, “the sense of his philosophy, that it is our philosophy, the philosophy of the new and racially mixed peoples, the optimistic philosophy of the Hispano-American Western tropics…” (Carrión 29). The new and racially mixed peoples Carrión refers to are not fixed categories such
as Black and Indian but that of a category defined by racial mixture, the “mestizo”. It is significant to note Carrión’s use of “optimistic philosophy” because U.S. racial discourse on racial purity rejects the type of miscegenation Vasconcelos praises. He also localizes mestizaje as operating in a “Hispanic-American Western tropical” context. Carrión emphasizes the regional context for Vasconcelos’ project and through his Vasconcelian praise, he endorses his rhetoric of providential miscegenation. However, in what manner does Carrión envision Ecuadorian mestizaje to incorporate Indigenous and Black elements in relation to Vasconcelos?

Carrión emphasizes Ecuador’s indigenous heritage as a central element of Andean mestizaje for his national project. While Carrión invokes many of the same primitivist and stereotypical images of indigenous peoples, he views the indigenous subject as foundational in ways that marginalize the Black subject. For example, Carrión views the socio-historical trajectory of Spain as having already infused Asian, African and European elements and that by the time the Spanish arrived to “America, the fusion process was advanced… Lacking America, with its natives and their immense, but a terrible tropic of threats” (Carrión 56). Carrión views the inclusion of the indigenous peoples of the Americas as the lacking element in the synthesis of races imbued in Vasconcelos’ fifth “cosmic” race. However, Carrión qualifies his valorization of the indigenous element by signaling the image of the “noble savage” with its attendant savage and “natural” environment that he characterizes as a “terrible threat”. Therefore, paradoxically indigeneity remains an undesirable and backward element in the process of racial mixing, yet is imagined as central to the construction of the “mestizo nation”.

39
In addition, Carrión’s emphasis of the indigenous contribution to Ecuador’s mestizaje is expressed in comparison to the African subject in a quick historical description. Establishing an Ecuadorian national foundation of myth, Carrión writes that, “The conquistadores… who forged their blood with the blood of the autochthonous peoples, with that of the imported Blacks, without racial pride nor particularisms, until producing that innumerable amount of species and subspecies of mestizaje…” (Carrión 51). Carrión’s usage of the term “autochthony” in reference to the indigenous population is significant for his subsequent comparison to the Black subject. While, autochthony may appear as a simple synonym for indigenous, the Oxford English Dictionary offers a definition of the term as “son of the soil” (Geschiere 4). In terms of national belonging and foundation, Carrión identifies those who are autochthonous (the indigenous subject) as compared to those who are imported (the Black subject) in his Ecuadorian articulation of mestizaje. Historically, “Blacks and mulattos were consistently blamed for the country’s political instability, with one writer even positing the importation of African slaves in the colonial era as having ‘disrupted the course’ of Ecuadorian history due to the ‘bloody and war-like ways’ of the blacks” (Foote 265). Both indigenous and Black elements are described in pejorative terms, yet there is a noticeable privileging of one over the other in terms of national belonging.

While Carrión’s references to the Black subject in his discourse on Vasconcelos are fleeting, they nonetheless express a perspective of the Black subject in Ecuadorian mestizaje as peripheral to the nation. Carrión does not outright exclude the African subject because that would belie the charge of ultimate assimilation for all ethnic groups that mestizaje prescribes. For example, Carrión insists that “in which our part of the
continent is not an exclusive patrimony of the Indian nor of the black, but neither of the White... because the fundamental sense of the cycle of civilization that begins with us, is the meeting of all types” (Carrión 52). In this statement, Carrión includes the Black subject, but only mentioned briefly as one part of the greater goal of aesthetic, cultural and biological miscegenation. When Carrión uses the pronoun we, he is referring to people who identify as “mestizo”, the product of the synthesizing process of mestizaje, as well as the mestizo public intellectuals like Mistral and Vasconcelos who are engaged in the formation of this new racialized discourse. In addition, Carrión curiously distinguishes the mestizaje of Iberoamerican countries in Latin America from three others of which contain large Afro-descendent populations. Carrión distinguishes between the Spanish and Portuguese colonial contexts (Iberoamerican) from that of the English and French in racialized terms writing, “to Haiti, to Jamaica, to the Guayanas, they did not send their delicate white bodies, instead asking to Black Africa for the arms for the colonizing work of the exploitation of the ground and subsoil” (Carrión 54). Carrión identifies Haiti, Jamaica and Guyana as lands dominated by Blackness as a result of the colonizing efforts of the French and English to exploit the land via African slave labor. While colonial Ecuador cannot be termed as a slave economy in the same way that Haiti can, both colonial context involved the enslavement of Africans in their colonial projects. However, Carrión’s inclusion of Haiti, Jamaica, and Guayana as markedly Black nations serves to further distinguish Ecuador as different. Even Carrión’s brief mention of the Black subject signal a peripheral position in his development of Vasconcelos’ mestizaje.

Like Vasconcelos, Carrión expresses a distinct aversion to U.S. imperialism and racial discourse, informed by eugenicist logic. The American and European scholars of
pseudo-scientific texts on human classification based upon race and origin often expressed notions of racial purity that legitimated U.S. racial discourse. For example, Carrión writes, “Against Madison Grant, the Yankee opportunist of Gobineau for the aims of saxon imperialism… that are the canons of the philosophy hegemony of the Whites… Vasconcelos offers to Hispano-America a philosophy of incredible amplitude/measure” (Carrión 73). Carrión connects Grant to his influence, nineteenth century French eugenicist Arthur de Gobineau, and aligns them with a white imperialist hegemony that involves a distinct philosophy. In contrast, he views Vasconcelos’ philosophy in La Raza Cosmica as not conforming to the same ideals of white supremacy that Gobineau and Grant espouse. Ironically, Carrión and Vasconcelos both condemn U.S. racial discourse for its explicit desire for racial purity and the separation of races, while maintaining that the white subject in mestizaje brings progress and civilization to their discourse founded on miscegenation. Through their anti-imperialist rhetoric, Carrión and Vasconcelos both are able to fashion a firm nationalist ideal in mestizaje, that serves to legitimate their place in the world in nationalist and regional terms.

The nationalist pride that Carrión invokes in Los Creadores de la Nueva America, via his commentary on four prominent Latin American educators, operates to define Ecuador and its place in Latin America. With an emphasis on indigenous culture for national distinction and the marginality of the Black subject, Carrión proceeds to write about his Ecuador. For example, Carrión extols, “my Ecuador, province of America, will feel powerfully the tonic value of the words of Jose Vasconcelos, the announcer, the prophet, of tropical lands” (Carrión 64). Here Carrión explicitly juxtaposes Ecuador with the ideology of Vasconcelos. His personalizing of the nation indicates that it is through
his subjective vision of providential mestizaje that the education of Latin American and Ecuador take place. Befitting of the title, “The Creators of the New America”, Carrión posits Ecuador as a province, not nation, of this new “America” that Latin American public intellectuals constructed through their collective discourse.

As an influential Ecuadorian public intellectual, Benjamin Carrión developed an Ecuadorian articulation of mestizaje that rearticulated race and nation in a way that marginalized Blacks. Through indigenismo and an understanding of mestizaje as exclusively mixture between European and Indigenous heritage, Carrión positioned Blacks as peripheral to the nation. Gabriela Mistral and Jose Vasconcelos are two Latin American public intellectuals that directly impacted Carrión’s discourse on Ecuadorian mestizaje. Together they represent a transnational network of educators united regionally under the racial ideology of mestizaje. Significant for the Black subject in their racial ideology, they position Latin American racial mixture and Blackness in contradistinction from U.S. racial discourse. The Black subject, as Carrión stated, is a part of mestizaje, yet in Ecuador the Black subject occupies a peripheral part of mestizaje as a trope for the nation. It is important to understand the internal, regional and inter-regional intellectual currents that have contributed to an Ecuadorian articulation of mestizaje. The legacy of Carrión’s work can be seen later in the installation of mestizaje in the founding of the House of Ecuadorian Culture in 1944.
Section IV-Carrión and the *Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana*

Benjamin Carrión contributed to the development of Ecuadorian *mestizaje* as a racial project in his literary works, but his legacy as the founding director of the *Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana* (CCE or House of Ecuadorian Culture) in 1944 more explicitly shows his influence on state institutions. As an Ecuadorian public intellectual, Carrión began his literary career with his 1928 *The Creators of the New America*. As previously analyzed, in the book Carrión cites Jose Vasconcelos as a major influence and develops a similar yet Ecuadorian specific ideology of racial blending. In this ideological development the meaning of race in Ecuador transformed responding to several external and internal forces during the early twentieth century. This section looks at Carrión’s Ecuadorian House of Culture as a state institution addressing national instability during the early twentieth century with anti-Black racism as a consequence. First, an overview of the transnational context in which the aforementioned public intellectuals rearticulated race nationally and regionally must be understood to consider the development of anti-Black racism in Latin America. Second, Carrión’s CCE serves as a salient example of the culmination of his ideology in a state institution that I argue operates as a racial project in its commitment to “an authentic national culture” (cce.org.ec). Finally, drawing upon *racial formation* theory we can understand Carrión’s racial project during the early to mid twentieth century as promoting a national culture with Afro-Ecuadorian presence on the periphery. The impact of this formation on the rearticulation of race contributed
significantly to anti-Black racism in Ecuadorean society and remains a challenge to
overcome today.

Vasconcelos set the stage for public intellectuals throughout the region to
undertake similar projects in the name of national culture and education. Writing La
Raza Cosmica in tandem with his service as Mexico’s Minister of Education,
Vasconcelos represented a model by which Carrión, Gabriela Mistral and other Latin
American public intellectuals followed. These elite intellectuals wrote their own texts on
national culture and each Carrión, Vasconcelos and Mistral served as their country’s
foremost spokesperson for national education at various times. Fernando Ortiz did not
serve as Minister of Education, however his texts on Afro-Cuban culture and Cuban
society received national and international attention. Their collective projects represent a
transnational racial formation for the region they designate as Latin America. Primarily
through mestizaje as a trope for the nation, they wrote on the national character and
history of their countries representing a regional paradigm shift in terms of the meaning
of race.

The common political and economic instability of Latin America during the early
twentieth century provided the historical context by which Vasconcelos and others
posited a transnational Latin America, unified by a racial ideology in mestizaje. Through
revolution (Ecuador in 1895 and Mexico in 1910) and U.S. intervention (1898 Spanish-
American War in Cuba), Latin American state formation was in a stage of intense
transition politically and economically. In order to maintain and increase state power
during this time, Latin American nations promoted mestizaje as the national character of
a mestizo nation. Prompted by major political and economic change during the early
twentieth century, Latin American states utilized these public intellectuals and their work to promote national unity and homogeneity, thus shifting the meaning of race in the nation and region.

U.S. Imperialism throughout Latin America contributed to the regional and racial distinction of these public intellectuals’ thought during this crucial time for state formation. Racial distinction becomes most salient when Vasconcelos and others reference Blackness in their racial discourse. Failing to acknowledge the Eurocentric logic inherent in mestizaje, Vasconcelos and others proudly proclaimed the inclusive nature of Latin America against the exclusive nature of U.S. racial discourse. The legal segregation of White and Black racial categories in the U.S. and U.S. imperialism signified “an empire of White supremacy” according to Vasconcelos (Vasconcelos 20). Thus, the fictive ethnicity of the “mestizo”, constructed as the hybrid product of mestizaje logic, represented a Latin American racial discourse not like the White supremacy of the U.S. Crucial to this distinction is inclusion or exclusion of the Black subject. However, in the development of both U.S. and Latin American racial discourses non-whites and Blackness especially is imagined as contamination or anti-progressive. The presence of U.S. Imperialism in Latin America produced a need for racial and regional distinction and the treatment of the Black subject helps define that distinction.

Turning to Ecuador and the later work of Benjamin Carrión, the treatment of the Black subject in the Ecuadorian expression of mestizaje marginalizes Afro-Ecuadorian contribution to the nation. This can be seen through Carrión’s positioning of Blackness as peripheral to the nation in my earlier discussion of Carrión’s Los Creadores de la Nueva America. While mestizaje in Ecuador as throughout Latin America was imagined
as the coming together of all racial types, Carrión positions the Black element on the periphery of racial blending. Carrión places more centrally the contribution of Indigenous and European heritage in the construction of Ecuador as a “mestizo nation”. Carrión’s rhetoric of mestizaje includes White, Black and Indigenous categories yet places Blackness the farthest away from ecuatorianidad when the “mestizo” characterizes the nation. Carrión’s discourse on mestizaje in his initial work carried over to his role as director of the Ecuadorian House of Culture.

While political and economic instability in Ecuador continued throughout the early twentieth century, 1941 brought a significant military conflict, effecting stability and national unity again. Before 1941, the fall of international cocoa prices, Ecuadorian debt to the U.S. and the extreme inconsistency in the office of president contributed to mestizaje as a viable racial project for national unity. However in 1941 the Ecuadorian-Peruvian war contributed to an already weakened Ecuadorian nation-state. Barely lasting a month the Amazonian territory dispute resulted in Ecuador losing nearly 100,000 square miles of land (Pineo 114). The war was the culmination of years of militarizing the border with Peru resulting in further national instability.

Subsequently, in 1941, Ecuadorian president, Carlos Arroyo del Rio, issued a mandate for the founding of an “Ecuadorian Institute of Culture” in the country’s capital of Quito. The creation of this cultural center following the Ecuadorian-Peruvian war was no coincidence. Arroyo del Rio needed to maintain state power resulting from “Ecuador’s humiliating rout in the war with Peru [that] had provided sufficient proof to most ordinary Ecuadorians that the oligarchy did not deserve to govern…” (Pineo 116). This sentiment pushed Arroyo del Rio to issue a decree on the Ecuadorian Institute of
Culture stating, “That it is necessary to give the greatest possible stability to the work of diffusion and stimulus of the national culture, moving it away from political activities and placing it in an independent and guaranteed plane” (Pino “Casa de la Cultura”). Arroyo del Río’s decree to promote national culture in 1941 in the face of a weakened nationalism, is the origin of the project that Carrión headed for decades.

In Ecuador, Benjamin Carrión and the Ecuadorian House of Culture exemplified a Latin American public intellectual’s direct contribution to the state’s racial project of mestizaje. Carrión defined national culture primarily through his perspective of mestizaje. After Carrión’s first publication in 1928, he produced many works on national history and culture such as Atahualpa and El Cuento de la Patria (The Story of the Homeland) among several others. Carrión’s prolific publications and career of promoting national culture positioned him well to head the institute. Having grown increasingly unpopular following the Peruvian-Ecuadorian war, Arroyo del Río was deposed in 1944 and formerly exiled president Juan Velasco Ibarra returned and spared no time renaming the institute and appointing Carrión as its first director (Pino). Renaming it the House of Ecuadorian Culture invoked a less erudite and more inviting image. It also marked the new presidency of Ibarra, distancing himself from Arroyo del Río and his failures.

The Ecuadorian House of Culture displayed exhibits, served as a publishing house, and hosted events and performances that promoted Ecuadorian culture in Carrión’s vision. As the architect for the CCE, Carrión constructed the cultural center in his image of the Ecuadorian nation. For example, Carrión wrote that, “The House of the Ecuadorian Culture originates profoundly in the constant feature of the vocation of the Ecuadorian man - culture and freedom” (cce.org.ec). Proudly displayed on the website
today, this quote shows Carrión’s attitude toward the CCE in its charge to promote and capture the essence of ecuatorianidad. Furthermore, Carrión’s commitment to culture at the founding of the CCE in 1941 can be encapsulated in the following quote, “If we cannot, neither we must be a power militarily, economically, diplomatically and less—much less!—militarily, we are a great power of culture because for that authorizes and encourages our history.” (“Casa de la Cultura”) Carrión viewed the CCE and promotion of culture as the most important aspect of Ecuadorian society and mesizaje was central to Carrión’s conception.

His conception of mesizaje in Ecuador as an exclusive mixture between indigenous and European heritage, as previously analyzed in Los Creadores, marginalizes Afro-Ecuadorian historical presence. Carrión viewed the Black element in mesizaje and in Ecuador as peripheral to the constitution of the Ecuadorian nation. For example, in a study on the Ecuadorian poor rural mestizo colloquially termed “chagra”, Emma Cervone observes that, “The Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana became the principal architect in the construction of the mestizo nation. Indigenous dances, music, legends, and deeprooted indigenous myths were situated within the national culture as the nation’s pre-Columbian roots.” (Cervone 103). While her analysis focuses on the discrimination of the “chagra”, her observation on the importance of the CCE in promoting Carrión’s ideology of mesizaje speaks to the marginalization of Afro-Ecuadorians. The focus on indigeneity as autochthonous to the nation, albeit primitivist and stereotypical, signals national belonging in Carrión’s representation of the nation in the CCE.

Racial formation theory helps to understand the function of the CCE in promoting state power as an institution of the state and its effect on Afro-Ecuadorians. As a state
institution the CCE operates as a racial project through promoting a national culture. National culture was not inherently racist, however, “race must be understood as occupying varying degrees of centrality in different state institutions and at different historically times” (Omi and Winant 83). Therefore, for Carrión, mestizaje and its ideology of racial mixing defined the culture of the nation through the indigenous and White racial categories. The CCE was the institution by which he carried out this racial project.

This project fueled anti-Black racism through the peripheral position Blackness occupied in Carrión’s construction of mestizaje. Omi and Winant define a racial project as racist, “if and only if it creates or reproduces structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race.” (Omi and Winant 135) Afro-Ecuadorians were essentialized Others, as were Indigenous populations as per Carrión’s image of Ecuador as a “mestizo” nation. To Carrión the mestizo population was considered as ‘the nerve of nationality’”(Cervone 103). Therefore, in terms of mestizaje, the Afro-Ecuadorian remains essentialized as Black and outside the terms of national belonging which reside with the mestizo. The impact of Carrión’s work permeated throughout Ecuadorian mainstream society and rearticulated the meaning of race.

The House of Ecuadorian Culture embodies the development of a transnational racial project in mestizaje that has implications for racial struggle today. Jose Vasconcelos, Gabriela Mistral and Benjamin Carrión, among other Latin American public intellectuals exchanged ideas on race through their service to national education and writing during the early twentieth century. Benjamin Carrión in Ecuador, represents an Andean negotiation of their collective development of mestizaje. The position of the
Black subject in Carrión’s *mestizaje* marginalizes Blackness in terms of national belonging. The establishment of the CCE represents the culmination of Carrión’s writing on *mestizaje* in a state institution. Carrión’s vision and mission survives today in the ongoing work of the CCE. Therefore, the racial project of *mestizaje* developed transnationally in the early twentieth century, remains an institution in Ecuador today.
Cuban scholar, Fernando Ortiz, contributes to the production of cultural works representing Latin American nations by public intellectuals in his 1942 *Cuban Counterpoint* that offers a Caribbean expression of *mestizaje* that incorporates the Black subject more centrally. Unlike Mistral, Vásconcelos and Carrión, Ortiz’ wrote from the discipline of anthropology in his early twentieth century texts on Cuban and Afro-Cuban culture. For example, prior to his 1942 *Cuban Counterpoint*, Ortiz produced works such as *Black Sorcerers* (1906), *Black Slaves* (1916) and *The Glossary of Afronegrismos* (1924). These texts are among the first to analyze and observe Afro-Cuban cosmology, music, dance, etc. through an anthropological lens and from an endogamous and not European scholar. Ortiz introduces the term *transculturation* that builds upon the ideology of mestizaje in its attempt to explain the unique confluence of cultures in Cuba and Latin America. For *Cuban Counterpoint*, Ortiz utilizes his knowledge of Afro-Cuban culture and Cuban society to provide a unique commentary on the intersection of national commodities, sociological processes and power relations.

In *Cuban Counterpoint*, Ortiz expresses a nationalist pride through the dynamics of tobacco and sugar as national commodities in terms of racial mixing and culture. Ortiz’ prose operates around the connection between Cuban culture and the commodities that define Cuba’s national exports. For example, Ortiz asserts that, “…a study of the history of Cuba, both internal and external, is fundamentally a study of the history of sugar and tobacco as the essential bases of its economy” (Ortiz 5). This introduction sets
up the reader to view the intermingling of science, economy and culture through creative metaphors that constantly reference tobacco and sugar. For example, Ortiz tends to align tobacco production with indigenous characteristics, while in contrast he indicates that, “Sugar was mulatto from the start, for the energies of black men and white always went into its production” (Ortiz 58). Ortiz references the African slave labor used for Cuba’s sugar cane production. However he does so through signaling sugar as “mulatto”, a racial category for racially mixed persons with white and Black heritage. His personification of sugar as a commodity marked by White and Black forces hints to the process of *mestizaje* in the refining and production of sugar. Like sugar, the process of upward mobility in a racially mixed society based upon White supremacy depended upon social whitening or *blanqueamiento*. Here Ortiz makes subtle reference to the concept of *blanqueamiento* and the white supremacist attitudes associated with color, whiteness and refinement in Cuba. However, Ortiz avoids the term *mestizaje* in his work and instead offers a new term to describe the unique racial milieu of Latin America.

Ortiz coins the term transculturation in attempts to reconcile the practice of mestizaje, which informs the ideological projection and development of the term in different national and regional contexts throughout Latin America. Ortiz invokes the spirit of Vasconcelos in his 1942 attempt to make sense of fusion of cultures represented in the Caribbean island nation. For example, after introducing the various indigenous, African and European elements as pure, he argues that, “each of them torn from his native moorings, faced with the problem of disadjustment and readjustment, of deculturation and acculturation—in a word, of transculturation” (Ortiz 98). Significantly, *transculturation* allows for the diverse negotiation of various cultures in contexts where
divergent cultures come into contact. Ortiz does not offer a providential prophecy of racial mixing like Vasconcelos, but does employ similar notions of race and racial blending in his text. In addition, *transculturation* “disabled the Anglo-American models of acculturation, which recognized only a unidirectional cultural influence of dominants over subalterns” (Miller 16). In light of U.S. imperialism and hegemony throughout Latin America, it makes sense that Ortiz would respond to “acculturation” as an American construction with his own term to reflect the fusion of culture in Cuba.

In terms of nationalism, Ortiz employs transculturation whereas Vasconcelos and others employed *mestizaje*, yet both terms remain about representation of descriptions of culture and biology. As an anthropologist, Ortiz coins transculturation to describe and analyze the creolization of culture in Cuba. However, the nationalist context in which Ortiz and other public intellectuals wrote from shows itself in the limitation of the term in not focusing on the signifying or cultural/racial categories inherent in the concept. For example, much of Ortiz’ prose depends on the interplay of metaphors of skin color, blood and national commodities. In doing so, Ortiz does not “avoid the temptation to understand miscegenation and biological mixtures” and misses the issue that it is “*descriptions* of blood mixture and skin color that are devised and enacted” by the state (Mignolo 15). Ortiz’ concept remains relevant to analyze the confluence of cultures in multicultural contexts. However, in terms of race and essentialized categories based upon race or culture, Ortiz falls into a nationalist rhetoric that limits critique of the power of signifying practices of Cuban race and culture.

U.S. cultural penetration motivated a nationalist rhetoric that Ortiz invokes throughout his cultural texts on Cuba. Ortiz’ coining of transculturation to define Cuba’s
unique cultural and racial blending contributed to notions of *cubanidad* or “Cubanness”. Cubans across social strata rejected U.S. intervention and elites promoted *cubanidad* as “necessary…to minimize social and racial differences internally so as to challenge the U.S. racist stereotypes that depicted all Cubans as biologically inferior and politically unfit” (De la Fuente 176). Transculturation seeks to conceptualize the development of diverse communities of people in Cuba during the early twentieth century in terms of a united nation based upon mixture. Ortiz certainly reflected an anti-U.S. sentiment writing in 1937, “We Cubans, whites, blacks, and mixed, know well how frequently we are all denigrated without distinction and en masse by some foreigners” (De La Fuente 177). Notions of non-white inferiority informed the U.S. perspective and orientation to Cuba and Latin America. Therefore, *transculturation* and *Cuban Counterpoint* understood in this context, shows Ortiz’ effort to promote a distinct national character from the U.S.

Like Vasconcelos and Carrión before him, Ortiz expresses a staunch anti-U.S. imperialist expression in his work that serves to demarcate Latin America culturally and racially from the U.S. Cuba’s proximity to the U.S., the legacy of the Spanish-American War of 1898 and the increasing integration of the Cuban economy with the U.S. contributed to a fierce anti-Americanism. For example, reflecting on the unequal relationship between Cuba and the U.S., Ortiz declares that Cuba will never be “independent until it can free itself from the coils of the serpent of colonial economy that fattens on its soil but strangles its inhabitants and winds itself about the palm tree of our republican coat of arms, converting it into the sign of the Yankee dollar” (Ortiz 65). Ortiz poetically defends his country’s The strong anti-American sentiment of Ortiz was
shared throughout Latin America and reflected in how they imagined their nations in
contradistinction to the U.S. An important marker of difference with the U.S. in Ortiz
and others is that of skin color and race in Latin America. Therefore the effect of
American political and economic aggression in Latin America, in part, produces a
cultural response embodied in the transformative ideology of *mestizaje*.
Conclusion

Benjamin Carrión’s vision and mission for the House of Ecuadorian Culture remains a part of the institute’s operation today in the capital city of Quito. The CCE developed over time, however amongst the exhibits, events, and description on the contemporary website there is no mention of Afro-Ecuadorian culture. This is significant because the racial project that Carrión’s prolific texts and CCE vision represent, remains a central site of national heritage and education. The vestiges of the transformative racial project of mestizaje during the early twentieth century can be found in Carrión’s CCE as discussed in the previous chapter. Therefore, Carrión’s discourse of Blacks as peripheral to national character continues to be promulgated by this state institution. By drawing upon racial formation theory we can see how the impact of this racial formation impact anti-Black racism in Ecuador today.

Racial formation theory seeks to understand social conflict in terms of how race is signified and how racial categories are transformed and destroyed. Racial projects are crucial to state formation because they, “connect what race means in a particular discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially organized based upon that meaning” (Omi and Winant 125). The racial project of mestizaje represents a foundational transformation of racial categories in Latin America. It is foundational because of the region-wide impact it continues to have in promulgating anti-Black racism through certain understandings of race and nation. The
CCE embodies the logic of mestizaje and thus an ongoing racial project of the state that contributes to contemporary racism.

This essay began by looking at contemporary anti-Black racism in Ecuador and how through Alexandra Ocles, the state is attempting to address it through policies and programs to raise the public’s awareness. Entrenched in Ecuadorian society, anti-Black racism affects access to education, health care, and employment (Hooker 283). In part, the anti-Black racism present today in Ecuador stems from the foundational era for the transformation of the meaning of race. As Minister of Social Movements and Citizen Participation, Ocles organized an international conference in Quito during December of 2010 to exchange ideas on how best to implement policies and programs to combat anti-Black racism. International Black activists such as Danny Glover contributed to proposals and papers to aid Ocles and the Ecuadorian government in this effort. However in order for these contemporary efforts by the state to be effective, a critical analysis of the central figures and state institutions of the past must be taken into account.

This essay is timely for transnational efforts addressing anti-Black racism such as Ocles, because it focuses on a transformative era for racial reconfiguration in Latin America that impacted how the nation-state included and excluded Blacks. During this era of economic and political instability for Latin America, states and public intellectuals rearticulated the nation in terms of race. This occurred in Ecuador through the work of Benjamin Carrión during the early twentieth century. His relative exclusion of Afro-Ecuadorians to the nation reflects a Eurocentric logic regarding race that is reflective of contemporary anti-Black racism that Ocles and the Ecuadorian government reject.
The Eurocentric logic inherent in *mestizaje* produced concepts such as *blanqueamiento* or whitening that refers to racial mixture that “whitens” one’s blood or pigmentation. This concept refers to the favoring of whiteness in the racial ideology of *mestizaje* (Wade 255). The consequence is a devaluing of Blackness and Indigeneity that leads to non-white racism. Therefore, the logic of *mestizaje*, engrained in the state institutions like the CCE, contributes to racist attitudes toward Afro-Ecuadorians today.

Concepts of *blanqueamiento* are especially egregious for Afro-Ecuadorians in Ecuadorian society. Indigenous groups remain central to the narrative of the nation and *mestizaje* whereas Afro-Ecuadorians remain excluded. For example, claims to collective rights for indigenous groups have received quicker consideration in Ecuador and throughout Latin America than Afro-Latino groups. (Hooker 286). Because of pre-colonial indigenous language and ties to the land, nations have been quick to recognize them, however, Afro-Ecuadorians face a more difficult path toward contemporary group rights claims. Therefore, contemporary anthropologists have described Afro-Ecuadorians as the “ultimate Other” in Ecuadorian society, owing to their exclusion and invisibility as a group constitutive of the nation (Rahier 422). In order to respond to anti-Black racism today, the historical development of racial ideologies such as *mestizaje* must be understood in their transnational and transformative context.

National and regional interpretations of Blackness can be seen operating through the intertextuality of *mestizaje* in the works of Jose Vasconcelos, Benjamin Carrión and Fernando Ortiz. Each author’s text in this essay represents a different yet similar negotiation with *mestizaje* and the Black subject within their racial discourse. This is because these public intellectuals wrote from the national contexts of Mexico, Ecuador
and Cuba in Central America, the Andes and the Caribbean, respectively. They each include an understanding of mestizaje as the uniting of all races; however depending on their national context and population, the centrality of the Black subject in that nation differs. In the context of Ecuador, Carrión posits Blackness as tangential to the formation of the nation. However, for Ortiz in Cuba, he employs transculturation as a concept to more critically incorporate Blackness as constitutive of cubanidad or national Cuban character. Their discourse on race and nation contributed to a regional ideology of mestizaje that legitimated anti-Black racism

They all acknowledge mestizaje as a regional phenomenon corresponding to Latin America, and U.S. imperialism contributes to this demarcation. U.S. imperialism and the presence of U.S. racial discourse in Latin America during the early twentieth century contributed to this regional divide that united Latin America in contradistinction to the U.S. in terms of race. Vasconcelos, Carrión and Ortiz consistently valorize race and racism in Latin America as different from the White supremacy of the United States. However, as previously discussed, White supremacy is very much a part of the ideology of mestizaje. With White supremacy operating in both U.S. and Latin American racial discourses, an understanding of the normative role of White supremacy globally must be taken into account.

At the global or macro level, racial projects in the U.S. such as Jim Crow segregation and mestizaje in Latin America represent a global system of White supremacy. State formation in the U.S. and Latin America constructed racial projects that resulted in non-white discrimination and racism. Latin America did not develop mestizaje within a regional or national vacuum. Instead, the development of this racial
project in Latin America came as a result of “the representation of a worldly web of racial arrangement, relationally produced over time, positioning not only people(s) but nation-states in terms of fashioned hierarchies” (Goldberg 133). Latin American public intellectuals provided the epistemological groundwork for these global discourses and the transnational exchange of ideas that facilitated these racial projects represent a network of global White supremacy.

It is against the anti-Black racism produced in part by transnational historical development of racial projects like mestizaje that Alexandra Ocles and the Ecuadorian state are responding. The 2011 United Nations campaign against global anti-Black racism, that Ocles takes advantage of, is in part a result of state racial projects that have essentialized notions of race and nation. The international network of Black activists that Ocles invited for her conference each resisted and waged campaigns against anti-Black racism in different national and social contexts. However, the common experience of anti-Black racism in their respective nations engenders a transnational connection and network that Ocles invoked through her position in the Ecuadorian government.

Future considerations and thoughts for this essay concern the role of the Ecuadorian state in redressing the racism it played a tangible role in promulgating. The racial project of mestizaje remains a part of the House of Ecuadorian Culture. Without addressing how the nation-state has contributed to the meaning of race through institutions like the CCE, then the work of mestizaje remains. In addition, future legislation and programs organized by state, whether through Ocles’ position or not, must be scrutinized according to the historical role of the state in the production of certain meanings of race.
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