In 1926 the Honduran Congress voted to name the country’s national currency in honor of Lempira, an indigenous chieftain who died fighting the Spaniards in the 1530s. Until then, as in most countries of Central America, the Honduran national currency was simply known as the peso. Consequently, from primary school through adulthood, Hondurans studied Lempira in schoolbooks and observed his image in statues located in parks throughout the country. Why was Lempira chosen as the icon for the national currency in Honduras in 1926? To what extent did the history of the banana economy, then thriving, serve as context for understanding the Lempira phenomenon? How did the black populations on the Caribbean coast, as settled communities and as imported laborers on the banana plantations, play roles in decisions made in Tegucigalpa about the national currency?

I address these questions in the context of a reinterpretation of the history of the banana exporting region of Honduras, the Caribbean North Coast, and the role of its black populations. The Honduran North Coast’s history, whose banana exports remained largely under the control of the United and Standard Fruit Companies for most of the twentieth century, has too often been interpreted within the narrow confines of a classic “banana enclave,” or worse, those of the “classic Banana Republic” (Euraque 1996c; Euraque 1997). This perspective has tended to delink not only national economic and political history from the banana enclave, at least insofar as Hondurans enjoyed any autonomy in the relationship, but it also delinked national cultural history from regional processes on the Caribbean North Coast, especially in sociological analyses (Del Cid 1988).
The best way to understand how and why Lempira became the symbol of the national currency is by locating that congressional decision in the relationship between labor struggles in the banana plantations and their racial and ethnic resonance in Tegucigalpa, the Honduran capital. The existing historiography has misread key issues associated with ethnicity and the banana companies, particularly the misrepresentation of blackness, its association with imported West Indian labor in the 1910s and 1920s, and the exclusion from regional history of Garifuna blackness. Garifuna blackness, associated with a black population located on the Caribbean coast since the 1790s (Pastor Fasquelle 1998; Herranz 1994), appeared as the main local “threat” to efforts to make Honduras a mestizo nation of an Indo-Hispanic ancestry.

**LEMPIRA, BLACKNESS, AND THE LABORING POPULATION IN THE BANANA ECONOMY OF THE 1910S AND 1920S**

Despite the lack of evidence for Lempira’s historic existence during most of Honduras’s emergence as a nation-state, elite intellectuals fashioned a “national” representation of Lempira. This occurred in the context of what Benedict Anderson (1994) has called the production of “imagined political communities,” fictive renderings of historic events that help imagine nations in particularly modern ways. The official nationalization of Lempira, despite his tragic death, originated in the nineteenth century and was consolidated during the second decade of the twentieth century, and it must be associated with the history of the banana enclave in those years (Alvarado 1993, 8–9; Joya 1992).

The state version of a “nationalist” Lempira in the twentieth century took place in two moments of official iconographic representation. A critical moment took place in 1928, when Dr. Precentación Centeno, then the minister of public education and a fervent patriot (Iraheta 1952), commissioned a painting of a “representative portrait of the valiant Lempira.” Another painter in 1929 fulfilled a commission for another official painting of Lempira. In this case, male members of the Lenca peoples from Intibuca posed for this effort (Castro 1929). This built on the other act, a congressional decree in 1926 that made Lempira the emblem of the national currency, thus making Lempira’s image available to most humble Hondurans. In 1935 a national holiday was declared in Lempira’s name (Zuniga and Zuniga Reyes 1993, 122). By the early 1940s Lempira’s name was used to designate avenues, schools, stadiums, and even coffee and cigarette brand names (Castro 1940).

In 1926 months before the deputies debated the national-currency issue and two years before the Honduran state commissioned Lempira’s first painting, a leaflet distributed among banana workers called for the “sons of the invincible Lempira” to defend the “land of Columbus” against the Yankees and the blacks. This document displays more than the uneasy coexistence between the conqueror and the conquered as the basis of a nationalist appeal. Negotiating this polarity has always been part of mestizo cultural heroism. Here, what is important is the negotiation evidenced in the leaflet as part of an emerging mestizo narrative of localized Honduran *Indo-hispanoamericanismo*, one that also targeted blacks and blackness on the Caribbean coast. In some ways, this is a form of “subaltern nationalism against the state” but one that simultaneously draws on a state-sanctioned discourse (Lloyd 1997). This issue is best explored by locating it within the texture of racial mixture and blackness on the Caribbean coast when compared to the interior.

In Honduras cultivation of bananas on the North Coast after the 1870s, which was to generate the country’s main foreign-exchange earnings by the 1920s, did not directly conflict with the land tenure of Indian communities. This was different from the overall process of coffee cultivation elsewhere in Central America (Williams 1995). The laboring peoples on the Caribbean coast consisted not of proletarianized Indians but mostly of mixed-raced migrants from Honduras’s interior and of peoples of predominantly African descent. In the latter case, these peoples consisted of West Indian blacks imported by the banana companies from the English-speaking Caribbean and of descendants of the Garifuna who arrived in Honduras in 1797. Between the 1910s and the 1920s, banana labor doubled in Honduras (see table 1). Equally important, by the 1920s Honduran intellectuals and wide sectors of the population as a whole viewed the blackness of some of this laboring population as a threat to the “mestizo” nation.

What kind of “threat” did “blacks” and blackness pose to Honduran Indo-mestizaje and the labor movement? Sadly, Honduran historiography about this period, particularly issues central to labor history, ethnic relations, and the role of the foreign banana companies on the country’s Caribbean North Coast, is very poor. In the 1980s prominent Honduran scholars such as Mario Posas,
TABLE 1 Estimated Number of Laborers Employed by the Banana Companies in Honduras, 1913-1925 (Average Monthly Employment)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Standard Fruit</th>
<th>United Fruit</th>
<th>Cuyamel Fruit</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1913/1914</td>
<td>1,400</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>1,500*</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3,980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923/1924</td>
<td>1,400</td>
<td>5,474</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>10,874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924/1925</td>
<td>2,450</td>
<td>5,474</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>12,924</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Based on company reports submitted to the Ministry of Development. Italicized figures represent estimates of given figures for years indicated.

* This figure is estimated based on information from Dispatch 210, U.S. vice-consul in Puerto Cortés, Claude Dawson, to Secretary of State (14 November 1911), United States National Archives, Record Group 59, 815.00/1388.

Victor Meza, and Mario Argüeta began to address one of the most glaring vacuums in Honduran historiography: the absence of working-class history. The working peoples of the North Coast have been notably absent from this history, including West Indian workers on banana plantations and the largest Honduran black community living on the North Coast, the Garifuna. These are issues central for contextualizing the national currency debate of 1926.

The historiography of the 1980s both narrated working-class history and linked it to broader narratives of the country’s political system. Even so, major issues remain unresolved, including the social and racial history of the most important banana towns on the Caribbean: Tela, La Ceiba, and Trujillo. In Argüeta’s view, the following questions merit research: “To what extent did the black West Indian workers incorporate themselves into the national culture and labor unions? Did they identify more with the corporation that contracted them and transferred them to Honduras, or with their class? Did they transcend the barriers of race, language, and customs of Hondurans? Did they become Hondurans in a cultural sense? How many remained and how many returned to their places of origin or even to a third country?” (1992, 66).

Important answers to these and other questions were first systematically offered by Elisavinda Echeverri-Gent (1988; 1992). Her most important contribution lay in her analysis of the role of race and ethnicity in the early history of the banana workers of the Honduran North Coast. Echeverri-Gent challenged key issues in previous historiography, especially the influential work of Mario Posas (1981a; 1983, 30) and others, namely Murga Frassinetti (1980). In particular, Echeverri-Gent regarded Posas’s explorations of the race issue as severely limited by the lack of available documentation, a problem that persists to the present day (1988, 13 n. 2). Also, according to Echeverri-Gent, “absence of cooperation between these workers went beyond a divide and rule strategy devised by the fruit companies, a position assumed by Posas” (ibid., 41). Indeed, “blatant racism on the part of the native workers and a well founded distrust towards them on the part of the blacks was equally, if not more, important in preventing any type of collective action” (ibid., 41).

Echeverri-Gent’s periodization regarding race and ethnicity on the Honduran banana plantations includes the period roughly between the 1890s and the early 1920s, that is, exactly prior to the nationalist racialization of Lempira in the 1920s. In her view, during this time West Indian laborers, recruited largely by the United Fruit Company, “were the largest and most stable group” of proletarianized workers on the North Coast (ibid., 8, 43, 68). While they were rural workers, in their relation to capital and their experience and organization in the workplace, they shared many characteristics of industrial laborers (Echeverri-Gent 1992, 276) In these years, therefore, West Indian ethnic identity became the basis for “collective action” against banana company exploitation (Echeverri-Gent 1988, 8).

Echeverri-Gent’s most critical claim, indeed perhaps the cornerstone of her challenging new views, turned on the extent to which West Indians actually made up, or not, the “largest and most stable group” of workers between the 1890s and the early 1920s. Her evidence to support this claim, unfortunately, is very sketchy. The only statistical evidence offered involves a 1931 British estimate of about 10,000 West Indian workers on the North Coast (ibid., 8, 43, 68). While they were rural workers, in their relation to capital and their experience and organization in the workplace, they shared many characteristics of industrial laborers (Echeverri-Gent 1992, 276) In these years, therefore, West Indian ethnic identity became the basis for “collective action” against banana company exploitation (Echeverri-Gent 1988, 8).

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Does this mean that between the 1890s and early 1920s the West Indian population was even higher and hence still the foundation of ethnicity as the basis of collective action during the period? Unfortunately, Echeverri-Gent’s evidence for West Indian-led strikes in Honduras during this period is also very vague. Her dissertation offered only one example, in 1919, of a strike movement led by “a British office employee” of the Cuyamel Fruit Company (1988,
However, in her 1992 article, she confuses this strike with a 1916 movement when black strikebreakers were used (305).

Interestingly, Cuyamel was not the primary recruiter of West Indian labor to Honduras or anywhere else in the Caribbean. According to Echeverri-Gent, "the UFCO. was the most concerned with the issue of West Indian labor. The other companies mostly hired those who drifted away from the UFCO. farms" (1992, 299 n. 86). Thus, one would have expected to find more evidence for West Indian collective action on the United Fruit plantations, as was the case in Costa Rica (Harpelle 2000; Putnam 2001), and as Echeverri-Gent so well documents herself.

In Honduras the United Fruit Company began building railroads and banana plantations only in the mid- to late 1910s, because the corporation secured its important concessions only in 1912. The first banana company to build railroads on the Honduran North Coast was an early competitor of United Fruit, the Cuyamel Fruit Company. Between 1908 and 1911, Cuyamel Fruit laid tracks in northwestern Cortés, probably with Honduran and Salvadoran labor. (A U.S. consular report of 1918 reported that Cuyamel Fruit was importing 1,500 Salvadoran laborers). United Fruit railroads in Honduras outdistanced Cuyamel Fruit's only after 1914 and surpassed Standard Fruit Company's only after 1918 (Euraque 1990, 145).

Thus, it appears difficult to substantiate the claim that United Fruit imported enough West Indian laborers to Honduras for them to have constituted the majority of banana plantation workers before 1920. In fact, the available historiography offers almost no evidence of coordinated, collective worker action against the companies before 1916. A review of U.S. consular reports from the North Coast between 1910 and 1917 found no evidence of strike movements at all. A 1916 strike movement led by mestizo workers against the Cuyamel Fruit Company is recorded as the first of its kind on the Honduran North Coast (Posas 1981b, 71-72).

Moreover, a review of the existing historiography and U.S. consular reports identified fifteen strike movements on the North Coast between 1916 and 1925. None of this evidence offered instances of West Indian ethnic-based leadership (O'Brien 1996). In fact, in some cases, as in the Cuyamel strike of 1916, black workers were used as strikebreakers. But even this does not emerge as a pattern.

A strike on the La Ceiba wharf in 1920, home of the Standard Fruit Company, was broken by laborers from the country's interior.

Echeverri-Gent's own evidence supports these findings. She attributed the lack of evidence for West Indian-led strikes and other forms of collective action to British officials themselves on the North Coast. For example, "the British Consuls on the coast of Honduras appear to have been less diligent at reporting workers' protests in the area [when compared to the Costa Rican case]" (1988, 100). U.S. consular officials, who might have been even more apprehensive about strikes than their British counterparts, also reported little strike activity prior to 1920. Echeverri-Gent nonetheless concludes, "It is difficult to believe that the earliest strikes on the banana plantations took place without the cooperation from the West Indians. By virtue of their considerable numbers in the plantations they were a factor that could not be ignored. In 1916 they still made up the majority of the banana plantation workforce" (1992, 305). Given the evidence suggested by existing historiographies and by consular reports, as well as evidence to follow, the tentativeness of this conclusion is difficult to sustain.

A major problem with Honduran labor historiography, especially that literature dealing with the pre-World War II period, centers on its lack of basic data on the structure of the labor force as such. Until now, few scholars have advanced even tentative estimates regarding the number of workers employed by the banana companies before the 1930s.

The great upsurge in banana labor employment occurred in the 1910s but mostly during the transition to the early 1920s (see table 1). What is more, contrary to Echeverri-Gent claims, the nearly 4,000 workers employed by the banana companies as of 1914 were mostly Honduran and Salvadoran workers, with perhaps a scattering of West Indian laborers as well. Honduran constitutions during the nineteenth century and well into the 1950s made Salvadoran access to Honduran residency and citizenship easy, which made their migration to the plantations equally simple given labor demand (Marinas Otero 1962, 146–47). As the U.S. minister in Tegucigalpa put it in 1914, "a puzzling feature in the study of political conditions here, and in all of the Central American republics, arises from the fact that while apparently and actually each claims to be a separate and distinct entity, yet the citizens of each of the republics are
proclaimed citizens of Central America. And upon removal of residence from one country to another a simple declaration is all that is required to invest the individual immediately with all the rights and privileges of Citizenship in the country to which he has removed.6

Thus, what can be said about the close to 10,000 workers employed in 1924 or the more than 20,000 employed by 1930? Might not the 10,000 West Indian workers reported by the British authorities in 1929 mean that fully half of the Honduran banana labor force represented imported labor by the United Fruit Company? I doubt it. An equally significant percentage, if not more so, of the new labor force represented immigrant Salvadorans. Echeverri-Gent notes that by the end of the 1920s more than 12,000 Salvadorans resided in Honduras (1992, 301). What percentage worked on the banana plantations?

Honduran censuses offer some basis for more fully addressing that question. The census data in table 2 show a great upsurge of Salvadoran immigration to Honduras during the first two decades of the twentieth century, precisely the period that Echeverri-Gent identifies as the time of West Indian hegemony. According to a 1932 report cited by Posas, the Cuyamel Fruit Company annually imported between 5,000 and 6,000 workers to work in its plantations in Cortés (1981b, 45–46).

Given the evidence in tables 1 and 2, this figure no doubt exaggerated the numbers of imported laborers. However, there is little doubt that Salvadorans early on made up great numbers of the banana workers, especially on the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>British</th>
<th>Salvadoran</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>West Indian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>1,033</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>4,710</td>
<td>6,260</td>
<td>19,176</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>3,977</td>
<td>13,452</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Dirección General de Estadística y Censo, Resumen del Censo de Población de Honduras for 1887, 1910, 1926, 1930, 1935. The 1892 and 1906 figures are from Schoonover and Schoonover 1989. The published 1926 Census did not present a West Indian (antillano) classification; that figure is from Carlos Zúñiga Figueroa 1953, 3.

Given the evidence in tables 1 and 2, this figure no doubt exaggerated the numbers of imported laborers. However, there is little doubt that Salvadorans early on made up great numbers of the banana workers, especially on the Cuyamel Fruit plantations. The censuses of 1926, 1930, and 1935 give significant basis for this assertion. In 1926, about 46 percent of Salvadorans domiciled in Honduras resided in the North Coast departments of Cortés, Atlántida, Yoro, and Colón. The 1930 and 1935 figures were even higher, 52 percent and 62 percent respectively. Finally, the department of Cortés's Salvadoran population represented more than 50 percent of the North Coast Salvadoran population as a whole.

On the other hand, table 2 indicates another interesting phenomenon: the great upsurge of British residents into Honduras between 1906 and 1910. In fact, the more than 1,000 British nationals in Honduras in 1887 might have included mostly Jamaicans reportedly imported to work on the construction of the projected Interoceanic Railroad in the early 1870s (Léon Gómez 1978, 129). The literature is rather clear that the rise of British residents on the Central America Caribbean littoral in this period meant the immigration of West Indian black colonials to labor on banana and sugar plantations or the Panama Canal (McLean Petras 1988). But if so, how was it linked to United Fruit importation if this company did not begin railroad construction until after 1912? Or might the new West Indian immigrants have been imported by Cuyamel Fruit or Standard Fruit? The available evidence does not support definitive answers to these questions. Notwithstanding these and other unresolved questions, the extant evidence suggests that West Indians probably did not make up the majority of workers on the Honduran plantations before or after 1920. Thus, the racialization of Lempira must surely be juxtaposed to the other important black population of the North Coast, the Garifuna.

GARIFUNA BLACKNESS ON THE NORTH COAST IN 1920S

During congressional debates over the currency in 1926, deputies entertained letters from different regions of the country. A letter from a number of people residing in Tela, then a major seat of the United Fruit Company, complained not only of the rapaciousness of the banana company, but of the labor preference it supposedly granted to blacks.7 What blacks did the Tela correspondence have in mind? Echeverri-Gent's research, the most systematic on this issue up to now, implies that the Tela letter should have referred to West Indian blacks. Available evidence suggests otherwise. Indeed, the history of Tela, like one al-

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ready available for La Ceiba, the seat of the Standard Fruit Company, shows that Tela's Garifuna were important pioneers in its settlement and were its early banana growers. Moreover, Lempira's racialization, as an element of Hispanic mestizaje, should be understood as an effort to exclude the Garifuna, as well as West Indian labor, from real and potential economic power.

In fact, Garifunas populated Tela as early as the 1810s, and the mixed-race population began arriving from the interior in the 1850s and 1860s, and only in the last decades of the nineteenth century did Tela come under the economic hegemony of mestizos and recently arrived Europeans (Elvir 2001). Whereas La Ceiba became the seat of Standard Fruit managerial operations, Tela became the early hub of United Fruit's administration. The Tela region saw the first imported black British laborers, officially permitted for the banana companies for the first time in 1912.

However, until very recently little was known about the Garifuna presence in the Tela region. It has been generally assumed that they resided mostly in their villages on the shore and only intermittently involved themselves in the labor market or even participated as banana growers themselves. Indeed, Garifuna as banana growers and urban and rural landowners are rarely mentioned. For example, some research suggests that originally the Tela region's best lands were owned by the Jicaque Indians but that between the 1880s and the mid-1910s, these passed first into the hands of the ladinos and then eventually into the arms of the United Fruit Company. Garifuna are missing from this narrative (Soluri 1998, 83–84).

Evidence suggests that their presence extended beyond seaside villages like San Juan, Tornabe, Triunfo de la Cruz, La Ensenada, and others (Euraque 2001; Mark Anderson 2000). Indeed, it seems that by 1900 Garifuna owned ejidal (community) land in Tela and that much of this land remained in Garifuna hands into the 1910s (Palacios and Sanchez 1996). Indeed, not only did a number of Garifuna own banana lands, but some, like Pascual Valerio, were considered "capitalists" in the records of the Tela municipality during the 1910s and 1920s (López García 1996, 112; Elvir 2001, 112–13). Indeed, in the 1930s, the Valerios owned much of the lands occupied by Garifuna and West Indians in the only black neighborhood in Tela, Barrio Las Brisas.

Also, a recent history of La Ceiba has unearthed not only wealthy urban and banana-growing Garifuna in the 1910s and early 1920s but has uncovered a history of Garifuna economic power there since the 1870s. Mestizos, many of black heritage extending to the late colonial period, and Europeans subjugated Garifuna economic power while thereafter losing the struggle to the Standard Fruit Company (Canelas Diaz 1999). In his analysis and narrative, Antonio Canelas Díaz makes Garifuna life central to La Ceiba's history, unlike existing histories of this century. In short, in Tela and especially in La Ceiba, and perhaps elsewhere on the North Coast, Garifuna blackness in the 1920s represented the "greatest threat" to an emerging Indo-Hispanic mestizaje.

Not only were the Honduran Garifuna the first stable black population employed by the banana companies, but Garifuna labor remained critical to banana-company employment much later than many commentators suggest. Finally, given their extensive settlement of rich coastal land, their "threat" was also connected to potentially cultivable lands as the banana companies and mestizo growers sought more and more land to grow more and more bananas, particularly as the first plantations fell victim to Panama Disease and other problems associated with ecological destruction in the 1910s and 1920s (Soluri 2001).

These Garifuna were descendants of a polyglot, racially mixed population that had occupied the Honduran Atlantic littoral since the late eighteenth century. Known by the British as black Caribs and by Hondurans as morenos, they were descended from formerly enslaved West Africans who had intermarried with the local Carib Indians on St. Vincent during the 1600s. Fiercely resistant to British colonization of St. Vincent, about 2,000 black Caribs were deported to Honduras in the 1790s after British forces had crushed them militarily. The British originally left the black Caribs on the Honduran Bay Islands, presumably to help them defend against the Spaniards. From there they moved to the Honduran mainland, near Trujillo, a town that in the 1910s became a major United Fruit center of operations. While not warmly received by the Spanish military outpost, then with a population of probably less than 300, the black Caribs soon dedicated themselves to cultivating rice, manioc, sugarcane, cotton, plantains, and squash. They not only met their own needs, but also sold surpluses in Trujillo.

The black Caribs also migrated east and west on the Honduran North Coast, toward Guatemala and Nicaragua, via land and on very maneuverable canoes. Nancie González, the most prominent ethnographic scholar of the Garifuna,
has identified three broad periods in what she calls the evolution of the Garifuna’s “work identity” as an aspect of their “ethnogenesis” between the 1790s and the 1930s (González 1988, 125–43; Mark Anderson 1997). Initially, from the 1790s and the 1820s, the black Caribs served as traders, even raiders, of tiny settlements all the way to Belize and as settlers in regions like Tela and La Ceiba.

Between Honduran independence in the 1820s and the 1870s, the Garifuna diversified their labor into smuggling, becoming temporary soldiers of fortune in the country’s civil wars, but also into temporary wage work in the lumber operations established in the river valleys in the interior. Their employment in lumber operations continued into the 1870s and even 1880s, when lumber exports still represented about 10 percent of Honduran exports. Finally, between the 1890s and the 1930s, black Caribs enjoyed wage work in the banana economy, both before and after the establishment of foreign-owned plantations and railroads (Galvão de Coelho 1981, 40).

González and others familiar with the Garifuna do recognize the importation of West Indian laborers and ensuing labor competition between them and the Black Caribs and Hispanic and “Indio” Honduran migrants to the area (ibid., 43). However, González argues that the black Caribs returned to “the Coastline itself,” to their traditional homes, and apparently left plantation work to the Indios, newly recruited West Indians, and mixed-race Hondurans. In González’s view, “Perhaps because dock work was less regular, and also because it was on the seashore where Caribs were at home and could easily travel, they came to predominate in the labor gangs of ports such as Barrios, [Puerto] Cortés, Tela, and La Ceiba” (González 1988, 136).

González does not offer a more precise periodization of this process. Given the evidence regarding banana-company employment, the establishment of United Fruit after 1912, and the timing of the Salvadoran presence on the North Coast, the exodus of black Carib labor from the plantations probably began in the late 1910s, with a greater upsurge in the early 1920s. This is not to suggest that Garifuna laborers formed the majority of the 4,000 or so wage workers in the banana economy between the 1890s and the early 1910s (see table 1). However, we cannot discount their significant numerical presence and hence their supposed threat to Indo-Hispanic nationalism in the 1920s.

It is likely that the very high estimates of West Indian labor on banana plantations probably confused black Carib workers with the smaller West Indian population. Furthermore, the banana enclave not only harbored a major transnational corporation capable of concentrating and reconcentrating capital inputs, but United Fruit transported national identities across their holdings in the Caribbean. Thus, high West Indian populations reported by British consuls in 1929 probably represented a momentary concentration of labor in Honduras in relation to company strategy elsewhere. According to Philippe Bourgois, “Internal company records from the early 1920s when labor unrest among West Indians was at a peak [in Costa Rica] document how thousands of workers were transferred from one country to another in order to saturate local labor markets, reduce wages, and undermine union movements. These massive labor transfers involved complicated shuffling of peoples of different nationalities and ethnicities” (1989, 217).

How significant was Garifuna labor in the overall evolution of banana-plantation life and its surroundings before and after 1920? It is very difficult to be precise, because even the total Garifuna population is difficult to pinpoint. While only rough estimates are available, little doubt exists about Garifuna fecundity and corresponding overall population growth (González 1988, 118–20). In 1986 the Garifuna population was estimated at 90,000, less than 1 percent of the country’s total inhabitants (Valencia Chala 1986, 38). In 1976 a population of about 61,000 was estimated by another scholar, also less than 1 percent of the total (González 1988, 119). However, the disproportionate Garifuna population today is a function of both great immigration after World War II and very high Honduran population growth rates overall. Rough estimates for the Garifuna population between 1800 and 1935 point to a range of between 1 and 5 percent of the total Honduran population (see table 3).

Obviously, Garifuna population density was highest in the departments of the North Coast. According to censuses in the 1920s and 1930s, even though they had jettisoned the “mulatto” category of the 1910 count, slightly more than 10 percent of the North Coast population was “Black,” including descendants from escaped slaves from the Caribbean (Garifuna) and West Indians imported by the United Fruit Company. What is more, 95 percent of the country’s black population resided on the North Coast, and well into the second decade of the twentieth century, a majority of black labor on the banana plantations was probably Garifuna.

The estimates in table 3 provide a more approximate estimate of the overall
concentration of Honduras's black population on the North Coast. The 1910, 1930, and 1935 numbers represent the black population, minus the "British" population and the West Indian inhabitants counted in the censuses for those years.12 Surely there is room for error here, but the pre-1910 estimates and the post-1930s estimates do not contradict the overall percentage patterns, which indicate that blacks represented a range of 1 to 5 percent of the country's total population.

Moreover, expert observers who offered estimates for the Garifuna population on the Atlantic coastal littoral as a whole generally don't contradict our projections for Honduras's share. In 1928 Edward Conzemius estimated the black Carib population then living in Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua to range from 20,000 to 25,000 people (Richard N. Adams 1957, 631). Ruy Galvão de Coelho estimated their Caribbean North Coast population to range from 40,000 to 50,000 members (1981, 41). Again, Honduras's approximate share of Garifuna for those decades does not contradict Coelho's views. In short, the primary black population on the Honduran North Coast between the 1890s and the 1930s and after continued to be Garifuna. The primary "Black threat" to the nation, in the 1920s, then, was internal and local.

TABLE 3  Estimates of Garifuna Population in Honduras, 1790s–1930

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>% of Honduran</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1797</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1801</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1816</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>14,466</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>18,092</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>22,979</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: The 1797 and 1816 figures are reported in "Informe de la Provincia de Honduras" 1991, 298. The 1801 figures are from "Población de las Provincias" 1991, 289. The twentieth-century figures are explained in the text.

In the 1920s the notion of an Indo-Hispanic mestizaje represented only an emerging elite discourse. However, the 1920s effort to officially designate Lempira as the "representative" of the "other race" in "our mestizaje" involved a local racism that drew on a postindependence rejection of blackness, and especially a rejection of Garifuna blackness as a more local and immediate racial threat. This elite fear was magnified by the "threat" that non-Garifuna and non-Jamaican laborers perceived in the context of labor struggles on the banana plantations. This turned into an anti-imperialism channeled through the iconography of Lempira and via concrete efforts to deport black laborers that linked these mobilizations to a racialized nationalism from above and from below. It also included ensuring that the Garifuna were deprived of resources—that is, land and commercial opportunities in towns like Tela and La Ceiba.

Honduran elites framed their nationalist response within the limitations of an Indo-Hispanic mestizaje that excluded blacks and blackness, subjects central to the history of the banana companies but critical to the immediate postindependence period as well (Euraque 2001, chap. 5). Froylan Turcios, a committed anti-imperialist in the 1920s and an ally of Sandino until 1929, published articles in Tegucigalpa as early as 1916 denouncing blacks on the North Coast, including the "danger" of racial mixture (Euraque 1998, 160). At that time, on the eve of his recognition with a verse in the national anthem decreed in 1915, Lempira was still framed as a defender of national autonomy and sovereignty, and not necessarily racialized (Liga de la Defensa Nacional Centroamericana 1914).13 This process began to change in the late 1910s, and especially by the mid-1920s.

In July 1916 Turcios published three long editorials in his El Nuevo Tiempo on "unnecessary immigrants." Turcios admitted that he lacked "exact statistics" on the issue, but he nonetheless unleashed a tirade against black immigrants, who, he argued, were causing all kinds of debauchery on the North Coast. He decried government policy, including the Immigration Law of 1906, which obstructed the government from expelling members of a race made arrogant by their "nationality"—that is, West Indian subjects of the British Empire. He also condemned the possibility that this "inferior race" might mix with the "Indian element." This, in other words, meant the "danger" presented by sambos.
By the early 1920s even labor leaders took up the racism espoused by Fraylan Turcios and others in the 1910s (Euraque 1998). Honduran labor leaders also contributed to smearing black Hondurans, closely related to mulattos, by pushing for antiblack immigration labor laws. Early in 1923, Liberal Party deputies associated with the Federación Obrera Hondureña (FOH), established in 1921 by Tegucigalpa artisans (Posas 1981b, 85), introduced legislation that sought to prohibit "the importation into the territory of the Republic of negroes of the African race and coolies."

The bill also called for the banana companies to deport, within a year, "the negroes and coolies that they have brought into the country." Finally, the deputies sought a census of all negroes and coolies and the issuance of identification cards. The left-wing Federación Socialista Hondureña, established in opposition to the FOH in 1929, declared its support for racist immigration legislation and called for a campaign to get the "black element into the organization in order to discipline him and conduct him in the struggle for his emancipation" (Villars 1991, 85).

At any rate, this 1923 bill, as well as others introduced into Congress in 1924 and 1925, merited the opposition of the banana companies, the British embassy, and the U.S. embassy. They failed. Nonetheless, they were important because these efforts converged with the elite racism espoused by Turcios, Valladares, and others regarding the ethnic amalgamation of the North Coast, and its relationship to race, immigration, and nationality. After 1924, powerful caudillos and various future presidents not only condoned this racism but in some cases even wrote publicly about it. For example, in 1924, General Vicente Tosta, provisional president at the time, openly opposed black immigration.

During the 1925 presidential campaign, General Tiburcio Carías Andino, who would eventually be the National Party president between 1933 and 1948 and would sanction the Lempira national holiday in 1935, pledged to oppose black immigrant labor on the North Coast. The National Party victor in the 1925 elections, Dr. Miguel Paz Barahona (in office from 1925 to 1928), claimed that Honduras needed "serene races," which "are essential for peace and necessary for the permanence of democracy. Blood is a commodity of utmost necessity. We must import it" (República de Honduras 1925, 7-8). A year later, in an article published in a Turcios publication, Ramón E. Cruz, a future supreme court justice (1940s) and Honduran president (1971-1972), and a confidant of General Carías, denounced the "black race" on the North Coast and argued "that the compensation received from black labor could not be compared to the incalculable damage done to our species" (1926, 700).

The elite National Party activists of the 1920s did not have a monopoly on racism and its efforts to officialize what the Honduran "species" or "race" could not be—either black or mulatto (Guillen Zelaya 1931). A 1929 Immigration Law that finally institutionalized antiblack racism, as well as other forms of racism, was signed by Liberal Party President Vicente Mejía Colindres (1929-1932), closely supported by Turcios. Indeed, in 1930 the liberals finally established the immigration office called for in the Agrarian Reform Law of 1924, enacted during the provisional presidency of General Vicente Tosta (1924-1925). The liberals complemented that strategy by contracting J. H. Komor, a British subject, to import "white immigration." Paradoxically, the efforts represented not just an assault on the imported black *antillanos*, but rather had as their target Garifuna blackness, especially in urban areas like Tela and La Ceiba. Sadly, the assault on Garifuna blackness in the 1920s and 1930s has only recently begun to capture some attention, especially in the work of Antonio Canelas Diaz and in forthcoming work of my own.

**CONCLUSION**

In the wake of the destruction wrought in Honduras in 1998 by Hurricane Mitch, Danish-American Erling Duus Christensen published a book of essays that registers an outsider's reflections on Honduran national identity. In one essay Christensen declares, "Hondurans are generally enormously inarticulate about their deepest sources. I do not suppose that they take them for granted; it is too much of a struggle to keep them alive in the midst of so much adversity, but they lack language and concept" (1999, 19). Nonetheless, Christensen argues, "this highly Catholic, Mestizo, culturally inundated and confused people . . . carry within them an indigenous soul" (ibid.).

His evidence? Duss informs his readers that he often likes to ask his students at the high schools in which he teaches in Tegucigalpa, "Who is the greater national hero, Lempira or Francisco Morazán?" Christensen relates that a "sur-
prisingly high number vote for Lempira.” In his mind this is a function of the Indian soul that has survived and resisted 500 years of colonialism. At work, he argues, is a “vestigial memory” that functions in the collective and elusive memory of the people, some remembrance of the primeval forest of a seamless garden of life and divinity embodied in the splendor of the natural world.”

In his essay, of course, what matters is less “vestigial memory” than state-sponsored memory, in this case, one closely intertwined with the cultural history of Indo-Hispanic mestizaje. In Central America mestizos achieved the full status of “cultural heroes” only in the late 1920s and early 1930s (Martin 1989, 8). Thereafter, the once opprobrious duality embedded in Indian-Spanish mestizaje became, especially in the minds of elites, more often praised than resented, contrary to what was the case in the immediate postindependence period. As Simón Bolívar put it in 1826,

We are far from emulating the happy times of Athens and Rome, and we must not compare ourselves in any way to anything European. Our origins have been of the most unwholesome sort: all our antecedents are enveloped in the black cloak of crime. We are the abominable offspring of those raging beasts that came to America to waste her blood and to breed with their victims before sacrificing them. Later, the illegitimate offspring of these unions commingled with the offspring of slaves transplanted from Africa. With such racial mixtures and such moral history, can we place laws above heroes and principles above men? (Wright 1990, 20)

How were these issues addressed in the case of Honduras, and how does the history of the banana enclave help address these issues? In part, as herein, by looking into the official history of the cultural and iconographic representation of Lempira in the context of a rereading of blackness on the Honduran Caribbean coast. Moreover, this issue should be located in two processes, one of a longer durée and another of more short-term duration. The first process involved the history of the banana economy of Honduras and its implications for the construction of the official national imagination espoused by the Honduran state between the 1860s and the 1930s. In this phase two things happened. First, intellectuals who fought for Lempira’s reinvention paralleled what Mexican colleagues have called the “reindianization” of Latin America in the nineteenth century, when that century’s liberal intellectuals constructed yet another “Indian” to be molded into the new nations of the postcolonial world (Reina 1997). In the case of Lempira this molding involved what John Agnew has called the “national representation of space,” in particular the cultural space occupied by “indianness” in early-twentieth-century Honduran history (Agnew 1994, 253). Second, in the 1920s Honduran intellectuals who were threatened by banana and U.S.-government imperialism established a mestizo identity that originated in the latter nineteenth century. This mestizo identity initially memorialized a romantic-nationalist indigenous myth that included Lempira as defender of sovereignty and autonomy against external threat. In the 1920s these long- and short-term processes served as a context for the elite liberal exclusion of blackness from the official national identity, and especially the exclusion of Garifuna blackness (Mehta 1997). Old Lempira was then put to another task, now as a racialized icon on the national currency that revered dead Indians domesticated within Indo-Hispanic mestizaje.

In short, Lempira has been celebrated not only because of the significant numbers of real Indians who preserved access to communal lands or because of some primeval Indian soul. Rather, his equation with national identity occurred precisely as banana production became the country’s leading export sector. “Depopulated” as a result of continuing conquests from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries of its original inhabitants, the Jicaques, the North Coast emerged during the twentieth century as the center of the country’s banana sector and its most racially heterogeneous population. The economic ascendancy of a region heavily reliant on the labor of mulatto and black populations, especially the Garifuna, was viewed as a “menace” to the Indian/Spanish national identity promoted in the 1920s. The official exaltation embedded in Lempira’s racialization must be understood in the context of the ethnic history of the banana enclaves.

NOTES

1. This essay draws from papers presented at conferences in 1994. A very short version of this essay was published in Spanish (Euraque 1996). Avi Chomsky deserves credit for my earliest concerns with Lempira and mestizaje. The intellectual context for this version of the original idea is grounded in a long-term interdisciplinary project called “Memories of Mestizaje,” which I, Jeff Gould, Charles
Hale, Carol Smith, and other colleagues have been involved in since 1995. The last version benefited also from colleagues Maurice Wade, Michael Niemann, and Stephanie Chambers, all associated with a writing group supported by the Trinity College's Center for Collaborative Teaching and Research.


3. “¡El Grito Del Pueblo!! A Las Compañias del Norte de Honduras,” Enclosure in Dispatch 30, Ernest E. Evans to Secretary of State, 25 January 1926, United States National Archives, U.S. Department of State, Record Group 59 [hereafter USNA RG 59], 815.00/3931. The currency debate in Congress is available in Actas, Boletín del Congreso Nacional Legislativo 1, no. 44 (3 June 1926): 675.

4. I began exploring these issues some time ago (see Euraque 1996b). Of course, the pathbreaking work on this is Gould 1998.

5. “Paraphrase of a Message received from the U.S.S. Schurzs at Puerto Cortés,” Office of Naval Operations to Department of State, 8 January 1918, USNA RG 59, 815.00/1752.

6. Dispatch 84, John Ewing, U.S. Minister in Tegucigalpa, to Secretary of State, 17 September 1914, USNA RG 59, 815.00/547.

7. Actas, Boletín del Congreso Nacional Legislativo 1, no. 44 (3 June 1926): 676.


9. Charles Mathews, 1999, interview by author, tape recording, Tela, Honduras, August 7. Mathews’s father was a good friend of the Valerios, and he confirmed this point. Mathews was born in Barrio Las Brisas in 1929. His parents, George and Catherine McNally, emigrated from Jamaica in the 1920s.

10. A 1929 report from a subsidiary of the United Fruit Company to the Honduran minister of development declared, “Naturalmente, señor Ministro, los morenos y caribes hondurenos que trabajan en la empresa, son generalmente tomados como negros, lo que quizás en la mente del pueblo da lugar a la errónea idea del gran numero de negros empleados” (Carta, 26 abril 1929, Trujillo Rail Road Co. al Ministro de Fomento, Salvador Corleto, Archivo Nacional de Honduras, Legajo, Correspondencia). I thank John Soluri for sharing this document with me.

11. A second source for the mid-1980s offers what is a probably an exaggerated figure of 300,000 Garifuna. (Chavez Borjas 1991, 204).

12. The most scholarly estimates of Garifuna population after the 1940s are available in the excellent work of Davidson (1983).

13. In 1915 Lempira’s struggle became part of the recently officialized Honduran national anthem. The third stanza of the anthem declares: “It was tragic that Lempira, Honduras’s lover, assumed the struggle with anger, because in the dead of night the Indian enveloped in blood succumbed; and about this epic exploit, memory has only safeguarded a rocky hill where a sepulcher remained.”

14. Dispatch 274, Franklin E. Morales, U.S. Minister in Tegucigalpa, to Secretary of State, 5 February 1923, USNA RG 59, 815.55/1.

15. Dispatch 570, Franklin E. Morales, U.S. Minister in Tegucigalpa, to Secretary of State, 12 January 1924, USNA RG 59, 815.55/3; and Dispatch 821, Lawrence E. Dennis, Chargé d’Affairs, to Secretary of State, 30 July 1925, USNA RG 59, 815.55/3.

16. Dispatch 641, Franklin E. Morales, U.S. Minister in Tegucigalpa, to Secretary of State, 23 July 1924, USNA RG 59, 815.50/35/1.
