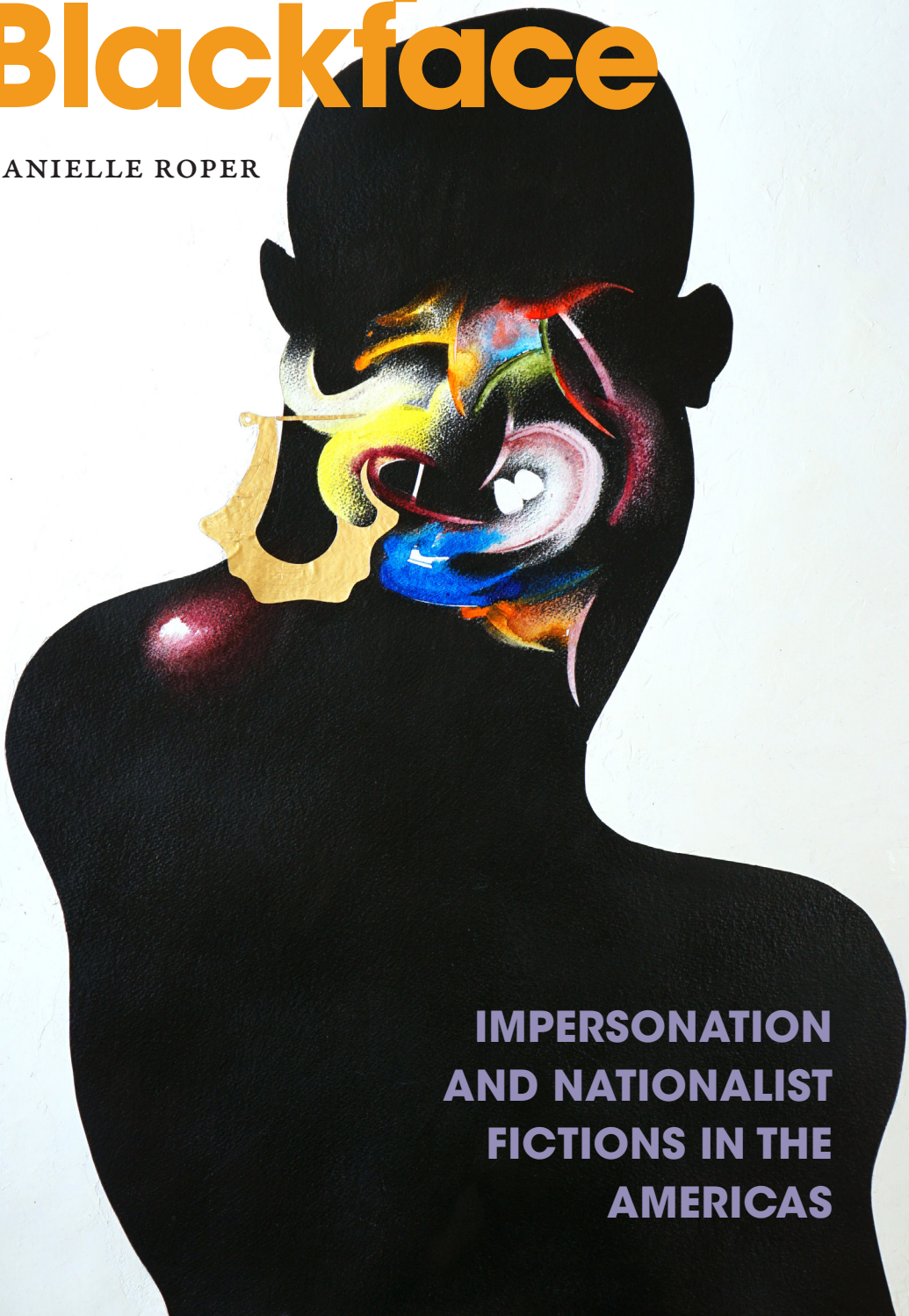
Hemispheric Blackface

DANIELLE ROPER



IMPERSONATION AND NATIONALIST FICTIONS IN THE AMERICAS

Hemispheric Blackface

Dissident Acts

A series edited by Macarena Gómez-Barris and Diana Taylor

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DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS DURHAM AND LONDON 2025

Printed in the United States of America on
acid-free paper ∞
Project Editor: Lisa Lawley
Designed by Matthew Tauch
Typeset in Garamond Premier Pro and ITC Avant
Garde Std by Copperline Book Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Roper, Danielle, [date] author.
Title: Hemispheric blackface : impersonation and nationalist fictions
in the Americas / Danielle Roper.
Other titles: Dissident acts.
Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2025. | Series: Dissident
acts | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2024038042 | (print) LCCN 2024038043 (ebook) |
ISBN 9781478031888 (paperback) | ISBN 9781478028642 (hardcover) |
ISBN 9781478060871 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Blackface—History. | Blackface minstrel shows—History. |
Performing arts—Social aspects—America—History. | Race in the theater—
History. | Racism against Black people—America—History. | Post-racialism—
America. | Multiculturalism—Latin America.
Classification: LCC PN2071.B58 R67 2025 (print) |
LCC PN2071.B58 (ebook) | DDC 306.4/8480899607—dc23/eng/20250131
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2024038042
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2024038043

Cover art: Leasho Johnson, *Banjee* #2, 2020. Charcoal,
watercolor, acrylic, oil, and gesso on paper mounted on canvas,
25½ × 33½ × 2 in. Courtesy of the artist.

For my family

This book is the result of the incredible mentorship and support that I have received from family, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. I thank my parents Garnett Roper and Georgia Tulloch Roper for teaching me to think, to be driven, kind, thoughtful, truthful, disciplined, and to be committed to political struggle. I love you, Mommy and Daddy. Thank you, Daddy, for being my first interlocutor, for teaching me to think, and for inspiring me. I miss our intellectual conversations every day. Thank you, Mommy, for being my rock, for teaching me Spanish, and for all those childhood trips to parts of Latin America. *Cho, look ow mi naym gawn abroad!* You two are who I aspire to be. To my siblings, Shani and Steven: thanks for your constant support. Thank you to Stephanie McIntyre Groves for being that sistrin I always need.

I am grateful to all my mentors and friends from Hamilton College. Meeting my close mentor and very dear friend, Susan Sánchez-Casal, as an undergraduate student completely changed the course of my life. Susie, I can never thank you enough for everything. I also remember fondly my time on the hill where I met people who have since become lifelong friends: Wangechi Thuo, Keya Advani, Shraddha Shah, Latoya Malcolm, and Michelle LeMasurier. My conversations with the women of ICWES as well as the folks from the West Indian African Association, the Womyn's Center, and in the classes I took with Professors Shelley Haley, Chandra Mohanty, and Gita Rajan have left an indelible mark on my thinking. I remain indebted to the Thomas J. Watson Foundation for granting me the incredible opportunity to explore my interests in humor and politics in Latin America. The lessons I learned during my Watson year became the early seeds of this book.

I feel lucky to have pursued graduate study in the Departments of Performance Studies and Spanish and Portuguese at New York University where I learned from Diana Taylor, Jill Lane, Ana Dopico, José Muñoz, Gabriel Giorgi, Deb Willis, Mary Louise Pratt, and so many other exceptional scholars. I am especially grateful to Diana, who encouraged me to apply to Performance Studies and who has remained a mentor and a friend at every step of my professional career. I am also honored to have

learned so much from Jill, whose thinking continues to shape my own and whose work is foundational for me. Thank you, Jill, Diana, and Ana, for every phone call, letter of recommendation, and word of advice. I would also like to thank the people who walked beside me during grad school: Cristel Jusino Díaz, Kaitlin Murphy, Leticia Robles, Eman Morsi, and so many others. I am grateful to all the folks at the Hemispheric Institute, especially Marcial Godoy and Lisandra Ramos for their friendship and for granting me the space to think about performance and politics. I appreciate Maya Berry, Brittany Meché, and Yanilda González for reading early drafts of so much of my work and for being such fabulous friends. A very special thank you to Matthew Chin, Neish McLean, Nadia Ellis, Shanya Cordis, Traci Wint Hayles, Nadia Chana, Naima Fine Isles, Nnenna Okeke, Gervais Marsh, Thandika Brown, and everyone else whose friendship, feedback, or support kept me going.

My time at the University of Chicago has been truly incredible. I am privileged to have such wonderful colleagues in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, the Working Group on Slavery and Visual Culture, the Committee on Theatre and Performance, the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality, the Department of Race, Diaspora, and Indigeneity, and the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture. I am grateful to all of you. My deepest appreciation to Agnes Lugo Ortiz for being such an amazing guide and friend. Thank you for (re)reading a draft of everything in this book, for pushing me, for asking such hard questions, for advocating for me, and for celebrating with me. *La verdad que te agradezco mucho, Agnes*. I am especially grateful to Mario Santana, Victoria Saramago, Larissa Brewer García, Miguel Martínez, David Levin, and Chris Taylor, who each read different versions of this book's manuscript over the years. To Daisy Delogu, I appreciate your having made the time to meet with me and to offer feedback on every paragraph of an earlier draft of the book's introduction. Thank you to Ally Fields, Larry Norman, and Bob Kendrick for all your help and feedback over the years. The experience of having to answer hard questions and critiques about my work throughout my time at this university has made me a better scholar.

This book would not have been possible without the support of the Neubauer Family Assistant Professorship. Many thanks to Cathy Cohen, Waldo Johnson, and Melissa Gilliam for all your support. Words cannot express the depth of my gratitude to Anitra Grisales, my developmental editor, who helped me figure out how to write this book. I would like to also acknowledge the hard work of all the research and editorial assistants

whose support was essential to the completion of this manuscript: Khalila Chaar-Pérez, Evelyn Pappas, Eduardo Leão, Eva Pensis, Pedro Doreste, and Ricardo Soler Rubio. A very special thank you to Allie Scholten and the team at the Visual Resource Center at the University of Chicago for all their assistance with the images in this book. My deepest appreciation to Albert Laguna, Daphne Brooks, and Donette Francis for giving me such helpful and honest feedback in the manuscript workshop and beyond. I am indebted to Ken Wissoker, Kate Mullen, Lisa Lawley, and the team at Duke University Press.

I am blessed to have such wonderful friends here in Chicago. I am profoundly grateful to my inner circle: Jessica Swanston Baker, Eve Ewing, Adom Getachew, Ryan Jobson, and Kaneesha Parsard: you all inspire me! It is not an exaggeration to say that Jessica was either beside me or across from me as I wrote almost every word of this book. What a privilege to have you by my side, Jess. I am grateful to the amazing people on campus who make my time here so enjoyable: Thuto Thipe, Patricia Posey, Adrienne Brown, Kamala Russell, Samuel Fury Childs Daly, and so many others.

To Lemis, you remain the person whose company I enjoy the most in this world. Thank you.

Scenes of Racial Enjoyment in the Hemispheric Fold

In 2018, Teatro Trail (Trail Theater) in South Florida released a promotional video of the Spanish-language comedy *Tres viudas en un crucero* (Three Widows on a Cruise), about three older women in Hialeah who plan to go on a cruise and then recount their stories upon their return. One of the white Cuban actresses, Martha Velasco, appears in blackface. People were outraged. In their coverage of the controversy, *NBCMiami* news and *Miami Herald* showed the same video clip. Velasco is in a living room talking to an older white woman dressed in an elegant black outfit and red floral vest and a younger white woman wearing jean overalls and a cowboy hat. They all stand beside one another on stage and face the audience, sitting in darkness below. Velasco's face is painted black, her eyebrows are thick and dark, her lips are bright red, and her large Afro wig is shaggy and unkempt. She wears a bluish jacket, bright red pants, and a white shirt and holds a folding fan in her hand. As she speaks to the women beside her, she bends her knees, almost crouching in an open stance. She turns to the audience with her eyes wide open. The video's audio only captures her saying one line: "¡Bailar, tomar, y gozar como TRES GORILAS!" (Dance, drink, and have fun like three gorillas!). Velasco punctuates each word with an exaggerated movement: she claps the fan onto her left palm, shimmies, pounds her chest, and then throws her hands in the air. The two white women laugh. The one wearing the cowboy hat also pounds her chest and softly grunts "hoo hoo!" like a gorilla. Some audience members laugh.

The backlash was swift. Afro-Latino activist groups in Miami lobbied for the removal of the blackface character. Initially, the directors and many sympathizers defended the portrayal, insisting that there is no racism in Cuba and that blackface is part of Cuba's *teatro bufo* tradition—a national theater genre for which blackface was a central feature.[1] Like many black people in Miami critiquing the play's use of blackface, Brenda Medina,

an Afro-Dominican journalist for *El Nuevo Herald* who first reported on the story, was accused of being ignorant of the specificities of Cuba's cultural tradition and of projecting her own racial trauma onto a celebrated national practice. However, one Afro-Cuban, Nérida Rodríguez, a sixty-six-year-old who grew up in Cuba, insisted, "It's not that we are offended now, we were always offended. White Cubans, they tell you there was no racism in Cuba. There was and there is racism in Cuba."[2] This controversy in Miami points to the imbrication of racial impersonation and nationalist fictions in the hemispheric Americas.

Until recently, discourses of racelessness, creole nationalism, and *mestizaje* were central to state constructions of national identities in Latin America and the Caribbean.[3] These fictions are grounded in the notion that racial mixture in the populace insulated the nation from racial discord, and they were wielded to homogenize the population under a shared national identity. Yet, as Rodríguez points out and scholars show, national myths of racial democracy produced structures of denialism that sidestepped or obscured systems of racial exclusion.[4] In recent years, many states have moved away from colorblindness toward multiculturalism and Black activists have made strides toward racial equality. But controversies about the use of racial impersonation, as in *Tres viudas*, reveal both the endurance of nationalist fictions of racial democracy on the ground and the way blackness continues to operate on the margins of the category of the human, even in cultural spaces where the "race problem" has historically been conceptualized as foreign to the national polity.

Hemispheric Blackface insists upon the ongoing power of these nationalist fictions through an examination of blackface performance. Across the four chapters of this book, I show how acts of racial conjuring reinscribe, resist, and reconfigure the racial scripts of these fictions in an era defined by the presumed end of myths of racial democracy. The meaning of an individual blackface performance is always contingent. But I open with Velasco's performance in *Tres viudas* because it was a scene of racial enjoyment—a ludic imaginary in which racial fantasies are staged for public or personal viewing and which activate the conscious or unconscious assumptions and beliefs we hold about racial others. I examine the workings of blackface in scenes of racial enjoyment to show how people fix or deconstruct familiar racial scripts in moments of political change. Because I neither see forms of racial conjuring as good or bad, liberatory or oppressive, nor as an inherent expression of antiblackness, each chapter conceptualizes different domains of racial enjoyment: subjection, re-

sistance, ambiguity, and abject pleasures. Together, I demonstrate that acts of racial conjuring serve as a recourse that allow people to levy and rework these scripts as the nationalist fictions persist and evolve.

Velasco's conjuring of blackness through simian tropes and her activation of scripts of black musicality show the role of impersonation in illuminating the ongoing racial constraints placed on black personhood and citizenship in a moment of new political articulations in the Americas. The blackface performances I analyze take place from 2001 to 2019—after the world conference against racism in Durban, South Africa, and before the COVID-19 pandemic and the George Floyd protests—two decades characterized by political gains and reversals for black people in the Americas. After decades of organizing by Black activists, the early 2000s saw major advancements in race relations across the region, including state recognition of the rights of racial minorities, formal documentation of black populations in these countries, the election of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States in 2008, and the emergence of Black Lives Matter and the Pink Tide in Latin America.[5] Racial impersonation allows people to make sense of the changes around them, to set new terms of belonging and citizenship, to redefine relations of power, and to activate the very racial scripts new state policies purportedly left behind.

Because nationally bounded scholarship dominates the field of blackface studies, this book insists upon thinking with and across national silos to attend to multivalent meanings of blackface performance. This controversy surrounding Velasco's blackface act, for example, reveals the limitations of the nation and its geohistorical specificities for reckoning with the meaning of racial impersonation. By this, I do not mean that the local context is unimportant. But, as Rodríguez's comment suggests, appeals to the sanctity of an autochthonous cultural tradition presume a national consensus that may not actually exist, or that the cultural specificities themselves are free of antiblackness. Furthermore, because it took place in Miami—the crossroads of the two Americas—this blackface performance exemplifies the encounter of multiple traditions of racial impersonation, different histories, and structures of racial formation. It occurred in a transitional moment of processes of racial formation when the postracial discourse surrounding Barack Obama's presidency had receded and the white revanchist fantasy of Donald Trump's reign in the United States had taken hold. Blackface on stage resonated with the racist ethos of the times and multiple histories of impersonation, even if the performers themselves sought to limit its meaning to Cuba's racial politics. Still, the history of US

blackface minstrelsy in Miami, by itself, cannot fully account for the layers of meaning in Velasco's blackface act and its entanglement with nationalist fictions of racial democracy. Centering US blackface minstrelsy would simply reproduce rhetorical appeals to the nation. Thrust before a hemispheric audience composed primarily of immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean, the figuration of blackness on stage multiplied in meaning, surpassing cultural and national differences.

Miami is an exemplar of what I call the *hemispheric fold*—an intercultural space where repeating nationalist fictions of racial democracy, geographies of antiblackness, and practices of racial conjuring collide and coincide with one another. Bounded by the hemispheric Americas—North, Central, and South, the West Indies, the Pacific, and the Andes—the hemispheric fold is forged by a set of geopolitical relationships: US empire and its histories of interventionism in the region, anti-imperialist struggle, south-south connections, the multidirectional migration of peoples, and the circulation and exchange of their practices. The fold is spawned by a set of foundational events: chattel slavery, indigenous genocide, and indentureship that, I insist, produced a set of nationalist fictions whose afterlives reverberate today. I privilege the term *hemispheric* over *transnational* to invoke the fraught histories and political tensions between the two Americas. Jill Lane rightly argues that the fold "encompasses colonial and postcolonial blackface practices."[6] The multiple registers of signification in Velasco's performance in Miami underscore the necessity of thinking with the particularities of the nation and the fact that histories and practices are shared. The hemispheric fold thus brings into view the capaciousness of the blackface sign and enables me to reorient blackface performance away from a singular performance or national tradition toward shared histories of slavery and their legacies of racial silence. Through the hemispheric fold, I imagine the Americas as linked by geographies of racial silence, and I theorize versions of postracialism and blackface performance as defining legacies of slavery in the Americas.

I argue that it is in acts of racial conjuring that slavery's logics of racial mastery, ownership, domination, and rebellion reassert themselves. While scholars in black studies have focused on how legacies of slavery are enacted through the precarity of black life, I attempt to glean how such legacies reverberate through acts of racial play. Since the ludic remains one of the few arenas in which publics can openly enact the fantasy of racial possession, I seek to map the domains of racial enjoyment where slavery's logics are articulated as nationalist fictions persist and evolve. Grounded

in a hemispheric frame, this book is conceptually organized to attend to the different domains of racial enjoyment and to the tensions between nationalist fictions and the everyday actions on the ground. I traverse multiple scenes of racial enjoyment by studying blackface performances at a carnival in Peru, on a Spanish-language television show in Miami, in a visual art exhibit by a black artist in Colombia, and in popular theater in Jamaica. The heterogeneity of these scenes enables me to trace how slavery's logics are imprinted across cultural practice: in "high" and "low" art, the quotidian and the spectacular, the formal and informal, the embodied and the discursive, and the private and the public. The objects of each chapter show how slavery's logics permeate the material, the performative, the theatrical, and the visual. Analyzed together, they illustrate that slavery's logics are not limited to a singular ludic domain; rather, they remain an ever-present feature of all forms of racial enjoyment today.

Racial enjoyment refers to an affective range of gratification—pleasure, wonder, fascination, desire, endearment, nostalgia, and even admiration—that acts of racial conjuring produce for performers and spectators alike. As used in this book, racial enjoyment is a terrain of struggle and negotiation. Charting its different domains illuminates how black, indigenous, mestizo, and white people alike summon slavery's logics to mediate the persistence and the evolution of these nationalist fictions in the Americas. The heterogeneity of the objects and the multivalent nature of these scenes of racial enjoyment also invite critical engagement with what blackface looks like today.

Blackface: A Set of Multivalent Practices

Blackface is a spectrum of aesthetic practices that involve different prosthetic techniques of racial caricature. It is a mode of stylizing the body that entails "blacking up"—the literal painting of the body and face to imitate black skin—and the exaggeration of lips, hair, and phenotypical features associated with people of African descent. Blackface characters are usually marked by the deformation of black vernacular or the incorporation of malapropisms. People typically associate blackface with the US blackface minstrel theater tradition, which in its infancy in the 1830s and 1840s involved white male actors who painted their faces black, gave stump speeches, and imitated the singing and dancing of enslaved Africans.[7] But scholars have shown that long before the US blackface minstrel tradition emerged, blacking up and imitating black vernacular forms were already

a feature of performance traditions across the globe. Practices of impersonating blackness were widespread across early modern Europe and the Americas.[8] Transnational in nature, blackface mediated colonial relationships between empire and colonies across Anglo-Atlantic and the Iberian worlds as well as genealogies of black performances across the African diaspora.[9] Performance theorist Catherine Cole rightly insists that we view blackface as a colonial sign that, as other scholars show, has never been limited to the Anglo-American world, has long been crucial to the articulation and configuration of power in the formation of Western modernity, and has shaped "how we understand the national in the first place."[10] Despite its hegemonic position in blackface studies, US blackface minstrelsy is only one tradition among a set of global practices.

This book therefore decenters US blackface minstrelsy and thinks across national silos to show that blackface is a set of multivalent and varied practices across all cultural forms that are not confined to a single historical period, tradition, nation, or geographical space.[11] The popularity of *negrito* figures—from teatro bufo and local blackface performance troupes along Río de la Plata in the nineteenth century, blackface characters on television and radio like "Diplo" played by Ramón Rivero in Puerto Rico, and the famous comic book character Memín Pinguín—from the 1940s onward demonstrates that blackface has been crucial to the articulation of national identity, the development of mass media, technological modernization, and representations of race across Latin America and the Caribbean.[12] Each chapter shows the multiplicity of instantiations of blackface, its many valences, and its power in negotiating the myths of racial democracy and their afterlives in the hemispheric fold. I analyze heterogeneous forms of blackface to show their ubiquity across the Americas, and I suggest that their meanings may or may not bear any relation to US blackface minstrelsy. Blackface, I insist, is a vernacular of racial power that demarcates and recodifies hierarchies and categories of racial difference amid the uncertainties and shifts in racial formation in the twenty-first century.

While blackface performance traditions that included stock figures, segregated theater audiences, actors specializing in blackface theatrical forms, and other old-school conventions are mostly gone, blackface has not disappeared. Instead, it merely evolved to keep up with the changing sensibilities of the times. Scholars and writers in popular culture alike have attended to the heterogeneity of the blackface form through the added qualifiers like "discursive blackface," or "digital blackface."[13] New cultural forms enter a preexisting racial matrix that has long codified blackness

through the regimes of racial distortion—the exaggeration and deformation of black physiognomy—and racist tropes of buffoonery, hypersexuality, musicality, and servility. To account for its heterogeneity, scholars define blackface as "a racial idiom," "a lingua franca," "a transnational language of race," and "a floating signifier" that has always transcended national borders.[14] This emphasis on blackface as a diffuse practice wielded across disparate cultural forms and geographical spaces, rather than a singular formal performance tradition limited to bodily acts and established theatrical conventions, is crucial for how this book accounts for the capaciousness of the blackface sign and the realities of our contemporary moment. The heterogeneity of the objects in these chapters shows how slavery's logics refashion themselves and adapt to the complexities of today's world and to new cultural forms.

Theorist Jill Lane explains that while impersonation is at the very heart of any theatrical practice, racial impersonation leads artists to draw, traverse, or complicate lines of differential social power that produce such categories as race, gender, and ethnicity in the first place.[15] Racial impersonation, she explains, refers to the figurative crossing of racial terrains or the occupation of racialized roles. It is a form of cross-racial identification, an act of substitution and occupation, where one stands in for or takes figurative possession of the Other.[16] Blackface is one practice that belongs to the broader category of racial impersonation. Although it is the primary feature of the performances I analyze in this book, blackface, in my view, must be combined with racial distortion or the invocation of racial stereotypes to be considered blackface. It is through the trafficking of racial distortion that racial impersonation reinscribes racialized bodies into the realm of the nonnormative, demarcating blackness as the sign of the ridiculous, of the strange, and of the spectacularly different. Blackface is thus a game of artifice whereby blackness is made present as racial distortion. It summons blackness as the marker of a racial excess plastered onto the conjurer's body.

Blackface is rarely contingent on the presence of a direct "original"; it is less concerned with truthfulness than it is with pleasure and political efficaciousness.[17] Because of this, I privilege the term *racial conjuring* to connote the projection of blackness as a figuration that enacts an *idea* of blackness rather than the reflection of any *real* black person. Drawing on Glenda Carpio's usage of "racial conjuring" to refer to the projection and amplification of stereotypes by African American humorists, this book treats racial conjuring as the amplification of a set of racial fantasies of

blackness.[18] The images that acts of racial conjuring produce are spectral presences that index the fungibility of blackness. These acts serve as figurative manifestations of a set of racial relationships conditioned by the history of chattel slavery in the Americas. Racial conjuring troubles the notion of the real because the figurations of blackness it produces on stage are ongoing fictions of blackness. These fictions are lodged in racial imaginaries plagued by the legacies of racial violence and dispossession. The term *racial conjuring* more accurately captures the multifaceted nature of blackface as an aesthetic practice whose logics of symbolic possession have never been limited to embodied practice and that has extended to material, digital, literary, and other cultural realms.

The blackface performances I analyze in Peru and Miami, for example, both emerge from popular and formal traditions of racial impersonation, the Bolivian Tundique dance and Cuba's teatro bufo traditions. These renditions of blackness bear the formal cosmetic techniques of their traditions: blackened skin, exaggerated lips, Afro wigs, and other markers of racial caricature that distort black physiognomy or black vernacular. I also consider how racial conjuring by black artists signify on practices of racial distortion by reworking the colors and tones of black skin. In my analysis of impersonations of black womanhood by artist Liliana Angulo's work in Colombia and then performer Andrea Wright's work in Jamaica, I pay close attention to how these artists blacken their faces to varying levels of (il)legibility by playing with the thickness of the layers of black paint. This play with different gradations of skin tone renders blackface an ambivalent reworking of bodily surface, the transformation of black skin into shine and gloss.[19] The range of skin-darkening combined with other markers of racial caricature across these performances demonstrate the multifaceted nature of blackface as a practice, its dynamism, ambiguities, and ongoing evolutions in contemporary acts of racial conjuring.

The vocabulary of racial distortion transcends renditions of blackness staged by and on the body to other cultural forms. In my analysis of Angulo's imitation of kitchen kitsch made in the likeness of black women, I explicate how the vocabulary of racial distortion extends to material culture: souvenirs, memorabilia, disposable candy wrappers, and cartoons. These are mass-produced, cheap objects that articulate, transmit, and circulate racial fantasies and meanings. Racial impersonation—and in this context I mean either the act of painting or fashioning an object into the likeness of blackness or plastering a caricature of blackness onto an object—enlivens material objects, transforming them into effigies of our racial at-

tachments, memories, desires, and dreams. This transformation, in turn, animates a whole dynamic of racial power when we interact with them. I therefore use the heterogeneity of mediums in this book—including television, theater, popular dance at a carnival, and multimedia installation at a museum—to track the pervasiveness of the blackface form and its transmogrification across different domains of racial enjoyment. Together these mediums mark diverse temporal registers and modes of diffusion and enable different forms of identification in the hemispheric fold. They have varying implications for how blackface and the relations of racial power it articulates live in the present, past, and future.

Acts of racial conjuring not only map out dynamics of racial power but also demarcate blackness as a racial category in spaces of racial fluidity. Critical engagement with renditions of blackness in parts of Latin America and the Caribbean is particularly challenging because racial categories in individual societies are often nebulous. Only people with distinctly African features and dark skin are typically referred to as "negro." But while a person may not be phenotypically black, they may very well still identify as black. In my discussion of blackness and blackface, I both acknowledge the ocular registers of race while accepting that ocular registers are not the only ways race or blackness are defined in each context. Regimes of racial signification have marked specific features and speech as indexing blackness, even in sites where there are no stable categories of racial affiliation. While sociological and anthropological approaches survey what the individual actors believe or understand their impersonations of blackness to mean and what blackness is, performance and visual studies attend to the relations of power that are embedded in the production of racial signs and signifiers of blackness. I therefore ground definitions of blackface in these fields because they treat embodied forms and visual culture as epistemes that serve both as objects of analysis and as constitutive sites of knowledge production.[20] Their methodological approaches enable me to emphasize how gestures, actions, speech, and other tools of racial conjuring bring blackness into being and to ascertain *how* and *under what constraints* blackness comes to be produced in visual culture and in embodied practice. I therefore consider how bodily enactments and visual artifacts propose what blackness is and how such proposals, in turn, constitute and sustain racial ideology within an imaginary where racial categories are fluid and nebulous.

Because for some, the word *blackface* imposes an imperial gaze upon a local practice, where appropriate, I acknowledge the rejection of the term

by the individual artist or performer.[21] Although it is a space of tension, I deploy the term because scholarly understandings of blackface as a colonial sign have rendered it capacious enough to include aesthetic forms outside the US blackface minstrel tradition.[22] In the contemporary moment, blackface acts are promiscuous in their engagement with historical conventions. Sometimes, unbeknownst to the performer, a single blackface performance may riff on a heterogeneity of historical traditions and tropes of blackness that are not limited to a singular geographical space. Since historically the movement of blackface tropes in the hemispheric Americas has always been multidirectional, I presume the reality of fusion and contact as a precondition of blackface forms in the hemispheric fold.[23] Velasco's blackface act in *Tres viudas* in Miami is a testament to the ways an individual performance may signify on multiple traditions and be totally legible to different audiences. While there is a need for historicist research that tracks the genealogies and circulation of blackface tropes in Latin America and the Caribbean, such questions are not my primary concern. Instead, this book seeks to critically engage the function of acts of racial conjuring in geographies of racial silence and the structures of antiblackness lurking beneath nationalist fictions in the Americas.

Repeating Nationalist Fictions: Myths of Racial Democracy in the Hemispheric Fold

Hemispheric blackface is a conceptual frame that I use to name a complex geographical space constituted by competing sites of racial formation, repeating nationalist fictions of racial democracy and their afterlives, and the practices of racial conjuring that mediate, trouble, or reinforce them. In the hemispheric fold, the racial taxonomy of the colonial order—the *casta* system of the plantation economy—collided with and rearticulated itself across multiple racial geographies that transcended the linguistic, historical, and geographical differences of the hemispheric Americas.[24] The casta system, plantation economies, and indentureship produced a set of "racializing assemblages" wherein race functions "as a set of sociopolitical processes that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and non-humans."[25] These systems relegated blackness to the margins of the category of the human and the citizen. But during independence, the leaders of the new nations in Latin America and the Caribbean sought to distance themselves from the colonial order and its systems of racial strat-

ification. They created a set of repeating nationalist fictions that were each grounded in the notion that racial miscegenation in a population insulates a nation from racial discord.[26] Despite the linguistic and cultural differences and geographic distances between the Atlantic/Pacific or Andes/Caribbean in each of the countries I examine in this book, these celebrations of racial mixture were deployed to sidestep the problem of racial difference and to homogenize the population under the auspices of a national identity. Articulated through local vocabularies of mestizaje, creole nationalism, and *mestiçagem*, these myths of racial democracy were a hemispheric phenomenon, foundational precepts of nationalist discourses in the region, and, despite the regional turns from colorblindness to multiculturalism, have continued to plague black people today.

In the nineteenth century, when Latin American nations gained independence, elites sought to unify societies that had previously been defined by systems of racial stratification under colonial rule.[27] Rather than adhere to colonialist paradigms and prevailing discourses of scientific racism that deemed racial miscegenation a sign of inferiority, elites across the region romanticized racial mixture and emphasized cultural homogeneity.[28] Even though scholars have long demonstrated how these celebrations of racial mixture cloaked the reality of material structures of racial exclusion in the region, according to the logic of *mestizaje*—which may be translated as miscegenation or racial mixing—racial mixture supposedly insulated the nation from racial discord.[29] As leaders of the burgeoning new nations, American-born Europeans or *criollos* who Ángel Rama calls *letrados* (lettered people) wielded nationalist discourses of mestizaje to position themselves as rightful heirs to European colonizers and continued to expropriate land and labor from black and indigenous populations.[30] Nevertheless, rosy versions of racial democracy were touted as a stark contrast to the racial divisions of the United States.

In his 1891 essay "Our America," the influential Cuban thinker José Martí issued a pan-Americanist call to reject the colonial and neocolonial impositions of Europe and the United States in favor of unifying "our America." He envisioned what he called *nuestra América mestiza* (our mixed-race America) as one that embraced its racial and cultural differences and overcame the problem of race. The quintessential emblem of Martí's America is a false originary figure he calls *el mestizo autóctono* (the native half-breed or the indigenous mestizo)—a mixed-race offspring of the colonial contact between European conquerors and indigenous women who emerges as the protagonist of Cuba's new nation as well as

that of other budding Hispanic American nations.[31] While the mestizo autóctono may celebrate racial hybridity, he was also wielded to disavow and transcend the problem of race itself. In the essay's concluding remarks, Martí declares "no hay odio de razas porque no hay razas" (there is no racial hate because there are no races).[32] In his estimation, the mestizo was both a marker of a celebrated multiculturalism and a postracial future to be ushered in by the new nation. He was a fictional device wielded to overcome the racial divisions of the colonial era and to discursively erase the problem of race itself. Little wonder, then, that Martí, the father of Cuban independence, would so famously define Cuban national identity as "more than white, more than mulatto, more than black."[33] This dual paradox of racial invocation and racial disavowal, racial celebration and racial erasure, is at the heart of repeating nationalist fictions of mestizaje and racial democracy that have permeated the region.

Martí was not alone in his formulation of a Latin American nationalism that used a mixed-race protagonist to both celebrate racial miscegenation and to disavow race itself. From the 1900s onward, discourses of racial inclusion proliferated across the region. Key thinkers of the Hispanophone and Lusophone worlds like Juan Pablo Sojo from Venezuela, Fernando Ortiz from Cuba, José Vasconcelos from Mexico, Gilberto Freyre of Brazil, and many others offered their own versions of "racial democracy" replete with celebrations of racial miscegenation among the African, white, and indigenous elements of the population. Until quite recently, Latin American discourses of "racial democracy" centered around the notion that colonialism had bequeathed a rather benign form of slavery, racial miscegenation, and fluid racial categorizations.[34] White Brazilian nationalist Freyre, who popularized the term *racial democracy* in his research on race relations in Brazil, claimed that the intimate and affectionate relationships among masters and slaves during slavery served as the basis for Brazil's peaceful race relations.[35] In his estimation, social intimacy meant that every Brazilian was part-African or -mestizo. The fact of this racial mixture was a source of national pride, the foundation of a national racial fraternity, and the antidote to racial discord.[36] Freyre's position has since been heavily critiqued, but at the heart of the myth of racial democracy is the long-standing sanitization of a racial past that effaces the brutal realities of sexual and racial violence of slave societies.

Celebrations of a mixed-race polity and the veneration of the mixed-race subject did not undermine racist ideas about blackness and indigeneity as backward and undesirable; rather, in many countries, it cloaked

the veneration of whiteness. Scholars contended that mestizaje required assimilation or the erasure of blackness.[37] Some Colombian thinkers in the early twentieth century, for example, believed that racial mixture would produce a "culturally and biologically homogenous people that were stronger than any of their individual roots."[38] And Mexican thinker José Vasconcelos published *The Cosmic Race* in 1925, advocating for the intermixing of diverse races and ethnic elements to form one "synthetic race," so that " blacks could be redeemed, . . . inferior races . . . would become less prolific, and better specimens would go on ascending a scale of ethnic improvement."[39] The repeating nationalist fictions not only created national stories that celebrated a mixed-race or brown protagonist, but paradoxically, also produced a set of racial scripts as instruments of differentiation that maintained racial hierarchies. While these racial scripts are articulated in culture, they are also present in state policies. Nationalist celebrations of racial democracy coexisted with varying structures of antiblackness and racial inequality. Across the region, practices of *blanqueamiento* (whitening) of the population through immigration policies geared toward Europeans, eugenics, the erasure of the black population in racial censuses, and continued discrimination in the workplace and other cultural spheres all persisted.[40] Racism also operated through customary law wherein housing officials or state employees often enacted racist social norms in their deployment of state resources, and the enactment of these social norms ultimately had the force of (unwritten) law.[41] Others have noted the centrality of antiblackness in families and bodily capital that affords more value to whiteness than blackness. But the fact that people of African descent often occupied the lowest rungs of societies in the region was seen as a sign of class and economic inequality, not racial discrimination.[42]

These celebrations of racial miscegenation are not unique to Latin America, and they certainly did not go unnoticed by West Indian thinkers seeking independence from Britain in the twentieth century. Like mestizaje in Latin America, creole nationalism in the Anglophone Caribbean was initially an anticolonial project developed by (West Indian) thinkers seeking to throw off colonial rule and unify a racially stratified society. Creole nationalism is a "Caribbean form of European liberal nationalism" that sought to account for "both the European origin of dominant institutions and the African origin of the dominated mass."[43] Trinidadian thinker Eric Williams and Jamaican prime minister Norman Manley were key leaders who sought to imagine a West Indian identity that superseded

the racial divisions of the colonial era. In a speech given on August 16, 1955, at the "University of Woodford Square," Williams declared, "Man in the West Indies is more than white, more than mulatto, more than Negro, more than Indian, more than Chinese. He is West Indian."[44] Williams took cues from Cuban nationalists when he further proclaimed, "Our democratic development, like Maceo's revolution in Cuba, has no color. It has no little Negroes, no little whites, no little Indians, no little Chinese; it has only West Indians."[45] In Williams's estimation, a national or regional identity would supersede racial difference. Jamaican prime minister Norman Manley similarly proclaimed, "We are neither Africans though most of us are black, nor are we Anglo-Saxon though some of us would have others believe this. We are Jamaicans! . . . We are a mixture of races living in perfect harmony and as such provide a useful lesson to a world torn apart by race prejudice."[46] Both Manley and Williams believed that newly independent Caribbean nations would serve as beacons of racial harmony and as counterpoints to countries such as South Africa and the United States, which were plagued by racial divisions.

Creole nationalism spawned a set of national slogans across the region that imagined a multiracial and multicultural society. Jamaica's discourse of creole nationalism was consolidated between the 1940s and cemented after independence in 1962 through its national motto, "Out of Many, One People."[47] Although over 90 percent of the Jamaican population is black, the motto suggests a multicultural, multiracial society. Critics have noted that the national motto was in fact designed to stymie the black nationalist mobilizations of the time and to reorder a racial hierarchy of the new nation to ultimately privilege Jamaica's brown class.[48] The motto occludes the fact that the national elite idealizes European culture and "puts everything . . . of African origin in a lesser place."[49] Trinidad and Tobago's motto, "Every creed and race find an equal place," also articulated a version of creole nationalism that "celebrated mixture along an African-European Christian axis but subordinated overtly African or non-Christian practices."[50] Scholars argue that though this version of creole nationalism rejected colonialism, it simultaneously celebrated proximity to whiteness and left the structural position of blackness unchanged.[51] Similarly, in Guyana, creoleness historically functioned as a disciplinary technology that legitimated the colonial project, privileged the local "near white" population, and maintained a color-class continuum that ensured the subjugation of the colonized population.[52] Guyanese independence occasioned the birth of the motto "One people, one nation, one destiny,"

an aspirational maxim that discursively imagined a unified nation free of racial discord. But the racial divisions of the colonial era and party politics after independence fomented racial antagonism between African and Indian populations and consolidated the dispossession of Guyana's indigenous population.[53] I place creole nationalism alongside mestizaje to emphasize the varying modalities of the repeating nationalist fictions in the hemispheric Americas.

Miami shows the reach and life of the repeating nationalist fictions in the United States. The city also functions as a point of hemispheric convergence, a crucial site of encounter for these disparate racial geographies that shaped structures of antiblackness in the hemispheric fold. The interconnected history of hemispheric migration and culture has rendered Miami the site of distinct modalities of the repeating nationalist fictions and an exception to US racial politics centered around Anglo-Saxon whiteness. As I explain in chapter 2, after multiple waves of migration and an immigration policy that granted Cubans a fast path to citizenship and government assistance for resettlement in the twentieth century, the Cuban ethnic enclave emerged as one of the strongest and most politically significant groups in South Florida. Theorists have critically engaged the racial hierarchies within the Cuban ethnic enclave by highlighting the ways race organized migration and resettlement patterns and, ultimately, produced Miami as the capital of Cuban whiteness.[54] When they first arrived, the Cuban exile generation, composed of the island's white ruling class fleeing Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution, reproduced Cuba's preexisting racial order in Miami. They clung to the notion of a racially democratic or race-neutral society while enacting antiblackness against their Afro-Cuban counterparts.[55] For the Cuban diaspora, clinging to the nationalist ideal of race neutrality has served to hide the complicity of white Cubans and US Latinos in producing antiblackness against African American and Afro-Latino communities living in the city.[56] This nationalist ideal of racelessness is precisely the discourse that Rodríguez referenced in her critique of racial impersonation in *Tres viudas*.

Whether through mestizaje or creole nationalism, nationalist fictions and their celebrations of racial harmony that historically sidestepped or silenced the problem of race are a shared hemispheric phenomenon. Since many of these nations have moved away from nationalist discourses of colorblindness to multiculturalism, I treat these myths of racial democracy as a historical foundation upon which I theorize blackness in the hemispheric fold. In thinking across disciplinary silos and conventional geo-

graphic paradigms that have traditionally cordoned off discussions of race in the West Indies from Latin America, I am better able to ascertain how shared and divergent histories of slavery and colonialism not only created structures of antiblackness but also occasioned formal structures of national disavowal that, by design, denied their very existence. Black people in the hemispheric fold must not only navigate structures of antiblackness in the afterlives of slavery but also the afterlives of structures of racial silence.

I trace antiblackness as articulated in a racial landscape where national identity centers around indigeneity (Peru and Bolivia), or in relationship to creole whiteness (Miami), brownness (Jamaica), or mestizoness and whiteness (Colombia).[57] In juxtaposing disparate sites, I identify different modalities of these repeating nationalist fictions and assess the implication of their evolution for constructs of blackness today.[58] Myths of racial democracy are constructed through multiple stories, different histories, and are articulated in different ways in the hemispheric fold. The repetitions of these nationalist fictions are imperfect, partially (un)faithful to the original. No two repeating nationalist fictions are exactly alike. I critically engage their myriad modes of articulation, their individual nuances, and their ongoing power amid the turn away from colorblindness. Each of these modalities allows me to highlight "relation across differences rather than equivalence," to focus on linked but not identical genealogies that emerge from a shared history of slavery and the foundational fictions that disavowed its legacies.[59] I am also able to distill the various registers of antiblackness that they produce today.

Since these nationalist fictions are grounded in the notion that because everybody is mixed no one can be racist, I define antiblackness in this book not through a black/white binary associated with the United States, but through a skin-color axis that rearticulates itself across different configurations of racial hierarchies. Indeed, social scientists have explained that skin color is in fact a primary stratifying variable across Latin America and the Caribbean that can determine social advantages or the worth assigned to an individual.[60] The reality of racial fluidity and the fact that many people across the region may not clearly identify with a given racial category does not contradict the widespread nature of discrimination; rather, it has often worked to obscure it as an ongoing reality. That an individual who is the victim of discrimination may not self-identify as black, for example, does not change the fact that people whose features are typically identified as indigenous or of African descent often do face discrimination or

social disadvantages in surprisingly common and measurable ways. These different constellations of racial hierarchies help us see how antiblackness operates as the foundational axis of racial power, even when a white majority is not necessarily present or when a nation's population (as in Jamaica) is predominantly black. Antiblackness is a registry of skin-color or phenotypical valuation that adheres to white supremacist logics that venerate proximity to whiteness without requiring the presence of actual white people. By attending to the modalities of the repeating nationalist fictions, I can better understand the nuances of how antiblackness works as a persistent structure that adapts to the racial scripts of multiple national stories. I show that slavery's logics of symbolic possession remain an organizing precept of racial power that can be consistently mapped across the diverse racial constellations of the hemispheric fold.

Racial Enjoyment: Troubling and Enforcing Myths and Scripts

Rodríguez's response to the controversy about blackface in *Tres viudas* not only signaled how slavery's logics remain hidden, but it also emphasized that scenes of racial enjoyment operate within a larger cultural landscape of "racial innocence" that renders quotidian expressions of antiblackness harmless or mere rituals of social camaraderie and deems extreme or explicit acts of violence as the benchmark of racism. Racial innocence is the "cloak that veils" antiblackness, that insists that unique racial mixtures of Latin American and Caribbean populations render them "incapable of racist attitudes," and that wields nationalist appeals to cultural specificities as the antidote to any interrogation of the antiblackness on display.[61] This landscape of racial innocence continues to shape how acts of racial conjuring are generally interpreted or perceived, even as nations across the region have turned toward multiculturalism.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Latin American states moved away from discourses of colorblindness, and instead systematically recognized ethnoracial difference, acknowledged the need to protect racial minorities, and began to conduct racial censuses in their populations. In 1987, Nicaragua became the first country to undertake multicultural reforms as the Sandinista government granted land rights and autonomy to its indigenous populace along the Atlantic coast.[62] Honduras, Ecuador, Colombia, and Bolivia quickly followed suit, and in 2000 Brazil undertook some of the

most comprehensive multicultural reforms when it implemented affirmative action policies in its education system and a slew of other legislative reforms.[63] Argentina, Cuba, Panama, and Uruguay explicitly condemned racial discrimination, and activists demanded the inclusion of ethno-racial categories on national censuses in the region to combat the invisibility of black populations. Thus, the early 2000s were a moment of new political articulation that required the evolution and reconfiguration of the repeating nationalist fictions.

It is unsurprising that the multicultural state did not dismantle anti-blackness in the region. Statistical evidence shows widespread rejection of intermarriage with black people, a correlation between social disadvantages and having darker skin tones, discrimination in the workplace, and social prejudices in parental attitudes and standards of beauty.[64] Moreover, scholars insist that the recognition of cultural and racial difference of the multicultural turn was tethered to neoliberal logics that sought to define the ideal new citizen, to "shape the terms of political contestations, to distinguish between acceptable and disruptive cultural demands," and to make "high-stakes distinctions between those cultural rights that deserve recognitions and those that do not."[65] The multicultural turn did not alter the racial scripts of mestizaje as much as they required their evolution, often leading to the creation of *el indio permitido* (the permitted Indian) or *el negro permitido* (the permitted black).[66] Furthermore, they did not necessarily rid nations of myths of racial democracy. Some of the processes even reproduced the silencing of race in new ways. Instead of treating the multicultural reforms as the end of the hemispheric phenomenon of the repeating nationalist fiction, I mark them as one of its afterlives. By tracking the endurance of the very racial scripts of mestizaje, I highlight how nationalist fictions evolved to account for global and local processes that demand the recognition of race but not the actual dismantling of racial inequality.

Because I see the contemporary moment as being defined by both the persistence and evolution of the repeating nationalist fictions in the hemispheric fold, I juxtapose sites where state policies have turned toward multiculturalism with those where nationalist fictions have remained intact. In keeping with the conceptual organization of this book, each chapter examines different evolutions of the fictions to ascertain their ongoing power. To capture the range of the multicultural shift, I dedicate one chapter to Peru, which operated on the margins of the multicultural turn, and another to Colombia, because it was home to some of the most exten-

sive reforms. Both examples illuminate the geographical specificities of the multicultural turn, but they also demonstrate that, as a hemispheric phenomenon, the repeating nationalist fictions cannot be undone by the advancements of a singular nation-state or shifts in state policy. The chapters on Miami and Jamaica show the persistence of the repeating nationalist fictions and their racial scripts both at the level of state policy (Jamaica) and in diasporic communities from Latin America and the Caribbean (Miami). By taking a conceptual approach, I can emphasize moments of new political articulation and attend to the many valences of the afterlives of myths of racial democracy in the hemispheric fold.

Across all the chapters, I show how those who engage in acts of racial conjuring levy racial scripts to forge a sense of social belonging, to reimagine citizenship, and to make sense of changes around them. When Velasco thumped her chest as a gorilla in the scene of *Tres viudas* and one of the other white characters grunted to punctuate the construction of blackness as simian, they worked together to relegate blackness to the margins of the human and to thereby codify the terms of social belonging in that space. I use the term *scenes of racial enjoyment* to refer to the vast gamut and varied constellations of racial gratification, delight, resistance, and subjection that blackface performance facilitates in today's world. In *Tres viudas*, the invocation of black animality and black people as symbols of fun brought delight to the audience at the theater. Whether as part of the everyday or a formal event, scenes of racial enjoyment, like those in *Tres viudas*, reveal the centrality of race for setting terms of belonging and defining relations of racial power in the afterlives of myths of racial democracy.

Instead of assigning a fixed or singular meaning to blackface acts in this book, I see impersonation as a set of ludic actions through which people test and figure out the racial terms for the formation of a given collective or social belonging, as they negotiate the ongoing power of the nationalist fictions and the changes in racial formation around them. As Lauren Berlant and Sianne Ngai write about comedy and pleasure, comedy can both dispel and produce anxiety, and it can intensify and impede pleasure.[67] They explain that comedy is "epistemologically troubling" and that it "helps us test or figure out what it means to say 'us.' Always crossing lines, it helps us figure out what lines we desire or can bear."[68] Acts of racial conjuring enable conjurers to amplify and rework, reinforce and defamiliarize, consolidate and invert the dynamics of racial power that determine belonging, notions of personhood, and ideas about who is marginalized or who is venerated as the ideal citizen. They may sustain, sub-

vert, or confront the racial scripts of the national story, or in the context of black social spaces, be levied for black enjoyment. I focus on scenes of racial enjoyment because they are meaning-making paradigms that offer up representations of race that entertain or disturb, titillate, or confront. Through racial enjoyment, black, indigenous, mestizo, creole, and white people critically rework their positionalities within or contest or reinforce hierarchies of the racial matrix in the hemispheric fold. The figurations of blackness that appear in this book cater to black, indigenous, white, and mestizo publics in different ways. Hence, I make space for the various reconfigurations of racial power that scenes of racial enjoyment produce in the hemispheric fold.

Racial enjoyment operates in a contemporary reality where black people have a level of agency that our ancestors simply did not have. To live in the wake of slavery in the hemispheric fold is to contend with the gains and limitations of black organizing, the ascension and co-optation of black subjects into positions of power. Although as black people we are not free from the political and social constraints of white supremacy, black people are cultural producers and critical actors who consume the figurations of blackness on stage for our own devices. Scenes of racial enjoyment enable me to account for the complexities of racial power and identification that racial impersonation permits, including among black people. I show enjoyment as operating along multiple axes of subjection, resistance, and even abject pleasures. Although not all scenes of racial enjoyment showcase acts of impersonation, as used in this book, they are the cultural *venues* for blackface forms. Belonging to the realm of the popular mythic, a scene is a place and a segment in a series of continuous action, the node in a plot, that offers snapshots of our psychic racial dreams, desires, and fears.[69] Scenes of racial enjoyment bring us joy, comfort, laughter, and pleasure. They reveal how logics of symbolic possession permeate the visual and the performative: a photograph, a play at a theater, a dance performance at a carnival or in media; a television show, a commercial, a cartoon, a TikTok or Facebook video, or a GIF on social media; a souvenir, kitchen kitsch, and even a candy wrapper.

Scenes of racial enjoyment like the video clip of Velasco's performance give us glimpses of how people rehearse and test the boundaries of social belonging at a particular moment in time. They are the points of entry to different domains of racial enjoyment. In this book, I track hierarchies of racial power by critiquing the racial scripts of mestizaje that appear in each scene. Grounded in racial fantasy and fiction, these racial scripts are

the popular mythologies that circulate around an individual racial group in a national story. Racial scripts make themselves felt in the sayings, the aphorisms, the jokes, and the stereotypes that circulate in the realm of culture. Black people are constructed as lazy fools who cannot think beyond midday, naturally musical, delinquents, hypersexual, and natural athletes, while indigenous people are configured as backward, primitive, and dirty. Velasco's reference to dancing and having fun, for example, tapped into the racial script of black women as being natural dancers or carefree figures of enjoyment and fun. All these racial scripts emerge from the romance of racial harmony that has adjudicated values and roles to a particular racial group in the national imaginary. Each scene shows the ongoing power of the racial script.

Hemispheric Blackface: Ludic Imaginaries in the Americas

This book is organized to engage different dimensions of racial enjoyment in the hemispheric fold. I neither use each performance to make an inherent judgment about a particular nation nor suggest that one blackface performance represents the totality of the politics of racial impersonation in a given locale. The first half of this book examines renditions of blackness by indigenous, mestizo, and white performers that reinforce racial hierarchies, and the second analyzes those by black performers living in the wake of slavery to discern how they subvert, contest, and defamiliarize slavery's logics of symbolic possession.

The first two chapters focus on the politics of subjection as a domain of racial enjoyment in the hemispheric fold. I begin by analyzing a performance by the Peruvian group Sambos Illimani at the 2013 Fiesta de la Virgen de la Candelaria, in which they use racial impersonation to commemorate the history of African enslavement in the Andes. In this chapter, I argue that the blackface performance reproduces the racial script of black disappearance at a time when the nation has moved away from nationalist regimes of colorblindness toward the recognition of race. Grounded in the popular lore that the black population in the Andes died out during slavery, this script has been crucial to the nationalist fiction of mestizaje in Peru. I track slavery's logics and interrogate the entanglement of subjection and racial enjoyment by analyzing Sambos's use of racial impersonation in its slave scene and show how the racial script is grounded

in popular imaginations of the slave past. Since impersonation is a central part of performance traditions that commemorate the history of slavery across the Andean highlands, I argue that traditions are neither static nor innocent; rather, they house racial fantasies about the slave past and reflect the hemispheric representations of blackness with which the performers come in contact. I trace the origin of the Danza de Caporales, a neofolkloric dance created in the 1960s, to its predecessor, the controversial Bolivian indigenous blackface dance known as the Tundique, to illuminate how the revolving fictions and fantasies about blackness circulating in the hemispheric fold are levied to construct a slave past and sustain a racial script. In doing so, I show how the zambo/sambo figure of their performance functions as a hemispheric double. Furthermore, I emphasize that subjection, as a domain of racial enjoyment, works to negotiate dynamics of gender and sexual power. I pay close attention to the invocation of queer desire and the act of gender-bending in Sambos Illimani's performance to show how staging the script of black disappearance allows antiblackness to stay intact even as normative boundaries of gender and sexuality are transgressed at the carnival. Ultimately, I not only show how Sambos's act of impersonation sustains a local racial script, bypassing sexual and gender transgression, but by highlighting its hemispheric dimensions, I also underscore how the performance surpassed its national context and resonated with an international audience.

In the second chapter, I pay further attention to the hemispheric dimensions of blackface performance by showing how subjection, as a domain of racial enjoyment, mediates the geopolitical relationships between the two Americas and works to create a sense of belonging across national differences in the hemispheric fold. In Miami, the racial script appears through the trope of the black buffoon who operates as a cultural symbol of a postracial nationalism for Cuban Americans. Conjured by and for Miami's Cuban diaspora, Yeyo Vargas is a negrito figure from the Spanish-language late-night TV program *Esta Noche Tu Night*, who was invented in 2008 just as Barack Obama rose to power as the first black president of the United States. Yeyo is the deluded leader of a fictional political party who serves as an adviser to President Obama and as a liaison to the president for Latinos and Latin Americans. As the familiar negrito of teatro bufo, he is a symbol of national identity and cultural memory for Cubans in the diaspora, but he also negotiates the postracial frenzy surrounding Barack Obama's candidacy, discourses of mestizaje circulating among Latin American immigrants in the city, and hemispheric formations of

antiblackness and of whiteness in Miami and Cuba. Like the hemispheric double of chapter 1, Yeyo is a stand-in for multiple figurations of blackness circulating in the two Americas. As a domain of racial enjoyment, here subjection negotiates the geopolitical changes in the hemispheric Americas, including the emergence of a Latin American left during the Pink Tide and a new set of policies between the United States and Cuba. In this context, racial scripts are levied to negotiate new political shifts between the two Americas and the evolution and convergence of multiple repeating nationalist fictions in the hemispheric fold.

The second half of the book underscores how black performers wield impersonation to challenge or deconstruct racial scripts. Here I discuss black performers who conjure racial stereotypes to humanize, register an oppositional gaze, engage in acts of spectacular opacity, or defamiliarize racist tropes. In my examination of the multimedia exhibit *Mambo negrita* (2006) by the Colombian black artist Liliana Angulo, I show how she conjures the stereotype of the *negrita*—which translates to little black girl or woman—to subvert and confront racial scripts that define black women as either domestic servants or hypersexual objects of desire. In an act that I call *spatial drag*, Angulo uses impersonation to present the negrita as a literal fixture of the kitchen and to highlight the role of space in racializing the black female body. She critically engages the relationship between black womanhood and objecthood by imitating the negrita in advertising, kitchen kitsch, and other material objects. In doing so, she illuminates the prevalence of blackface in material culture. Because her intervention took place amid Colombia's turn away from colorblindness to multiculturalism and new celebrations of diversity in art, I theorize resistance as a domain of racial enjoyment and show how black people wield impersonation to negotiate the state's shift toward the recognition of race. She exposes the endurance of nationalist fiction of mestizaje by subverting and resisting the racial scripts that construct black women as perpetual servants. Here I show how racial scripts are critically reworked to challenge the presumed end of mestizaje and the inauguration of the multicultural nation.

In the final chapter on racial conjuring in Jamaica, I examine black enjoyment and abject pleasures as a domain of racial enjoyment. Beginning in 2008, a popular blackface character, Delcita Coldwater, appeared in several plays from a theatrical genre in Jamaica known as "roots theater." A dismissed and denigrated theatrical form consumed and produced by Jamaica's black working class, roots theater uses farce to center the experi-

ence of the black underclass. Delcita, an immensely popular roots character, plays the racial script of the country bumpkin who comes to town. But she is not just a caricature of Jamaica's black underclass. This figuration of blackness doubles as the voice of working-class resistance who both confronts social prejudices and outsmarts the brown ruling class. I argue that Delcita is conjured by and for Jamaica's black underclass to articulate a counternarrative that challenges the racial scripts of Jamaica's nationalist fiction of creole nationalism. These racial scripts persist despite the emergence of "modern blackness" in the 1990s that entailed the recasting of race in the public and cultural sphere.[70] In her performance, Delcita oscillates between resisting the racial script and pandering to debased stereotypes of blackness, thereby countering any notion that this performance is solely about resisting the stereotype. I attend to the paradoxes of black enjoyment of black tropes to underscore why subjection and resistance, by themselves, do not capture the complexities of blackface performance. I emphasize the function of abject pleasures and radical disregard and examine the presence of black diasporic ludic circuits in the hemispheric fold.

Together, these domains of racial enjoyment all underscore how blackface, as a multivalent set of material, theatrical, performative, and visual practices, negotiates distinct modalities of repeating nationalist fictions in the hemispheric fold in an era of political change. I examine racial impersonation to not only highlight the endurance of these repeating nationalist fictions, but also to illuminate the disconnect between official state shifts toward the recognition of race and the reality people still face on the ground. I track how racial enjoyment enables ordinary people to both reconfigure and consolidate dynamics of racial power in the contemporary moment, amid shifts toward multiculturalism and the recognition of race. And as I emphasize in the last two chapters, I think about how black people wield racial conjuring to demarcate spaces for themselves, to affirm their own humanity, to create spaces of black sociality, and to develop ludic strategies to negotiate life in the wake of slavery and the afterlives of myths of racial democracy.

After public backlash about her performance in *Tres viudas*, the actress Velasco, the director and writer Pedro Román, and Teatro Trail announced their collective decision to modify the character. She ceased appearing in blackface.[71] Her act of racial conjuring and the controversy that ensued in Miami had activated racial scripts, exposed the endurance of nationalist fictions, and sparked public conversation about antiblack

racism in the hemispheric fold. The scene of racial enjoyment and the controversy it generated serve as an invitation to attend to the politics of racial conjuring in the Americas, to think with and across national silos, to wrestle with the ongoing power of repeating nationalist fictions, and to think critically about the figurations of blackness circulating in our midst. I take up this invitation in the pages that follow.

Introduction: Scenes of Racial Enjoyment in the Hemispheric Fold

1 Lane, *Blackface Cuba*.

2 Nadege Greene, "A Miami Theater Group Has a Change of Heart over Blackface," The World from PRX, June 25, 2018, https://www.pri.org/stories/2018-06-25/miami-theater-group-has-change-heart-over-blackface. For the video clip and further coverage, see also Brenda Medina, "The Miami Parody Features an Artist in Blackface and the Audience 'Loves It,'" *Miami Herald*, June 1, 2018, https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/article211404909.html.

3 Whitten and Torres, *Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean*; De la Fuente and Andrews, *Afro-Latin American Studies*; Appelbaum et al., *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*; Hernández, *Racial Subordination in Latin America*; Nascimento and Nascimento, "Apresentação."

4 See De la Fuente, *Nation for All*; Hernández, *Racial Subordination in Latin America*; Geler, *Andares negros, caminos blancos*. Black thinkers in Latin America such as Abdias do Nascimento, Manuel Zapata Olivella, Alberto Arredondo, and others were vocal critics of myths of racial democracy. For example, see Nascimento, *O negro revoltado*; Robaina, *El negro en Cuba*; Carbonell, *Crítica cómo surgió la cultural nacional*.

5 As I explain in chapter 2, the Pink Tide referred to the emergence of a bloc of leftist leaders in Latin America in the early 2000s. The policies of some of these leaders marked the advancement of racial equality and shifts in state policies toward race. Affirmative action policies in Brazil were implemented during Lula da Silva's first term, and the election of Evo Morales, Bolivia's first indigenous president, occasioned the protection and expansion of indigenous rights as well as the development of a new constitution that defined Bolivia as a plurinational state. For more, see Crabtree, "Indigenous Empowerment in Bolivia." On Brazil, see Júnior, Daflon, and Campos, "Lula's Approach to Affirmative Action and Race."

6 Lane, "Problems of Framing," 127.

7 On the origins of US minstrelsy, see Lhamon, *Jump Jim Crow*; Smith, *Creolization of American Culture*; Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder*. US blackface minstrelsy evolved to adapt to the emergence of new cultural forms from television to animation. See the introduction in Johnson, *Burnt Cork*. See also Chude-Sokei, "Uncanny History of Minstrels and Machines."

8 See Jones, *Staging Habla de Negros*; Stevens, *Inventions of the Skin*, chap. 3; Carr, "Material/Blackness"; Ndiaye, *Scripts of Blackness*. Hoxworth, *Transoceanic Blackface*; Francisco Covarrubias first performed in blackface on Cuban stages in 1812, some thirty years before the first American minstrel shows. See Thomas, *Cuban Zarzuela*, 82, 83. Rine Leal's two-volume study *La selva oscura* (1975) and *La selva oscura: De los bufos a la neocolonia* (1982) offer the most extensive examination of teatro bufo. For blackface in Bolivia and Peru, see Roper, "Blackface at the Andean Fiesta" and chapter 1 of this book. On La Fiesta de Blancos y Negros in Pasto, Colombia, see David Jáuregui Sarmiento, "¿Conoces la historia del Carnaval de blancos y negros?" *Señal Colombia*, December 29, 2021, https://www.senalcolombia.tv/cultura/historia-carnaval-negros-y-blancos.

9 For black-on-black performance, see Chude-Sokei, *Last "Darky."* On blackface in the Anglo-Atlantic world, see Nowatski, *Representing African Americans*. On blackface in the Iberian world, see Fernández de la Reguera Tayá, *Cuba y Catalunya*. For blackface in the British empire, see Hoxworth, *Transoceanic Blackface*.

10 Cole, "American Ghetto Parties." For an early history of using impersonations of blackness to articulate Western modernity, see Ndiaye, *Scripts of Blackness*; Carr, "Material Blackness"; Jones, *Staging Habla de Negros*. On how colonial blackface shaped understandings of the national, see Lane, "Problems of Framing," 115.

11 For the turn away from the nation in blackface studies, see especially Thelwell, *Exporting Jim Crow*; Hoxworth, *Transoceanic Blackface*; Witmann, "Empire of Culture"; Cole and Davis, "Routes of Blackface." All show the transnational reach of US minstrelsy and the limitations of the nation for wrestling with the form. Hoxworth, especially, debunks the notion that blackface was a distinctly US American phenomenon. He charts a transoceanic history of blackface performance across the British empire.

12 On blackface performance troupes in Río de la Plata, see Andrews, "Remembering Africa, Inventing Uruguay." On teatro bufo, see Leal, *Teatro Bufo Siglo XIX*. On "Diplo," see Rivero, *Tuning Out Blackness*. On Memín Pinguín and the role of Mexican *historietas* in national cultural formation, see Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies*.

13 For discursive blackface, see Lane, *Blackface Cuba*; on digital blackface, see Madeline Howard, "What Is Digital Blackface? Experts Explain Why the Social Media Practice Is Problematic," *Women's Health Magazine*, February 11, 2022, https://www.womenshealthmag.com/life/a33278412/digital-blackface/. See also John Blake, "What's 'Digital Blackface'? And Why Is It Wrong When White People Use It?" CNN, March 26, 2023, https://www.cnn.com/2023/03/26/us/digital-blackface-social-media-explainer-blake-cec/index.html; Jason Parham, "TikTok and the Evolution of Digi-

tal Blackface," *Wired*, August 4, 2020, https://www.wired.com/story/tiktok-evolution-digital-blackface/.

14 On blackface as a floating signifier, see Cole, "American Ghetto Parties." On blackface as form, see Yang, *Peculiar Afterlife of Slavery*. On blackface as lingua franca and racial idiom, see Ochieng' Nyong'o, *Amalgamation Waltz*. See also Lott, *Love and Theft*. On blackface as a transnational language of race, see Chude-Sokei, *Last "Darky."*

15 Lane, "Hemispheric America in Deep Time."

16 Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*; Roach, *Cities of the Dead*.

17 Lott, *Love and Theft*.

18 Carpio, *Laughing Fit to Kill*.

19 For more on blackface as shine, see Post, "Williams, Walker, and Shine."

20 Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*; Hall, "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies."

21 The term *blackface* has been used in social media discussions of controversial television characters who black up, such as "El Negro Mama" in Peru and Colombia's Soldado Micolta. The Peruvian Newspaper *El Comercio* traced the history of blackface to the Elizabethan stage and US blackface minstrelsy in its discussion of El Negro Mama. See Luis del Campo, "Blackface y brownface: del Otelo al Negro Mama . . . ," *El Comercio*, August 8, 2020, https://elcomercio.pe/luces/blackface-y-brownface-de-otelo-al-negro-mama-el-origen-de-la-mala-costumbre-que-se-niega-a-morir-vania-torres-noticia/. In coverage of *el soldado micolta*, writers used the term blackface to describe the racial impersonation. See Rodriguez Garavito's "La controversia sobre el soldado micolta y su salida . . . ," accessed July 15, 2024, Dejusticia, https://www.dejusticia.org/column/adios-soldado-micolta/; see also Radio Ambulante's podcast "No soy tu chiste," 48:02, accessed July 15, 2024, https://radioambulante.org/audio/no-soy-tu-chiste. For *corcho quemado*, see Denise Braz, "Corcho Quemado | ¿Qué Es El Blackface? Revisando La Educación Racista Que Supimos Conseguir," *Página/12 Web*, July 6, 2018, https://www.pagina12.com.ar/126215-corcho-quemado. In Spanish it is referred to as *pintarse de negro*, *corcho quemado* (burnt cork), *cara negra* (blackface), and *tiznarse el rostro* (painted face). For *cara negra*, see Lane and Godoy-Anativia, "Dossier." For *tiznarse el rostro*, see Adamovksy, "Los Negros, la primera comparsa."

22 Lane, *Blackface Cuba*; Rivero, *Tuning Out Blackness*.

23 I am thinking here about the circulation of bufo tropes and US blackface minstrel tropes in the region. For work on the circulation of the bufo tropes in the Caribbean, see Rivero, *Tuning Out Blackness*. In the 1860s, Cuba's teatro bufo performance tradition—a comic revue style for which blackface was a central feature—produced the figure of the "negro catedrático." Rivero explains that bufo comedies first appeared on Puerto Rican stages in 1873 in local plays *Los negros catedráticos*, *Un negro bueno*, and *Los Negros espir-*

itistas, written by Cuban scriptwriter Francisco Fernández. The teatro bufo characters also appeared on stages in New York in the early 1920s as Cuban artists traveled to and from the United States. For the travel of blackface from Cuba to the United States, see López, *Unbecoming Blackness*; and Laguna, *Diversión*. For circulation of US blackface minstrel archetypes in Latin America, see Karush, "Blackness in Argentina"; and Derby, *Dictator's Seduction*. Chinua Thelwell has also generously shared with me archival information of the travel of a minstrel, Frank Hussey, from the minstrel troupe the Sable Brothers, who traveled the world in the 1840s, including Brazil, Peru, and other parts of South America.

24 Implemented under colonial rule, the casta system was a hierarchical system that classified racial groups and racial mixture and determined one's social and socioeconomic status; see Rosenblat, *La población indígena de América*. See also Katzew, *Casta Paintings*.

25 Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 4. On the casta system, see Rosenblat, *La población indígena de América*.

26 Here I riff on Antonio Benitez-Rojo's concept of the repeating island, which suggests that within the disorder of the Caribbean there emerges an island of paradoxes that repeats itself; Benitez-Rojo, *Repeating Island*.

27 Múnera, *Fronteras imaginadas*; Mosquera, Pardo, and Hoffman, *Afrodescendientes en las Américas*; Alberto and Hoffnung-Garskof, "'Racial Democracy' and Racial Inclusion."

28 See Ingenieros, "Las razas inferiores"; Bunge, *Nuestra América*; De Friedemann and Arocha, *De sol a sol*.

29 See Kutzinski, *Sugar's Secrets*; Hernández, *Racial Subordination in Latin America*; De la Fuente and Andrews, *Afro-Latin American Studies*.

30 Rama, *Lettered City*. See also Lane, *Blackface Cuba*, 4.

31 Martí, *Nuestra América*, 16 (translation from Lane, *Blackface Cuba*, 2005, 4). Lane insists that Martí's casting of this mestizo autóctono in the place of a native is, in fact, the conjuring of a false originary figure who erases the violence of colonial contact. Martí invents this figure to serve as an "original" American protagonist in his mestizo America; Lane, *Blackface Cuba*, 5.

32 Martí, *Nuestra América*, 24 (translation from Lane, *Blackface Cuba*, 5).

33 Ortíz, *Martí y las razas*, 30.

34 Alberto and Hoffnung-Garskif, "'Racial Democracy' and Racial Inclusion."

35 Freyre popularized the term "racial democracy" in *The Masters and the Slaves*. While Freyre acknowledged the violence of slavery in Brazil, he ultimately saw interracial mixture of enslaved African women with white colonial masters, the childrearing of white children by enslaved people, and all the social interactions between black and white people during slavery to have created an organic social inclusion that softened racial divisions and social hierarchies. For more on Freyre, see Alberto and Hoffnung-Garskof,

"'Racial Democracy' and Racial Inclusion," 274. See also Benzanquen de Araújo, *Guerra y paz*; Ribeiro, *O povo Brasileiro*.

36 Freyre, *Masters and the Slaves*. Many Brazilian scholars have critiqued Freyre's paradigms by highlighting the persistence of systemic racial inequality in Brazil despite celebrations of racial miscegenation; see Araújo, *Guerra y paz*; Ortiz, *Cultura brasileira e identidade nacional*.

37 Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, thinkers adjudicated different values to racial miscegenation that involved blackness and indigeneity, but generally they all venerated whiteness. See Ingenieros, "Las razas inferiores"; Bunge, *Nuestra América*; Saco, *Colección de papeles científicos*; Romero, *Estudos sobre a poesia popular*.

38 Paschel, *Becoming Black Political Subjects*, 29. Paschel also notes that while influential thinkers such as Colombian president Laureano Gómez (1950–1953) saw racial mixture as a sign of degeneracy, over time other thinkers, such as the Colombian writer Luis López de Mesa, concluded that racial miscegenation was in fact the solution to overcoming the country's black and indigenous elements. Despite their differences, both López de Mesa and Gómez believed in the moral, aesthetic, and intellectual superiority of Europeans.

39 Vasconcelos, *Cosmic Race*, 30.

40 Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics*; Saco, *Colección de papeles científicos*; Ortiz, "José Antonio Saco y sus ideas"; Geler, *Andares negros, caminos blancos*; Figueras, *Cuba y su evolución colonial*.

41 Hernández, *Racial Subordination in Latin America*.

42 De la Fuente and Andrews, "Making of a Field."

43 Ledgister, *Only West Indians*, 25.

44 Williams, *Historical Background of Race Relations*.

45 Williams, *Historical Background of Race Relations*.

46 Quoted in Nettleford, *Mirror Mirror*, 23.

47 Thomas, "Democratizing Dance"; Thomas, *Modern Blackness*.

48 Although Maziki Thame argues against the notion of nonracialism, she eloquently underscores how creole nationalism was in fact the articulation of a brown nationalism; see Thame, "Racial Hierarchy."

49 Nettleford, *Caribbean Cultural Identity*, 4.

50 For more on race in Trinidad and Tobago, see Crosson, "Race, Nation, and Diaspora," 419. See also Welcome, "To Be Black Is to . . ."

51 See Welcome, "To Be Black Is to . . ."

52 Hintzen, "Creoleness and Nationalism in Guyanese."

53 Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity*. For a nuanced critique of the limitations of the settler-colonial framework and its erasure of antiblackness as coconstitutive of indigenous dispossession, see Cordis, "Forging Relational Difference."

54 López, *Unbecoming Blackness*.

55 Hay, *I've Been Black*; Aja, *Miami's Forgotten Cubans*.

56 Aja, *Miami's Forgotten Cubans*.

57 On creole whiteness, see Francis and Harris, "Introduction."
58 See Sommer, *Foundational Fictions*.
59 Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*, 11.
60 See Telles, *Pigmentocracies*.
61 Hernández, *Racial Innocence*, 1, 7.
62 Hooker, "Indigenous Inclusion/Black Exclusion."
63 Paschel, *Becoming Black Political Subjects*.
64 See Telles, *Pigmentocracies*. See also "Americas Barometer 2010," Ethnicity Module of the Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA), Latin American Public Opinion Project of Vanderbilt University.
65 Hale, *Más que un indio*, 35.
66 For indio permitido, see Hale, *Más que un indio*.
67 Berlant and Ngai, "Comedy Has Issues," 233.
68 Berlant and Ngai, "Comedy Has Issues," 235.
69 Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "scene," accessed August 20, 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/scene.
70 Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, 11, 12.
71 Teatro Trail, "Friends of Trail Theatre and Sala Catarsis/Amigos de Teatro Trail y Sala Catarsis," Facebook, edited May 5, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/notes/648624872469165/. See also Nadege Green, "Afro-Latinos Say Miami Blackface Play Is Part of Bigger Problem with Racism in Latino Communities," PBS, May 29, 2018, https://news.wgcu.org/2018-05-29/afro-latinos-say-miami-blackface-play-is-part-of-bigger-problem-with-racism-in-latino-communities.

1. Blackface and Racial Scripts at the Andean Fiesta: Staging the Slave Past in the Andes

1 Wright, *Café con leche*.
2 It may be an intermediate racial form determined by hair texture; see Golash-Boza, "Does Whitening Happen?"
3 The founders of the troupe Sambos Illimani took the name "Illimani" from the mountain in La Paz, Bolivia, to affirm the dance's Bolivian origins.
4 The PachaMama is Mother Earth and is a revered feminine deity in indigenous traditions.
5 On the Baile de los Negritos, see Sánchez-Patsy, "País de caporales." For analyses of negrito dances in Peru, see Bigenho, "El baile de los negritos"; and Feldman, *Black Rhythms of Peru*.
6 Maidana Rodríguez, *La danza de los caporales*.
7 Since I was unable to reproduce images from the 2013 dance that I describe here with good resolution quality, I have instead shown an image from a 2020 performance. You can find a video of the original performance in 2013 here: