



The Black Central Americas Project: Phase I - Constellating Black Central America

Fathia Fasasi and Allie Schlicht

Faculty Mentors: Dr. Melanie White, Dr. Nicole Ramsey

Introduction

The Black Central Americas (BCA) Project is a digital public humanities initiative to explore and advance Black Central American history, culture, and scholarship. Through its core mission, the BCA Project provides a transdisciplinary and transnational platform that fosters discourse and hosts innovative programming within the field of Black Central American Studies. The project's first phase, "Constellating Black Central America," involves creating an interactive and creative digital mapping platform. This platform will illuminate the histories, cultures, and migration patterns of Black and Black Indigenous Central American communities across Central and North America.

Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this phase were to record and visually represent historical and current data related to Black diasporic movements in efforts to generate new insights into migration trends and to address a significant gap in Caribbean digital scholarship. The digital map we are creating will be valuable for historians, sociologists, anthropologists, artists, and non-traditional and independent scholars. By highlighting the underrepresented stories of Black Central America, our overarching objective is to fill a long-existing gap in Caribbean Studies.

Methodology

- Produce research reports on Black history, politics, and culture for:
 - San Miguel, El Salvador
 - La Ceiba, Honduras
 - Livingston Guatemala
 - Limón, Costa Rica
 - Panama City, Panama
 - Colón, Panama
- Conduct primary and secondary literature reviews
- Gather credible insights from social media.
- Write a 1,000-1,200-word report on each city

Conclusion

Narrative of Afro-descendant communities
Colonial oppression, Socio-economic challenges, Struggles for rights and recognition

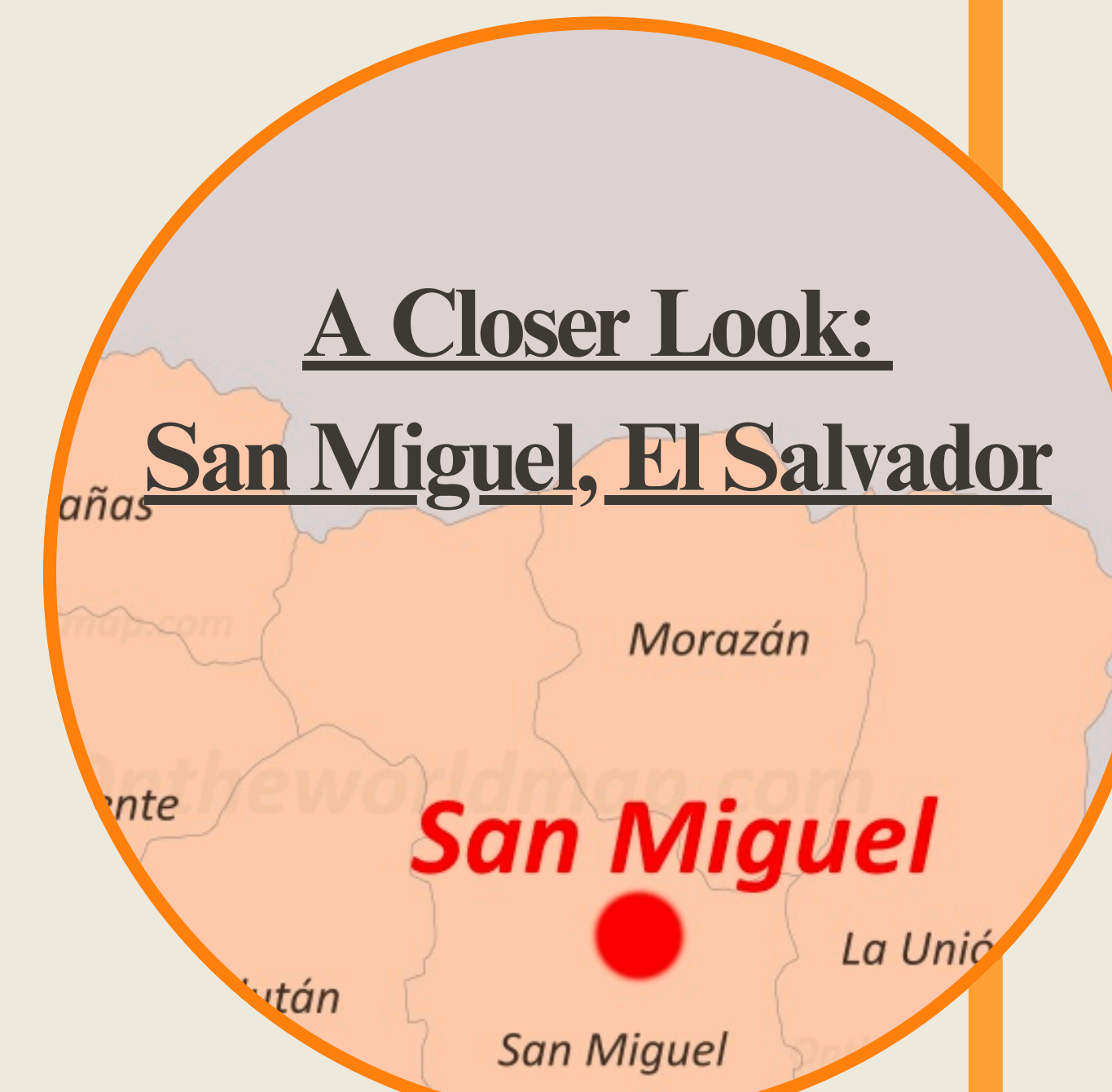
- Common themes of resistance through:
Legal action, Uprisings, Education, Cultural preservation
- Afro-descendants' battles against:
Direct violence, Efforts to erase their culture, Efforts to maintain traditions that define their identities
- Research contributions to Afro-descendant Scholarship
Focusing on the interconnected histories of Afro-descendant communities in the region, Emphasizing the importance of giving voice to Afro-descendants in discussions on migration, colonialism, and resistance, Highlights the need to acknowledge the unique experiences of Afro-descendants, who have often been excluded from national narratives
- Supports the BCA Project's aim to:
Make Black Central American histories and cultures more visible and acknowledged, Fill a long-existing gap in Caribbean Studies through research on Black social movements, organizations, and contributions of Afro-descendant people

References



Acknowledgments

We are immensely thankful to the Laidlaw Scholars Foundation, Dr. Melanie White, Dr. Nicole Ramsey, and the Georgetown University Center for Research and Fellowships for providing us with the invaluable opportunity and resources to pursue this research endeavor. We also sincerely appreciate the work of authors, researchers, and individuals whose expertise in Black Central American Studies as they were instrumental in shaping our work.



A Closer Look:
San Miguel, El Salvador

In 1541, over 10,000 Africans were forcibly brought to El Salvador. In the 1540s and 50s, many Africans were forced to work in the gold mines around San Miguel. During the colonial era, several towns and cities had populations consisting of mostly Africans (Williams 2001). As time went on, Mulatto (mixed African and White descent) and Zambo (mixed Indigenous and African descent) communities formed. After slavery was abolished in El Salvador, several enslaved peoples from Belize escaped to El Salvador and started lives there, continuing to mix into the population. At the end of the colonial period, the majority of the population did not maintain strong ethnic ties to their Indigenous, African, or European descent (Williams 2001). Today, Afro-Salvadoran history is often overlooked, and many believe there are no Black Salvadorans, which leads to Afro-Salvadorans facing stigma and erasure. Despite the systematic erasure of Blackness in El Salvador, African heritage still appears in culture and language.

Important figures/institutions

- Afrodescendientes Organizados Salvadoreños (AFROOS)*
- Zaira Miluska Funes (@Centam_Beauty):*
- Breena Nuñez*
- Ana Yency Lemus Chavez*
- Prudencia Ayala*

Contemporary Black social movements

- La Matanza*
- Digital Organizing*
- Salvadoran Afro-descendants Day*



A Closer Look:
Livingston, Guatemala

Livingston, Guatemala, is small, vibrant town rich in cultural heritage only accessible by boats, primarily inhabited by the Afro-descendant Garifuna and indigenous Maya Q'eqchi' people ("Garifuna People, History and Culture," n.d.). "In the 1970s, Livingston's Garifuna population was around 10,000 and has dwindled to around 4,000 today" (Amaryah 2022). Their journey began with a shipwreck in 1653 near the island of St. Vincent. The ship, carrying Africans from what we now know as Nigeria, allowed its survivors to escape and integrate with the indigenous Caribbean people, forming a new community on the island (Gudmundson and Wolfe 2010). This union was disrupted in the 17th century when the British invaded St. Vincent. Despite their resistance, the Garifuna were eventually forced to leave for Roatán, an island in Honduras, in 1796. From there, the Garifuna spread along the Caribbean coast, establishing settlements, including Livingston in Guatemala (Amaryah 2022). They resisted colonial oppression through maroon communities, education, legal avenues, and artistic expressions such as music, dance, and more.

Important figures/institutions

- The Garifuna Cultural Center*
- 7 Altares*
- National Garifuna Day*
- Tomas Sanchez*
- Juan Carlos Sanchez*

Contemporary Black social movements

- The Organización Negra Centroamericana (ONECA)*
- Organización Negra de Guatemala (ONEGUA)*
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Methodology

The primary objectives of this phase are to record and visually represent historical and current data related to Black diasporic movements in efforts to generate new insights into migration trends and to address a significant gap in Caribbean digital scholarship. The digital map we are creating will be valuable for historians, sociologists, anthropologists, artists, and non-traditional and independent scholars. Our main aim is to bring attention to Black Central America and its diverse diasporas within the context of Caribbean digital scholarship. By highlighting the underrepresented stories of Black Central America, our overarching objective is to fill a long-existing gap in Caribbean Studies.

- Produce research reports on Black history, politics, and culture for:
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- Meet faculty mentors weekly.

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Conclusion

Each city provides a unique narrative of how Afro-descendant communities have navigated:

- Colonial oppression
- Socio-economic challenges
- Struggles for rights and recognition

Common themes of resistance through:

- Legal action
- Uprisings
- Education
- Cultural preservation

Afro-descendants' battles against:

- Direct violence
- Efforts to erase their culture
- Efforts to maintain traditions that define their identities

The research contributes significantly to Black Central American Studies by:

- Focusing on the interconnected histories of Afro-descendant communities in the region
- Emphasizing the importance of giving voice to Afro-descendants in discussions on migration, colonialism, and resistance
- Highlights the need to acknowledge the unique experiences of Afro-descendants, who have often been excluded from national narratives

Supports the BCA Project's aim to:

- Make Black Central American histories and cultures more visible and acknowledged
- Fill a long-existing gap in Caribbean Studies through research on Black social movements, organizations, and contributions of Afro-descendant people

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AFFILIATIONS

Laidlaw Scholars Foundation
Georgetown University Laidlaw Scholars Programme

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San Miguel, El Salvador:

