

## In search of the «fugitivo antillano»: Black Internationalist Testimony from Jacques Viau Rénaud to Bloque

*En busca del “fugitivo antillano”: El testimonio negro-internacionalista de Jacques Viau Renaud a Bloque*

À la recherche du «fugitivo antillano»: Témoignage des Internationalistes Noirs, de Jacques Viau Rénaud à Bloque

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### Abstract

This article argues for placing Dominican journals of the 1960s and 1970s in global black internationalist writing. It routes this argument through the literary and arts journal *Testimonio*, and the interdisciplinary journal *Bloque*, with specific attention to the Haitian poet and revolutionary, Jacques Viau Rénaud, who published two poems in *Testimonio* before participating and ultimately dying during the 1965 Revolución de Abril. I analyze Viau's pre-Revolución poems alongside his posthumously published book of poems, *Permanencia del llanto*, in conjunction with writing by his friend and literary executor, Antonio Lockward Artiles, about Viau's place in black diasporic thought. I argue that *Testimonio*, *Bloque*, and Viau's poetry require close attention because of the way they point to alternative histories of Dominican black internationalist

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solidarities that are often ignored within the nation and by scholars studying it from abroad.

### **Key words**

Literary journals, 1960s, Jacques Viau, Black internationalism, Black Diaspora, Dominican poetics

### **Resumen**

Este artículo argumenta que las revistas dominicanas de las décadas de 1960 y 1970 deben formar parte de la literatura global del internacionalismo negro. Presenta este argumento a través de la revista literaria y de arte *Testimonio*, y la revista interdisciplinaria *Bloque*, con atención específica al poeta y revolucionario haitiano, Jacques Viau Rénaud, quien publicó dos poemas en *Testimonio* antes de participar --y eventualmente morir-- en la Revolución de Abril de 1965. Investigo los poemas pre-Revolución de Viau junto con su libro de poemas publicado póstumamente, *Permanencia del llanto*, junto a los escritos de Antonio Lockward Artilles, amigo y albacea literario de Viau, sobre el lugar de Viau en el pensamiento negro-diaspórico. Sostengo que *Testimonio*, *Bloque* y la poesía de Viau precisan atención cuidadosa porque nos dirigen a historias alternativas de las solidaridades dominicanas con el internacionalismo negro, historias que a menudo son ignoradas dentro del país y por los académicos que lo investigan desde el exterior.

### **Palabras clave**

Revistas literarias, década 1960, Jacques Viau, internacionalismo negro, diáspora negra, poesía dominicana

### **Résumé**

Cet article postule pour placer les revues dominicaines des années 1960 et 1970 dans l'écriture internationaliste noire mondiale. Je pose cet argument à travers de la revue littéraire et artistique *Testimonio*, et la revue interdisciplinaire *Bloque*, avec une attention particulière au poète et révolutionnaire haïtien, Jacques Viau Rénaud,

qui a publié deux poèmes dans *Testimonio* avant de participer et finalement de mourir au cours de la Révolution d'avril 1965. J'analyse les poèmes d'avant la Révolution de Viau et son recueil de poèmes publié à titre posthume, *Permanencia del llanto*, en conjonction avec les écrits de son ami et exécuteur littéraire, Antonio Lockward Artilés, sur la place de Viau dans la pensée diasporique noire. Je soutiens que *Testimonio*, *Bloque* et la poésie de Viau nécessitent une attention particulière parce qu'ils pointent vers des histoires alternatives de solidarités internationalistes noires dominicaines qui sont souvent ignorées au sein de la nation et par les universitaires qui l'étudient à l'étranger.

### Mots clés

Revue littéraires, années 1960, Jacques Viau, Internationalisme noir, Diaspora noire, poésie dominicaine

In the immediate aftermath of Rafael Trujillo's *ajusticiamiento*, a spate of literary and cultural journals emerged. Their prompt emergence reveals not only that Dominican cultural production had been suffering under the weight of the dictatorship but also that such work had also been building, ready to burst forth with the end of the regime. The writings in these journals are important indices of Dominican engagement with broader—Caribbean, hemispheric American, and global—literary, cultural, and political Black internationalist movements. In this article, I draw from two short-lived journals, *Testimonio* from the mid-1960s and *Bloque* from the early 1970s, as a way to draw out the black internationalist thinking that is present in Dominican journals in the post-Trujillo period and extends through Joaquin Balaguer's murderous *Doce Años*. I also zero in on the figure of Jacques Viau, whose poetic work published in *Testimonio* and after his death in 1965 are part of the wider, usable Dominican tradition of black-affirming and anti-racist writing that *Testimonio* and *Bloque* represent.<sup>1</sup> Un-

1 Across the 1960s and 1970s, this tradition would include other minor and academic journals, like *Brigadas Dominicanas* (1961), *Testimonio* (1964), *Eme*

even as it is, the black internationalism in these journals and in Viau's writing points to an emergent Dominican tradition that predates the large-scale migration to the United States, a migration often credited incorrectly with creating Dominican racial self-consciousness.

Within months of Trujillo's *ajusticiamiento* in May 1961, Aída Cartagena Portalatín established a new literary publishing house, Brigadas Dominicanas, with a journal that ran for ten issues from December 1961 through March 1963, and a book series. It also included a literal house where writers would meet and read together, not unlike the literary salons organized in 1920s Paris by the Martinican intellectuals Jeanne and Paulette Nardal and in 1930s London by the Jamaican writer Una Marson.<sup>2</sup> In fact, this literary house pre-existed Trujillo's death, as the journal *Brigadas Dominicanas* would emphasize across its issues, publishing poetry that was shared and read but not published during the final years of the dictatorship. Part of the journal's project, then, was to publish work that served as a testimony of life under the *trujillato* and of the necessarily covert forms of literary resistance. Before emerging as Brigadas Dominicanas, the group organized around Cartagena Portalatín's home was known as Brigadas Clandestinas.<sup>3</sup>

As Elizabeth Russ has stressed, however, the journal did more than merely function as an anthology of unpublished work during the *trujillato*: "Cartagena's journal represents a very early attempt by an intellectual to engage the world through the literary imagination so as to pose an alternative to the

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*Eme: Estudios Dominicanos* (1972), and *Bloque: Revista Crítica de Arte, Literatura y Ciencias Sociales* (1973), and also the literary and cultural supplements in well-established and widely circulating periodicals, like *Listín Diario* (1889), *¡Ahora!* (1962), and *Aquí: Suplemento Cultural del Periódico La Noticia* (1973).

2 On the Nardal sisters, see T. Dinean Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); on Marson, see Delia Jarrett-Macauley, *The Life of Una Marson, 1905-1965* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

3 Elizabeth Christine Russ, "Between the Unthinkable and the Unsayable: The Legacy of *Brigadas Dominicanas* (December 1961-March 1963)," *Hispanic Review* 84, n.º 4 (2016): 386.

culture of isolation, fear, censorship, and division that Trujillo had relied upon to maintain his power.”<sup>4</sup> *Brigadas Dominicanas* also drew a straight line from earlier journal and publishing work in the mid-1940s in *La Poesía Sorprendida*, with which Cartagena Portalatín was associated.<sup>5</sup> It was part of a larger surge in writing, now able to more openly criticize *trujillismo*, even as the continued repression at the hands of Trujillo’s son, Ramfis, was relentless and brutal in those first months following Trujillo’s death in May. In other words, the climate did not immediately become safe for open opposition to the now-ended dictatorship, as Elizabeth Manley has pointed out: “Given the chaotic political conditions that follow the assassination, including a vicious manhunt for the dictator’s killers, most Dominicans kept their celebrations secret.”<sup>6</sup> It is all the more remarkable, then, that Cartagena Portalatín would both be able and willing to launch *Brigadas Dominicanas* by that December.

Although the remainder of this essay will focus on *Testimonio* and *Bloque*, it is important to note that *Brigadas Dominicanas* inaugurates the post-Trujillo engagement with wider black diasporic writing, as a number of its issues featured translations of works by major black writers such as Aimé Césaire, Patrice Lumumba, and Léopold Sédar Senghor. This explicit and public engagement occurs immediately after Trujillo’s *ajusticia-*

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4 Russ, “Between the Unthinkable and the Unsayable,” 382.

5 *La Poesía Sorprendida* (1943-1947) was a journal whose name came from the avant garde group of literary and visual artists in the Dominican Republic who were directly or indirectly associated with surrealist movements in France, Spain, and Chile. In addition to major Dominican poets of the period such as Cartagena Portalatín, Freddy Gatón Arce, Manuel Rueda, and Franklin Mieses Burgos and the painter Jaime Colson, two of its core members were from abroad, the Spanish painter Eugenio Fernández Granell, and the Chilean poet Alberto Baeza Flores. It represented a meaningful but muted challenge to the dictatorship, publishing during the brief period in which open dissent was permitted by the Trujillo regime. For more on the journal, see Eugenio García Cuevas, *Poesía moderna dominicana del siglo XX y los contextos internacionales: Estudio sobre La Poesía Sorprendida* (Santo Domingo: Ministerio de Cultura, 2011).

6 Elizabeth Manley, *The Paradox of Paternalism: Women and the Politics of Authoritarianism in the Dominican Republic* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2017), 2.

miento, disrupting both the dominant anti-Blackness internal to the Dominican Republic and the sense, often external, that the primary or even only catalyst for Dominican racial awakening was, as Juan Flores has put it, “a veritable apprenticeship in black consciousness acquired in working-class diaspora ‘hoods’ in the United States,” in the wake of largescale migration to the UNITED STATES during the later 1960s and through the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>7</sup>

Alejandro Paulino Ramos has noted that between the last issue of *Brigadas Dominicanas* (dated January-February-March 1963) and early 1964, he has been unable to locate any literary or cultural journals circulating in the Dominican Republic.<sup>8</sup> With the first issue of *Testimonio: Revista de Letras y Arte* in February 1964, however, “El vacío dejado fue ocupado,” the journal running through 1968.<sup>9</sup> As was the case with *Brigadas Dominicanas* shortly before it, *Testimonio* “is a key early instance of incipient Afro-Diasporic consciousness and demonstrates the important cultural and racial work that began immediately after Trujillo’s death,” with essays in its pages analyzing the writings of Black writers such as Senghor and Nicolás Guillén.<sup>10</sup>

Its opening issue asserts what might be called its mission statement, penned by the founding editors, Lupo Hernández Rueda, Luis Alfredo Torres, and Alberto Peña Lebrón. In it, they lament the political and social atmosphere of the time: “La injusticia social campea por nuestros lares. La desnudez, el hambre y la ignorancia tienen en este suelo su morada.”

7 Juan Flores, 47-48.

8 Alejandro Paulino Ramos, “Poetas en caminos de libertad: Revista *Brigadas Dominicanas*,” *Acento*, 4 de febrero de 2017, acceso el 8 de octubre, 2021, <https://acento.com.do/cultura/poetas-caminos-libertad-revista-brigadas-dominicanas-8426548.html>.

9 Alejandro Paulino Ramos, “Poetas en caminos de libertad: La revista *Testimonio*,” *Acento*. 10 de febrero de 2017, acceso 8 de octubre 2021, <https://acento.com.do/cultura/poetas-caminos-libertad-la-revista-testimonio-8428944.html>.

10 Raj Chetty, “Archives of Afro-Affirmation: Post-Trujillo Journals and Dominican Literary Blackness,” en *Transnational Hispaniola: New Directions in Haitian and Dominican Studies*, ed. por April Mayes y Kiran Jayaram (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2018), 128.

In this climate, they assert a cultural imperative that is at the core of the founding of their journal: “estamos obligados a dar testimonio de nuestro tiempo.” Their invocation of “una responsabilidad ineludible” to “contribuir al engrandecimiento material y espiritual de la República” is a crucial opening for the possibility of a new Dominican social agenda, one that addresses material social injustice through art and culture.<sup>11</sup> This, I argue, provides a foundation upon which incipient forms of black internationalism expressed themselves in the journal’s pages.

One key figure published in *Testimonio* is the young poet, Jacques Viau Rénaud, who was born in Port-au-Prince in 1941 and moved to the Dominican Republic with his family when he was 7. During his young adult life, Viau was ensconced in the Dominican literary community of the early and mid-1960s, writing and declaiming poetry in El Conde and eventually participating in the Revolución de Abril, during which he was killed by U.S. mortar fire in June 1965.

Part of a section on “jóvenes poetas” featured in various issues of the journal, Viau’s poetry demonstrates the startling maturity of such a young poet—he is 22 when his first poem appears in the journal—and the strong support he received from the literary critics and editors comprising the 1960s Dominican literary and arts scene. Viau’s place in *Testimonio*, and in the wider literary and artistic circles out of which the journal emerged, is an important index of post-Trujillo Dominican-Haitian collaboration that survived the dictatorship’s violence, a testament to an early and sustained effort at Dominican-Haitian cultural and political solidarity. It is also possible to read his work as part of emergent black internationalist cultural work in the Dominican 1960s.

Viau’s two poems published in *Testimonio*, “El nuevo torreón” and “Canción de gesta,” both appeared in 1964, in March and

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11 Lupo Hernández Rueda, Luis Alfredo Torres, y Alberto Peña Lebrón, “La suerte está echada,” *Testimonio: Revista de Artes y Letras* 1 (1964): 6. Biblioteca Pedro Mir, Dpto. Hemeroteca, Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo.

September, respectively. Across the two poems, one sees Viau's political alignment with the proletariat and its life-affirming link with island ecology. "El Nuevo Torreón" beautifully transforms nature into the source for new life and new voices: "de cada roca o piedra o vegetal / surgirá la vida resplandeciente del maíz / de cada rostro hermoso de tierra o marmól / hablarán las bocas desheredadas."<sup>12</sup> One way to read a black internationalist commitment is to see the way these lines articulate with a broader Caribbean poetics that Viau very likely would have known. They deploy a "combination of earthy, vegetal, life-giving equality" that "pulls into the Dominican present of 1964 the writings of [Martinicans Suzanne and Aimé Césaire] in *Tropiques*, their journal of the early 1940s, and [the Haitian] Jacques Roumain's 1944 novel, *Gouverneurs de la rosée*."<sup>13</sup> The lines also flesh out Viau's poetic vision of "la unidad sin roturas de todos los camaradas."<sup>14</sup> "Canción de gesta" does explicitly address racial blackness, but only briefly, alongside global categories of race and only in terms of a future, universal, post-race human unity: "Morirá el negro, / el blanco / el mongol / y el mestizo, nacerá el hombre."<sup>15</sup> In this latter poem, Viau specifically announces his commitment: "Marcho atado al proletario." This political solidarity leads to Viau's poetic vision of a future in which the end of private and self-interested ownership is the beginning of collective and cooperative stewardship: "Morirá lo mío / nacerá lo nuestro, / y desde lo nuestro un Yo inmenso / cubrirá la tierra."<sup>16</sup> Viau's political alignment with the oppressed, which he expressed various times in both poems, and his vision of a future "de to-

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12 Jacques Viau Rénaud, "El nuevo torreón." *Testimonio: Revista de Artes y Letras* 2 (1964): 138. Este número de la revista se encuentra en el Departamento de Hemeroteca, Archivo General de la Nación, Santo Domingo.

13 Chetty, "Archives of Afro-Affirmation," 131.

14 Viau Rénaud, "El nuevo torreón," 138.

15 Jacques Viau Rénaud, "Canción de gesta," *Testimonio: Revista de Artes y Letras* 8 (1964): 90. Biblioteca Pedro Mir, Dpto. Hemeroteca, Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo.

16 Viau Rénaud, "Canción de gesta," 91.



dos / y para todos” took precedence for him over an explicitly black-centered poetics or political project.<sup>17</sup>

Nonetheless, there is a way to read something like a black politics into Viau’s work. In an interview with Luis Alfredo Torres, Viau makes explicit the political commitment to the people that he voices in these poems. Published May 1, 1965 in *¡Ahora!*, within a week of the outset of the Revolución de Abril, the interview reveals Viau’s view of the public importance of culture and literature. He argues, “A través de [escritores dominicanos] es difícil conocer al pueblo porque se ha hecho poco para reconstruir y valorizar las aspiraciones y creaciones artísticas de aquél.” His solution: “La única forma de realizar un verdadero aporte a la literatura mundial es revelando nuestras dormidas esencias nacionales.”<sup>18</sup> In fact, in a poem written in 1963 but published posthumously, “Estoy tratando de hablaros de mi patria,” Viau strove to reveal how those “dormidas esencias nacionales” are not Dominican-specific, but instead span the entire island, unifying the struggles facing the people (“el pueblo”) of Haiti and the Dominican Republic: “He querido hablaros de mi patria, / de mis dos patrias, / de mi Isla / que ha mucho dividieron los hombres / allí donde se aparearon para crear un río.”<sup>19</sup> Viau would confirm this island-spanning commitment by giving his life in defense of Dominican sovereignty while fighting in the Revo-

17 Viau Rénaud, “Canción de gesta,” 90.

18 Luis Alfredo Torres, “Ámbito de la cultura,” *¡Ahora!*, May 1, 1965, 21. Archivo Histórico Ahor@digital. <http://biblioteca.funlode.net.do/rahorafb/HTML/No.0106/index.html>.

19 Jacques Viau Rénaud, *Y en tu nombre elevaré mi voz: Poesía y homenaje a su gesta*, ed. por Ángela Hernández (Santo Domingo, Fundación Juan Bosch, 2015), 24. The poem was first published in Spanish in Viau Rénaud, *Poesía completa* (CEDEE, 1985; Cielo Naranja, 2006 and 2010). French translations of the poem appear in *J’essaie de vous parler de ma patrie*, ed. por Sophie Marifé y Daniel Huttinot (Montréal: Mémoire d’encrier, 2018), and the French-Spanish bilingual publication, *Mi patria, mis dos patrias, mi isla (Poemas de Jacques Viau Rénaud, hijo de Haití y de la República Dominicana)*, ed. y trad. por Jean-Marie Bourjolly (Montréal: CIDIHCA, 2018). There is also an English-language translation alongside the Spanish original: “I’m Trying to Tell You of My Country / Estoy tratando de hablaros de mi patria,” trad. por Amaury Rodríguez y Raj Chetty, *The Black Scholar: Journal of Black Studies and Research* 45, n.º 2 (2015): 61-64.

lución de Abril against the 1965 U.S. invasion, one month shy of his 24<sup>th</sup> birthday. The Dominican historian, Roberto Cassá, one-time student of Viau—Viau taught French and literature at the Liceo Dominicano and privately—recalls visiting Viau frequently in the days between his injury and his death. For Cassá, Viau “pasó a representar un elemento simbólico de la relación con los haitianos; porque a pesar de que había crecido en el país y hablaba perfectamente el español, sin el mínimo acento, se le identificaba como un dominico-haitiano, un haitiano-dominicano. ...En el momento en que fallece adquiere una dimensión nueva de solidaridad dominico-haitiana, y creo que en ese sentido su muerte inmediatamente tuvo una repercusión importante.”<sup>20</sup> Historian Andres L. Mateo similarly calls Viau a symbol for the entire island.<sup>21</sup> At the time of the Revolución de Abril, both Cassá and Mateo were young men of the emergent island-based Dominican Left, and both had grown up in the latter years of the Trujillo dictatorship.

In addition to publishing work in *Testimonio*, Viau participated actively in *Arte y Liberación* prior to the Revolución de Abril and continued in *El Frente Cultural* during the revolution, establishing close associations with the writers and artists, like the painter Silvano Lora and writer Antonio Lockward Artiles, who would later form the literary groups *El Puño* and *La Isla*.<sup>22</sup> Viau’s legacy has been cemented among the small circle of Dominican poets and artists among whom he circulated or who write and work in his spirit of Haitian-Dominican solidarity.<sup>23</sup> This solidarity, however, is rarely articu-

20 Citado en Pedro Pablo Fernández. *La otra guerra de abril: La batalla cultural de los constitucionalistas* (Santo Domingo: Biblioteca Nacional Pedro Henríquez Ureña, 2009), 157.

21 Andrés L. Mateo, “Prólogo: El valor de un símbolo,” en *Y en tu nombre elevaré mi voz*, 14

22 Formed in 1962 by the painters Silvano Lora, Iván Tovar, and José Ramírez Conde and the painter and sculptor Antonio Toribio, the group *Arte y Liberación* laid the politico-cultural groundwork for the explosion of revolutionary cultural work that would be a crucial element of the Revolución de Abril. It brought together visual and plastic artists, poets, theater artists, and musicians around a commitment to using art to intervene in social and political realities. This same group would form *El Frente Cultural* during the Revolución de Abril.

23 Viau Rénaud also remains important to Dominicans of Haitian descent

lated in terms of racial identity or blackness even as many of the poets who have honored him in their poetry and writing are black Dominicans who have foregrounded racial blackness in their literary work and politics, such as the poets Matteo Morrison and Alexis Gómez Rosa, and even prominent political figure José Francisco Peña Gómez.<sup>24</sup> On the one hand, such explicit identity assertions have not been central to these figures' respective political orientations, even as they all have participated, in various forms, in anti-racist struggle. The point here is to suggest that a black political orientation need not necessarily include explicitly enunciated black self-assertion.

Additionally, Viau was quite light-skinned, “casi blanco,” and came from a degree of class privilege.<sup>25</sup> In a “pigmentocratic” Dominican context, which mirrors the wider Caribbean color-based social hierarchy that Frantz Fanon diagnoses in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Viau's color and class markers make solidarity based on black self-identity less viable.<sup>26</sup> As Matthew Smith has pointed out, his father, Alfred Viau, was “a [light-skinned] judge from a prominent middle-class family” who felt persecuted under Haitian President Dumarsais Estimé's *noiriste* government.<sup>27</sup> In 1946, Alfred Viau's older son Gérard killed a black rival in a confrontation over a university scholarship Gérard had won to study abroad but was revoked because the *noiriste* government did not want the scholarship to go to a mulatto. Gérard subsequently was killed in

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and their struggles today. See, for example, the online activist network, la Red de Encuentro Dominicano-Haitiano Jacques Viau: <https://www.facebook.com/RedJacquesViau/>.

24 Morrison's poem, “Homenaje de luces,” has been collected in *En tu nombre elevaré mi voz*, 176. Peña Gómez's poem, “Canto Revolucionario,” is collected in Fernández's *La otra guerra de abril*, 111-113.

25 Jean-Baptiste Marckenson, “Jacques Viau Rénaud en la primera línea de fuego en la Guerra de Abril de 1965,” *Camino Real: Revista de la Fundación Juan Bosch* 17 (2010): 66.

26 Jim Sidanius, Yesilernis Peña, y Mark Sawyer, “Inclusionary Discrimination: Pigmentocracy and Patriotism in the Dominican Republic,” *Political Psychology* 22, n.º 4 (2001): 827-51.

27 Matthew Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict, and Political Change, 1934-1957* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 119.

clashes that threatened to erupt into a “color war,” prompting the elder Viau to move his family, including seven-year-old Jacques, eventually ending up in the Dominican Republic.<sup>28</sup> From the Dominican Republic, Alfred Viau continued to be critical of the Haitian *noiriste* government, even penning a paean to Rafael Trujillo, titled “Impressions of the Hospitable and Democratic Dominican Republic during the era of Trujillo.”<sup>29</sup> Later, after returning to Haiti in 1956 as President Paul Magloire’s regime was waning, Alfred Viau would be a minor candidate in the presidential race that culminated in Francois Duvalier’s election.

This biographical information should sound a cautionary note against an easy reading of Viau, and in particular his poetry, into black cultural politics. While in no way are his father’s politics necessarily reflected in his own, it would be unwise to ignore the relative privilege he had as the son of a mulatto professional, even as his family was in exile in the Dominican Republic. This is particularly true when treating Viau’s work for themes of blackness, race, Africa, and Haiti, what might be circumscribed as topics in black diasporic thought. While Viau’s poetry, his Dominican literary associations, and his militancy point to a clear commitment to leftist and anti-imperialist politics, his relation to questions of diaspora—Haitian, African, black—is more complicated. While he occasionally explicitly aligned his work with wider 1960s anti-racist currents, as in “A un líder negro asesinado,” his elegy to the Black American activist Medgar Evers who was assassinated in 1963, more often his work opposed forms of class-based oppression and imperialism. This is not to say there is a clear line between these two forms of progressive politics, but only to stress the interpretive work required to build a case for reading Viau into black internationalist thought.<sup>30</sup>

28 Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 120.

29 Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 142.

30 For one strong example of this kind of interpretive work, see the opening section of Alanna Lockward’s “*Saint Domingue* Kins in the Continent of Black Consciousness,” Commissioned originally by Centro León and JP Morgan for a volume on Contemporary Dominican Art, 2014. See, too, Miguel D. Mena, “Viau

Writing about the same lines from “Canción de gesta” quoted above, American literary critic Dawn Stinchcomb asserts that the poem “makes no specific mention of the role that race and racism play in oppression in any country; however, the above stanza [“Morirá el negro, / el blanco / el mongol / y el mestizo, nacerá el hombre”] demonstrates that the poet was keenly aware of the divisiveness of racial labels. His choice not to address specific concerns about race may be due to his own oppression in the Dominican Republic as a black Haitian dedicated to the creation of a country that might consider him human above all else.”<sup>31</sup> Stinchcomb’s reading is a strained one. On the one hand, Viau’s elegiac poem to Medgar Evers does make a very specific and explicit “mention of the role of race and racism” in the United States. More to the point of this article, however, the assumption that Viau was “a black Haitian” reveals a sort of “Haitian exceptionalism,” somewhere between what Nadège Clitandre has usefully distinguished as “negative exceptionalism that causes Haiti to disappear and reinforces problematic stereotypes, and the positive exceptionalism that centers Haiti in history and promotes regional, African diasporic, and global affiliations.”<sup>32</sup>

Stinchcomb’s comment clearly derives from a black diasporic investment in centering Haiti and the Haitian Revolution as a beacon of radical black struggle that challenged white supremacist colonialism, affirmed the value of black people, and demonstrated the centrality of black people to modern history and modern thought. Nonetheless, it presumes a uni-

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Rénaud, Jacques,” *Dictionary of Caribbean and Afro-Latin American Biography*, ed. by Franklin W. Knight and Henry Louis Gates (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

31 Dawn Stinchcomb, *The Development of Literary Blackness in the Dominican Republic* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 81.

32 Nadège Clitandre, “Haitian Exceptionalism in the Caribbean and the Project of Rebuilding Haiti,” *The Journal of Haitian Studies* 17, n.º 2 (2011): 147. See, too, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “The Odd and the Ordinary: Haiti, the Caribbean and the World,” *Cimarrón: New Perspectives on the Caribbean* 3, n.º.2 (1990): 3-12. For an extension of Trouillot’s and Clitandre’s respective arguments into a study of the way the Haitian diaspora becomes exceptionalized, see Régine Jean-Charles, “The Myth of Diaspora Exceptionalism: Wyclef Jean Performs *Jaspora*,” *American Quarterly* 66, n.º.3 (2014): 835-52.

versal black sociopolitical subjectivity, distinct from a universal black self-identity, for all Haitians. Such a presumption doesn't quite fit someone like Jacques Viau. To be sure, my point here sidesteps the question of whether or not Jacques Viau Rénaud recognized himself as black—in all likelihood, he did, considering Haiti's positive reclamation, revindication, and universalization of the term *nègre* dating to its earliest constitutions—but does so in order to raise the question of why self-recognition as black serves for Stinchcomb as the basis for an evaluation of Viau's commitment to black cultural politics. How might we read Viau under the rubrics of race, blackness, diaspora beyond explicit self-recognition as a black subject? How might we, instead, see his work as part of black internationalism?

One place to begin to answer this question is through an analysis of Viau's collection of poems, *Permanencia del llanto*, which he authorized Antonio Lockward Artiles, his close friend and comrade, to publish after his death. *Permanencia del llanto* has received little critical attention in the UNITED STATES, in the Dominican Republic, and in Haiti. Sophie Mariñez, one scholar who has analyzed the poem, argues that *Permanencia* produces an "image de similitude" that "est fondée sur le constat de la condition d'oppression matérielle partagée par les deux peuples, condition contre laquelle il appelle au combat."<sup>33</sup> In other words, as with his poems in *Testimonio*, *Permanencia del llanto* links Haitians and Dominicans across the island through the material oppression they face at the hands of elites in both countries.

Nonetheless, *Permanencia del llanto* presents this sense of unity between the two halves of the island and between the people and Africa in a way that articulates with black diasporic poetics that deserves to be drawn out through the work of interpretation. The poem registers multiple diasporas, Haitian and African, while at the same belonging to the Dominican Republic, through a Haitian-Dominican whose Spanish-language poetry and political activism force Dominican national identity to reckon with the border-crossing he and his poetry

perform. First published posthumously in September 1965 by El Frente Cultural, *Permanencia del llanto* features nineteen poems Viau selected before his death, and a prologue penned shortly after his death by Lockward Artiles.<sup>34</sup> In fact, I want to spend some time with Lockward Artiles's prologue, precisely because it offers an interpretation that reveals how a black internationalism can be constructed out of Viau's work.

To frame his short prologue, Lockward Artiles focuses on the way Viau's collection asks the question, "qué ha sido del hombre?," directed specifically at Dominicans and Haitians.<sup>35</sup> Lockward Artiles laments that artists in the Americas often give in to the easier option, namely to lose oneself, rather than search for this still undefined man. He thus becomes hidden, because, says Lockward Artiles, he has learned to be ashamed of himself. Lockward Artiles gives the reader some clue as to who this man is, naming him "ese antillano fugitivo."<sup>36</sup> He then runs through a list of early-twentieth century Caribbean writers who have found this man, and where: Jean Price-Mars, in the elderly uncle; Nicolás Guillén, in the Cuban son; Langston Hughes, in his dreams. The list concretizes the identity of the "antillano fugitivo," whose black and African identity, Lockward Artiles notes, is obscured by Dominicans who are "añorando las puras esencias del hombre universal, intemporal, ahistórico."<sup>37</sup>

What is clear is that Lockward Artiles is creating a version of Viau and Viau's poetry that places him squarely within the black internationalist tradition represented both by the authors mentioned above—Price-Mars, Guillén, Hughes—and the black French-language writers in Paris behind the journal *Légitime Défense*; the négritude triumvirate of Léopold Seng-

34 That collection, also available at Marxists.org, includes three pieces in honor of then recently deceased Viau, Juan José Ayuso's "Canto a Jacques y a los otros," Miguel Alfonseca's "Diario de Guerra (Funeral del poeta combatiente)," and Pedro Caro's "Habrá una isla un día."

35 Antonio Lockward Artiles, prologue to *Permanencia del llanto*, by Jacques Viau Rénaud (Santo Domingo: Publicaciones del Frente Cultural, 1965), i.

36 Lockward Artiles, prologue, ii.

37 Lockward Artiles, prologue, ii.

hor (Senegal), Aimé Césaire (Martinique), and Léon Damas (French Guiana); and Jacques Stephen Alexis (Haiti). In other words, Lockward Artilles situates Viau's *Permanencia del llanto* within wider and longer movements as a way to assert aesthetic and political value in black cultural production. This is the Viau that Lockward Artilles wants to remember, positioned in the way that Lockward Artilles wants to position him. For the purposes of this essay, however, whether or not this is who Viau "actually" was is less germane than understanding that Lockward Artilles's move is part of a black diasporic sensibility, and at a time well before the largescale Dominican migration to the United States that too much scholarship continues to credit for Dominicans' "racial awakening." This black diasporic sensibility is one that theorist Brent Hayes Edwards has described as "an ambitious and radically decentered analysis of transnational circuits of culture and politics that are resistant or exorbitant to the frames of nations and continents." Crucially, Edwards continues, "the 'African diaspora' is formulated expressly through an attempt to come to terms with diverse and cross-fertilized black traditions of resistance and colonialism."<sup>38</sup> While Lockward Artilles is much more interested in the cross-fertilizations than the diversity, his reference to black writers across multiples languages and nations forces us to consider the constitutive differences between their various articulations of black affirmation. To put it differently, perhaps simplistically, black cultural politics are not one.

Sometimes these politics aren't even black, at least not in the normative sense of blackness that some black nationalists try to project as global. This, I submit, is what makes Viau's poem—and Lockward Artilles's prologue—so interesting: across *Permanencia del llanto* there is no explicit affirmation of a black cultural politics nor an explicit embrace of what might be called a pan-African sensibility or a black diasporic imagination. In the narrowest sense of black cultural politics, then, Viau's poems do not belong. What to make of Lockward Artilles's prologue, then?

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38 Brent Hayes Edwards, "The Uses of Diaspora," *Social Text* 66 (2001): 52-53.



That prologue must be seen as a practice of reading that inscribes black internationalism into Viau's poetry. This isn't to say that the prologue is merely a reading, nor that *Permanencia del llanto* has no place in black cultural production. Instead, criticism requires that we determine what practice structures Lockward Artilles's reading and then evaluate the appropriateness of such a practice. In my view, Lockward Artilles's practice is motivated by multiple interlocking desires: to foreground Viau as a poet who belongs to a Caribbean tradition of seeking after the black «antillano fugitivo», to assert in 1965 the general absence of this tradition in the Dominican Republic, and to offer Viau as inspiration for other Dominican writers to take up the task of making this tradition a Dominican one. In choosing to read Viau this way, however, Lockward Artilles also radically opens up the very terms of inclusion into black diasporic thought and practice.

Viau opens *Permanencia del llanto* with a question: «En qué preciso momento se separó la vida de nosotros, en qué lugar, / en qué recodo del camino?»<sup>39</sup> The syntax of the question renders the object of separation ambiguous. Is it an alienation between life and subjectivity, between the «us» and the «life»? Or is it a rupture amidst what once was a collective «life of us,» alluding perhaps to the island's division into two nations? The poem asks a few lines later, «Qué ha sido de nosotros?»<sup>40</sup> While Lockward Artilles focuses on the more broadly humanistic question that comes later in the poem—«qué ha sido del hombre?»—this early reference to an «us» suggests that Viau is equally interested in collectivity as he is in subjectivity. Viau's interest in subjectivity might be read, contra Lockward Artilles, not in terms of an explicitly black politics, but instead in terms of a collectivity that includes attention to black politics.

Alternately, in his brief prologue, Lockward Artilles simply may not make explicit the careful interpretive work that at-

39 Jacques Viau Rénaud, *Permanencia del llanto* (Santo Domingo: Publicaciones del Frente Cultural, 1965), 1.

40 Viau Rénaud, *Permanencia del llanto*, 1.

tends his reading of black politics in Viau's poetry. Throughout the collection of poems in *Permanencia del llanto* Viau focuses on workers' struggles and their intimate connection to the land through their labor, but nowhere does he name these workers as black or otherwise racialize them explicitly. When Viau evokes the humility and anonymity of the worker, homeless and forgotten, he adds, "Lo arrojaron en la parte trasera de la casa."<sup>41</sup> The phrase indirectly recalls the Dominican—and wider Spanish Caribbean—vernacular chiding of those who attempt to hide one's black or African ancestry behind one's ear ("el negro detrás la oreja") or black or African ancestors in the recesses of the house ("y tu abuela, ¿dónde está?"). The line, however, is not about the Dominican worker hiding or obscuring his own blackness but focuses attention on the unidentified but clearly powerful "they" who have cast him to the back. Even if the lines are much more explicit about their class politics, race subtly but crucially becomes intertwined with these class-based critiques.

A similarly subtle evocation of black struggle occurs a few poems later. A section of the poem inquires, "En qué lugar del corazón dar forma a la venganza? / En qué rincón deshabitado recomponer la alegría?", and then immediately answers: "Toda la prole de los callejones, / Toda la gente de la periferia."<sup>42</sup> Again, attention to spatial references—in this case the geography of the city—reveals what for Dominicans would be recognized as impoverished spaces that are predominantly black, from alleys and side-streets to the peripheral barrios surrounding the capital city, Santo Domingo, where Viau wrote lived, wrote, and publicly read his poetry.

The most powerful, and powerfully indirect, reference to blackness and Africanness comes near the close of the collection. The poem labeled "XVI" calls on a personified

41 Viau Rénaud, *Permanencia del llanto*, 4.

42 Viau Rénaud, *Permanencia del llanto*, 12.

breeze and ship—“Dura brisa, / ruminante nave de transparentes remos...peregrina nave”—to show the poet “el polvo de otros continentes, / las hojas de otros árboles.”<sup>43</sup> The poet has a specific purpose in mind: “Acumula en mí los olores de otra selva, / de otros bosques, / quiero penetrar en todo lo que nunca mis ojos han tocado, / en todo lo que me es lejano, / en toda lejanía.”<sup>44</sup> A ship journeying to an unknown forest, jungle, and continent conjures images of a symbolic return to an ancestral Africa that has become unknown over time and distance. However, the reference to multiple continents instead of the ancestral continent makes it much less certain that Viau is exclusively after Africa here. While Africa may be implicated in the continents, the lines suggest a broader desire to know the afflictions of oppressed peoples across the world.

The unity offered in the poems is a unity of oppression, which suggests a common racialized oppression but is not reducible to it. Viau would have been well aware of the way even a black affirming politics, in the wrong hands, could end up oppressing the very black people it appears to be serving. Of course, this does not excuse the also oppressive conditions black Haitians historically have faced often under mulatto leaders; however, the poem’s refusal to tie itself to an explicitly articulated black politics protects against an overly celebratory and uncritical embrace of black-centered politics.<sup>45</sup> Such an embrace obscures the way black-centered politics do not guarantee freedom from

43 Viau Rénaud, *Permanencia del llanto*, 35.

44 Viau Rénaud, *Permanencia del llanto*, 35.

45 In a brief comparative study of Dominican and Haitian popular culture, Rachelle Charlier Doucet usefully traces Haitian elites’ early 20<sup>th</sup>-century “negación ideológica de la población negra” and underscores that “el prejuicio de color, íntimamente unido al prejuicio de clase, todavía desgarrar a nuestra sociedad.” In “Haïti et la République dominicaine: La culture populaire peut-elle aider à tisser des liens durables entre les deux pays? / Haïtí y la República Dominicana: ¿Puede la cultura popular ayudar a tejer lazos duraderos entre los dos países?” *Les relations Haïti-République dominicaine*, special issue of *Conjonction: La revue franco-haïtienne de l’Institut Français en Haïti* 226 (2014): 37.

class oppression for marginalized people, and perhaps this helps explain why Viau refuses to name blackness explicitly, not, as Stinchcomb would have it, because of “his own oppression in the Dominican Republic as a black Haitian.” What’s more, to read Viau’s poetry as part of the development of a black literary tradition in the Dominican Republic threatens to fetishize his Haitianness as coextensive with blackness. Again, there is a compelling way to read Viau’s poetry as intersecting with black cultural politics; however, such a reading depends on interpretive work that extracts black cultural discourse from poetry that does not announce itself explicitly as black. This is the interpretative work toward which Lockward Artiles’s 1965 prologue pushes Viau’s readers, the work required to recognize Viau’s work as part of black internationalism alongside Price-Mars, *Légitime Défense*, Guillén, Hughes, the Césaires, Senghor. Reflecting years later on the meaning of Viau’s life, Lockward Artiles states, “en las Antillas lo popular iba íntimamente ligado a la actitud del negro hacia su raza. ...[el] estudio del cimarronaje cultural que fue una aspiración del hijo de Alfred Viau en su habitación del Hotel Universal en la calle Arzobispo Nouel en Santo Domingo en los años sesenta.”<sup>46</sup>

Following Lockward Artiles, although Viau’s poems, from those published in *Testimonio* during his short life to the posthumously published *Permanencia del llanto*, do not explicitly engage pan-African or black diasporic thought, they are bound up with the 1960s Dominican left’s focus on oppressed classes in the Dominican Republic. It is no large leap to see that focus as the source for black transnational political activity. This interpretive leap, which Lockward Artiles makes, contains a radical implication: it challenges the scholarly and popular indictments of Dominicans for being anti-black, self-hating, and anti-Haitian. Instead, the same

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46 Antonio Lockward Artiles, “Jacques Viau Rénaud en la generación del sesenta.” *Haitianos y Cocolos en la literatura dominicana* (Santo Domingo: Editora Universitaria-UASD, 2009), 55.

analytical practice that places Viau into a tradition of black diasporic thought can be used to investigate those Dominican racial articulations, performances, and discourses—in literature, theater, carnival, music—that too often are unrecognized or misrecognized by scholars of African and black diasporas. Both Viau's mid-1960s poetry and Lockward Artilles's contemporaneous reading of it represent an alternative Dominican poetics and an alternative critical tradition, both of which affirm connections to Africa and blackness, even if indirectly. Perhaps more crucially, Lockward Artilles's work explicitly aligned itself and Viau's poetry with wider black internationalist currents that preceded and were contemporaneous with it.

As with Cartagena Portalatín's *Brigadas Dominicanas*, the literary journal *Testimonio* and Viau's and Lockward Artilles's respective work are important indices in the 1960s of a concerted but unrecognized effort to come to terms with both the Dominican Republic's African past and its black and mulatto present, through an emphasis on socioeconomic struggle. All of this work suggests that in addition to turning to black struggles abroad, Dominican activists, writers, and intellectuals today can draw upon island-based racial discourses and racial projects—a usable past—as they work to forge more progressive racial agendas. This usable past includes all the 1960s literary and cultural production, from journals to poetry to fiction to theater, and the groups that met together regularly to circulate it.

However, those 60s literary and arts groups and journals were short-lived, often because of internal fractures. Attempting to re-establish the sort of cross-disciplinary, progressive collaboration that the earlier groups and journals had promised, in 1973 the group Bloque de Jóvenes Escritores formed. For the purposes of this essay, Bloque represents another instance of island-based writing about racial blackness in the Dominican Republic and in relation

to wider black social movements, and in this case explicitly so. *Bloque* does emerge as Dominican emigration is increasing rapidly, particularly to urban centers in the United States (primarily New York), and shifting demographically from more lighter-skinned and middle class migrants of the 1950s and early 1960s to more working-class Dominicans of the later 1960s and into the 1970s, Dominicans whose class position often articulates with darker skin. Nonetheless, this demographic shift in the color and class position of Dominican im/migrants was still in process in that mid-1970s conjuncture, and *Bloque*'s attention to racial blackness cannot be attributed to the "apprenticeship in black consciousness" that Dominicans in the UNITED STATES receive.<sup>47</sup> Much less is it possible to say that the people associated with *Bloque* experienced what Frank Moya Pons outlined in 1981: a "real discovery of black origins" that "has been a result of the behavior of the returning migrants who go back to their communities transformed into new social agents of modernity, capitalism, and racial emancipation."<sup>48</sup>

Instead, even if articulating with these wider Black internationalist currents, including in the United States, *Bloque* also emerged from Dominican-specific efforts to confront the nation's racial past and present. Paulino Ramos states that *Bloque de Jóvenes Escritores* "trató de romper el aislamiento, y la desintegración de los agrupamientos anteriores, así como impulsar una actividad literaria fecunda," publishing the journal *Bloque: Revista Crítica de Arte, Lit-*

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47 Flores, *The Diaspora Strikes Back*, 48.

48 Frank Moya Pons, "Dominican National Identity and Return Migration," Occasional Papers No. 1 (Center for Latin American Studies, University of Florida, Gainesville, 1981), 32-33. Silvio Torres-Saillant makes a somewhat similar point about the Dominican diaspora's positive effect on blackness and Africanity in the Dominican Republic, though inflected as possibility, rather than as established or guaranteed outcome: "The Tribulations of Blackness: Stages in Dominican Racial Identity," *Callaloo* 23 (2000): 1109. Torres-Saillant's article and Flores's book have been widely influential, the two pieces cited over a combined 600 times.

*eratura y Ciencias Sociales*.<sup>49</sup> With Mateo Morrison as *jefe de redacción* and Lockward Artilles, Héctor Amarante, and Rafael Abréu Mejía as *editores asociados*, *Bloque* featured the collaboration of not only many of the artists, writers, and critics comprising the various groups and journals in the 1960s, but also historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and ethnomusicologists. It was a literary bloc in the strongest interdisciplinary sense.

In *Bloque's* second issue (September-October 1973), the opening editorial, "Nuestra Opinión," flags the importance of studying "la problemática negra" but stresses a relational approach that takes into account both particular and universal contexts. I quote the opening paragraph at length because it reveals a rich black internationalist sensibility:

Un punto importante con el cual podría contribuirse en nuestro país al estudio de la problemática negra (a los dos niveles que es necesario abordarla: particular y universal), es el que consistiría en determinar la forma [cómo] ve el dominicano la lucha sostenida por el negro en diversas latitudes del planeta, y las posibilidades que habría de que, informado debidamente nuestro pueblo de la realidad de esa lucha, se opere un cambio en la concepción negativa que acerca de éste le han legado casi cinco siglos de historiografía, literatura, arte y teoría y práctica políticas francamente antinegras.<sup>50</sup>

Even though the editorial eventually turns to the United States, it does so not to privilege racial struggle there but to comment on one case in a longer and more global "lucha sostenida por el negro en diversas latitudes del plane-

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49 Alejandro Paulino Ramos, "Agrupaciones culturales, 1960-1970: Los grupos literarios," *Historia Dominicana*. 20 de noviembre de 2005, acceso el 9 de octubre 2021, <https://historiadominicana.blogspot.com/2005/11/agrupaciones-culturales-1960-1970.html>.

50 "Nuestra Opinión." *Bloque: Revista crítica de arte, literatura y ciencias sociales* 1, n.º 2 (1973): 3.

ta.” In other words, I argue that this editorial and *Bloque* more broadly reveals that a racial “apprenticeship” in the United States is insufficient to explain how Dominicans’ commitment to black struggle develops, particularly for island-based Dominicans. In fact, when the editorial turns to the increasing number of migrant or immigrant Dominicans facing racial struggle in the United States, instead of exalting their experiences and voices it is stridently critical of these early diasporic Dominicans’ reports and judgments about “el negro de Harlem”:

Sin tener la más mínima noción de cómo se desenvuelve la vida del negro en aquel país; sin conocer siquiera las características más generales del proceso social norteamericano; cargando con un pesado fardo de prejuicios antinegros llevados desde su pequeña isla del Caribe, el inmigrante dominicano ve al negro de Harlem, no como al representante de una raza humillada y expoliada, justamente rebelado contra un sistema deshumanizante y criminal, sino al ser marginal que no desea integrarse a la actividad común de una nación próspera y trabajadora.<sup>51</sup>

The problem becomes more “grave,” the editorial stresses, because “cuando ese emigrante regresa a su país ayuda a reforzar con su errado criterio los prejuicios antinegros existentes entre la población dominicana.”<sup>52</sup> The editorial refutes the idea that Dominicans of the period—i.e. the late 1960s and early 1970s—were unaware of their own society’s historical and contemporary anti-blackness and were unwilling to confront it directly, and that the necessary racial transformation would occur as a result of racially awakened returning Dominican migrants. What’s more, *Bloque* is part of a broader politically and culturally progressive tradition in Dominican journals, groups, and social science research during the first two decades after Trujillo’s *ajusticiamiento*—

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51 “Nuestra Opinión,” 4.

52 “Nuestra Opinión,” 4.



in many cases archivally buried, like *Bloque*, but nonetheless available—and specifically attentive to anti-racist work.<sup>53</sup>

The same *Bloque* editorial includes a celebratory but critical reflection on “El coloquio sobre la presencia de África en las Antillas y el Caribe” earlier that same year, July 26-August 4, 1973, at the Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo.<sup>54</sup> The issue also includes the first of a two-part article in Spanish entitled, “La literature negra de los Estados Unidos de America,” by the African American scholar, Carolyn Fowler Gerald, an early theorist of Black Aesthetics and, at the time, a professor at Clark Atlanta University. Fowler Gerald’s article presents a condensed but substantial literary history of black American writing, with sub-headings devoted to Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Charles Chestnutt, W. E. B. DuBois, and Langston Hughes (other black American writers, including women like Phyllis Wheatley and Jessie Fausset, are mentioned in the course of the article). The opening editorial and Fowler Gerald’s article are evidence that there were important and influential Dominican writers, artists, activists, and intellectuals—and students at the public university—who were interested in pursuing possibilities for racial struggle and affirmative black cultural work in their own nation and in a broader, pan-Caribbean context, while also in conversation with U.S. black struggle.

Indeed, the Dominicans writing in *Bloque* demonstrate that a truly internationalist approach cannot ignore the contributions made by writers on the island who may or may not have migrated to the United States but are nonetheless fully versed in both U.S. black struggles and worldwide ones, as also confirmed by articles in *Testimonio*, Viau’s poetry and Lockward Artilés’s reading of it, and other work during the

53 For a brief overview of intellectuals in the 1960s and 1970s offering new ways of approaching and writing about Dominican society and history, see April Mayes’s introduction to *The Mulatto Republic: Class, Race, and Dominican National Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014).

54 “Nuestra Opinión,” 5-6.

Dominican 1960s and 1970s. What's more, the editors of *Bloque* offer a much more productive approach to interrogating black struggle on the island, an approach not merely critical of dominant Dominican national narratives on racial identity. The editorial also offers a relational approach to black struggles, positing the need for a study of the particularities of Dominican race relations; particularities in other sites, including but not limited to the US; and more global or universal struggles for black political and cultural liberation.