
INFRASTRUCTURE AND CARIBBEAN MIGRATION IN PANAMA, MIDDLE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES: AN INDIRECT APPROACH BASED ON HEMEROGRAPHIC AND SECONDARY SOURCES*

*Juan Santiago Correa Restrepo*¹

* DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18601/01245996.v25n49.08> Recepción: 13-01-2023, modificación final: 27-04-2023, aceptación: 31-05-2023. Sugerencia de citación: Correa, J. S. (2023). Infrastructure and Caribbean migration in Panama, middle 19th and early 20th centuries: an indirect approach based on hemerographic and secondary sources. *Revista de Economía Institucional*, 25(49), 165-188.

¹ Doctor en Sociología Jurídica. Decano, Facultad de Ciencias Económico Administrativas, Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano, Bogotá, Colombia, [Juansj.correar@utadeo.edu.co], [<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3958-3701>].

Infraestructura y migración caribeña en Panamá, mediados del siglo XIX y principios del XX: una aproximación indirecta a partir de fuentes hemerográficas y secundarias

Resumen Este artículo analiza, desde una perspectiva en primer lugar historiográfica, utilizando, además, fuentes hemerográficas y primarias, cómo los procesos de construcción del ferrocarril y del Canal en Panamá desde mediados del siglo XIX hasta comienzos del XX, generaron dinámicas migratorias al interior del mar Caribe que han sido poco estudiados. Este estudio encuentra que existe un vector dominante de migración jamaicana hacia Panamá, aunque su magnitud no es fácil de cuantificar. Por lo que puede deducirse, esta población migrante se dedicó a la construcción como obreros calificados y no calificados, pero además que se asentó definitivamente en el Istmo.

Palabras clave: migraciones, infraestructura, historiografía, ferrocarril de Panamá, canal de Panamá; JEL: B27, B52, B55

Infrastructure and Caribbean migration in Panama, middle 19th and early 20th centuries: an indirect approach based on hemerographic and secondary sources

Abstract This article analyzes how the processes of construction of the railroad and the Canal in Panama from the mid-nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth, generated migratory dynamics from the Caribbean and other origins, with a historiographical perspective, and also using hemerographic and primary sources, that have been little studied. This study finds that there is a dominant vector of Jamaican migration to Panama, although its magnitude is not easy to quantify. From what can be deduced, this migrant population dedicated itself to construction as skilled and unskilled workers, but also settled definitively on the Isthmus.

Keywords: migrations, infrastructure, historiography, Panama Railroad, Panama Canal; JEL: B27, B52, B55

Infraestrutura e migração caribenha no Panamá, meados do século XIX e início do século XX: um enfoque indireto a partir de fontes hemerográficas e secundárias

Resumo Este artigo analisa, a partir de uma primeira perspectiva historiográfica, também utilizando fontes hemerográficas e primárias, como os processos de construção da ferrovia e do Canal no Panamá, de meados do século XIX ao início do século XX, geraram dinâmicas migratórias para o interior do Mar. Caribe que têm sido pouco estudados. Este estudo constata que existe um vetor dominante de migração jamaicana para o Panamá, embora sua magnitude não seja fácil de quantificar. Do que se pode deduzir, esta população migrante dedicou-se à construção como trabalhadores qualificados e não qualificados, mas também se instalou definitivamente no Istmo.

Palavras-chave: migrações, infraestrutura, historiografia, Estrada de Ferro do Panamá, Canal do Panamá; JEL: B27, B52, B55

Migration is the most important population process in the Americas. Whether we refer to the Bering Strait or speak of arrivals from Polynesia, our continent has been populated with migrants. The arrival of Europeans, coupled with the processes of conquest, colonialism, independence, and the attraction of capital at the beginning of the independence in Colombia and Panama, has been a constant variable since the 15th century. The social sciences, of course, have devoted attention to immigration. Given its own objectives, each discipline conducts its approach with different methods and questions, which simultaneously yields different analyses and answers that make certain facts visible, while others remain without resolution.

From the perspective of history, the gaps in knowledge about migration are mainly due to two reasons: first, it is an unexplored topic in the historiography, and second, the sources are insufficient or difficult to access. One of the most controversial issues in historiography is the relationship between migratory processes and the construction of railroad infrastructure in the current Panamanian territory in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The present study aims to demonstrate how the migratory phenomena that accompanied these infrastructure developments has been studied, albeit in a limited manner by different authors and with different objectives. Such inquiries highlight a complex population mobility process but leave unanswered questions in areas that need resolutions. Despite the limited availability of primary information on the topic, it is believed that searching and analyzing published press information during the study period can be a valuable source for filling existing gaps. This option is particularly relevant, as there is no evidence of other types of primary sources in Colombian archives that can be used for this purpose. Therefore, as will be seen in the second section, hemerographic sources become an important primary source for this work, which allow in some way to fill the mentioned gaps.

To achieve our objective, we will review relevant literature over the last 50 years to show the research interests and objectives, approaches, and results of such inquiries to outline a state of the art on the relationship between migrations and the construction of the Railroad and the Canal in Panama. The line that connects different authors and sources is the migration to Panama owing to the construction of the Panama Railroad, the French Canal and the U.S. Canal. Some themes are recurrent, and others are studied in a particular manner, which is the reason some research studies show greater consensus and developments as compared to others.

A chronology of such studies, apart from being a laborious task, can lead to misunderstandings or obvious or uninteresting results. Therefore, the works examined will be classified into two large sections oriented by the causes of the migratory process and the main topic covered. The first section, which consists of texts not directly related to migration but address it in some manner, is divided into three subsections: the first, which consists of works related to infrastructure construction processes²; the second includes studies on the population that resided in this area of Panama; and the last, focuses on works on specific migrant populations in the Isthmus of Panama. The second part of this article concentrate on the Antillean³ presence in the isthmus, approached at different times and by different scholars.

MIGRATION AS A SUBORDINATE THEME IN GENERAL HISTORIOGRAPHY: AN INDIRECT APPROACH TO A STATE OF THE ART

The studies on Antillean migration to Panama, linked to the construction of the Panama Railroad and the Canal, have traditionally been subordinated to sections of works on other issues, such as foreign investment, civil wars in the 19th century, among others, and have rarely been a central element of the research carried out. In this section, we will first review the studies carried out on the process of construction of large infrastructure projects in Panama and their relationship with migratory processes; in the second section, we will examine the works related to the demographic phenomena in Panama during this period; and finally, in the third section, we will analyze the contributions made by specific studies on the migration of specific population groups to the Isthmus of Panama.

² Migration can be defined as the process of movement of people from one place to another, within a country or between different countries, with the aim of establishing themselves temporarily or permanently in a new place. Migration can be driven by various factors such as economic, political, social, environmental, or cultural reasons. In this paper, the main driving force of migration being analyzed is the large infrastructure works in Panama in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.

³ For us, "Antillean" refers to a person who is native to or has links with one of the islands in the Caribbean, known as the Antilles. Historically, the term has also been used to refer to people descended from the original inhabitants of these islands, as well as people of African, European, Indigenous, or mixed ancestry who have inhabited the Antilles throughout the centuries.

WORKS ON INFRASTRUCTURE CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

Although there are many studies on the construction of the Panama Canal from different viewpoints and at different times, most of these ignore the migration issue or barely mention it or reduce it to a statistical summary.

To begin with, in *The path between the seas: the creation of the Panama Canal, 1870–1914*, McCullough (1977) focuses on the bibliography up to 1914 and on the primary sources useful for dealing with that construction. As the author focuses his interest on the canal project, the migration problem is reduced to statistical data, such as origin (USA, China, Antilles, and Spain) and the number of migrants who arrived as a labor force at the canal works, despite the author's attempts to explain the said population movement and describe the working conditions of these workers. As a rule, this approach will be found in the first group of works analyzed in this study.

Figueroa (1978) discusses the construction of the railroad and the French Canal in his study of Panamanian society in the 19th century, titled *Dominio y sociedad en el Panamá colombiano (1821–1903)*. Further, he reviews the history of Panama from when it was a part of Colombia, using an exhaustive historiography and statistical data that allows him to witness the impact of migration on the isthmus. The reference to figures obtained from other authors and the hypothesis that the migratory wave was caused by the need for labor tasks in the Panama in the 1800s are worth considering.

In *Hombres y ecología en Panamá*, Jaén (1981) dedicates an important section of his work to adaptations to the natural environment of the isthmus and strategies enabling this adaptation. First, he indicates statistical sources used to establish trends to understand the adaptation in times of construction of the French Canal and the U.S. Canal. He then focuses on the antecedents to contextualize tropical diseases, mortality rates, and geographic and demographic dynamics from the colonial period to the mid-19th century. Furthermore, he mainly focuses on mortality during the execution of the French and U.S. projects.

In *La tierra dividida: historia del Canal de Panamá y otros proyectos del canal ístmico*, Mack (1992) follows McCullough's route, dealing with different projects that took place in the canal area, but leaving the migratory phenomena in the background. However, with a sensible historiographical framework, he illustrates the problems presented in the initial stages of construction with the lack of native

labor and issues associated with recruiting and retaining workers who migrated to the canal project for extended periods of time. It is worth highlighting the interest in daily conditions that migrant workers had, and the aspects derived from these, such as wages and mortality rates, which the author accesses from different types of sources.

McGuinness (2001) examines the construction of the railroad and its impact on aspects of the Panamanian society in his work titled *In the path of empire: labor, land and liberty in Panama during the California gold rush, 1848–1860*. When dealing with the problem of labor, he highlights that the project was energized by the gold rush and consequent migration to the western US, and that there were issues associated with retaining workers owing to the increase in mortality, limited interest in residing in this area, and disobedience of some migrants. In *Aquellos tiempos de California: el ferrocarril de Panamá y la transformación de la zona de tránsito durante la fiebre del oro* (McGuinness, 2004), there are notable affinities with his previous work .

In Panama, during the construction of the U.S. Canal, Conniff (2004) reviews the historiography highlighting milestones of the canal phenomenon at the beginning of the 1900s. Moreover, migration in the isthmus remains a second-level matter, despite the author focusing on racism and marginalization of the migrant population during that period. According to the author, racial discrimination in the US was transferred to the isthmus during the construction of the canal, although Europeans and North Americans who arrived in the area were witnessed as an example of modernity. The author also notices environmental problems caused by the construction of the canal, such as depopulation of villages that had to be flooded to make way for the Gatun Lake dam, which resulted in internal migration.

Two works of Colombian historiography, *Inversión extranjera directa y construcción de ferrocarriles en Colombia: el caso del ferrocarril de Panamá* (1849–1869) (Correa, 2010) and *The Panamá Railroad Company o cómo Colombia perdió una Nación* (Correa, 2012), address various aspects of Panamanian history during the construction and operation of the railroad line. In the first work, the author examines the ideas for a route that would connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans through Panama and the role that foreign investment played in this process. The second work is a continuation of the previous one, although the author further studies the influence of foreign and local interest in the independence of Panama and the effects of these on the railroad and the interoceanic canal. Although

these studies do not focus on migration, they do dedicate space to address the phenomenon from the compilation of academic literature.

WORKS ON MIGRANTS IN THE CANAL ZONE

As mentioned before, there is a second group of studies on the population that resided in this area of Panama. This literature is focused on population or demographic phenomena, although migration is not the protagonist; instead, it is a small part of the works or one of the several elements that make up a larger theme.

In *La población del istmo de Panamá del siglo XVI al siglo XX: estudio sobre la población y los modos de organización de las economías, las sociedades y los espacios geográficos*, Jaén (1979) presents statistics from primary and secondary sources on migration between 1880 and 1920, focusing on population dynamics and aspects related to this in the isthmus since the colonial period. He mentions the arrival of multiple population groups and explains the reasons that led to this mobilization. Further, he illustrates the conditions of the arrival and settlement of migrant populations, including a section addressing the health, racial, discriminatory, and highly moralistic environment for those who accept enrollment in different projects for the construction of the canal, and aspects that make this work a mandatory reference for researchers addressing immigration issues.

In the compilation *El movimiento obrero en Panamá (1880–1914)*, Navas (1999) approaches the workers' struggle from different perspectives, starting from the beginning of the French Canal project to the 1900s. Navas bases his work on a review of primary sources and a great bibliographic component on different topics that can be used to characterize the reality of the worker at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Although migration is not the focus of the work, it is considered as a determinant of conditions experienced in the isthmus during the period examined. When analyzing the migrant population, he finds three groups: migrants with contracts from the Antillean areas, spontaneous migrants who were once employed in Panama, and only a small North American population, due low wages and unwillingness to be a part of the project. Finally, the author examines the precarious conditions of migrants working on the canal project, as well as the company's ties with others, such as the United Fruit Company, which was in charge of transferring laborers due to labor shortages.

In *El trabajo de las mujeres en la historia de la construcción del canal de Panamá*, Reyes (2000) attempts to compensate the oversight of the participation of women as a historical subject of study. It is an approach from the gender perspective, which explains the role of women because of migration and the lives of those who participated in the works of the canal. The author describes Panama as a “border zone,” where populations arrive to be transformed into floating groups and end up establishing themselves along the canal zone while it is being built. She also discusses how the company’s policies were discriminatory and even “fascist” not only in terms of “race” but also in terms of gender, combined with unsanitary conditions and violence, even in private spaces such as the family. While North American women were employed as teachers and administrators, discriminated in terms of salary, nonwhite women were doubly segregated and worked as laundresses, prostitutes, cooks, or saleswomen. Reyes concludes that the work of women in the construction of the Panama Canal was very valuable, but a little valued or studied.

In *La inmigración internacional en el caribe panameño vista a través de los censos*, Marín (2009) reveals the interest of demography in the changes that the isthmus’ population underwent at the beginning of the 20th century. Although Marín’s central interest is not immigration, she exposes elements to understand the evolution of the migrant population and the behavior of demographic growth in stages after the completion of the works. Complementing Reyes (2000), the author admits the ruptures that the family structure could have, but she reveals how many migrants who arrived or settled in Panama did so with their families. She also highlights that once the works were completed, the population concentrated in Colón and Panama was heterogeneously distributed to other productive sectors outside North America.

In *Las migraciones laborales en las islas del caribe*, Johnson (2011) offers the only work whose specific subject is migration, although highlighting that it was not an exclusive phenomenon of the Panama Railroad and the subsequent canal zone. Conversely, she shows how migrations in the Antilles were a constant fact. Jamaica is the most notable of the cases studied; the author identifies the island’s population growth and subsequent unemployment generated by the inability to employ the entire population in productive tasks as the prominent cause of migration. This generalized poverty created conditions for the population to leave in search of employment and never return, generating diasporas of Antillean islanders in the US and Central American countries.

WORKS ON SPECIFIC MIGRANT POPULATIONS IN THE ISTHMUS OF PANAMA

Academic work on the migration of specific population groups is scarce. We have witnessed how the recurring subject is the construction of infrastructure—construction of the Panama Railroad, the French Canal, and the US Canal—in which migration is elided, scarcely analyzed, or reduced to statistics to explain other dynamics of greater interest to researchers from social disciplines. Regarding specific populations, the analyses can be traced back to the 1970s and 1980s, although for some authors, this field of study has been unavoidable since the 1950s.

For the Antillean case, in *Los hombres del 'Silver Roll': migración antillana a Panamá*, Newton (1984, in Spanish, 1995) presents the most complete specific study on the migratory phenomenon of Antilleans to Panama in the second half of the 1800s and the early 1900s, owing to the rigorous search of bibliography, hemerography, statistics, and historical documents, such as contracts and recruitment notices, among others.

Newton addresses aspects such as the causes of migration to the isthmus from different Caribbean islands, including the internal crisis experienced by migrants and the need for many inhabitants to emigrate in search of employment and better wages. He affirms that population growth exceeded employability in the islands, and that upon learning of the Panamanian projects, this population went out en masse in search of jobs. Jamaicans, who were the largest population group in the construction of the railroad and the French Canal, participated in large numbers in this first wave.

According to Newton, this first period, termed as *minimal controls*, is characterized by easy recruitment and the massive arrival of workers from the Antilles, which, after the failure of the French company, resulted in the abandonment of the mainly Jamaican population, that were stranded in Panama. The author describes how for the second wave, there was greater control and clashes between the Antillean governments and the canal company, considering the fear that the abandonment that had once occurred with the French company would be repeated. This discontent is evident in the case of Jamaica, where only a small proportion of Jamaicans among the workers are involved in the construction of the US canal.

Newton also makes extensive use of statistics that allow him to explain the dimension of the migratory phenomenon to Panama

for more than half a century. Owing to this, she develops a profile of the migrant and explores multiple scenarios in which migrations occurred and how they have impacted the places of origin of the migrants. Finally, she examines in-depth the daily life of the Antillean worker in the isthmus, with an emphasis on recruitment strategies, wages, sanitary and housing conditions, mortality rates, and working conditions.

With the commemoration of the separation from Colombia, between the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, a copious number of studies appear on the history of Panama and some conjunctural issues, such as the construction of the canal and the impact of the migrant population.

In *Los inmigrantes antillanos en Panamá*, Westerman (1999) proposes a historical study on the migratory processes of this population in the canal area. Using figures, he argues that the recruitment was more successful in some cases than in others, as the number of incoming migrants is higher for cases such as Barbados. Parallel to this, he highlights that racial discrimination encompassed multiple spheres. In an initial phase, he studies it not only from the salary statistics and the creation of differentiated payrolls (“Golden Roll” and “Silver Roll”) but also from the health and educational structures that in everyday life separate black people from white people. In a second phase, he examines the repatriation after the completion of the works, indicating that due to the excess of labor, the unemployment problem worsens, even more if it is considered that many Antilleans refused to return to their homes and when they were returnees, they were looking for a way to return. Finally, Westerman reviews the claims to this population in which it is recognized as the constructor of the project and the rejection of discrimination based on race or origin.

In *El canal de Panamá y los trabajadores antillanos. Panamá 1920: cronología de una lucha*, Maloney (1999) studies the Antillean population in the period immediately after the completion of the canal. Although the research does not focus on immigration, but on the labor movements of the 1910s and 1920s, she makes a wonderful contextualization of the causes regarding the presence of a large number of West Indians at the beginning of the 20th century. According to Maloney, racism is a structural problem with a dramatic expression during the construction of the canal. Apart from overt racism in its various manifestations in everyday life, West Indians suffered from the severities of work and high death rates for health reasons and harsh working conditions. In conclusion, the author believes that the

conditions faced by West Indian migrants were the catalyst for the 1916 and 1920 strikes.

Being one of the foremost experts of the presence of Antilleans in Panama, in the context of the publication of the General History of Panama, on the occasion of the centenary, Maloney (2004) publishes in this compilation a chapter entitled “Meaning of the presence and contribution of Afro-Panamanians in the Panamanian nation,” in which the author analyzes in detail the phenomenon of the coupling and adaptation of this migrant population to Panamanian society in the period after the construction of the canal.

Although it is not a study of migration, the author discovers a significant shift in Panamanian demography during the 19th century and the first years of the 20th century, which would have a long-term impact. The author exalts the racial component and racism to which the immigrants were subjected even after the project was completed and materialized in multiple ways, considering elements such as language, name, and religion.

In relation to women, an aspect that is not exclusively examined, the author proposes that women arrived in the isthmus as a strategy to increase productivity through marriages, primarily in an environment where the most difficult and the lowest paid jobs were handled.

In *Los Afroantillanos en Panamá*, Maloney (2011) returns to the topic and proposes that the Afro-Panamanian population should be divided into two groups: Afro-colonial and Afro-Antillean. Each one has its own historical characteristics: past, language, and surnames, among others. This group of immigrants primarily comprises Jamaicans and Barbadians who arrived at the time of infrastructure construction.

Once again, racial segregation in the form of exploitation is central to the author’s experience, which resulted in creating accumulated discontent that would manifest itself in the years following the culmination of the canal. This would lead to a systematic struggle against exploitation, as the entire population would continue to be marginalized by the Panamanian society, which continued to consider them as foreigners in Panamanian lands—even after they settled and their children were born in Panama.

For Maloney, this dynamic of exclusion was maintained until the 1960s, when the Panamanian society underwent a transformation under the leadership of Omar Torrijos, which lasted till the turnover of the canal to Panama. During this time, the Antilleans underwent a transformation that continues to this day, allowing them to integrate

into the Panamanian culture. The struggle for the recognition of this population, the past, and their descendants has been constant and has coincided with their recognition as Panamanians.

In *¿Qué tan ajenos y qué tan extranjeros?: los antillanos británicos en América Central, 1870-1940*, Putnam (2011) examines population mobility in the Caribbean and Central America. Beginning with the fact that this phenomenon was constant in the second half of the 20th century, the author illustrates these movements on maps and divides them into different moments, all of which allows us to understand that the Atlantic world at that time had great mobility, and this was not limited exclusively to the Panama area. Putnam also proposes that by the late 1800s, it was common to find migration networks on the isthmus and islands that facilitated the mobilization of this population, as in Costa Rica, through plantations, and in Panama, through infrastructure.

Putnam agrees with the aforementioned scholars that the largest migration to the isthmus was Panamanian Jamaican and Barbadian; however, he goes further and reduces the impact of the permanence of this population after completion of the works. For the author, a large part of this population refused to return to their places of origin and witnessed only one place of employment in Panama, although they would later emigrate to new employment options, such as Cuba after 1915, when sugar prices rose and labor was needed there.

In Putnam's opinion, West Indians adapted to the racist contexts of North American companies that continuously promoted segregation in multiple aspects. It was common for this population to seek employment in areas outside of the North American influence, as people preferred to be in places ruled by non-North American governments, something that would change in the 20th century. In the 19th century, fluid mobility between borders was constant, but in the 1920s, a racist sentiment developed in Central American countries. This was mainly due to the contraction in exports and the eugenic trend that was on rise in the international context. The imaginary of a separation between the British Caribbean and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean was reinforced when many West Indians born in Central America or those being of the third generation were expelled to other places; however, in reality, this imaginary had little hold, as a large part of this population had a high level of adaptation and had settled in lands where they had migrated decades ago.

In summary, the migration of Antilleans to Panama has been addressed with a variety of approaches: some authors treat it as an

element of the migratory processes in the Caribbean, others as a collateral element of the processes of construction of large infrastructure projects and, finally, a group of researchers addresses it as the cause of population and racial phenomena after the completion of the projects.

At this point, it is worth highlighting an enormous gap in the historiography on population issues and more specifically on migration of European origin.

This subject is rarely addressed; it is limited to mentions of the existence of this population, and there are no specific works other than photographic ones, such as in *The building of the Panama Canal in Historic Photographs*, where Keller (1983) makes a compilation of photographs that account for the construction of the canal and many spaces in which the daily life of the project was experienced.

Apart from this, it is difficult to find a work that shows the presence of the European population beyond a mention in statistical tables, which may be due to limited existing sources or dispersion. However, regardless of the reason, the information in this regard does not exceed the field of the anecdotal.

This context is constructed exclusively from the review of historiography, for which most of its arguments have already been explored before by other authors. It explores the arrival of the first migrants to the railroad area, conditions they were subjected to, conflicts with the Irish, and high death rates. Following this, an approximation is made of the establishment dynamics in other areas of Colombia and the Caribbean. Finally, it focuses on the organizations, their creation, and the way they stabilized and settled in the Colombian territory, especially in Bogota.

In conclusion, the studies on migration to Panama in the second half of the 19th century and the first years of the 20th are quite varied. There are those who propose that this phenomenon was not exclusive to the isthmus, but rather is the example of a much larger dynamic in which people moved throughout the Pacific and the Caribbean for different reasons. This focuses on general studies on migration or specific studies on the infrastructure of Panama. In the more specific ones, migration has been in the background, while in the more general ones, it is understood as one of many that occurred in the region. In any case, migration to Panama during the aforementioned period and for labor purposes was not emphasized in any of the two studies; on the contrary, it has been presented as a marginal and unexplored issue.

A line of research focuses on Antillean migration processes. This is probably the most developed topic in terms of historiography.

Newton's (1995) work has acted as a pillar in the construction of a history of Antillean migration to the railroad and canal areas, a topic that has been extensively researched but still leaves many problems unexplained and is being addressed by scholars more recently.

MIGRATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE RAILROAD AND THE PANAMA CANAL

The construction, first of the Panama Railroad in the mid-19th century, and later of the canal generated a profound transformation in the isthmus as both transit projects enabled interoceanic trade to be connected more efficiently and turned Panama into a strategic scenario for global geopolitics.

The incorporation of necessary labor for the construction of both projects was a problem that investors had to face and that, in the case of the railroad, caused migrations from various parts of the world, including Europe, the US, China, and the Caribbean islands. Below we will explore these processes from two perspectives: the manner in which this phenomenon has been studied in literature and an analysis accompanied by a hemerographic review that allows us to demonstrate the way in which discussions about migrations with emphasis on the Caribbean were registered. The period of analysis corresponds to 1849, when the construction of the railroad began, and in 1903, when Panama separated from Colombia. In order to meet this objective, this section is divided into four subsections. In the first, the literature review is presented; in the second, a synthesis of the construction and commissioning processes of the railroad and the interoceanic canal is presented; in the third, the findings regarding Caribbean migrations to Panama are presented in the framework of these two projects; and in the fourth, final comments on these findings are presented.

THE TWO ROUTES: RAILROAD AND WATER

As a passage route between the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific, the Panama Railroad Company was the first railroad line built in Colombia. From a business perspective, it was one of the most profitable companies of its time that clearly reflected the economic and political interests of the US, not only regarding Latin America but also regarding its strongest competitors in the region: France, England, and Spain. The company became one of the most important transport monopolies of all time (Correa, 2012).

The geopolitical expansion of the US, coupled with the gold rush, created important incentives for American capital and US government with a view to develop a safer and more expeditious passage between the American coasts while a reliable internal route was normalized. The Mallarino-Bidlack Treaty (1843) between Colombia and the US was the legal basis to advance an investment process in Panama that would lead, first, to the construction of the railroad and later, of the canal (Weaver, 1992: 153-155). On December 28, 1848, John Stephens, William Aspinwall, and Henry Chauncey signed a contract in Washington with Pedro Alcántara Herrán, on behalf of the government of José Hilario López, for the construction of a transcontinental railroad, with the goal of establishing the Panama Railroad Co. (Board of Directors, 1849: 29-54).

In August 1850, construction started in Cerro Mono, which would later be known as Monte Esperanza. However, after seven miles were built, engineers informed investors that the money was exhausted, resulting in an investment of just over a million dollars going nowhere.

Owing to the bad weather, two steamers that were heading to California had to take refuge in the bay, and around a thousand miners landed on Manzanillo Island. After contracting the services of this small section to connect with the Chagres River and continue with its journey, this had a decisive effect on the construction of the railroad, as the news triggered stock market activity in New York, allowing work to continue without a shortage of resources (Rippy, 1981). The construction brigades advanced from the two fronts met; by the end of January 1855, the first interoceanic and transcontinental train in history came into operation. The total length was 47.5 miles. For some time, the great demand for this railroad made it the most profitable in the world, even recording profits of 4.3 million USD dollars in 1868. Despite the inequality of the concession that was signed with Colombia, this country received a significant amount of revenue, making it one of the nation's most important fiscal resources (Hull, 1999: 13-15). A new concession was signed in 1867, and with it, the term was extended to 99 years, with the payment of USD 1 million and an annuity for USD 250,000 to the Colombian government, as well as free transportation of troops, officers with luggage, ammunition, weapons, and other products.

In addition, the new concession contract abolished the restriction that Colombia had to grant privileges to build roads and a canal in the isthmus. Despite this modification, the interests of the railroad were secured by the clause that if the canal was built on the Panama-

Colón axis, the company would be compensated (Lemaitre, 2007). Therefore, Ferdinand de Lesseps founded *the Société Internationale du Canal Interocéanique* (later termed as *Compagnie Universelle du Canal Interocéanique*) in Paris, together with other partners. In 1879, Lesseps began to accumulate significant quantities of supplies in Panama, with an unexpected effect for the railroad, as it obtained a significant increase in cargo transported.

However, the costs of freight rates were too high for the French company and de Lesseps decided to buy 98.41% of the shares (68,887 of the 70,000 available) for the Panama Railroad Co. The shares soared from about USD 60 per share to USD 291, for a total of approximately USD 25 million (93 million francs), which was cheaper than paying freight.

The French administration made improvements and updates to the infrastructure, but also acquired a significant amount of unnecessary machinery, including snow shovels, the construction of a pier in Panama City for the scandalous value of USD 2,220,357.18, and luxury homes, among other assets, which in turn, generated a widespread reputation for corruption (Hull, 1999, p. 15). For all this, the end of the *Compagnie Universelle du Canal Interocéanique* could not have been more deplorable. Lesseps, like his son, spent his final years involved in a grueling legal procedure that resulted in a two-year jail term. Even Gustave Eiffel was sentenced to two years for the same process based on financial loss suffered by 800,000 investors who had purchased the company's bonds.

This financial disaster reached the highest level of the French government, causing the fall of the cabinet of President Sadi Carnot and affecting the reputation of the important politician Georges Clemenceau. After these painful events, the liquidators of the *Compagnie Universelle du Canal Interocéanique*, achieved the constitution of a new company, after a difficult process, with the remaining assets of the company: *Compagnie Nouvelle du Canal* (Pérez, 2007). Simultaneously, the US government insisted on signing a treaty with Colombia to build a canal; however, the Colombian government, throughout 1901, constantly delayed providing any response, and Marroquín, as vice president in charge of the executive, fiercely opposed any initiative in this regard.

This attitude was seen in the US as a sign of the corruption reigning in Bogota. To make matters worse, the ambassador in Washington, Carlos Martínez Silva, was withdrawn by the government due to his political position. His replacement was José Vicente Concha,

who apart from not speaking English, had never left the country. As directed by Foreign Minister Abadía Méndez, Concha demanded from the US government a sum of USD 20 million to terminate the contract with the French (Turk, 1974).

In January 1903, after strong pressure from the US, the Herrán-Hay treaty was signed, which granted the North American country the right to build a canal and temporarily occupy a strip of land five kilometers wide on both sides of the line that the canal would occupy, in exchange for which Colombia would receive compensation of USD 10,000,000.

In two months, the US Congress approved this treaty, but its Colombian counterpart received it with a negative attitude and delayed discussions on the subject, despite the angry demands of Panama City authorities.

For this reason, the US ambassador to Colombia, Mr. Baupré, sent a threatening communication to Congress to urge that the treaty be approved, or Colombia would suffer the consequences (Pérez, 2007: 189). Under the banner of exacerbated nationalism, Marroquín and Caro successfully opposed Congress passing the treaty. In response, President Roosevelt ordered the Army and the Navy to prepare necessary plans to prevent Colombia from preventing the secession of Panama, issuing a directive that established an effective blockade on the coasts of the Pacific and the Colombian Caribbean, as well as plans to occupy the ports of Cartagena, Santa Marta, Sabanilla, and Buenaventura.

Considering the precariousness of the Colombian troops, who came from the Thousand Day War, and the painful fiscal situation, it was impossible to undertake any operation to recover Panamanian territory, which in practice was more of an insular territory than an integral part of the country. The separation generated a difficult diplomatic situation between the Colombian and US governments, which would take many years to resolve (Hendrix, 2006: 36-42).

Once the independence of Panama was recognized, the US government, as per the Spooner Act of June 28, 1902, acquired the rights, privileges, franchises, concessions, land transfers, right of transit, unfinished works, machinery, and real estate that the *Compaigne Nouvelle du Canal* owned in Panama for USD 40 million in 1904.

Additionally, the Buneau Varilla-Hay treaty was signed, which offered free rein to the construction of the canal in the Panamanian territory. In May 1904, President Roosevelt created the Isthmian Canal Commission to build the canal, placing the railroad under his jurisdiction (Political Information, Anon., 1903).

MIGRANT AND LOCAL WORKERS

Building the railroad through the Panamanian jungle was not an easy task. Although popular mythology holds that a worker is buried under each sleeper, this is impossible, as in total there were more than 150,000 sleepers; however, it does offer a clear idea of the popular imagination around the human cost of the work (McCullough, 1977: 37). Of course, the main problem that the company had to face was the need to recruit, discipline, and maintain a sufficient workforce for construction in adverse conditions.

This was accentuated by the gold rush in California, as part of the demand for labor for mining increased significantly, distracting part of the human resources necessary for the railroad's construction. In addition, the local press indicated that by March 1850, the arrival of 40 ships with people in transit to California was registered, and it was claimed that the workforce was insufficient, among other reasons, due to the fact that 300 sappers promised by the Colombian government had not been transferred (M.A., 1850a: 1).

In the transit area of the said labor, prices also increased, owing to the greater demand for supplies and goods, and wages increased due to the shortage of available arms (McGuinness, 2008: 55). Alternatively, workers from varied countries worldwide participated in the railroad's construction: Jamaicans, Martinicans, Germans, Portuguese, Irish, Indians, Austrians, Chinese, and Colombians. During the execution of the project, between 6,000 and 7,000 people were hired, most of them were from Jamaica or Cartagena.

Slave labor was used initially, but the company abandoned this initiative due to legal changes that were introduced with the Liberal Reforms, which lead to the manumission of the slaves between 1851 and 1852, in addition to the possible political repercussions in New York and Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera's opposition to its use (McGuinness, 2008: 59; M.A., 1850a: 1).

To face these difficulties, there was an initial attempt to hire Cartagena labor, for which Totten had to move to this city to try and personally convince potential workers, as most considered Panama too dangerous and unhealthy to reside.

It was through six-month contracts that labor was hired, but the initial precarious infrastructure, rigors of the rainy season, and difficulties inherent to the type of work caused large numbers of workers to abandon their tasks (McGuinness, 2008, p. 59; Oran, 2004 [1858], p. 23). In December 1849, the news about the upcoming start of the railroad

work and hiring in New York of “100 first-class workers” together with engineers was published in the Panamanian press (M.A., 1849: 1–2).

Engaging foreign labor, however, began with a disastrous attempt to recruit Irish workers. The first 50 were hired in New Orleans, not New York, for a term of six months in exchange for a ticket to California, at a cost that ranged from USD 15 to USD 50 per person (Cohen, 1971: 311; Oran, 2004 [1858]: 23). The transaction was made through the firm *Baker and Truesdale*, which managed to hire about 400 workers, and the workers started to arrive in September 1850 (McGuinness, 2008: 63; M.A., 1850b: 2–3). In 1850, Totten insisted on hiring of Cartagena labor, which he knew from his experience in constructing the *Canal del Dique*, and had managed to connect with 600 workers who would arrive in groups of 150 people per month. In addition, the possibility of linking slaves continued to be discussed despite the political changes in this regard, as well as the hiring of 100 “first-class” American workers (M.A., 1850c: 1–2).

Moreover, in 1850, the first arrival of Jamaican labor was registered, with 300 laborers arriving at the construction area on the island of Manzanilla for a total on 1000 laborers gathered at the construction site. The introduction of these workers was considered by the local press as a “successful trial” that was added to the Cartagena workers hired by Totten (M.A., 1850d: 2; M.A., 1850b: 2).

By the end of the same year, about 500 American workers were involved in the work (M.A., 1850e: 1–2; M.A., 1850f: 3), although certain diseases and difficult working conditions quickly claimed the lives of these workers.

As if that were not enough, some 150 went on strike, in response to which the company suspended their contracts and sailed back to New York, where some of them also died of diseases contracted (Otis, 1867: 35).

This generated a series of press releases with the New York Sun and other American media reporting that the fatality rate was so high that one person died for every foot advanced. Of course, the company responded that this was “absurd, as 22 miles had been built in 1853, which would imply that more than 33,000 workers would have died in this period” *El ferrocarril de Panamá i sus antagonistas*, (Anon., 1853: 3). Beyond the discussion about the impossible figures, there is a clear situation of concern regarding what had happened to the American workers.

The insistence on hiring foreign labor was notorious, as they considered that the local labor force –mestizo, Indian, and black– to be

lazy, indolent, inefficient, and not used to working to entrust them with construction in the long term (Oran, 2004 [1858]: 20).

Colonel Totten reported to the Board of Directors that in 1850 there were a total of 1,590 active workers, who were divided in some 1,200 native, Jamaican, and Chinese workers and 390 white workers. In addition, he requested funds necessary to increase the number of Cartagena workers to 2,000, from other parts of New Granada to 500, 1,700 Chinese workers, and 1,000 Irish workers, for a total of 6,790 workers (Board of Directors & Totten, George M., 1853: 18). Despite the unfortunate experience with Irish workers, Totten believed that they could still be useful for manual jobs.

Finally, local and Cartagena labor was considered by Totten to be the most suitable for manual work and, after the Chinese, the cheapest. In this report, Totten's cultural vision regarding the segmentation of manual and technical work can be clearly appreciated, in addition to the advantages each of the population segments offered over the others (Board of Directors & Totten, George M., 1853: 18).

The company decided to hire Jamaican and Cartagena workers, predominantly black and mulatto, as it "seemed" that this workforce was better adapted to the conditions of the area. How many lives could have been saved and human tragedies prevented if the obvious had been considered before starting? The indigenous population is more acclimated to the environment than foreign labor.

Both the Jamaican and Cartagena populations had settled in Panama by 1881; most of them had engaged in commercial businesses and lived with their families in the cities of Colón and Panama, even though the press reported situations of public order with reference to this population in contrast to the "civilized" population of American and European immigrants who lived in these cities (Life in Panama, Anon., 1881: 879).

At the beginning of 1882, there was evidence of a reactivation of Jamaican migration to participate in the canal work under the French administration, and simultaneously, there were strikes by workers dissatisfied with working conditions and wage payments (*Huelga*, Anon., 1882: 1116). In 1883, there were frictions between Cartage-nan and Jamaican workers in Panama, with violent confrontations appearing to be common and significant delays in the work of the canal reported due to technical aspects rather than the shortage of labor or resources (*Sucesos de Culebra*, Anon., 1883: 1788).

Moreover, in 1883, the possibility of "regulating" the migration of foreigners was raised in a proposal that defined the emigration of

Italians to other parts of Europe, which could be used as an example in Colombia to control the Chinese and Jamaican migrant population that worked in the canal, with an additional record of the conditions of location, wages and guarantees offered, among other elements (Migration in Italy, Anon., 1883: 1792).

Four years later, in 1887, a new regulation was issued to differentiate “resident or transient” foreigners, which is defined by means of a formal registration with the competent authorities. The law also defines different types of residence as follows: the four-year residence, the residence linked to the acquisition of land, and the residence linked to the exercise of commerce and having contracted marriage with a Colombian, which is defined as a “presumed spirit of permanence” (Interior, Anon., 1887: 511).

The newspaper *El Cronista* published a news item in 1887 reporting the arrival of “Africans” to Panama due to the construction of the canal. The text states that this is a consequence of the fact that, at the moment, there are only a few workers left at the site, some of them Colombian and others Jamaican.

Without hiding a racist and xenophobic tone, the columnist describes this workforce as “savages, cannibals, consumers of raw meat, of a ferocious and violent nature and living completely naked.” In addition, he continues, “they do not speak Spanish, French or English,” although the company indicated that they did (*Los sucesos de la culebra*, Anon., 1887: 663). Faced with the suspension of activities in the construction of the canal, coupled with the effects of the Thousand Day War, the governor of Panama wrote a warning to Jamaica in 1902 to prevent the migration process from continuing, as job opportunities were slim and prospects were bleak (*Warning to Jamaican Labourers*, Anon., 1902: 1).

However, once the war came to an end and Panama was separated, it was evident that immigration agents in Jamaica could grant freedom to form contracts and allow workers to migrate. Despite these intentions, there was no significant migration in the 20th century during the construction of the canal by the US, and the governor of Jamaica warned his people about his refusal to encourage migrations to Panama as opportunities were still uncertain at that time (*Jamaica Immigration Department*, Anon., 1903: 1; *West Indians. Jamaica*, Anon., 1903: 1).

AS A FINAL REMARK

In general, the records of labor and construction deaths are dispersed and incomplete, as there is only a small collection of statistics refe-

ring to white labor in secondary sources. The information available in the Colombian archives is also very limited to the general census, and the data do not delve into differentiations that allow a certain account of the magnitude of the Caribbean migration to Panama as a consequence of the two major infrastructure projects that begun in the 19th century: the railroad and the canal. This is the reason why it was not used in this study.

However, there is evidence of a dominant vector of Jamaican migration to Panama, although its magnitude is not easy to quantify. References in the local news and other literature frequently reference this problem, compounded by the population exodus from Colombia's Bolivar region.

It can be deduced from available sources, particularly the hemeographic ones, that this migrant population not only dedicated itself to construction work as skilled and unskilled workers but also settled and engaged in commercial activities, such as retail and agriculture. Likewise, it can also be inferred that their settlement was associated with better job opportunities and the formation of families.

BIBLIOGRAPHY REFERENCES

- Anonymous. El ferrocarril de Panamá i sus antagonistas. *El Panameño*, May 19 of 1853.
- Anonymous. Huelga, *El Cronista*, January 7 of 1882.
- Anonymous. Información política, *El Colombiano*, November 12 of 1903.
- Anonymous. Interior *El Cronista*, 23 junio de 1887.
- Anonymous. Jamaica Immigration Department. *The Colon Starlet*, February 24 of 1903.
- Anonymous. La migración en Italia, *El Cronista*, June 20 of 1883.
- Anonymous. La vida en Panamá. *El Cronista*, June 7 of 1881.
- Anonymous. Los sucesos de la culebra. *El Cronista*, November 17 of 1887.
- Anonymous. (1883). Sucesos de Culebra. *El Cronista*.
- Anonymous. (1902). Warning to Jamaican Labourers. *The Colon Starlet*.
- Anonymous. (1903). West Indians. Jamaica. *The Panama Star and Herald*.
- Board of directors & totten y M. George. (1853). *Communication of the Board of Directors of the Panama Railroad Company to the Stockholders together with the Report of the Chief Engineer to the Directors*. Nueva York: John F. Trow Printer.
- Board of directors. (1849). *Panama Rail-Road Company*. Nueva York: Van Norden Amerman.
- Cohen, L. (1971). The chinese of the Panama Railroad: preliminary notes on the migrants of 1854 who "failed". *Ethnohistory*, 18(4), 309-320.
- Conniff, M. (2004). Panamá durante la época de construcción del Canal norteamericano. En: A. Castillero (ed.), *Historia general de Panamá* (Tomo I, Vol. III) (pp. Xx-xx). Panamá: Comité Nacional del Centenario de la República.

- Correa, J. S. (2012). *The Panama Railroad Company o cómo Colombia perdió una nación*. Bogotá: Editorial CESA.
- Correa, J. S. (2010). Inversión extranjera directa y construcción de ferrocarriles en Colombia: el caso del ferrocarril de Panamá (1849-1869). *Estudios gerenciales*, 26(115), 141-160.
- Figueroa, A. (1978). *Dominio y sociedad en el Panamá colombiano (1821-1903)*. Panamá: Imprenta Panamá.
- Headley, J. T. (1855). Darien Exploring Expedition, under command of lieut Isaac C. Strain. En M. LaRosa y G. R. Mejía (eds.), *The United States discovers Panama: the writings of soldiers, scholars, scientist, and scoundrels, 1850-1905* (pp. 45-81). United States of America: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Hendrix, H. J. (2006). TR's Plan to invade Colombia. *Naval History*, 20(7), 36-42.
- Hull, G. (1999). Panama's Transcontinental Railroad. *National Railway Bulletin*, 64(5), 4-35.
- Jaén, O. (1979). *La población del istmo de Panamá del siglo XVI al siglo XX: estudio sobre la población y los modos de organización de las economías, las sociedades y los espacios geográficos*. Panamá: Impresora de la Nación.
- Jaén, O. (1981). *Hombres y ecología en Panamá*. Panamá: Editorial Universitaria Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute.
- Johnson, M. (2011). Las migraciones laborales en las islas del Caribe. En: R. Cáceres (ed.), *Del olvido a la memoria: nuestra herencia afrocaribeña* (pp. 7-13). Costa Rica: Universidad de Costa Rica.
- Keller, U. (1983) *The building of the Panama Canal in Historic Photographs*. Nueva York: Dover.
- Lemaitre, E. (2007). *Panamá y su separación de Colombia*. Nueva York: Biblioteca Banco Popular.
- M. A. Ferro-Carril. (1849). *El Panameño*.
- M. A. Para el extranjero (1850a). *El Panameño*.
- M. A. Comunicación Intermarina. (1850b). *El Panameño*, 41.
- M. A. Comunicación Intermarina. (1850c). *El Panameño*, 28.
- M. A. Comunicación Intermarina. (1850d). *El Panameño*, 37.
- M. A. Comunicación Intermarina. (1850e). *El Panameño*, 43.
- M. A. Comunicación Intermarina (1850f). *El Panameño*, 49.
- Mack, G. (1992). *La tierra dividida: historia del Canal de Panamá y otros proyectos del canal istmico*. Panamá: Editorial Universitaria.
- Maloney, G. (1999). El canal de Panamá y los trabajadores antillanos. Panamá 1920: cronología de una lucha. En: L. Navas (ed.), *El movimiento obrero en Panamá 1880-1914* (pp. 3-135). Panamá: Autoridad del Canal de Panamá.
- Maloney, G. (2004). Significado de la presencia y contribución del afropanameño en la nación panameña. En: A. Castellero (ed.), *Historia general de Panamá* (Tomo I, Vol. III) (pp. 239-267). Panamá: Comité Nacional del Centenario de la República.
- Maloney, G. (2011). Los afroantillanos en Panamá. En R. Cáceres (ed.), *Del olvido a la memoria: nuestra herencia afrocaribeña* (pp. 77-82). UNESCO.

- Marín, G. (2009). La inmigración internacional en el caribe panameño vista a través de los censos. *Revista estudios*, 22, 331-347.
- Mc Cullough, D. (1977). *The path between the seas: the creation of the Panama Canal, 1870-1914*. Nueva York: Simon and Schuster.
- McGuinness, A. (2001). *In the path of empire: labor, land and liberty in Panama during the California gold rush*. Ann Arbor: UMI.
- McGuinness, A. (2008). *Path of the empire: Panama and the California Gold Rush*. Ithaca: Cornell Press.
- McGuinness, A. (2004). Aquellos tiempos de California: el ferrocarril de Panamá y la transformación de la zona de tránsito durante la fiebre del oro”. En: A. Castellero (ed.), *Historia General de Panamá* (Tomo I, Vol. II) (pp. 257-285). Panamá: Comité Nacional del Centenario de la República.
- Navas, L. (1999). El movimiento obrero en Panamá (1880- 1914). En: L. Navas (ed.), *El movimiento obrero en Panamá 1880-1914*. Autoridad del Canal de Panamá.
- Newton, V. (1905). *Los hombres del “Silver Roll”: migración antillana a Panamá*. Sociedad de Amigos del Museo Afroantillano de Panamá.
- Oran. (2004). Panama Railroad. En: M. LaRosa y G. R. Mejia (eds.), *The United States discovers Panama: the writings of soldiers, scholars, scientist, and scoundrels, 1850-1905* (pp. 1-15). United States of America: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Otis, F. N. (1867). *History of the Panama Railroad and of the Pacific Mail Steamship Co*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Pérez, G. (2007). *Nos dejó el tren: la historia de los ferrocarriles colombianos y los orígenes del subdesarrollo*. Colombia: Ediciones Cisnecolor.
- Putnam, L. (2011). ¿Qué tan ajenos y qué tan extranjeros?: los antillanos británicos en América Central, 1780-1940”. In: Cáceres, R. (ed.), *Del olvido a la memoria: nuestra herencia afrocaribeña*. UNESCO Office San José. pp. 22-36.
- Reyes, Ey. (2000) *El trabajo de las mujeres en la historia de la construcción del canal de Panamá*. Panamá: Instituto de la Mujer, Universidad de Panamá.
- Rippy, F. J. (1981) *El capital norteamericano y la penetración imperialista en Colombia*. Bogotá: El Áncora Editores.
- Turk, R. (1974). The United States Navy and the ‘Taking’ of Panama, *Military Affairs*, 38(3), 92-96.
- Weaver, T. (1992). *Los indios del Gran Suroeste de Estados Unidos: veinte siglos de adaptaciones culturales*. España: Abya Yala.
- Westerman, G. Los inmigrantes antillanos en Panamá. En: Wolfschoon, E. (ed.), *Panamá, sus etnias y el canal*. Autoridad del Canal.