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The Poetic Development of Panamanian Nationalism

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The Poetic Development of Panamanian Nationalism

A Thesis

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College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University

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by

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The Poetic Development of Panamanian Nationalism

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I dedicate this thesis to my family: Mom, Dad, Brad, and Dan, without whose love and encouragement neither this project nor my Saint John’s education would have been possible.

Philippians 4: 4 - 7
"The nationalistic ideology that has supported Latin American regimes since independence, institutions of learning charged with lending support to such ideologies, the most commonly held beliefs about the bonds established by the commonality of language, all rest on the assumption that there is a solid link between language, literature, and culture."

- Roberto Gonzalez Echeverría
  The Voice of the Masters
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I. Introduction

Panama has often been described as a nation in transit, both literally and figuratively (Martínez Ortega, *La Modalidad* 64). Given the strategic position of the republic on the isthmus connecting Central and South America, this characterization is the result of Panama’s having been used as a major shipping route since the early days of Spanish colonization of the Americas. Figuratively, the formation of Panamanian nationalism has been transitory in that it is difficult to find an enduring and clear sense of Panama’s national identity that is not based on one or another of the nation’s insecurities. These insecurities, or “phobias” as one of Panama’s great literary figures, Octavio Méndez Pereira, calls them, have most often been throughout Panama’s history, a result of the North American presence in Panama (Martínez Ortega, *La Modalidad* 64).

This project studies the link between literature and culture in the poetic construction of Panamanian national consciousness. I will focus especially on the far-reaching influence of the United States on Panama’s nationalism as evidenced in the poetry of this isthmian republic. The poetry I have selected will show the development of Panamanian national identity since the isthmus’ independence from Spain in the nineteenth century to the present. I will attempt to show that through their verse, Panamanian poets have constructed a national identity based on anti-Imperialistic sentiment. This stands in contrast to the predominate model of creating a sense of nationality centered around the positive aspects of a nation.

Historical events have been a major influence on the canon of Panamanian poetry. This Central American republic has been marked by domination and dependency on either Spain, Colombia, or the United States for much of its existence. The Bolivarian revolutions of the Americas brought about the end of Spanish colonization of Panama in 1821. This was the first
cause for celebration and patriotic sentiment for the Panamanians. The rest of the nineteenth century saw repeated attempts and subsequent failures to gain independence from Bolivar’s Gran Colombia, the building of a trans-isthmian railroad to facilitate transport of United States gold miners to California, an attempt by a French company to build a canal across Panama, and the failure of that French project eight years later. In 1903, with reinforcement from the U.S. Navy, Panama won its independence from Colombia. This was certainly cause for a large swell of patriotic good feeling but something more menacing than their troubled relationship with Colombia was close at hand for Panama: United States imperialism.

The United States, through a treaty signed with the owner of the failed French canal company acting in the name of Panama, was granted sovereignty “in perpetuity” over the area comprising the Canal Zone, a ten mile-wide strip bisecting the isthmus and bordering the Canal itself over which the United States claims sovereignty. Re-drafts of this treaty and increasing Panamanian demands for more control in the Zone marked the first half of the twentieth century in Panama. In 1964 a watershed event, the flag riots, prompted real changes in the structure of United States-Panamanian relationships. One of these changes was the drafting of the new canal treaties in 1977. Today, Panama is preparing for the last day of 1999 when the Canal Zone becomes Panama’s sovereign territory.

These historic events since 1821 have greatly influenced Panamanian nationalism and poetry. The most influential event was the completion of the Canal in 1914 and its enduring imperialistic legacy in Panama over the course of the twentieth century. María A. Salgado writes, “The central role played by the Canal Zone in the formation of a Panamanian national identity is reflected in the predominance of ‘Canal topics’ in national letters” (Foster 454). The
thrust of my argument remains that the Panamanian people, insofar as the patriotic poetry they produce, rely very heavily on defining themselves as being opponents of the United States imperialism demonstrated in the Canal Zone to construct their identity as a nation.

What, then, is meant by “the Panamanian nation?” This name not only refers to a physical space demarcated by geographical boundaries, it also refers to the people of Panama and a combination of sociological factors such as heroes, famous places, language, historical events, traditions and hopes that the people within those predetermined boundaries cherish in common. These factors unite the Panamanian people by attempting to create unity of thought and action.

This phenomenon of creating national unity is what Benedict Anderson, in his study of nation-building, identifies as the construction of an “imagined community.” They are communities because “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each [nation], the nation is always perceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 7). The communities are imagined because “the members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow members, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 6). In this way, it is shown that the nation is not only a geographic space but rather that it is also composed of the people who live in that space and the common values they share.

One of the ideas that surfaces in Anderson’s work Imagined Communities is that the products of nationalism, one of them being poetry, can demonstrate the profound love for the nation that nationalism creates. Anderson mentions that it is rare to find cultural products based on hate because those products based on love for the nation and fidelity to her predominate.

“Even in the case of colonized peoples, who have every reason to feel hatred for their imperialist
rulers, it is astonishing how insignificant the element of hatred is in these expressions of nationalist feeling” (Anderson 142). The student of Panamanian literature can readily see that this is not the case of Panama, especially in the second part of the twentieth century. Through the poetry I have selected for study in this project, it will be apparent that it is, in fact, difficult to find patriotic poetry in the Twentieth Century that does not have scorn for the United States or other imperialist forces as its point of departure.

A salient poetic example of this important connection between poetry and national identity is the poem El cantar opinado written by José Franco in 1976. Many poets took it upon themselves to speak for the entire nation in their poetry. This is a significant claim to make but poets like José Franco are a perfect example of this speaking in the name of the nation. By composing poetry thus, the poet makes himself or herself one who defines the thoughts of the collective, thus creating, by accident or by design, a national identity. Franco’s poem El cantar opinado, though it is admittedly not very invective, is an example of this.

No soy,
una isla.
Vivo en plena comunión con mi pueblo.
Sus glorias, sus derrotas.

No podría callar la tristeza del mundo. . .

Yo canto opinado, yo luchó
It is clear that Franco is a poet in solidarity with his pueblo. This type of poetry, in fact, shows one of the key factors on which my thesis rests. The poet is a representative of the thoughts of the majority of the nation. If this is not the case, then the poetry produced cannot have the desired nation-building effect. This is because the majority of the community must subscribe to the ideas put forth in the poem or the formation of the nation, at least the poetic formation of the nation will not take place.

Latin America Scholars Arthur Whitaker and David Jordan have addressed the issue of this negative nationalism. Whitaker and Jordan note that the development of mass communication in the twentieth century finally gave the proponents of nationalism in Latin America an audience to influence. The scholars note that nationalism in Hispanic America has seen a shift at the turn of the century from nostalgic to dynamic nationalism. By “dynamic” nationalism, Whitaker and Jordan mean a nationalism that moves away from “the retrospective nationalism that glorifies the nation’s past” and toward a more revolutionary nationalism obsessed with destroying foreign economic and political imperialism (Whitaker and Jordan 3). Undoubtedly, this is typical of Panamanian nationalism and its struggle against the hegemony of the United States. Whitaker and Jordan also see nationalism as distinguishable by two categories according to their orientation: domestic and foreign. They describe foreign-oriented nationalism as “marked by xenophobia and aggressiveness” (Whitaker and Jordan 6). Panamanians do predominately ascribe to this foreign-oriented nationalism. It is through strengthening their position against the United States that the Panamanians come to define themselves as a people, a
nation.

John Armstrong, writing on the topic of nationalism, sheds some light on the concept of defining the self by another. He writes that “groups tend to define themselves not by reference to their own characteristics but by exclusion, that is, by comparison to strangers” (Hutchinson 141). Through the use of pejorative terms like gringo and in overwhelmingly negative portrayals of the United States citizens in Panamanian poetry, the bards of the Republic help to reinforce the ways in which Isthmian are essentially different from the North Americans. These negative images of the North American also serve as a cohesive element in which “large ethnic groupings [like the heterogenous societal mix in Panama] come to recognize their relatively close relationship” (Hutchinson 142). However, this identification by exclusion necessarily presents a significant obstacle to the formation of an authentic national identity, a phenomenon seen in the development of Panamanian poetry.

Panamanian literary critics, such as Pedro Correa Vásquez, have recognized not only the importance of poetry in revealing national identity but also the deep significance of anti-Americanism in Panama’s poetic canon. Of poets and their work, Vásquez writes: “at the same time as they reveal the essence of our being and for that reason have limited importance for us, they possess a universal characteristic trait in that they can collaborate to understand the essence of that which is Panamanian” (Correa Vásquez 71). This same critic also recognizes that Panama’s social and cultural life is inescapably influenced by the United States’ presence on the isthmus. “Our nation supports... in her bosom, the presence of the well-known Canal Zone, a territory occupied by North Americans which, sadly, dictates our own social and cultural life” (Correa Vásquez 73). Vásquez argues that Panama’s literature, like the nation itself, is a victim
of the dependency created by neo-colonialism in Central America.

It is my contention that the common animosity for the United States which the Panamanians share serves as a force to unite the people of this Central American republic which in turn creates Anderson’s idea of the imagined community, one of the goals of nationalism. However, as will be shown, it is difficult to form a genuine national identity based on reaction against another nation. This project will explore the forces at work, especially those anti-American, that influenced the Panamanian parlance over the past nearly 180 years since Panama’s independence from Spain. I have broken down this work into three sections based on periods of history in which I will study the events and poetry that are products of these divisions.
II. 1821 - 1903: From Colonization to Nationhood

This discussion of Panama’s poetic construction of nationalism begins in the early nineteenth century with the liberation of the Isthmus from Spain. I must start here as it is in this century that the foundation is laid for the future of national identity and nationalist poetry. Admittedly, the poetry from this century and into the early part of the twentieth tends toward glorious celebration of the patria, which is much more consistent with Anderson’s argument of the overwhelmingly positive characteristic of nationalism. However, there are undoubtedly instances in which the xenophobic tendencies of the people of this former Spanish colony arise. I will seek to explore both negative and positive manifestations in this section to better understand the events and ideas that shape Panamanian national identity in the 1900’s.

A Panamanian history text from 1949 is careful to point out that while Bolivar fought the victorious Andean Revolutions, liberating the republics south of Panama, the Great Liberator is not able to claim for his own honor the victory of Panama’s independence from Spain. It was a native son, Colonel José de Fábrega who rallied the undying patriotic support of the Panamanian people to gain independence for the isthmus on November 10 of 1821 (Castillero 59). This exaltation of Fábrega, a son of one of Panama’s most illustrious families, shows the importance of these patriotic figures from Panamanian history to further create the imagined community which Panama had developed by the time the textbook I refer to was written in 1949. The foundations for the patriotic pride and nationalistic sentiment with which this textbook is overflowing were established in the crucial period of Panama’s history which is the subject of this section: 1821-1903.
These dates represent Panama’s liberation from Spain in 1821 and her independence from Colombia in 1903. The history of this period had an inestimably important influence on the poetry Panamanian bards produced in this same time frame. Those who were destined to become Panama’s first poets spent their childhood and adolescence in a cultural ethos in which memories and stories of national heroes like Colonel Fábrega and decisive events like union with Bolívar’s Gran Colombia were still very much alive in the minds of the Panamanians (Miró, El Romanticismo 14-15). These memories, as well as the events that would transpire in following years of the nineteenth century, served as inspirations for most of Panama’s first poets.

This first generation of poetry is most commonly called the Romantic period in Panamanian letters. Most critics, however, do not even consider Panamanian literature to have existed until after the creation of the Republic in 1903. This is claimed because no Panamanian poet or essayist adopted a style that was distinctly Panamanian throughout this period (Foster 454). On the contrary, the Romantic writers followed models that were typical of Spanish and Latin American literature. However, the subjects of their writing and poetry had extreme importance for the Panamanian people. The influence and importance of poetry is helped by the fact that distinguished statesmen, as well as a few women of the upper class, were predominate in the Romantic period. This tendency of high-ranking government officials to also be hombres de letras is a common occurrence in Latin America. It is hardly surprising, then, that Panamanian letters were dominated by historical and socio-political issues throughout this movement. With this in mind, let us take a more in-depth look at the historical events shaping what was written between 1821 and 1903.

As aforementioned, independence from Spain was won in 1821 with Bolívar’s Andean
Revolution providing the catalyst. Eighteen days later, on the 28th of November, Panama united its fate with that of Gran Colombia, Bolivar's post-revolutionary union that would eventually become the countries of Panama, Ecuador, Venezuela and Colombia. This event appears to be the first to merit verse from the pens of Panama's romantic poets.

Gil Colunje, another of Panama's first great national heroes, is a prime example of the marriage of literary and governmental careers. Colunje was born in 1831 in Panama City, completed his elementary and secondary educations, and made his way directly to Bogota. That city, which was the administrative and cultural center of the Colombian union, was the most popular destination for wealthy members of Panama's elite. There young men would train for careers in public service, winning diplomatic posts abroad as the crowning achievements of their careers. Colunje was no exception. He is heralded by literary critic Rodrigo Miró as "having lived a life dedicated to the service of the Republic" (Miró, Cien 3) Miró doesn't specify what he means by "Republic" and I hesitate to assume that he is referring to Panama as during the time Colunje was serving in the government and writing his poetry, Panama was still just an administrative division of Colombia.¹ This in itself is a fascinating example of the way Panamanians, both critics and lay people alike, can coopt poets like Gil Colunje to build national identity. This statesman-poet, who was born in Panama but spent most of his professional life in Colombia and then died there, is nevertheless exalted as one of Panama's national heroes into the

¹ In his book, Naturaleza y forma de lo panameño, Isaías García explains that patriotic sentiment expressed in 19th century poetry was always specific to Panama. That is, when the word "patria" is used, it is in reference only to Panama itself. However, I believe that García's view is affected by the fact that he is taking a retrospective look at this situation and seeing nationalism develop as specific to Panama whereas I would assert that there more likely was patriotic sentiment for the Colombian union among those of the department of Panama in that they, too, could identify and celebrate liberation from Spain.
twentieth century.

Colunje’s poem, *Al 28 de Noviembre*, is considered by Miró to be “perhaps one of the first Panamanian poems” (Miró, *Cien 3*) The 28th of November refers to the date in 1821 when the isthmus united itself to Bolivar’s Colombia. It is difficult to find a strong sense of definitively *Panamanian* patriotism in this poem. Aside from the title, which is the birth date of Panama as a department of Colombia, there is only one other reference to the people of the isthmus in the last line of the poem

_Yo no tengo del vate afortunado__

_ni el estro, ni la voz, ni la armonía,__

_para cantar tus glorias, ¡patria mía!__,

_y tu nombre y tus héroes bendecir._

_Mas si no sé pulsar el arpa de oro,__

_ni arde en mi sien el numen soberano,__

_Yo tengo un corazón americano__

_que sólo por tu amor sabe latir..._

_Y tú, ¡Bolívar!, dios de la Victoria;_

_tú, cuyo aliento devolvió la vida_

_a esta patria otro tiempo envilecida..._

¡No! Que si un tiempo la discordia

_los pueblos dividó que eran hermanos,_

_siempre esos pueblos fueron colombianos_

_y al través de los siglos lo serán._

¡Y si los vieras hoy! ¡Si tu los vieras!_

¡Otra vez por Colombia ya se unieron,_

_y en su nombre querido se ofrecieron_

_que juntos han de ser o morirán!_

_Hoy abren estos pueblos a los pueblos_

_el que Dios les donó, suelo fecundo,_

_y el Mundo de Colón y el Viejo Mundo_

_en breve un solo pueblo formarán._
¡Tú acabarás de redención la obra,  
lazo del Orbe, templo del Océano!  
¡En ti los hombres, Istmo Americano,  
juntos, a Dios adoración, darán! (Miro, Cien 4-6)

This poem, written in 1852, certainly shows patriotic zeal for the Colombian union. However, the exaltation of the Panamanian people or denunciation of enemies specific to Panama is virtually non-existent.

Considering the conspicuous absence of singularly Panamanian patriotism in the poem, it is important to look at the more troublesome topic of how this 1852 verse of Colunje fits into the formation of Panamanian national identity. I find this poem to be rather inconsistent with the Panamanian desire for separation from Gran Colombia. Manifestations of this separatist party began to create an impact in the isthmian department as early as 1830, less than ten years after the creation of the union upon independence from Spain (Castillero 69).

The first attempt at separation was made in cooperation with Ecuador and Venezuela in 1830. Both of these former administrative divisions of Gran Colombia were successful in gaining their independence as a result of this challenge to Bolívar’s dictatorship. However, Panama’s independence after this revolution lasted less than three months before the government of Gran Colombia forced the Isthmian department to rejoin the republic. Slightly more than one-half year later, in July of 1831, a Venezuelan dictator acting as the top departmental authority in Panama declared separation from Gran Colombia once again. This time, however, Panamanian citizens unsympathetic to the Venezuelan’s personal agenda rallied around General Tomás Herrera to depose the dictator Alzuru and after just one month of dictatorial rule, Panama was again United with Gran Colombia, now called La Republica de la Nueva Granada (Castillero 71).
Separatist sentiment was even more strongly encouraged by the United States’ initial expedition to study the feasibility of a canal project in 1835. President Andrew Jackson sent one of his colonels to study the situation of Panama and make a proposal for a trans-isthmian canal. The people of Panama recognized immediately the incredible windfall this canal could be for their economy. The government in Bogota, which the Panamanians had resented for their lack of concern for isthmian affairs, did not accept the proposal of Jackson’s colonel. This created even more animosity among the Panamanians toward Colombia and only contributed to the desire of many Panamanians to run their department autonomously. The economic crisis Panama found itself in at the end of the decade of the 1830’s was also blamed, in large part, on Colombia’s economic exploitation of the Isthmus.

By 1840, fighting between liberals and conservatives resulted in a Colombian civil war. As news of the fighting reached the Isthmus, Panamanian desire to distance themselves from such chaos and thereby prevent their own already unfavorable situation from worsening grew quickly (Castillero 71). In response, a national assembly convened in Panama on November 18, 1840 to declare separation from Colombia for the third time. This period of independence, though successful, was to last a fleeting three months.

More relevant to the purpose of this present project is investigating the patriotic poetry produced as a result of this separation. Tomás Miró Rubini’s poem, “al 18 de Noviembre, 1840” is highlighted by Panamanian literary critic, Mercedes Bolaños Guevara. She writes of Rubini: “These verses, full of patriotic fervor, are not of great poetic accomplishment, but are our [the Panamanians’] first romantic manifestations which are known to us today which makes them valuable in the history of Panamanian literature” (Bolaños Guevara 16).
¡Oh amada patria mía!
Llegó, llegó el instante
de un dulce porvenir, el más risueño,
cuando el Estado Libre, independiente,
de orden goce, de paz y garantía;
cuando el comercio rico y floreciente
vuelva a llegar de su esplendor al grado
que subió de poder y bizarría,
y lo que es ahora ruinas espantosas
y maltratadas chozas
en palacios dorados
se transformen brillantes, elevados,

Entonces si diré: Salve, dichosa,
mil años, patria amada! (Bolaños Guevara 16)

It is important to note that Rubini focuses in this poem on the material changes that will come about as a result of independence from Colombia. There is no mention of his Panamanian brothers and sisters, only optimism toward the future of the newly-liberated state.

This poem stands in contrast to the poetry of the twentieth century that relies heavily on creating unity among the Panamanians by drawing heavily on historical events, national symbols, or common enemies, which the United States will become to most Panamanians. Instead, Rubini does not seem to be concerned so much about helping form the imagined community as the political state.

Benedict Anderson writes that the American revolution against Spain brought with it many symbolic things like flags and anthems that help to create unity among the newly liberated masses of Latin America (Anderson 81). I assert that even the identification of a national flower is significant in the helping to create community by revering a tangible object that is particular to one geographic region. For Panamanians, the flower they claim as their own is the Flor del
Espíritu Santo or Holy Spirit flower.

Tomás Martín Feuillet, another of Panama’s nineteenth century poets, also maintained a political and military career in addition to writing poetry. His poem, “La flor del espíritu santo,” written in 1856, is heavily imbued with pride for the products of the Isthmus of Panama. In this case, the national flower is the object of that admiration:

\[
Y \ es \ esa \ flor \ encantadora, \ mística, \\
de \ nuestros \ climas \ exclusivo \ dón: \\
nuestros \ campos \ adorna \ con \ su \ mérito \\
y \ jamás \ embellece \ otra \ región. \\
\]

\[
Y \ por \ eso \ el \ viajero \ del \ Atlántico \\
que \ bellas \ flores \ en \ Europa \ vió, \\
queda \ admirado \ ante \ la \ flor \ de \ América \\
que \ sin \ cultivo \ y \ ruego \ aquí \ nació. \\
\]

¡Oh!, cuando a fuerza de tormentos hórridos 
cese de palpitar mi corazón;....

\[
Yo \ sé \ que \ nadie \ verterá \ una \ lagrima, \\
y \ ojalá \ que \ siquiera \ por \ favor, \\
alguien \ coloque \ en \ mi \ enlutado \ féretro \\
del \ Espíritu \ Santo \ alguna \ flor! \ (Míró, Cien 25-26) \\
\]

Feuillet recognizes in this poem that the Americas, Panama in particular, have something that even Europeans marvel at: the beautiful “flower of the Holy Spirit.” The identification of this flower as being unique to Panama is just one more way to help create national identity by pointing out and celebrating things for which the Panamanians may deservedly be proud. As seemingly insignificant as this flower may be, Feuillet even requests that one be laid on his grave at the end of his life. This may be read as a last request to be honored with a symbol dear to Feuillet’s heart and reminiscent of his homeland.

Separation from the fatherland is a recurring theme in Panamanian poetry, even in the
nineteenth century. This poem, written by Jerónimo de la Ossa in 1865, expresses the longing he feels for Panama while he is separated from her in Chile.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Desde lejos admiro, patria mía,} \\
\text{tu cielo azul, tu claro firmamento,} \\
\text{y de tus cristalinos ríos siento} \\
\text{y en los vírgenes bosques el rumor;} \\
\text{miro tu noche bella, iluminada} \\
\text{por la pálida luz del astro hermoso,} \\
\text{y percibo el ambiente caluroso} \\
\text{que te lleva el aroma de la flor.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Hermoso es en verdad el sol de Chile} \\
\text{y hermosas por demás son las chilenas} \\
\text{pero, ¡ay!, al recordar las panameñas} \\
\text{un gozo siente mi alma sin igual.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Entonces tornará la dicha mía} \\
\text{y para siempre cesará mi llanto,} \\
\text{porque en tus playas hallaré mi encanto,} \\
\text{que no hay dicha distante del hogar. (Miró, Cien 62-63)}
\end{align*}
\]

I cite this poem to show the consciousness that is developing for things specific to Panama, not America in general. This is the same phenomenon seen in Feuillet’s poem to Panama’s flower. De la Ossa exalts not only his native terrain but also praises the attributes of Panamanian women. What I find to be most remarkable about this poem is that De la Ossa feels a definite tie to geography and people; if only for coquettish reasons, the poet regards Panamanian women as distinct and better than Chilean women. The exaltation of things generally “American” is breaking down somewhat and more emphasis is being placed on fatherlands. In De la Ossa’s case, the fatherland is Panama. By looking at this poem from 1865, I have actually moved farther ahead chronologically and missed some important events in the meantime that had a great impact on the Panamanian parnassus.

The great powers of the world in the mid-nineteenth century, specifically the United
States, Great Britain an France, saw incredible potential in exploiting the geography of the isthmus to expedite trade and bolster their economies. The United States was the first to take advantage of the short distance between the oceans at the isthmus and formed the Panama Railroad Company in 1949 to expedite the transport of gold miners heading West to California in the 1849 Gold Rush.

The worldwide interest in the trans-isthmian canal which had been a subject of speculation ever since Spanish discovery of the region, intensified greatly after the success of the railroad. In 1880, a French private interest accepted the challenge to build a trans-isthmian canal under the direction of Count Ferdinand de Lesseps. The prospect of a canal was not always met with enthusiasm by the Panamanian people. Despite the North-Americanizing influence of the railroad, the Isthmian saw the great economic prosperity it also brought (Miró, El Romanticismo 15). Nevertheless, there was still suspicion on the part of Panamanians that the canal could really accomplish all the miracles it promised.

One poetic demonstration of this mistrust is the bitterly sarcastic poem of José María Alemán entitled simply, “Al canal.” Another statesman-poet, Alemán is considered one of the least romantic poets of Panama because he often breaks the mold established by Colunje and Feuillet, two of his predecessors (Miró, Cien 27). Certainly this is seen in his treatment of the canal issue in which his distrust of the benefits of the Canal is clear.

Está de dicha contento
mi buen amigo Pascual,
Porque se acerca el momento
de su unión matrimonial
cuando comience el canal.
No más miseria y pobreza,
ni godo ni liberal:
por montones la riqueza
recojerá cada cuál
cuando concluya el canal.

¿Revolución? ¡Ni por pienso!
Ni comedia electoral;
que el horizonte es inmenso,
y sin fin el mineral,
cuando comience el canal.

En materia de elecciones,
aun siendo presidencial,
no habrá más agitaciones.
ni la ambición personal,
cuando concluya el canal.

Pues todos piensan, a una,
hacer un gran capital,
con buena dicha y fortuna,
por la industria comercial,
cuando comience el canal.

Más, caro lector, te digo,
con mi franqueza genial,
que de alguien seré testigo
que busque su bien final
arrojándose del canal. . . (Miró, Cien 28-29)

The allusion to suicide in the final strophe of this poem is indicative of the grave effects
that the Canal and foreign involvement in Panama would have on the Isthmian nation. While the
influence of Alemán on the twentieth century American poets may not be great, he undoubtedly
displays in this poem an attitude of distrust of the benefits imperialistic influences can bring to
Panama as a result of the Canal. Alemán died in 1887, four years before his mistrust would
prove to be warranted upon failure of the French canal

Alemán would never know that in 1904 construction would begin on a canal project
funded by and under the direction of the United States. Much less could he have known the far-reaching impact that canal would have on Panamanian nationalism. The attitude seen in his poem, however, is an excellent blueprint for the anti-American, anti-Canal poetry that will appear in the mid-twentieth century.

The construction of the French canal progressed very slowly and was plagued by corrupt mismanagement of funds for the project. By 1891, the “Compañía Universal del Canal Interoceánico” declared bankruptcy and the entire scandal of the mismanagement of the funds was exposed. The Panamanian historian Castillero asserts that this scandal was unjustly called “de Panamá” when, in reality, the corruption that led to the failure of the canal project was due to poor French husbandry of the project (Castillero 100-101). This worldwide embarrassment caused a significant blow to Panama’s national dignity.

José María Alemán’s poem shows a certain concern for the well-being of the nation in the face of foreign threat. It is edifying to note that this type of national consciousness, which is aware of the potential dangers that could befall the nation is more or less absent in earlier Panamanian poetry. What is seen, then, is the beginning of a Panamanian national identity based on fear and rejection of extra-national forces.

Another poet, Federico Escobar, takes this national consciousness one step further in his poem, “28 de noviembre.” This poem, exactly like that of Gil Colunje, is dedicated to the memory of Panama’s independence from Spain. Escobar’s poem, when compared to Colunje’s verse on the same topic, clearly shows a development of national identity over the nearly forty years between the writing of the two poems.
[...] A impulso de espontáneo patriotismo fundiste, pueblo hermoso, tus cadenas; pero no recibiste el bautismo de libertad, con sangre de tus venas. ¡Vienticho de Noviembre! Santo día de gloria inmarcesible. El edificio que en Panamá erigió la monarquía española, terror de las naciones, monarquía que, de gloria en Zaragoza se colmó, y en Lepanto y en Pavia, hoy se vio demolido en beneficio de la América entera, y allí, sobre sus mismas fundaciones, a la Libertad alzóse un templo, y en su vistoso y bello frontispicio sus colores lució nuestra bandera. Compatriotas: juremos con anhelo de nuestro patrio amor en el exceso guardar la integridad de nuestro suelo, y únicamente sea nuestro desvelo continuar la jornada del Progreso. Sí; juremos también en este día ante la faz del mundo, torvo el ceño, odio y terror a toda tiranía mientras palpite un corazón istmeño.

La voz que alienta el santo patriotismo levantemos unísona sonora, y exclamemos con voz atonadora: ¡Viva la Independencia! ¡Gloria al Istmo! (Miró, Cien 72-77)

It is important to note that Escobar, unlike most poets before him, was a lower-class, dark-skinned (non-Spanish) Panamanian. The fact that he is of indigenous Panamanian blood is significant in that it signals the extension of nation-building through poetry to all classes of Panamanians. Rodrigo Miró writes of Escobar: “a vivid sense of Panamanian feeling brought him to sing honestly of our [Panamanian] regional glories and create in such a way an expressive and popular poetry that is supported by our likes and customs” (Miró, Cien 64). Miró continues,
writing that the work of Federico Escobar is an accurate reflection of the varied and unequal circumstances he was living (Miró, Cien 64). The poet’s disdain for Spanish exploitation of the riches of Panama may be interpreted as a reflection of the racially discriminatory society in which he lived as a deprived member of society because of his racial background.

More intriguing still is that in this poem there is a dark-skinned, lower-class laborer (Escobar was a carpenter by trade) writing about profoundly nationalistic issues. In fact, his writing is so intensely patriotic that Rodrigo Miró has also asserted that Escobar is an antecedent for the twentieth century nativists in Panama (Miró, Cien 64). Instead of writing from the point of view of an elite, wealthy statesman, Escobar wrote directly from his experience as a member of nineteenth century Panama’s laboring class. This extension of nationalism to the popular masses is one of the main elements that Benedict Anderson establishes as being crucial in the formation of national identity. As the masses of lower-class Panamanians begin to see more and more of their personal experience reflected in the poetry of Panama, loyalty to patriotic causes increases. Until the late nineteenth century, official nationalism was determined solely by the elite and employed as a tool to justify administrative policies and political demands, as in challenges to Colombia’s sovereignty over the isthmus. With Escobar as one of the poets at the forefront of the change, Panamanian nationalistic poetry will tend to involve more people of his class, especially after the construction of the Canal in 1914.

The last verse in Escobar’s poem cannot be overlooked in this study. The verse is a charge to the poet’s fellow Panamanians to swear love for the nation as well as intolerance for any imperial force at work in the world. Concurring with Miró, I believe this poem to be influential in setting the tone and building the foundation for twentieth century nationalism.
The contempt for Spain with which Escóbar writes is much more intense than that seen in Colunje’s 1852 poem. This abhorrence for imperialistic nations will, of course, spread into the twentieth century shifting the focus of hate from Colombia and then to the United States. The identity of an extra-national influence that effects the national community in a negative way is another major factor in the construction of national identity. Anderson writes of the power of identifying in print a cause for a nation’s woes and the unifying effect that identification can have on the people reading the printed medium, whether it be a newspaper, essay, or poem (Anderson 33-34). The identification of the “them,” which is the extra-national influence causing despair in the imagined community, is a concept of nationalism that I will employ often in the subsequent sections of this project.

Historically, the decade of the 1890’s is extremely important in deciding the future of the Panamanian state and her people. In 1893, the former French canal company was reorganized and set as its goal a 1904 completion date for the canal. This reorganized company failed also when it was unable to raise the necessary capital to complete the canal project. Therefore, in 1898, a third attempt at the canal project was made with the completion date set for 1910. However, the Bolivarian union’s civil war between the country’s liberals and conservatives, the so-named One Thousand Days War, began in 1899. This bloody war brought Panama to financial ruin and was finally ended by United States intervention in November of 1902. During the war, the United States decided to construct the interoceanic canal when the French proved unable even after their third reorganization.

The Hay-Pauncefote Treaty of 1901 allowed the United States exclusive rights to build a canal with their own funds and under their own direction. No specification was made in this
treaty regarding governing sovereignty over the zone. This stipulation would come later in the form of the Herran-Hay Treaty in which the United States and Colombian governments laid out the terms for the North American construction of the Canal. As well as being granted the land on which to build the Canal, the United States would be allowed sovereign authority over this land which would become the Canal Zone.

Panama's interests, as ironic as it may seem given the provision for United States' sovereignty over the Canal, were undoubtedly benefitted by the Hay-Herran Treaty. It is important to note that the urgency to build a canal connecting the oceans was so great that the United States was willing to excavate a canal through Nicaragua if that proved necessary. There existed no doubt that Panama wanted the economic benefits of a canal for themselves. Because this was the case, Isthmian reaction was very unfavorable when the Colombian congress in Bogota refused the terms of the Treaty on August 12, 1903.

This was to be the last time that Colombia would dictate affairs on the isthmus. Through their negation of the Treaty, the Colombian government proved once again that it did not have Panamanian interests in mind in their legislation. Dr. Amador Guerrero then assumed the leadership of the movement to secede from Colombia. His plans included enlisting the support of United States warships, an indispensable component to the securing of independence, to restore peace in the event that revolution should break out between the department and the Colombia.

On the third day of November in 1903, the Panamanians duped a division of the Colombian army into believing that a Nicaraguan invasion was taking place. Upon arrival of at least ten Colombian generals and their troops to Panama City, army officials from the rebelling department imprisoned them and declared victory. This is the day that the Republic of Panama
was formed and consequently so was a new national identity.

E.J. Castillero, the historian to whom I have referred several times already, cites a “notable Colombian writer,” D. Salvador Camacho Roldán, as analyzing the main sociological problem facing Panama at the turn-of-the-century as essentially a problem of bringing together Panama’s four sociological groups (the Creole, land-owning whites, the former black slaves, the sedentary foreigners and the dislocated Colombian bureaucrats) in a spirit of fraternity and common interest (Castillero 115). Indeed, the Panamanian poetry of the twentieth century will be a study in bringing together these groups to form a national community which is Panama and to identify causes with which all Panamanians can relate and which help to build their imagined community. As will be seen, the “glue” used to hold together the fledgling nation is, more often than not, anti-Americanism.
III. 1903 - 1964: Birth of the Republic to the Flag Riots

This second section has as its time frame the years 1903 and 1964. As the section title indicates, these years represent two pivotal events in Panamanian history: the 1903 independence from Colombia and the Flag Riots of January 1964. While independence and the Flag Riots were watershed events in the country’s history, many other happenings in between these two bookend dates are crucial in defining Panamanian national identity. As evidenced in the first section of this project, Isthmian poetry continued to reflect the historical changes happening in the nation throughout the 20th century.

Poetically speaking, this period is one that built on the important literary foundations of nationalism laid in the nineteenth century. However, there is a change in the tenor of patriotic poetry that occurred during this historical division. A shift from glorious celebration of the new nation in 1903 to disdain for the United States manifested itself very strongly after completion of the Canal and then continued throughout the century. This movement was prompted to a large extent by several poetic movements like modernism and vanguardism that tended to draw heavily on anti-American feeling.

Having studied the first epoch of Panamanian poetry, the formation of national identity through this period was also seen. Although both brands of patriotic feeling are based on spite for an extra-Panamanian force, the patriotism developed in the nineteenth century stands in contrast to that of the twentieth in at least one very distinct manner. In the first period, this spite was focused mostly on Colombia while after the completion of the Canal, Panamanian nationalism becomes almost analogous to anti-Americanism. It is important to note how the
force of anti-Colombianism in the late nineteenth century served to precipitate the independence of the isthmus at the dawn of the twentieth century.

It is difficult to determine exactly how much the independence of the isthmus was a consequence of nationalism or a result of United States imperialism. Panamanian sociologist Isaías García explains the independence thus: “the independence of the Isthmus from Colombia was but the necessary consequence of the maturation of a nationalist sentiment that, in an act of free will, decided to reclaim responsibility for its own destiny” (García 46). I think Garcia’s view gives more credit to the will of Panamanians in bringing about independence than is due to them. There is little doubt that the independence would have been achieved without the military assistance of the United States. The United States clearly played a large role in engineering the independence of the former isthmian department of Colombia. Nevertheless, the Panamanians relished their newly-won liberty and looked forward to the economic boon a trans-isthmian canal would be.

Another sociologist, Ricaurte Soler, sees the independence of the isthmus as a result of the liberal economic and political ideas influencing Panama around the turn-of-the-century. Soler continues writing: “in its economically liberal fashion, Liberalism intended to reclaim for Panama a political and administrative autonomy that powerfully influences the formation of a national conscience” (Soler 56). But liberal economic ideals are not enough on their own to bring about such a significant demonstration of Panamanian nationalism as was the 1903 independence.

Soler also notes that liberalism helps to create a strong sense of political autonomy and national identity. The identity created, however, is constructed around the ways in which
Panama is *different* from Colombia. It is this self-identification of not being what "the other" is that not only sets the stage for but *necessitates* Isthmian independence. Soler writes, paraphrasing the main ideas set out in *El Estado Federal de Panamá* by Justo Arosemena: "...the isthmus of Panama is a simple political and social structure which, for that reason, is much closer to the interests of Panamanians as concrete individuals, distanced from the ever 'abstract' pretensions of the Colombian nation, and requires, demands, a judicial and political administrative status that is of Panama proper, individual, and autonomous" (Soler 58). This citation shows the formation of Panamanian nationalism as based on the idea that the people of Panama must be that which Colombians are not.

What is seen through the cited texts from Garcia, Soler, and Arosemena is that nationalistic thought is a crucial element in the Panamanian people’s attainment of their political goals. As aforementioned, this is a trend that will be repeated time after time throughout the twentieth century. Also, these texts show the formation of a *negative* national identity. That is, an identity that has as its base the definition of the nation by what it is not. In the case of the first period, the national enemy of Panama and determiner of national identity was Colombia. In twentieth century nationalistic development, the United States becomes the standard against which the Panamanians define themselves.

Contributing to the growth of anti-North American poetry was a general shift taking place in all of Latin America that downplayed disdain for Spain’s past imperialism and focused on the twentieth century imperialism of the United States. This change in feeling occurred as a result of several late-nineteenth century developments. Among them were the Mexican War and subsequent annexation of Texas, John Hay’s arrogance at the Pan American Conference of 1889-
90, and the United States’ appropriation of Puerto Rico and Cuba after Spain suffered a devastating loss to the North Americans in 1898, thus concluding the Spanish-American War (Brotherston 37).

The implications of the defeat of Spain by the Angios are enormous. Latin Americans will come to see in this event a bad omen for the future of their own nations. Martin Stabb, analyzing the Latin American essay writes, “The popular mind undoubtedly saw in the defeat of a swarthy southern ‘race’ by a blue-eyed northern ‘race’ a good example of the triumph of a ‘more fit’ people over an ‘inferior’ group” (13). If Stabb’s assumption about the popular view of this war is true, it is hardly difficult to realize the strong impact that this will have on Panamanian attitudes toward the United States. Scholar of Latin American nationalism Gordon Brotherston writes that by 1904 Latinity had become “full-blooded racial and political enthusiasm” (37). It is in this context of burgeoning anti-Americanism in Latin America that the Republic of Panama is born in 1903, and the new Republic’s first national poetry is written.

In this ethos of enmity for the United States and national development, the first poets of the new republic emerge. First among them is the author of the Panamanian national anthem, Jerónimo de la Ossa. This poet is still considered a member of the Romantic movement in Panama. He is not yet a part of the later generation of poetry, the “first generation of the republic,” which produces more politically-oriented poetry. Rather, De la Ossa’s work tends toward more sentimental glorification of the homeland. Panama’s national anthem, for which de la Ossa is immortalized in the republic’s patriotic thought, was written in 1903 and officially approved in 1906 by the Panamanian congress. The emphasis in the poem is mine.
Alcanzamos por fin la victoria  
en el campo feliz de la unión;  
con ardientes fulgores de gloria  
se ilumina la nueva nación...

En tu suelo cubierto de flores  
a los besos del tibio terral,  
terminaron guerreros fragores,  
solo reina el amor fraternal.

Adelante la pica y la pala,  
al trabajo sin más dilación,  
y seremos así prez y gala  
de este mundo ferá de Colón. (Miró, Cien 63)

National anthems are a crucial building block in formation of the imagined community. I draw special attention to two concepts in particular that are presented in the anthem. First it is seen that Ossa recognized the birth of the new nation. Although the “new nation” fit in exactly the same geographical space and within that space lived exactly the same people who lived there before independence, de la Ossa recognized that the new nation was inherently different from the former department of Colombia which was also “Panama.” Indeed, post-independence Panama was distinct in many ways since now a true national identity could be formed by people who were citizens of a sovereign republic. The idea of the imagined community is also expressed in the verse, “solo reina el amor fraternal.” Statements such as these evoke an image of all Panamanians living together in community with common beliefs, goals, and love for the nation and one another.

Benedict Anderson writes on the subject of the singing of national anthems and the power that has in producing the imagined community which is the nation. “No matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely
such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody. The image: unisonance" (145). This phenomenon of unisonance is very important to community-building. The idea can also be applied to the fledgling nation of Panama at the beginning of the twentieth century. As stated earlier, one of the main challenges facing Panama at the turn of the century was creating unity among the different classes of people in the nation. The national anthem is most important in that it facilitates the creation of a national identity by providing the image of the entire nation singing together about events and ideals relevant to the fatherland. This early poetic manifestation of patriotism helped to establish a base of nationalistic thought upon which later poetry built.

One year after de la Ossa wrote his poem, the Congress of Panama ratified the republic’s constitution. In the approbation of this document there was simultaneously created a precarious relationship between Panama and the United States. The 1903 constitution gave the United States the right to intervene militarily to reestablish peace on the isthmus (Beatty 5). The United States used this right on several occasions throughout the twentieth century to use their armies in the republic as well as other parts of Central America. This use of often times violent force undoubtedly aided in the creation of a Panamanian national consciousness that takes into consideration the ills the nation suffers at the hands of the United States. This clause of the constitution is the second of two documents that later Panamanians regarded as outright vestiges of U.S. imperialism on the isthmus.

*The Canal is Begun*

In the same year as ratification of the constitution, construction of the Panama Canal, a
central figure in Panamanian poetry, was begun. This canal, often hailed as one of the world’s great engineering marvels, was also the source of much disdain for the people of the newly-formed republic. Originally celebrated as the crossroads of the world, Panamanians were initially very eager to see the completion of the Canal and reap the economic benefits they had fought hard to win.

The building of the Canal brought together several different social classes on the isthmus. Blacks drafted from Barbados, whites from the southern United States, Italians, and Panamanians (albeit few) labored together to construct this seaway. Blatant racism was the first conflict to arise between workers on the Canal. Segregation was maintained in virtually all areas including on trains and in administrative offices. Even the pay-scale, which will be discussed in more detail later, was different for whites and non-whites. One Panamanian academic, Nestor Porcell, is cited as saying after a visit to Panama: “The North Americans and the Spanish [i.e., Panamanians] do not, in a word, maintain everyday relations. It appears to me that they mutually disdain each other” (Murray 20). This is evidence that even in the earliest stages, there has been enmity between these two groups. As different events exacerbate the already troubled Panamanian- U.S. relations, a more solid base of hate will be constructed on which the Panamanians base their national identity.

An important influence on Panama’s poetic canon was newly-available technology at the dawn of the twentieth century. The construction of the Canal in Panama brought to the Republic all the technology of a much more modernized state, the United States. The consequences of such a rapid increase in technology can have a great impact on a fledgling nation like Panama was at the beginning of the twentieth century. Two scholars of Latin America, Arthur Whitaker
and David Jordan, write on the topic of the influence of technology on nationalism.

First, [technology] led to a great expansion of the means of communication and transportation, which in turn stimulated a sense of nationality. Second, it promoted the extraordinarily rapid growth of urban centers and their agglomerations of uprooted masses of immigrants and internal migrants who, with their other ties and loyalties broken, were highly susceptible to the nationalist appeal.

Third . . . it gave most Latin Americans keener awareness than ever before of what was going on in other parts of the world, which seemed to be advancing while they stood still. The effect on them was perhaps deplorable, but certainly not surprising. They gained a clearer vision of the United States' presence, which they deplored; of its wealth, which they envied; and of its power, which they resented and feared. Fresh impetus was thus given to anti-Americanism, which had long been one of the chief ingredients of nationalism in Latin America. (Whitaker and Jordan 10)

The influence of technology most definitely should not go unnoticed in Panama's national development. This important influence is also reflected in the poetry of the republic from this period. Amelia Denis de Icaza, one of the Romantic poets, wrote her poem *Al Cerro Ancón* in 1909. This poem was a response to the advance of technology that has altered forever one of the sacred places of her nation, Ancón Hill.

It may be argued that the poem is primarily one expressing the agony of separation from the homeland as Denis de Icaza did write these verses while away in Nicaragua. In that sense, it parallels Jerónimo de la Ossa's nineteenth century poem, *A Panamá*. Nevertheless, through the lens of lamenting the distance between the poet and her nation, Denis de Icaza conveys several
important ideas that help us to better understand the construction of Panamanian national identity.

Ya no guardas las huellas de mis pasos,
yo no eres mío, idolatrado Ancón.
Que ya el Destino desató los lazos
que en tu falda formó mi corazón.

Cual sentinela solitario y triste
un árbol en tu alma conocí:
allí grabé mi nombre: ¿qué lo hiciste?
¿por qué no eres el mismo para mí?...

¿Cuántos años de incógnitos pesares
mi espíritu buscaba más allá
a mi hermosa sultana de dos mares,
la reina de dos mundos, Panamá! . . . (Miró, Cien 45-46)

Agustín del Saz Sanchez writes that: "Her poetry is that of sadness caused by the reform of beloved places, sadness caused by nature’s beauty being transformed by progress (Saz Sanchez 22). I would call more attention to the fact that Denis de Icaza is expressing love for a particular place in her native land that is now the victim of the destructive progress that is rising in Panama. While it cannot be said that the poem is definitively anti-American, there is undeniably a sense of resistance to change in the poem which is building toward anti-Americanism but does not fully arrive there. This is reflective of the great change that the entire nation was experiencing at the turn of the century given the recently won independence and inauguration of Canal construction. Amelia Denis de Icaza is considered one of the last poets of the Romantic era (Saz Sanchez 23). With the end of this era and the dawn of the new nation, the stage is set for the literary influences of Modernism to appear in Panama’s poetry."
The Influence of Modernism

Modernism as a movement in literature has its beginning in 1888 with the publication of the Nicaraguan poet Ruben Dario’s work Azul. Modernism was such a profoundly different movement in literature that its development was recognized and imitated throughout Spain and, in fact, all of Europe. By this widespread admiration for what was a truly Latin American product, the self-image of the American nations changed greatly. For the first time, Spain recognized and imitated Latin American letters. Put in the context of the inferiority complex that Latin America has always suffered because of its passive acceptance of European models for literature, the discovery of the worth of Latin American poetry by both the Americans themselves as well as Spain greatly helped to reduce this sense of literary impotence (Ferro 136). Hellén Ferro, critic of Latin American poetry writes that: “this [discovery of literary worth] helps to develop the nationalisms that were coming to manifest themselves. With Modernism, America is made to exist, intellectually, for the rest of the world” (Ferro 137). This reaffirmation of Latin America also helped to bring out the anti-American tenor in the region’s poetry in general, and specifically of Panama.

Dario himself was motivated by events having to do specifically with Panama. The father of Modernism did not concern himself very much with Latin Americanist poetry until his 1898 visit to Spain in which he saw himself acclaimed by the Spanish people. This approval by the Spanish literati inspired in him new feelings of Latin Americanist patriotism that came to be reflected in his verse (Henriquez Ureña 177). This new feeling of Dario’s clearly showed itself in his 1904 poem A Roosevelt, written in response to the United States occupation of Panama.
¡Es con voz de la Biblia, o verso de Walt Whitman,
que habría que llegar hasta ti, cazador!
¡Primitivo y moderno, sencillo y complicado,
con un algo de Washington y cuatro de Nemrod!
Eres los Estados Unidos,
eres el futuro invasor
de la América ingenua que tiene sangre indígena,
que aún reza a Jesucristo y aún habla en español.

Los Estados Unidos son potentes y grandes.
Cuando ellos se estremecen hay un hondo temblor
que pasa por las vértebras enormes de los Andes.
Si clamáis, se oye como el rugir del león.
Ya Hugo a Grant lo dijo: «Las estrellas son vuestras.»
(Apenas brilla, alzándose, el argentino sol
y la estrella chilena se levanta...) Sois ricos.
Juntáis al culto de Hércules el culto de Mammón,
y alumbrando el camino de la fácil conquista,
la Libertad levanta su antorcha en Nueva York.

...«Tened cuidado. ¡Vive la América española!
Hay mil cachorros sueltos del León español.
Se necesitaría, Roosevelt, ser, por Dios mismo,
el Riflero terrible y el fuerte Cazador
para poder teneros en vuestras férreas garras.

Y, pues contáis con todo, falta una cosa: ¡Dios! (Imbert, 102-103)

In this poem the waking of American conscious to the reality of the Americans’
manipulation by the great power of North America is demonstrated. Darío opens with a
description of the United States’ sheer might and unchecked power. The modernist also indicts
the North American giant as “el futuro invasor de la América ingenua,” thus highlighting the
United States’ imperialist nature. This invective poem ends with a defense of the Latin
American nation and a caveat to the United States that the Hispanics, in no uncertain terms, will
resist North American control in their lands. Throughout the poem, Darío highlights the saving
faith that the Hispanics have in the Christian God and actually concludes the poem pointing out
that the United States supposedly has everything, except for God. This distinguishes the two halves of America, North and South. The poet is, in effect, bestowing a blessing on Spanish America which the United States cannot deserve.

Darío's attitude toward the United States, which manifested itself in his invective verse, appears not to have influenced to any great extent Panamanian poets writing before the completion of the Canal in 1914. However, Panama's modernists are, like Darío, fiercely American and proud of their Creole heritage (Martínez Ortega, La Modalidad 13). This discussion of Modernism begins with Nicole Garay, whose poetry is an excellent example of this Panamanian criollismo. Garay is a woman raised in the arts, a musician from a musical family. Rodrigo Miró writes that the poetry of this Panamanian is sentimental, full of affection for the native people and land of Panama (Miró, Cien 121). She is a strong defender of things American and Miró puts her on a nationalistic par with Amelia Denis de Icaza (121). Her 1898 poem Brindis Criollo is absent of blatant anti-American nationalism but undoubtedly shows her affection for Latin America.

Si yo fuera a meterme en las honduras
en que metióse Aspasia de Mileto,
a la Castalia, en busca de aguas puras,
iría, mas yo en esas no me meto
aunque me traigan las cabalgaduras
de Astolfo y de Perseo, a quienes reto
a elevarse conmigo a las alturas
de mis Andes en alas de un soneto.

en brindar por la tierra con el zumo
de cañas que en la rústica vangaña
bebe el criollo a la sombra de un guaramo. (Miró, Cien 126)

I include this poet, although she wrote this poem in 1898, to indicate the tenor of Panamanian
modernism and its fervent criollismo that will last into the rest of the century. The poetic products of modernists Garay certainly helped to lay the foundations of what will come to be known in the Panamanian parnassus as la primera generación republicana.

Agustín del Saz Sanchez writes in his anthology of Panamanian poetry that the first generation of the republic is so called because “they are the writers of the independence... the independence of those who write in a free and independent country” (Saz Sanchez 26). Indeed, all of these poets did write with a definite zeal for the newly liberated fatherland and contributed substantially to the formation of nationalism in Panama. Rodrigo Miró writes: “... this generation acted out their role, a role more political than literary, because it contributed powerfully to maintaining the optimism that was indispensable to the health of the new state” (Miró, Cien xv). Another literary critic, Aristides Martinez Ortega writes:

...their [the poets of the first generation of the republic] inspiration in national and American themes has the joyfulness of a new world that animates them. That is to say, the authors of the last generation of the modernist period [read: first generation of the republic]... are characterized by a distancing from aesthetic aristocraticisms... and a drawing closer to the American continent to which they sing with emotion, pride, and optimism. (Martinez Ortega, La Modalidad 13)

While I don’t want to diminish the effect that Ruben Dario and his modernist ideas had on the writers of this generation, the first poets of the republic were distinct from those of the modernist movement in that they tended to follow more closely the anti-imperialist tone of the post-modernist movement (Ferro 173). The invective demonstrated in A Roosevelt is only reflected in Panamanian poetry after the Canal’s inauguration in 1914. Our discussion of the first generation
of the republic opens with Panama’s best-known poetic voice, Ricardo Miró.

Miró was born in Panama City in 1883 and educated in Bogota, like most affluent Panamanian children. Of his verse it is written that his poetry was “simple” and “intimate,” loyal to his own native land and that Miró was one of the most effective in creating the voice of nationalism (Miró, Cien 129). Ricardo Miró is, in fact, considered Panama’s first truly national poet. A parallel can be drawn between the naming of Miró as a national poet and one of the decisive moments in nation-building that Benedict Anderson points out in *Imagined Communities*.

Although a world away in Europe, the development of Hungarian nationalism, or at least one part of it, has a striking similarity to Panama’s same process. Anderson writes of the birth of Hungarian nationalism as being dated in 1772. The significance of this date is none other than the year in which was published a rather “unreadable” text by a Hungarian author, György Bessenyei. The immediate connection with Panama is far from obvious. However, it must be taken into consideration that this work of Bessenyei was “meant to prove that the Hungarian language was suitable for the very highest literary genre” (Anderson 73). The connection is that the Panamanians, in naming Ricardo Miró their first national poet, are reaffirming that Panamanian letters are also worthy to be recognized. As the works of Bessenyei were important to Hungary’s national identity, so too was the poetry of Miró in Panama’s nation building.

Not only is Miró considered the national poet but, indeed, he wrote the republic’s so-called “national poem.” This poet, who knew Rubén Darío personally and was undoubtedly influenced by him, wrote the national poem *Patria* while stationed as a Panamanian diplomat in Barcelona in 1909. As in the poems already studied by Amelia Denis de Icaza and Jerónimo de
la Ossa, there is a profound sense of separation in *Patria*.

¡Oh Patria tan pequeña, tendida sobre un istmo desde es más claro el cielo y más vibrante el sol, en mí resuena toda tu música, lo mismo que el mar en la pequeña celda del caracol!

La Patria es el recuerdo... Pedazos de la vida envueltos en jirones de amor o de dolor; la palma rumorosa, la música sabida, el huerto ya sin flores, sin hojas, sin verdor.

¡Oh Patria tan pequeña que cabes toda entera debajo de la sombra de nuestro pabellón; quizás fuiste tan chica para que yo pudiera llevarte por doquiera dentro del corazón! (Miró, *Cien 142*)

This poem, while not a vehicle for any anti-American rhetoric, was a great source of national pride for the Panamanian people who, by this point, had enjoyed independence from Colombia for six years. *Patria*, Mercedes Bolaños Guevara notes, touched the hearts of Panamanians which were brimming with fervor. Indeed, the people could identify deeply with the verses Miró wrote (Bolaños Guevara 144). In fact, the poet himself is supposed to have found his real identity in the lines of this poem, reaffirming even more the deep nationalist conviction from which this poet wrote (Saz Sanchez 29).

By 1914, the year of the completion of the Canal, Panamanian poetry took a definitive turn toward anti-Americanism. This new poetry is much more reflective of the attitudes seen in Dario’s 1904 poem, *A Roosevelt*. Miró’s 1915 poem, *La voz de la raza* shows the emergence of a much more invective poetry. The contrast between the idyllic paradise Panama is portrayed as in *Patria* and the anti-American stance from which Miró writes his 1915 poem are astounding. Miró is quoted as saying:
We have had to exhaust our scare abilities making all at once poets, storytellers, critics, editors, to deceive America, to make the Continent believe that we will not, even for a minute, become Yankees. (Saz Sanchez 30)

It is with this attitude that he writes *La voz de la raza*. Finally in this poem is illustrated the influence of Darío’s anti-Americanism that most likely influenced Miró, especially since the two Central American poets did know each other.

By 1915 the Canal had been a year completed and the North American threat, both politically and economically, was growing for the Panamanians. For that reason Miró is clear to point out that the people of the isthmus will not succumb to the Yankee influence. Let us look at some selected parts of *La voz de la raza*.

¡Son los conquistadores del mundo!
si no queréis que lo abran con su potente brazo
señor de la muerte. Mientras otros durmieron,
ellos, en rudo siglo de trabajar, se hicieron
fuertes y poderosos como ninguno. Es tarde
para pedir clemencia. Quien se sienta cobardí
que doble la rodilla. El que es débil, que muera;
que sea su carne abono para una primavera
mejor. ¡Viene el reinado del cañón, de la bala
que vuela más que el viento, y vuela más que el ala!

*La América de España* tiene también al frente
una raza que viene como un gran mar creciente
inundándolo todo. Es fuerza ya que se una
la América Española para oponerle una
barrera infranqueable. Fuerza que como hermanos
juntamos en cadena potente nuestras manos
tostadas por el sol. Es la hora propicia
para exaltar el santo culto de la justicia
y del honor. Ya Roosevelt pasó como una sombra
de una época. Su pueblo sabe que sus razones
son buenas para el Africa y propias de leones
This poem is nothing less than a Pan-American call to fight the wave of injustice begun by the United States. The anti-American imagery is powerful as Miró describes the growth of the United States to its status as one of the most powerful nations on Earth that manipulates the Latin American republics like a puppet master. The poet recalls President Roosevelt and his visions, discarding them now as irrelevant for Latin America (but more appropriate for a presumably less sophisticated Africa). The poem ends with an exaltation of the Latin American nations, proclaiming their greatness which is yet to come.

The rather militant final verse does serve as a compass for the direction that the future of nationalist Panamanian poetry will take. The Panamanians began to realize that real change would not happen in their nation simply as a result of romantic musings about the patria. On the contrary, the United States was increasingly seen as a malicious force that this small nation would have to deal with effectively. Although there were exceptions, the completion and inauguration of service of the trans-isthmian canal and the realization by the Panamanians that the United States was not about to give up sovereignty of the Canal Zone helped to create a persistent theme of anti-Americanism in the republic's poetry. In fact, the completion of the
Canal created a fundamental shift in the nature of the Republic’s poetry.

Gaspar Octavio Hernandez is another poet who contributed effectively to nation building in Panama in his socially-conscious poetry. Hernandez was a poet profoundly influenced by his love for the fatherland. In fact, it is written that eighty-three per-cent of his poems were based on nationalistic themes (Bolaños Guevara 179). His nationalistic poetry also tends to have as its point of departure a very skeptical attitude toward the “all-powerful neighbor”, the United States (Miró, Cien 186).

Hernandez’s 1914 poem A Panamá coincides with the completion date of the Canal. Mercedes Bolaños Guevara writes that “Hernandez sees the construction of the Panama Canal as a door through which [the United States] have entered his native soil . . .” (Bolaños Guevara 180). His verses are revealing of the Panamanian attitude toward the seaway at this time.

*Ciñete casco de Adalíd! Entona
no himnos de paz, sino canción guerrera
que derrame su música alnanera con estruendo marcial,
de zona en zona.*

¡Oh emperatriz herida y sin corona!
No ves cómo se pliega tu bandera
cuando advierte que ríes placentera
al mismo buitre que tu herida encona?

*Sé heróica y digna ¡oh! patria . . . todavía
- aunque ave inicua te rasgó la entraña -
no te avergüence tu infamia y cobardía!*

Pues en medio al dolor que te acompaña,
puedes gritar con fuerza y gallardía
que aún tienes sangre de tu abuela España. (Hernandez, Obras 207)

In this poem Panama is personified as a wounded empress, suffering the humiliation of the United States’ imperialistic force that created the Canal Zone. As in the later poem of Miró
already studied, the attitude conveyed is hardly passive. Just the opposite, Hernandez, like Miró, called the Panamanian people to stand up for their dignity and to not lie down in the face of oppression. Also having previously examined the shift that took place from Spain to the United States being the focus of Panamanian indignation, the last strophe of the poem can be understood as a good example of this new focus of Isthmian indignation.

Hernandez offers as a solace to the people that even though they are suffering the effects of a crippling imperialism they still have something to cling to: their Spanish heritage, personified in this poem as a grandmother. This does say much about the formation of Panamanian national thought in that the poem speaks to the fact that Panamanians are realizing their relative impotence in the face of the awesome power of their northern neighbor. It is for this reason they invoke the memory and power of something that once was a stable part of Panama’s history: in this case, Spain. Most ironic, of course, is that this is the same Spain from which Panamanian troops fought for independence. Now, however, the people of the new republic see in Spain glory, honor, dignity, and most importantly, strength. There is a desire among the poets to exploit that glorious memory at a time when the reality that the Panamanians are facing is one of declining morale due to the United States’ exercise of power in their country.

Another poem of Hernandez from 1915 offers a more explicit caveat about the threat of the United States. The name of the poem, Azul, is in itself symbolic. Bolaños Guevara explains the symbolism thus: Hernandez asks the mountains, sea, and sky to change their blue color to red. The reason for this is to evoke the memory of the republic’s heroes that have died in defense of the nation when the Panamanian nation realizes in the twentieth century that it has been invaded by a foreign power (Bolaños Guevara 181). The verses of his poem both draw on past
glories as well as prepare the nation for what lies ahead.

Las cadenas de oprobio y servidumbre
siempre las destrozó nuestro heroísmo:
quien aspira a ser libre, es una cumbre,
quien ama la abyección es un abismo. . .

¡Preparaos! En sórdida cohorte
ya asoma a nuestra vista
un grupo de bárbaros del Norte
enhestado el pendón de la Conquista. (Bolaños Guevara 181-182)

While remaining hopeful about Panama’s ability to overcome oppression, Hernandez does warn his fellow countrymen of an impending threat: the barbarians from the North.

Canto a la bandera, another Hernandez poem written in 1916, is one that tells of the love for the fatherland that the flag inspires. I cite this poem not only because it shows the intense patriotism of Hernandez but also for the fact that through the poem, Hernandez calls for courage in front of the enemy. Impending threat, as has been demonstrated, is a common thread that runs through the poetry of this bard of the first generation of the republic.

¡Bandera de la patria! Las estrellas
en tus colores su fulgor derraman
perrenemente vívidas. Por ellas
los hombres duros, las mujeres bellas
en patriotismo fervido se inflaman!

Ellas, en nuestros fuertes corazones
la llama avivará del heroísmo,
cuando al grito marcial de los cañones,
enemigo clarín vibre canciones
bajo el ardiente sol de nuestro Istmo! (Miró, Cien 190-191)

This discussion of the patriotic verse to come out of this generation of the new republic ends with this poem which warns the Panamanian people to be strong in the face of the enemy’s cannons.
Considering what the future was to hold for the Isthmus, such a caveat is hardly unmerited. I believe a brief retrospective look at what events have brought us to this period as well as the poetry they produce is appropriate at this point to set the stage for the next era in Panamanian nation-building.

Upon the republic’s winning of their independence in 1903, which I believe would have been impossible without the military intervention of the United States, Panama finally procured that which they had wished for since the early nineteenth century: freedom from Colombia. However, the entire independence event ended up clearly being about one essential issue: the construction of the canal in Panama. So long as Colombia would not give approval for this project which Panama saw as essential for their economic well-being, the isthmian department would be ill at ease in their relationship with the government in Bogota.

The United States cannot afford to intervene militarily when there is not a clear advantage to doing so. Hence, lending support to the Panamanian struggle for independence from Colombia was no less than a way for the powerful North American nation to secure the rights to build a trans-isthmian canal. This fact makes the Panamanian independence bittersweet for the people of the new republic. On one hand, the long sought-after freedom from the Colombians was achieved. On the other, Panama now had to confront what was quickly becoming the most powerful nation in the world and assert their own rights in the Canal project funded and directed by the United States. This proved to be a daunting task, especially in light of the odious Hay-Herrán Treaty which granted the North Americans sovereignty over the Canal Zone and the right to intervene militarily on the isthmus to protect their valuable assets, material and non-material.
The Second Generation of the Republic

By 1903, formation of the imagined community had already begun to emerge in the newborn republic. The poetry of the early period, as seen in Jerónimo de la Ossa’s national anthem, is full of patriotic fervor and relatively absent of spite for the northern threat. However, it is not long before the Panamanian poets realize the gravity of the situation with the United States and act on that alarming realization by composing anti-American poetry. Therefore, in these critical early years of nation-building there is already a precedent established for the republic’s poetry and hence nationalism. That precedent is one of anti-Americanism that will endure throughout the century. Having now studied poetry through 1916, let us turn our attention to the history leading to the segunda generación republicana.

The United States policy of gunboat diplomacy remained the norm even after the completion of the Canal in 1914. The United States was asked in 1918 by the ruling elite of Panama to supervise the elections in the rural province of Chiriquí. This electoral supervision came to be one of the sorest spots in U.S.-Panamanian relations this century. In short, the United States troops remained in Chiriquí about two years after the elections in spite of repeated protests by the Panamanian government. The U.S. Army finally retreated back into the Canal

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2 “Gunboat Diplomacy” is the name given to the United States’ tendency to use military force in Latin America to affect political change. This was the norm in United States-Latin American affairs until the change to the Good Neighbor policy in the 1930’s.

3 Elitist Panamanian governments throughout the twentieth century maintained strong ties with the United States government and on occasion actually asked for United States military intervention in the isthmus. This shows the benefit that elites saw in tying their fate to the might of the United States at the expense of the popular Panamanian masses. For a further discussion of this topic, see Thomas L. Pearcy’s article, “Panama’s Generation of ‘31: Patriots, Praetorians, and a Decade of Discord.”
Zone in 1920.

This extended military presence was hardly a benevolent act in favor of the Panamanians. In fact, it is due mostly to the decisions of an American officer, Major Page, who was put in charge of protecting the interests of a certain Costa Rican-born North American named William Chase who owned vast territory in Chiriquí and sought to protect it from the conflicts he was forever having with the inhabitants of that province. The Panamanian historian Castillero writes:

Major Page, in charge of this [occupation of Chiriquí], was noted for his discourtesy, arbitrariness, and lack of respect for local authorities to whom he made a show of arms and with that awakened in the Panamanians feelings of ill will toward the government of the United States which he represented. (Castillero 145)

The military occupation is just one of a series of events occurring between 1915 and 1925 that served to build Panamanian suspicion of the United States and further erode an already precarious relationship between the two republics.

On the heels of the conflict in Chiriquí, another inflammatory event occurred, this time involving the annexation of the Isle of Taboga into the Canal Zone territory. This 1920 annexation caused, not surprisingly, much resentment among the Panamanians. President Lefevre, Panamanian head of state at that time, declared that he would not cede even an inch of the fatherland to the United States. Castillero’s remarks regarding this event are very telling of the building of spite on the isthmus for the Northern giant. He writes of the visit of a certain General Pershing in Panama after the conflict over Taboga. General Pershing left Panama taking with him the painful impression of the hate that was being nurtured in the isthmus as a result of the political follies of the governing body of his great country. (Castillero 146)
One year later debate over the Panamanian-Costa Rican border surfaced again when the United States demanded adherence to the 1914 decision of United States Chief Justice Edward Douglas White. This decision, put to arbitration by the United States with the consent of both nations, decided in favor of Costa Rica. This caused Panama to lose a significant portion of waterfront territory to their neighbor to the North. Panama resisted the 1921 demand of the United States and Costa Rican military occupation of the northern Panamanian province of Cotó quickly followed. Exacerbating indignation of the isthmian was the fact that two boats belonging to the United Fruit Company converted for war-time use were used to support the Costa Ricans and enforce *el fallo White*.

Meanwhile, in Panama City, a group of youths launched an attack on the presidential palace, then occupied by Belisario Porras. This was done in protest of declarations made by the commander-in-chief to the foreign press that apparently were not considered strong enough in their nationalist tenor. Such manifestations of nationalism demonstrated by the zealous youth threatened the political stability in the isthmus on which the United States came to rely to efficiently to perform Canal operations. Because of this threat, the North Americans sent two gunboats to put down the nationalist uprisings and maintain the political status quo.

Panamanian response to the dispatch of the gunboats by the U.S. was hardly favorable. D. Narciso Garay, chancellor of Panama in 1921, wrote the following memo to the U.S. Department of State following the incident. I will quote at length and leave the citation in his

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4 The United Fruit Company is one of the United States most infamous imperialist capitalistic ventures. United Fruit Company became one of the largest landholders in Central America and had significant influence over infrastructure development in Latin America. For an account of United Fruit’s actions in Latin America, see Eduardo Galeano’s *Open Veins of Latin America*. 
native Spanish to preserve a more authentic meaning in his words.

*En presencia de la actitud inequívoca asumida por el Departamento de Estado de los Estados Unidos, Panamá se ve obligada a someterse a su duro destino; pero en su misma debilidad encuentra energías suficientes para clamar al cielo contra la injusticia y la violencia a que se le sujeta, y para declarar que mientras palpitén corazones panameños en el mundo, conservará viva la herida profunda inferida a su dignidad y a su altivez y mirará con ansiedad hacia el porvenir en espera de esa justicia redentora que hoy se le deniega, pero que llegará para ello algún día por inexorable designio de Dios.*

(Castillero 147)

These words of Garay are an excellent exposition of the anti-American attitudes developing among Panamanian officials in the beginning of the 1920's and will help us to better understand how this anti-Yankee sentiment manifests itself in poetry. More than anything else, the military might that the United States exercises in the republic seems to be the most problematic factor for the Panamanians. It is important to always remember that the Canal itself was not the problem. Nor was it problematic for Panamanians that the United States funds and builds the waterway. Rather, it is the way in which the United States assumes a sovereign role in Panama and exercises at will and to satisfy North American ends its incredible military, political, and financial power. Discriminatory pay practices, military intervention, and colonization of a significant portion of Panama had all become features of the United States presence in this tiny republic by the third decade of the 1900’s.

In 1925 the American Canal Zone forces were called in yet again to help re-establish peace during the so-named “Rent Riots” of 1925 in which masses of Panama City’s urban poor
protested the amount paid for housing. It is important to mention here a trend being established. The U.S. Army, in most situations in Panama, did not intervene unilaterally to quell unrest that threatened American enterprises. It is the elites of the Panamanian government, often in league with the United States, who request the military services of the North Americans. That in itself makes for an intriguing commentary on the social structure of Panama because it shows again the cooperation that existed between Panama's elites and the United States.

In this period, the poets, unlike those earlier, are less and less occupants of official government posts. Rather, there was a growing trend which saw the general population (and this includes poets) expressing nationalist sentiment. Besides, with the elites of the government in league with the United States in the 1920's, it is understandable that they will not be as suited to write on anti-American themes. As will be seen in the 1930's, the most successful governments were those that played off the anti-American feeling predominate among the popular masses of the isthmus. These masses resent actions like U.S. military intervention and unequal employment conditions between those jobs inside and outside the Canal Zone. The pueblo did effectively help to bring about real change in the U.S.-Panamanian relations by constantly asserting nationalist goals and feelings that influence but do not always become embodied in nationalist leaders of the state. This is a trend that will be observed more clearly as the century goes on, however. For now, let us look at the characteristics of the vanguard movement that heavily influenced the poets of the 1920's and '30's.

**The Vanguard Movement**

Vanguard poetry is very much a product of this tumultuous anti-American period as will
be demonstrated in the verse produced under the influence of this movement. Vanguardism was a significant move away from the preoccupation the modernists had with maintaining a high level of literary and intellectual discussion. Correa Vásquez writes that, as a result of this preoccupation, “our poets reveal much less protest against that foreign culture which threatened to impose itself [on Panama]” (Correa Vásquez 76). The poets of the vanguard, to a large extent, threw off the shackles of convention to produce what is, up until the mid-1920's, the most bitterly anti-American poetry in Panama.

What is truly remarkable about this movement is that its poets, who came from many different backgrounds, adopt a tone which is much more universal and understood by the many human components of Panamanians heterogenous society. Their poetry was “by all” and “for all” (Correa Vásquez 32). They wrote with themes of universal relevance for Panamanians, one of the most salient being the United States presence in their country. Poetry thus became definitively Panamanian, but in a negative sense. By that I mean that the identity created is one that focuses on the victimization and exploitation of Panama which thus impedes the development of authentic national identity that isn’t based on hatred for an extra-territorial force.

As aforementioned, this poetry mixed with a nationalist regimen applied on the nation by the government was a catalyst for change in the republic of Panama. I refer to Pedro Correa Vasquez’s work once again: “Therefore, Panamanian vanguardism is a conscious choice before a

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5 Vanguardism is frequently associated with an optimistic body of literature that was free from symbolic language or political motive. However, another type of vanguard literature existed alongside what is often called la vanguardia alegre y confiada. This opposite vanguardism is la vanguardia angustiada y comprometida that abandoned rational poetry in favor of a literature that was an active part of social and political struggle. It is this brand of Vanguardism that emerges in Panama. For more detail on this see the work Manual de literatura española by Felipe B. Pedraza Jiménez and Milagros Rodríguez Cáceres.
double reality that would bring us to two types of independence: cultural and political” (Correa Vásquez 76). The poets of the vanguard can, in a very few words, be said to have written “en contra” (Ferro 238). Whether the opposition was the United States or unjust political practices in Latin America, the Panamanian vanguards truly did produce a poetry “in opposition.” Many are the poets of this period who realized the condition of Panama as a “penetrated world” and gave poetic voice to their sentiments against the presence of the United States in the republic (Correa Vásquez 32). I begin with the leader of the movement, Demetrio Korsi.

Korsi, forerunner of Panama’s vanguard poets, was born in 1899 and one of the republic’s first poets to be raised and educated in Panama proper. His 1923 poetic collection, Tierras virgenes, becomes one of the leading examples of truly “American” poetry in that it is free of Spanish influence. In fact, Aristides Martínez Ortega writes that the title itself is indicative of the fact that Korsi had left behind Europe and the East to focus on the poetically virgin lands of the American continents especially, of course, Central and South America (Martinez Ortega, La Modalidad 18).

Although his poetry may be primarily a search for American identity in general, it leaves no doubt as to his nationalist sentiment for the Panamanian nation. “The marked interest in Korsi for making of nationalistic themes something universal is the first step in the constitution of an authentically Panamanian poetry” (Correa Vásquez 49). There is, in Panama, the ever-present difficulty of forming cohesive identity in a country that is made up of such a varied mix of races, social classes, and, because of the foreign element in the Canal Zone, citizenship. This reminds us of the great sociological problem facing Panama with which I closed the first section: combining the many social groups in the Republic. Using anti-yanqui sentiment as a sort of
“national glue” provides an important factor which unites the people. Korsí saw the definition of Panameñidad in a mixture of the languages, preferences, and idiosyncracies of the various groups in his country as constituting the essence of what it meant to be Panamanian (Correa Vásquez 52). As will be evidenced in his poetry, he does set out to write truly popular verse that identifies with the feelings of the average Panamanian, which are often times quite anti-American.

The poem Tamborito is from the 1923 publication Tierras Virgenes. The tamborito surfaces as a peculiarity of Panamanian culture as it will again in the work of Moises Castillo in the 1930’s. The music of the drum, as well as the instrument itself, are used in this poem to help create two powerful images of nationalism: unisonance and the imagined intimately-connected community.

*El alma panameña vibra y se encierra en el maravilloso canto infinito que, como un romancero, para mi tierra hace épico el tumulto del tamborito...*

*Música de mi tierra, por tí aprendemos el amor a la patria que, en tí, sentimos... ¡Nos meces en la cuna cuando nacemos, y nos cierras los ojos cuando morimos!...*

*Encierras la ternura de una fontana, de patriotismo ocultas noble colonia, ¡Desde el pueblo mestizo que hay en Santa Ana hasta el barrio de negros de Calidonia!...*

*De la conquista ruda a la bárbara ola te mira cual si fueses sagrado rito, ¡pues la patria se encierra, valiente y sola, en el círculo estrecho de un tamborito!...*

*Que en los ricos palacios y en los bohíos*
tu ritmo a otros edades, grácil, nos vuelva...

como muestra sublime de la alegría,
como canción propicia de los felices,
como una voz que tiene la patria mía
para decirle al mundo... ¡que somos libres! (Korsi, Tierras 27)

The music of the drum, an essential part of *panameñidad*, is described in this poem as rocking
the nation's children when they are young as well as closing their eyes at the end of their lives.
The whole Panamanian soul echoes the never-ending song of the drum. The music pours out
patriotism from one geographical extreme of the nation to the other, encompassing everybody
from the *mestizo* people in Santa Ana to the Blacks in Calidonia.

The drum itself is employed to model the actual Panamanian community as the *patria*
comes together in the wide circle of the drum. There is an image of the entire nation locked in a
circle of unity for which the drum itself is a good model, especially in the Panamanian mind.
One of the manifestations of unity of the community, whether real or imagined, is union of the
voice of the *pueblo*, or unisonance. This harmony in vocal expression is used to declare with one
voice that Panama and her people are indeed free, much like the effect of de la Ossa's 1903
national anthem.

Korsi's poem, *A Panamá*, also from 1923, was one of the first poetic expositions of the
injustices of the Canal. The poem is nationalistic in two senses. Not only is there the more
conventional exaltation of the fatherland typical of any patriotic verse but there is also seen a
brand of anti-Americanism particular to Panama that increasingly defines the entire national
identity. The poem contains many revealing lines that expose the attitudes of this poet in regard
to the Canal and all that comes with it, especially neo-colonialism.
Este eslabón del Continente
es mi tierra natal,
es el Istmo por donde se filtran las razas
para ver los dioramas del Canal;
es el pigmeo
que con su abrazo ahoga el titán,
y es uno de los objetivos
de los que forjan servidumbres en nombre de la libertad! . . .

La California en tu Camino de Cruces
le abrió al oeste tu humanidad
y las inmigraciones viajeras
hasta el final del mundo te bendicen, Panamá

¿No véis al futuro humano,
por esta ventanita universal?

"Pro Mundi Beneficio".
(¡Qué barbaridad!) (Korsi, Pequeña 72)

While there can be no doubt that there is clearly exhibited in this poem what may be
called “conventional” patriotism, images of slavery and the irony of the last strophe certainly
serve to portray Korsi’s feeling toward the Canal. The last two lines of the first strophe (y es uno
de los objetivos. . .) beg the question of “who are those people that make slaves in the name of
liberty?” One is almost obliged to respond: the United States. Korsi also exposes the bitter irony
of the national motto in that the nation and the Canal seem to benefit the entire world to the
exclusion of one important nation which is Panama proper.

I see this poem as simultaneously an “arrival point” and “departure point,” so to speak,
for poetry seeking to expose the injustices of the Panama Canal. I have already looked at earlier
poetry that did indeed show Panamanian attitudes that were unfavorable to the American
presence in the Canal Zone and this 1923 poem can be seen as the culmination of twenty years of
explicit United States presence in the isthmus. On the other hand, this poem, with its labeling of
the national (and Canal Zone) motto *Pro Mundi Beneficio* as a barbarity, serves as a compass for the future of isthmian patriotic poetry. It is difficult to underestimate the effect that Korsi had on so many poets writing on nationalistic themes that followed him. Truly he is an integral part in the foundation of Panama’s anti-American national identity.

It is edifying to compare Korsi’s *A Panamá* with Gustavo Octavio Hernandez’s poem of the same title from nine years earlier. Reading this later work of Korsi, it is seen that the Canal has clearly become a significant factor in Panamanian poetry by the mid-1920’s. In comparing these two poems, it is seen that national identity can and does change as a result of different historical influences at play in the nation. Undoubtedly, the series of military interventions carried out by the United States in isthmian political affairs only served to exacerbate Panamanian distrust of the Northern superpower.

The poetry and events of the 1920’s set the course of nationalism for years to come. By 1924, Panamanian demand for a revision of the despised Hay- Banau-Varilla Treaty of 1903 which established the United States’ sovereignty in the Canal Zone, had so intensified that a Panamanian diplomatic mission was sent to Washington. Two years of debate and political negotiations between the North Americans and Panamanians resulted in the *Convenio Kellogg-White* of 1926. The document was presented to the National Assembly of Panama and rejected there as well as by the Panamanian public. The Panamanian legislators held approval in the balance until there could be obtained “solutions that satisfy the aspirations of the nation” (Castillero 151). The *Convenio* was far from demanding the United States to give up its sovereign rights over the Zone and ability to exercise military power in the isthmus. Panamanian sovereignty appears to be the ultimate goal that the people of the Republic demand and the fight
will continue through the century until that is gained.

**The 1930's and the Legacy of Arias**

The decade of the 1930's saw the opening of the floodgates of nationalist feeling in Panama due in large part to the ascent to power of Harmodio Arias, a member of a movement called *Acción Comunal*. This movement, begun in 1923, was one of many civic organizations to emerge after World War I. This movement was composed largely of middle-class professionals among whom was created sufficient solidarity to actually create a meaningful change in the status quo of the nation (Pearcy 695-696). The movement engendered a very definite mistrust of the United States government as well as the ruling class of Panama whom the middle-class members of this movement believed to maintain a definite pro-U.S. policy (Pearcy 696). *Acción Comunal* put forth seven basic tenets which they believed would "exalt national values and revitalize Panama from years of dishonest government" (Pearcy 696). These tenets were:

1. Teach your children to love the country.
2. Teach your children to respect the flag.
4. Address foreigners in Spanish.
5. Ask for Panamanian currency [the Balboa] and count in Balboas.
6. Do not make purchases in stores that advertise in English.
7. Do not make purchases in stores that do not employ Panamanians. (Pearcy 696)

This list of planks in the movement's political platform demonstrate a pride in the nation of Panama and those things that define her such as the flag, national currency, and most relevant to this present endeavor, the Spanish language itself.

Harmodio Arias, who assumed the presidency in 1932, concentrated heavily on improving the conditions of Panama's countryside as well as founding the national university, a
hotbed for nationalistic political activity and articulation of patriotic ideals (Meditz 30). This move toward a more militant nationalism may seem somewhat anachronistic as it was also during this time frame that the United States was backing away from “gunboat diplomacy” and implementing the principles of the Good Neighbor policy. This policy helped the United States to maintain control in Latin America through development programs rather than military intervention. Sarah Meditz writes in Panama: A Country Guide: “Thus, a certain asymmetry developed in the trends underway in the 1930's that worked in Panama’s favor. While the United States was assuming a more conciliatory stance, Panamanians were losing patience, and a political base for virulent nationalism was emerging” (Meditz 30). One cannot dismiss the power of nationalist sentiment in effecting change in Panama in the 1930's.

Another of Arias’ major accomplishments so far as nation-building was concerned was the establishment of the Universidad Nacional de Panamá in May of 1935. The president placed the zealous nationalist, Octavio Méndez Pereira, in the position of director of this institution. It is hardly surprising, then, that university students emerge as the most strident nationalists in Panama. Benedict Anderson writes of the power of education and literacy in the creation of the imagined community. As literacy increases and the ideals of nations are expressed in the languages of a particular community, it becomes easier to communicate nationalist thought to the masses and its dissemination is that much faster and more effective (Anderson 80). Indeed, university students become some of Panama’s most devoted and virulent nationalists, especially in the 1960’s.

Perhaps the most important gain won by the Arias administration during this decade was the revision of the 1903 treaty in 1936. The new Hull-Alfaró Treaty represented significant
benefits for the Panamanians. The Treaty stipulated that the Canal Zone was Panamanian
territory leased to the United States and allowed Panama to increase the lease amount the U.S.
paid. The 1936 documents also guaranteed Panama’s right to military intervention anywhere in
the Republic, as well as requiring consent between the two nations before acting militarily on a
threat to the Canal (though the United States Foreign Relations Committee would not approve
the Treaty until there is a guarantee that Panama will accept the U.S. right to act unilaterally).
The new treaties notwithstanding, the Panamanian hunger for complete sovereignty over their
Republic was not satiated and the struggle to win what they perceived as their right continued
and was embodied in more anti-American poetry and nationalist political figures.

Demetrio Korsi continued to be a strong anti-American influence into the 1930's. The
poet provides an excellent example of the increasing bitterness toward the United States that was
growing in the early 1930's in his poem New York.

Triunfa la luz, capitalizada por Edison
el seno virginal del ferry-boat
Rascacielos hechos con five-cents
cuántos proyectos se estrellan
contra tus muros!
en tí rugen lo mismo, oh gran New York
las maquinarias y el hambre;
Estatua de Libertad,
tu luz no es para el sur
Córtate el brazo. (Korsi, Pequeña 55)

Korsi masterfully combined the use of English and Spanish in this poem to communicate his
bitter message. Perhaps this combination of languages can be perceived as a reflection of the
reality of Panama in which it would not have been uncommon to hear both English and Spanish
spoken regularly. Like his poem, A Panamá, Korsi ends New York with a line meant to
communicate his indignation toward a symbol which is supposed to represent something benevolent and good. In *A Panamá* that object was the motto of the Republic. In this poem, Korsi demands the Statue of Liberty to cut off her arm that bears the torch of Liberty. This liberty, the poet points out, is not meant for the nations of Latin America. Apparently especially not for his home country, Panama. Moisés Castillo, another of Panama’s poets of the vanguard movement, was born in 1899 in Chorrera, a population just outside Panama City. The poems of his that I will cite here are based on what might be called the “musical” side of Panama’s national identity. Castillo, like Korsi, used the image of the drum as a definitive part of Panama’s culture. However, he employs this instrument to demonstrate the destructive influence that the United States has on Panamanian culture. To see this, two poems should be studied, one from 1937 and one from 1938. *El Tambor de la Alegría*, the earlier of the two poems, appears to be like any other poem written in joyful celebration of the culture and life on the isthmus.

Panameño, panameño,
panameño, vida mía:
yo quiero que tú me lleves
al tambor de la alegría. (Castillo, *Romances* 19)

His poem from 1938, however, is more revealing of the actual way in which the Panamanians saw the North Americanizing effect of the United States presence. This poem also shows a return to the theme of the tamborito as a symbol of Panama. The emphasis is Castillo’s.

*Nuestro Tamborito no ha fenecido aún,
pero fenecerá en no muy lejano tiempo.*

*Tamborito* panameño

*Que baila la panameña*
- *ritmo de gracia y donaire,*
  *sal y pimienta y canela-*;
tamborito panameño
que baila la panameña...

...Ya el tamborito se va...
y la el tamborito se aleja...
Está muriendo tal vez,
de nostalgias y de tristezas,
affectado de añoranzas
y sufrido de otras épocas:
Santiagos, Corpus, San Juanes,
Año-Nuevos, Nochebuenas...
Alegrias de mi pueblo,
ramilletes de polleras,
repiques del tamborito
-copla y tonada en la rueda,
cantares de Andalucía,
cante jondo de mi tierra!-
¡Como viven en mi alma
festividades pretéritas,
segadas por el alfanje
de las influencias norteñas...

...Ya el tamborito se va...
y el tamborito se aleja...
Está muriendo tal vez,
de nostalgias y tristezas...
¡Que no se vaya, señores!
¡Que el tamborito no muera!
¡Viva! Que viva el tambor
y se enseñoree en las fiestas
de Santiagos y San Juanes,
Año--Nuevos, Nochebuenas!
¡Viva! Que viva el tambor!!
¡Que viva la panameña!! (Castillo, Romances 77-79)

This poem is clearly one of lamenting the loss of the sound of the tamborito of Panama. Of course, the loss is not the instrument itself but rather what it represents. The drum stands for that which is genuinely Panamanian and is in grave danger of being eliminated by the “northern influences” which the United States brings to the Republic. The last stanza is a desperate cry
from the poet begging some force to spare the life of the tamborito. In the last two lines, Castillo shouts a wish for long life to the tamborito and to the vida panameña, as if the two were synonymous.

The Tumult of the 1940's

Castillo's 1938 poem nearly brings us to the end of the decade of the 30's and into the 1940's, a decade of war, dictators, constitutional reform, and continued struggle with the United States. The decade begins with the presidency of Arnulfo Arias, elected by an overwhelming majority of the voting body, and his panameñista government. Arias sought to create "a government of Panamanians for the happiness of the Panamanian people" (Castillero 164). Panameñismo was a nationalist movement "which in Panama's situation meant opposition to United States hegemony" (Meditz 32).

Arias began an aggressive campaign to "Panamize" the Republic's economy, putting many industries under state control in an effort to discourage the operation of businesses by illegal immigrants in the country. Arias did succeed in consolidating the foreign debt, fixing the Costa Rica-Panama boundary, and establishing the national bank. He also created a new constitution which effectively sanctioned his dictatorial rule and extended his term in office indefinitely.

The Panamanian people, disillusioned by Arias' great promises of national reform, overwhelmingly supported the constitution when it was presented by Arias on the 2nd of January, 1941 in the National Stadium. It didn't take long, however, for the dictatorial administration to prove its deficiencies and popular support for the government waned quickly. Arias' dictatorship
precipitated an election tax of 10% of a Panamanian’s annual salary, dissenting opinion was suppressed in all public forums, casinos threatened to impoverish the poorest classes, and foreign policy, especially in relation to the United States did not meet the approval of the Panamanian public. Castillero writes that “it became necessary to change practices that sent the country on a crash course toward failure and loss of its reputation as a nation with democratic principles” (Castillero 167). That change was effected by a coup in 1941.

Two Panamanian political leaders, Ricardo de la Guardia and Ernesto Fábrega made plans to depose Arias’ government. In October of 1941 while the dictator was temporarily absent from the country, the National Police deposed him from his office. Appropriating Arias’ power as head of state was Ricardo Adolfo de la Guardia. This leader immediately won the support of the political parties in Panama, the applause of the people, respect from foreign nations and support of the National Assembly (Castillero 168).

De la Guardia’s administration also proved to be much more sympathetic to the causes of the United States... at least as far as the matter of World War II was concerned. Panama linked itself with the Allied nations, declaring war on the Axis powers. This was a welcome change for the United States government whose patience was being tested by the nationalistic policies of Arnulfo Arias. Because of the cooperation of de la Guardia, the U.S.A. was able to gain from Panama an additional 15,000 hectares of land on which to build military bases for use during the war in exchange for turning over to Panama significant territorial holdings of the United States as well as public works and infrastructure which were once the property of the United States.

This moment of cooperation between the two nations may paint a healthier picture of U.S.-Panamanian relations during the 1940’s than what was actually the reality. True, both
nations did benefit significantly from wartime cooperation but several developments after 1945 brought to light once again the issue of Panamanian sovereignty in the Canal Zone.

The first major irritation to Panamanians was the United States inclusion of Panama in a list of "non self-governing" territories at a 1945 United Nations conference. Second, the Americans almost immediately began making plans to extend their lease of Panamanian territory to be used for military bases granted by Panama specifically for use during the war. In an attempt to curb what the United States perceived as growing nationalist discontent, Ambassador Frank T. Hines traveled to Panama to propose a shorter-term, 20-year extension of the lease.

Responding to Ambassador Hines' proposal, President Enrique Jiménez, elected in 1945, authorized a draft of the treaty to be submitted to the National Assembly to be considered for ratification. When the National Assembly met in 1947, ten thousand armed Panamanians showed up to express their opposition. As would be expected, the treaty was unanimously rejected. The fact that most of this armed group was university students lends even more credibility to the idea that the recently formed National University was a breeding ground for virulent anti-American nationalists. What is most significant about this event is the fact that "the incident was the first in which United States interests were thwarted by a massive expression of Panamanian rage" (Meditz 34). It was becoming clearer that the Panamanian people were very nationalistic and unified in their jealous guarding of sovereign independence of their own state. Henceforth nationalist isthmian poetry will become much more prolific and its tenor more anti-American.

Korsi's 1943 poem *Una Visión de Panamá* is a brilliant witness to the Panamanian frustration with the Yankee presence in the isthmus and in many ways summarizes the feeling of
the decade in its entirety.

Gringos, gringos, gringos . . Negros, negros, negros . . 
Tiendas y almacenes, cien razas al sol.
Cholitas cuadradas y zafías mulatas
llenan los zaguanes de prostitución.

Un coche decrepito pasa con turistas.
Soldados, marinos, que vienen y van,
y, empantalonadas, las cabaretistas
que aquí han descubierto la tierra de Adán.

Panamá la fácil, Panamá la abierta,
Panamá la de esa Avenida Central
que es enrocijada puente, puerto y puerta
por donde debiera entrarse al Canal.

Movimiento. Tráfico. Todas las cantinas,
todos los borrachos, todos los fox-trots,
y todas las rumbas y todos los grajos
y todos los gringos que nos manda Dios.

Diez mil extranjeros y mil billeteras . . 
Aguardiente, música . . La guerra es fatal!
Danzan los millones su danza macabra.
Gringos, negros, negros, gringos . . ¡Panamá!
(Korsi, Pequena 109-110)

This poem shows that Korsi focuses on both racial anomalies of Panama: Gringos and Negroes. Nevertheless, his poetic focus is clearly on the demoralizing influence of the United States which brings drunkenness and dancing, among other things. The poet also does not fail to mention the presence of the marines in the vignette he paints of Panama. These American soldiers are, for the Panamanians, the embodiment of the United States imperialism so it is no surprise to read that Korsi includes them in this poem. It is this imperialism that promotes the image of Panama as "easy" and "open" to exploitation. As a result of this thinking, the creation of "this Central Avenue" which puts on display all that is bad about Panama is seen and it might
be perceived that Korsí sees them all proceeding from one origin: the United States abuse of the isthmian nation.

In retrospect the following may be said about the decade of the 1940's in Panama. The introduction of Arias' panameñismo ideologies laid a strong base for not just nationalism, but nationalism armed with education promoted by the National University. Now Panamanian identity will be taken to an entirely new level which becomes more and more anti-American in its tenor. Also, in the face of the spread of nationalism to the popular masses, there will be more demands placed on the United States to change their policies in relations with Panama. The power of en masse protest was demonstrated later in this decade.

The 1949 popular demonstration in protest of extending the lease to the American government on the occupied territory is a landmark event in that it signals the shift from national identity being defined by the oligarchy to being defined by the pueblo itself. Anti-oligarchy nationalist leaders like those that emerged over the past two decades beginning with Acción Comunal were largely responsible for this change. Another important factor is that there are increasingly more issues upon which the Panamanian people can base hatred for the United States, such as the lease extension proposition, as well as poetry like the sordid picture of Panama the Northerners helped to create that is painted by Korsí in Una Visión de Panamá. This popular definition of national identity is a key factor in the formation of Panamanian nationalism in the decades following the 1940's.

The 1950's: Setting the Stage for 1964

The events of the 50's set the stage for the watershed event in Panamanian history which
was the Flag Riots. Throughout 1948 to 1952, Commander of the National Police, José Antonio Remón initiated agricultural and economic programs designed to reduce the Republic’s economic dependence on the canal. In 1953, Foreign Minister Octavio Fábrega, spoke out vociferously in a well-attended rally protesting the fact that the 1903 treaty denied Panama sovereignty over its greatest resource, its geography. Later the same year Remón went to Washington to discuss revisions of the Hull-Alfaro Treaty of 1936 including Panama’s receiving a larger portion of the canal tolls and a more equitable wage scale for both Panamanian and American workers in the Zone. Remón’s visit to Washington laid the groundwork for the 1955 Treaty of Mutual Understanding and Cooperation.

This 1955 treaty, like that of 1936, did not go far enough in abrogating the 1903 treaty to be completely satisfactory to the Panamanians. “It was plain that the attitude of the U.S. government remained defensive; the 1903 treaty rights would be protected. But if material concessions could placate Panama, the United States was willing to grant them” (Ryan 37). Under the 1955 treaty, the United States gained continued use of the very important Rio Hato air base while Panama received $25 million in real estate as well as retirement benefits and equal opportunity employment for Panamanian workers in the Zone. On the sovereignty issue, however, the United States remained steadfast in denying even “titular sovereignty” of the zone which would include flying the Panamanian flag, speaking Spanish, and Panama’s accrediting all foreign consuls. Panama proposed an amendment to the treaty limiting the United States’ sovereignty to only ninety-nine years which was rejected by the United States Senate. Nevertheless, the Treaty was approved unenthusiastically by the Panamanian legislature. Despite the approval, strong doubts definitely existed that this would be the last time the issue would be
raised. Also, the Panamanians knew that the intense anti-American nationalism in the Republic gained them leverage with the United States. Clearly the nature of the U.S.-Panamanian relations was not, at this point, one of amicable cooperation. This is reflected in the poetry of the 1950's.

Following the publication of the nationalist poems of Demetrio Korsi, there was a proliferation of anti-American poetry. The effect this poet and his writings had on poets following him is difficult to overestimate. Let us look first at the poetry of the first half of this decade, the history of which has just been outlined above.

Santiago Anguizola Delgado was born in 1898 in the rural province of Chiriquí, site of the troublesome American occupation in the early twenties. As a poet, he is noted for his patriotic writing and loyalty to his native province. This probably has much to do with the fact that he is one of a very few poets writing in the 1950's that was born, raised, and educated in a rural province of Panama versus being formed in one of the urban areas of Colón, Panama City, or Bogota.

I begin with Anguizola Delgado's poem *Pobre Patria*. This poem is a better example of the anti-oligarchy feeling that was taking a stronger hold in Panama than anti-American rhetoric. There is a clear condemnation in this poem of the national oligarchy which has trampled the dignity of the Republic. This is an important theme that was often reflected in poetry and, more importantly, was a major tenet of General Omar Torrijos' regime which assumed power in the late 1960's. It should also be remembered that the Panamanian people saw the oligarchy as selling out the nation to the North Americans as the dismal situation in Panama was described by Anguizola Delgado in this poem.
Patria: con qué dolor en este día,
te contemplo confusa y angustiada,
por obra de la chusma enacanallada
servil, de la oprobiosa oligarquía.

Tu no has sido en el alma, Patria mía,
como excelsa deidad enronizada;
tu has sido por tus hojas pisoteada
sin que a nadie le importa tu agonía.

En vez de conducirte hacia la cumbre,
te insulta despuñadado muchedumbre
y aprisiona tu planta lodo infecto. . . (Delgado, Obra 33-34)

Another very brief but revealing selection is a short poem by the same poet titled *Panama en el cincuentenario*. The poem was written in 1953 in celebration of the 50th anniversary of Panama’s independence. I include the three lines that deal with the Canal here.

No en balde quiso el cielo que en tus nativos lares,
Lesseps todas las rutas juntara de los mares,
y soñara Bolívar el corazón del mundo. (Delgado, Obra 26)

The revealing element is actually what *doesn’t* appear in the poem with regard to the canal; that missing element is any credit given to the United States for the construction of the Canal. This choosing to ignore United States influence is, I believe, indicative of the general anti-yanqui mood predominant in Panama at the middle of this decade.

The poetry of Korsi surfaces again in the early 1950’s with a nationalist message that serves as a compass for the future not only of Panama’s poetry but also of her national identity. His verse is powerful and free of ambiguity with regard to his anti-American attitude. One of his poems from 1954 is called *Oda Inflexible* and truly is an inflexible ode to the nation in which is pledged allegiance to her flag and defense of her future. At the same time, there is in this ode a
message of hope that one day soon justice, which Korsi believes Panama epitomizes, will
conquer the isthmus once again and restore the face of the nation. The poem itself is dedicated to
Cerro Ancón which symbolizes, as in Amelia Denis de Icaza’s 1906 poem, the loss of
Panamanian sacred places to destructive exploitation.

Alzas tu mole frente al mar, y tomas
la sencilla actitud de un compañero,
cuando en mi adolescencia azul, asomas,
sentimental, selvático, y sincero...

Y en tus prohibidos términos, apenas
se podia el domingo visitarte:
poco a poco te echaban las cadenas
por siglos destinadas a humillarte.

Muerta la musa que lloró tu entrega,
y en este siglo de voluble atuendo,
paragonaste a la colonia griega:
solo hubo un medio de salvarse... ¡huyendo!

El yanqui alerta, en el festín del oro,
hizo el Canal y te horadó la entraña;
te dió otro aspecto a cambio del decoro,
para trocarse en fortaleza extraña.

¿Ah, cuando volverá sobre tu cumbre
nuestra bandera a temblar un día?
cuando terminará la servidumbre
de tu inmolado pueblo, patria mía?...

Y mientras tanto la Justicia aguarda...
Pareces increpar en tu mutismo
a la equidad, como diciendo: ¿Tardas?
Por qué no vienes a salvar al Isthmo?

Muévase Lázaro espectral, y ande;
y que termine ya la reverencia:
falta el Ancón para la patria grande!
¡cómo pesa el Ancón en la conciencia! (Korsi, El Tiempo)
There is a sense of lamentation in this poem. Korsi writes that the United States had bore
through the belly of the Panamanian nation which has changed forever Panama’s reality. The
poet, with the rest of the nation, waits for the return of Panama’s glory when the national ensign
flies over the Canal. However, such visions are far from reality in the mid-1950's.

The Suez Canal Link

A very important event effecting the poetry of the second-half of the 1950's was the
nationalization of the Suez Canal and the repercussions of that action in Panama. The
inauguration of the presidency of Ernesto de la Guardia in 1956, the same year as Egyptian
nationalization of the Suez Canal, marked a new low in Panamanian-United States relations. The
subtle difference between the Suez Canal in Egypt and Panama’s was that the Egyptian canal was
actually owned by a private investment firm while the United States Government owned the
Panama Canal. This difference proves to be of little importance to the Panamanians who are
inspired by Egyptian President Nasser’s 1956 nationalization of the Suez Canal with the support
of U.N. peacekeeping forces. Secretary of State Dulles quickly asserted that there was no
analogous situation between the Panama and Suez Canals and that he did not see nationalization
of the Panama Canal pending as a result of the Egyptian president’s actions. Panama
subsequently played the sovereignty card again in an era of heightened nationalism in former
colonies throughout the world, and again demanded recognition of at least its titular sovereignty
(Ryan 41). Anti-yanqui sentiment continued to gather strength, especially among young people
who were considered by the United States to be influenced by Castro’s communism, perceived as
a serious threat by the United States in this era.
The post-1956 body of poetry does also reflect growing discontent among the *pueblo panameño*. Korsi’s *Oda Inflexible* provides a bridge into the new poetic movement of Panama known as *la poesía nueva*. This is a movement based on the Vanguard ideals of anti-Americanism and nationalism and defined well by one word: *descontento*. As the poetry will illustrate, there was profound discontent with the political status quo in Panama. Also, there was an increase in popular movements led by nationalist leaders whose ideals were often reflected in the work of the Republic’s poets. The people of these movements will take matters into their own hands to create change.

*Pro Mundi Beneficio*, a 1956 poem by Santiago Anguizola, may initially appear as just another flowery hymn celebrating the glories of the isthmus if not for one crucial stanza which I cite here. The poet is writing about the accomplishment of constructing the trans-isthmian waterway.

*Tan grande fue el contento,*
de ver lograda tan sublime hazaña
que consiente al momento,
en que se abra su entraña,
sacrificando los nátivos lares,
para que se realice el gran portento
de que se abracen los dos grandes mares
en donde el gran Lesseps dejó la obra,
la toma Roosevelt y así fue acabada
porque pujanza a su nación le sobra;
hoy, por el gran Canal más codiciada
y la unión con el águila norteña
se encuentra la pequeña
a menudo en su fama desairada,
pese a que sigue alta
proclamándose libre y soberana,
siempre a la influencia del extraño esquiva,
celosa de su estirpe castellana. (Delgado, *Obra* 30)
The adjectives and phrases that characterize the United States (pujanza, esquiva, celosa) reveal to us the way the Panamanian mind sees the North. More revealing still is the way the relationship with the “northern eagle” is described as a tenuous one in which the small Latin American nation often finds itself belittled next to the abundant power of the United States.

Mario Augusto Rodríguez wrote his Canto de Amor para la Patria Novia in 1957. This poem is a beautiful allegory in which Panama is cast as an innocent young woman whose radiant beauty at birth is destroyed through continually being violated throughout her life. I cite the section entitled Explotación.

*Descendia del Norte,*  
*con larga barba de oro y fusiles,*  
*el coloso.*

*Sus plantas gigantescas,*  
*como huracán demoledor, terrible,*  
*crujían en las pisadas*  
*crucificando pueblos y caminos,*  
*agarrando las aguas del océano*  
*y asiendo entre los dedos los pulmones*  
*azules de los cielos.*

*Tendía su brazo hercúleo*  
*brindando protección para los débiles,*  
*pero sus dedos de águila imperiosa*  
*exprimían*  
*la asustada semilla de la sangre.*

*Habló una lengua extraña*  
*de ambiciones, promesas y arrogancias.*  
*Y otra vez la cintura de la dicha*  
*quedó ceñida por la mano férrea*  
*del seductor.*

*Tu cuerpo*  
*de árboles, de ríos y de corolas,*  
*pura vestal ansiosa de infinito,*
se entregó en holocausto ante el coloso.

¿Era tu desamparo tan tremendo?
¿La soledad del alma era tan honda
en medio del oceano sin fronteras?

Tal vez temblaba
tu corazón de liberada cierva.
Tal vez soñaba estrellas
tu juvenil cerebro de paloma.

Fue así como entregaste
tu frescura de hamaca entre dos mundos
para mecer las ansias insaciables
del imperial gigante de piel roja.
Y otra vez el gemido,
la angustia, la tortura, los dolores
de la sangre brotando de las hojas,
cayendo en aguacero fecundante
sobre tu vientre fértil,
para emerger del hambre y la miseria
al morado fulgor de la añoranza. (Rodriguez 95-99)

The image of the foreigner cited in this poem is one of a completely anomalous character in the nation. The conquering Northerner speaks a different language. The language barrier is not one of English and Spanish; it is a barrier of the language of ideology. The Northerner speaks in terms of ambition, promises, and arrogance while all the while tightening his crushing grip on the innocent being of the fatherland. The patria novia has become a submissive servant to the imperialist master and his desires, much like a sordid relationship between a selfish, dominant man and submissive woman might be. The moving last line might be described as “innocence lost.” The once-great things of the nation are now only an añoranza, a sadness for something lost. While the poetic figure of the defiled woman may have lost her innocence, for the
Panamanian reader of this poetry in the 1950's, what has been lost are sovereignty, territory, and national dignity.

*The Late 1950's: Popular Participation and Increasing Demands*

Important events of 1958 and 1959 had a great impact in increasing anti-American sentiment in the period after 1956 but before the 1964 Flag Riots. Panamanian students threatened a peaceful invasion of the Canal Zone in 1958 which they carried out by placing about 70 Panamanian flags within the zone. This led to a conflict with the zone police and shortly thereafter, demonstrators outside the zone turned on the National Guard in a bloody riot in which nine people lost their lives. Most of the Panamanian resistance stemmed from the issue of flying two flags over the zone. The United States would not agree to flying two flags as this would, in their opinion, only open the door for Panama to make more demands for sovereignty. A second attempt of the Panamanians in November of 1959 to fly their colors over the zone resulted in another bloody battle, this time involving both Panamanian and United States troops. The armed nature of this conflict cast an even more dismal shadow on the experience of Panama with the United States in the 1950's. Several poems bring out the feeling of impotence in the face of American power as well as assert demands to be answered by the United States.

Reflecting the chaotic nature of Panama and the relative lack of defenses the Panamanians possessed compared to the United States is the poem *El Canal de Panama Tiene Peces Asombrados*, written by Aristides Martinez Ortega in 1959.

*En aquel tiempo, los hombres cavaron la tierra
y apareció una mezcla oceánica con peces asombrados.*
Extraño océano sin corales, sin moluscos, sin cangrejos,  
sin algas, sin caracoles, sin nada,  
sólo peces asombrados - (Martínez Ortega, Poemas)

The image is of thousands of scared little fish outside of that which should be their natural  
habitat. The parallel is the abnormal situation of the Panama Canal in which the scared fish are  
the Panamanians themselves. The Canal, the once-glory of Panama, has become the nation’s  
biggest bane and not much time will pass before the people start demanding change. The poem  
certainly is not a poetic masterpiece but in its simplicity, an important message is conveyed.

Another poem that illustrates the emergence of the popular masses’ participation in  
Panama’s battle against the United States is the poem by Demetrio Herrera Sevillano, Tu siempre  
dices que sí. This poem is a call to all of the passive people in Panama who casually have come  
to accept United States hegemony in the isthmus to stand up in defense of their nation.

    Paisano mío,  
    panameño,  
    tu siempre respondes: sí.  
    Pero no para luchar.  
    Que no para protestar  
cuando te ultrajan a sí.  
    Paisano mío,  
    panameño,  
    tu siempre respondes: sí.

    Sí te dan un peso diario,  
    - Sí, sí, sí.  
    Se te gobierina un tirano,  
    - Sí, sí, sí.  
    Paisano mío,  
    panameño,  
    tu siempre respondes: sí.

---

6 This is a direct parallel to the Guatemalan Juan José Arévalo’s book, The Shark and the  
Sardines in which the United States is depicted as a shark and the nations of Latin America as  
sardines that become victims of the shark’s might.
Aprende a decirle no, 
aprende a decirle no 
a lo que le dices sí... 

¡Por favor! 
Que no se diga 
que tú no tienes conciencia, 
no, no, no. (Miró, Cien 281-282)

The message of this poem is clear. Sevillano implores his countrymen to actively search their conscience and ask themselves if they can longer endure the unfair conditions in which they have been living. This is a call to stand up to the United States and confidently say “no” to their imperialist ways. Poetry like this that has the popular masses as its audience had as its intent the mobilization of the pueblo against the United States. It was also this kind of thought, nationalism combined with action, that would lead to events like the 1964 riots.

A good poem to close the section with is Panama Defendida by José Franco. The poem is a lyrical mix of many themes. First among them is that of demands. The poem requires nothing less from the United States than peace and the return of the fatherland.

PORQUE EL DÍA VENDRA
EN QUE POR LAS PLANICIES,
POR LAS ALTAS VERTIENTES ERIZADAS,
POR LOS DIFUSOS SIMBOLOS
DEL PASTO Y LOS JARDINES,
VENDRAN LOS COMBATIENTES. . .
NO A RECOGER SITIOS, NI CIUDADES,
SINO A EXIGIR TERRUÑO,
PAZ Y PATRIA FINAL. (Franco, Panama Defendida)

In another section of the same poem, Panama is depicted again as a helpless victim. This victimization also comes to be a strong factor in strengthening anti-Americanism. The United States is blamed for almost all of Panama’s ills, easily shifting responsibility for the milieu of
mid-century Panama from the Republic itself to her imperialist neighbor.

PATRIA MIA, CUANTAS VECES TUS HORAS
SON HORRIBLES CLOACAS, OSCUROS POZOS
DE MIEDO ESTREMECIDO...
TE MIRO A VECES, PATRIA, COMO UN TUNEL
DE CRUCES Y BURDELES.
COMO UN GOLPEADO MURO DE CANTINA...
CUAL BRUJAS MITOLOGICAS,
CHUPAN TU SANGRE PURA,
CORTAN TU CARNE HUMILDE,
TUS MANOS TEMBLOROSAS COMO PETALOS.

(Franco, Panama Defendida)

Franco muses about what Panama could be like if the political situation of the Canal were reversed. Also, the image of the United States as a vampire emerges again as it often does in

poetry of the Isthmus of Panama. Clearly the vampire metaphor is a parallel for the resource- and spirit-draining force of the United States in the Republic. He paints in the following selection from the poem a picture of a utopian Panama in which the Canal could be transformed from a producer of hate and war to producing love and peace.

TAMBIEN “THE CANAL ZONE”
ES UNA BRASA ARDIENDO, PATRIA MIA
SI FUERA EL CANAL UN SITIO DULCE,
SI FUERA UN SENDERO
DE ALBOROZO,
SI ABRIERA SUS COMPUERTAS A LA DICHA
DEL HOMBRE SIN REMILGOS;
SI LA BANDERA NUESTRA
TREMOLARA EN SUS AGUAS,
SI NO DECAPITARAN LA ALEGRIA.

IRIAMOS CONTIGO,
SALUDANDO,
HACIENDO UN MUNDO BUENO.
SERIA EL CANAL UN SITIO PURO,
UN ETERNO VEHICULO DE AMOR.

(Franco, Panama Defendida)

There are, however, significant obstacles to peace and chief among them, from the
Panamanian point of view, are the economically unjust policies practiced by the United States in the isthmus. Franco writes of the "gold roll," part of the wage system for workers in the Zone. The native Panamanians were paid less on the so-called "silver roll" while the transplanted United States citizens were paid on the more lucrative "gold roll." Naturally, this is one of the policies upon which the Panamanians focus their disgust and in so doing seek to eliminate.

\[ \textit{PERO LA GRUTA RUBIA DEL GOLD ROLL} \\
\textit{HA SIDO UN CRATER SUCIO} \\
\textit{DE ESPUTO Y PUS, DE HUESOS} \\
\textit{Y CARNE DEVORADA.} \\
\textit{PORQUE MIENTRAS EXISTA UN SILVER ROLL...} \\
\textit{NO HABRA PAZ} \\
\textit{NI FUNDAMENTALES REGOCIJOS.} \\
\textit{NI HABRA UN MANTEL DE AMOR} \\
\textit{PARA EL DOLOR ANTIGUO DE LA PATRIA.} \]

(Franco, \textit{Panama Defendida})

I close my last citation of this poem with Franco's call for a return to Panama's purity.

This, like Sevillano's poem, elicits a call to action to help restore the battered figure of the motherland.

\[ \ldots \textit{QUE VUELVA LA REPUBLICA A SU JUSTO LITORAL DE ALEGRIAS.} \\
\textit{QUE VUELVA LA REPUBLICA A SU AUSTERO RAMAJE DE ESPERANZAS.} \\
\textit{ILUMINEN LA PATRIA LOS AUTENTICOS,} \\
\textit{LOS TRIBUTARIOS GUIAS} \\
\textit{DEL PUEBLO LABORIOSO.} \\
\textit{QUE LA PATRIA ES EL ISTMO,} \\
\textit{AMERICA Y EL MUNDO.} \] (Franco, \textit{Panama Defendida})

The question remains if there truly can be a return to purity for the motherland. The Panamanians will, in the second half of the century, work much harder at asserting their rights while continuing to define themselves ever-stronger as an anti-American nation.

Before opening the third and final section which will be studied, a brief summary of
events from the late 50's to 1964 is necessary. Relations between the two governments were strained as never before after the 1958 and 1959 conflicts. Exacerbating the already-tense situation, students again threatened a march into the Canal Zone on Panama's Constitution Day in March of 1960. This potential conflict was avoided by reports that the United States might allow the flags of both countries to be flown in the zone.

Indeed, in 1960 President Eisenhower allowed both flags to be flown in a particular section of the canal, Shaler Triangle. "Eisenhower's decision, which he apparently believed would end the constant squabbles over sovereignty, proved to be only a temporary remedy" (Ryan 44). As predicted, the Panamanians began demanding their ensign to be flown in other places as well. Doubt was now shed on the United States' control in the zone and Panama began reasserting its claim to sovereignty even more. "By making this symbolic gesture, Eisenhower thought he could satisfy the 'emotional' needs of the Panamanians, while he satisfied their 'real' [monetary] needs" (Knapp 60). Nationalism had risen to a point in Panama by the middle of the 20th century that created a continuing increase in the Panamanian demands of the United States Government.

As part of the fulfillment of the "real" economic needs of the Panamanians, President Kennedy had hoped to accomplish a boosting of Panama's economy without making any treaty changes. Kennedy recognized that underlying Panamanian President Chiari's request in 1961 for treaty revisions was "a sluggish Panamanian economy" (Farnsworth 37). Kennedy planned to do this through the Alliance for Progress but raising the standard of living conditions was not all the Panamanians were looking for. Substantial changes in sovereignty over the zone would be the only solution and anti-American nationalism seemed to be the tool that could facilitate such
changes.

At this point, a retrospective look at over sixty years of poetry of the Republic of Panama shows very important developments that have created the foundation for the scathing invective poetry which is to come in the second half of the century. The birth of the new republic elicited romantic and optimistic verse from the pens of the nation’s first poets. However, almost as soon as the Canal is completed in 1914, poetry’s dialectical relationship with politics develops more fully, especially that which has to do with United States-Panamanian relations. The tenor of patriotic poetry became increasingly bitter since the early 1900's. This shift was facilitated largely by blatant shows of U.S. imperialism and encouragement of nationalist groups in Panama. By the time the Flag Riots occur in 1964, it is expected that the event will be addressed in poetic texts given the history of Isthmian poetry and politics through the middle of century.
IV. 1964 to the 1990’s: Changing Definitions

The poets of the first half of the century contributed greatly to the definition of Panama as an anti-American nation. I have discussed the historical events that built the case against the United States and connected them to poetry written at approximately the same time. It must be remembered that the poetry produced since independence to the 1960’s is overwhelmingly negative in its tenor. With that in mind, it is beneficial to quote Panamanian sociologist Isaías García to create a context of national identity in which to discuss the poetry of the second half of the century. I quote at length from his late 1950’s work *Naturaleza y forma de lo panameño*.

Therefore, upon attempting an analysis of our culture, or of our objectives, we cannot ignore that we could arrive at the realization that our authentic being has not yet found its authentic expression. And it is possible that, upon doing this, our judgement of national values more often than not tends toward the negative, because it is precisely there that we believe to be found the logos of our inauthenticity (García 8).

Thus what is seen here is nothing less than the realization that perhaps Panama had not found its authentic national identity at all by the 1960’s. It seemed impossible to separate Panamanian national identity from a context of negativity; an asset that perhaps Panamanians saw as necessary to remain strong in spite of North American imperialism. As the poetry is continually based on negative themes most often having to do with hatred directed at the United States, a genuine definition of that which makes Panama what it is is not allowed to emerge. Just the opposite, a true national identity is suppressed by a poetry of hate which will be exacerbated through this latest period.
In many ways, the historical events since independence precipitated the watershed event of 1964 which is the Flag Riots. These riots will have significant impact both poetically and politically for Panama. This next period encompasses the height of nationalism in 1964, the poetic result of those events, the emergence of Omar Torrijos and his accomplishment of gaining new Canal treaties, further U.S. intervention in 1989, and ultimately the questioning of national identity in contemporary Panama.

As aforementioned, the Flag Riots of 1964 were a definitive turning point in United States-Panamanian relations. The scene occurred at an American high school in the zone where American students were marching around a flagpole in protest of the dual-flag policy implemented by Eisenhower. Once word of this spread across the zone border, a group of two-hundred Panamanian students marched into the zone with their flag. Upon confrontation with the American high school students, a struggle ensued in which the Panamanian flag was torn. With their national ensign damaged, several of the native protesters gave word to others outside the zone and the worst riot Panama has known then occurred. After three days of rioting, the list of injured was in the hundreds and among the dead were twenty Panamanians and four Americans. Panama then charged the United States with aggression and severed the diplomatic relationship between the two countries.

In a perfect, though unconscious on their part, illustration of the relationship between poetry and politics, the Panamanian poets reacted immediately to this most recent conflict between the United States and their nation. As might be expected, anti-Americanism soared to a new level. The Panamanian attitudes are most definitely reflected in the poetry following this event. However, there is a new generation of poets writing from a new perspective that is
different from most poetry seen thus far in the isthmus.

The poetic movement to which so many of these writers belong is called simply poesía joven. The movement included a significant number of poets, many of them more radical college students motivated by the violence of January, 1964. The poets take patriotic verse a step further in that brutal honesty and commitment to their conscience which tells them of the injustice of the U.S.-Panamanian relationship. In short, they acted on their emotions which produced some of the most invective poetry seen in the Republic to date.

This type of poetry that is an acting out of deep convictions is called by critic Leslie Bethell “engaged poetry” (Bethell 272). This engaged poetry is a product of political circumstances and leaves no doubt in the reader as to the feelings of the poet. All ambiguity is put aside in favor of communicating a definite political message. The poetry also relied on the creation of deep associations between the poet and the reader and in this sense is the example par excellence of nation-building poetry. “A prime intention was to make poetry matter again in the struggle for social justice, and this still concerns younger poets” (Bethell 272). The poetry of the Republic of Panama from 1964 to the mid-70’s is an excellent example of this engaged poetry as will be shown below.

Roberto Fernandez Iglesias, one of the principal Panamanian writers on the subject of this generation, writes in his book Los recién llegados: “[The writers of poesía joven] present themselves as they are. . . they don’t feel weak and affront that which is necessary to survive, that which they must do, that which they must create without giving in, before their time, to an adult world that doesn’t yet belong to them” (Correa Vásquez 3). The poets do face significant trouble in printing their poetry which they blame in large part on the oligarchy that doesn’t appreciate
their work. This is one more reason that Torrijos and his breakdown of the oligarchy will precipitate the production of invective poetry by members of this generation; the general’s regime encourages this type of literary expression.

Bertalicia Peralta is one of the poets of this generation that seeks to inspire people to act on what they see as unjust in their nation because those who succumb to lethargy in the struggle for sovereignty “will only know liberty in dreams” (Correa Vásquez 65). Peralta’s poem 9 de enero: un minuto de silencio is one of the best examples of poetry reacting to the Flag Riots.

_Nueve de enero, número inicial_
_principio germinal de independencia_
_Lúgubre silencio letal de palomas_
_soltadas en el centro de la vida_
_donde nacieron los soldados de la Patria_
_donde murieron: quemados sus ojos_
_acongojados por dentro_
_ultrajados en su casta y en su sangre_
_violados en su lengua y sus hijos_
_acogetados, sumidos en la ira y en la barbarie_
_los militantes de la Patria nueva_
_de la Patria sangrante_
_de la gimiente Patria_
_de la despedazada, dulce, buena Patria_
_con su pecho abierto por la metralla_
_la soberbia, la odiosa conquista del imperio_
_de estados unidos por el crimen. . .

_quiero gritar a todos que no es posible amar a los sol-_
_los yankees_

_que no es posible comprender palabras_
_en vueltas en duras balas_
_ni es posible conocer a ningún John_
_ni hablar tranquilmente a Mary_
_Compañeros: un grueso manto repleto de flores_
_y verdes celajes para cerrar sus ojos para siempre! . .

_Hablo de mástiles que tienen nombres_
_hablo de niños con sus cantos_
This poem shows just how much any hope of cooperation or peaceful co-existence on the isthmus between Panamanians and United States citizens was waning. The image of Panama Peralta paints in this poem is one of her Republic being sold by Yankee soldiers. There is also in this poem an unashamed description of the violence the people of the nation suffer. Sexual metaphors of violence and rape are included which demonstrate the politics of sexuality, much like those modeled earlier in *Canto de amor para la patria novia*. Perhaps the most important development illustrated in this poem is the introduction of martyrdom. The poem begins with a lamentation for those soldiers that died in battle against the Yankee, “their chests opened by machine gun fire.” She specifically mentions the martyrs, however, in the last stanza and for them asks for a moment of silence among those in the Panamanian national community. Those martyrs can serve as a very powerful source of nation building.

Although to the vast majority of Panamanians the dead are no more than names, their suffering at the hands of the North Americans is something almost all members of the nation can empathize with. It matters not who the martyrs were because the fact remains that they are Panamanians, too. They are part of the community in which all members, to use Anderson’s
words, "share the fatality" of being members of a nation under the control of the United States. The Flag Riots are an especially inflammatory event for the entire community because it is not a specific group of Panamanians that is attacked but rather one of Panama's most universally beloved symbols: their national flag.

In his work Sacred Text, Sacred Nation, Pierre Taminaux also writes of the importance of martyrdom in nation building. He writes that the martyrs become sacrified so that they are an essential part of the national identity, a theme especially important in Roman Catholic Latin America. Although he is writing about the French in this particular instance, the following quote may be just as well applied to Panama after the Flag Riots: "They [I insert "Panamanians"] must fight and speak for those who will no longer speak; in this case, the nation identifies itself with a single dead body in which all men and women can be reunited" (García Moreno 95). The martyrs who are presented in poems like Peralta's facilitate the creation of the imagined community. The violent past is used as a tool to "stir up identification of the individual with the crowd" (García Moreno 98). Poetry is an excellent vehicle to foment this identification with the deceased countrymen and consequently with the entire nation.

Another poet that masterfully combines anti-yanqui rhetoric with exaltation of the martyrs is Diana Morán. Although she is writing in 1989, many years after the Riots, her poems on this topic are too relevant to not include here. Her purposes are much the same as those of Peralta which are to encourage identification with the martyrs and reaffirm the nation's anti-American stance. She wrote a series of poems in the late '80s dedicating each to the memory of a specific martyr for the Patria that perished in 1964. Let us look at one dedicated a la mártir Maritza Alabarca:
RUMOR DE HOJAS

MARI . .MARITZA. . .ALABARCA
luna y media del sueño,
muñeca azul en las alas,
candor de piano
en el vuelo. . .

GOLPE DE SANGRE

MARI . .MARITZA. . .ALABARCA
Fue en enero. . .
Fueron ellos.
Ku Klux Klan, capucha blanca,
Horno de babys negros.

GOLPE DE PIEDRA

MARI,
MARITZA ALABARCA,
mi cervatillo deshecho
- como una carta de pascua
te hicieron musgo los reyes-
nueve, diez, once de enero.
¡Ay, MARITZA,
FUERON ELLOS!

This poem shows the simultaneous mourning of the martyr and condemnation of the
United States. The Americans are depicted as racist and violent people (images of Nazis and Ku
Klux Klan) who have taken the life of a fellow Panamanian, Maritza. Thus it is seen that even in
1989 the making sacred of the memory of the martyr set in a context of hatred for the Yankee is
still common. This is probably owed much to the events of 1989 which paralleled those of
January 1964, but that issue will be dealt with later. For now, let us look at another poem on the
subject of the Riots.

The poetry of Manuel Orestes Nieto, like that of Morán, is somewhat of an anachronism
here. I include it to show the poetic response to the Flag Riots that continued for decades after the actual event in the mid-60's. This shows the continuity of themes that is so prevalent in Panamanian poetry. The poem, *Era nuestro país a comienzos de año*, is written to a small girl, Rosa. Whatever relation Rosa has to the poet is not known, nor is it very important. Most relevant to this study of the poem is that it is written by someone who experienced the bloody events of 1964 and is relating them to a young member of the imagined Panamanian community.

_Aquel principio de año de 1964
nos invadió la muerte por el centro - Rosa -
fue un año de esos que llamamos duros
   inolvidables
amargos
tú no lo recuerdas como nosotros  tú no
   estabas allí
no fue fácil para nuestras calles
ni para nuestro país
todo aquello pareció suceder de pronto
pero que había venido sucediendo de siempre. . .

ya lo entendíamos - Rosa -
era nuestro país a comienzos de año
con sus muertes
   adolescentes
sus avenidas alteradas por una guerra injusta
y un vampiro invasor
dejando casas solas  llenando hospitales hasta
   los techos
partiendo piernas  vaciando estómagos  pupilas
separando hermanos y hermanas
y viejos amigos que no volverían a verse

_aquel principio de año de 1964
fue para nosotros una ciudad en lágrimas
una larga profanación
un nuevo atentado contra este pueblo nuestro
   - Rosa -
un canal a más alto precio que nunca
una jaula suelta de acreditados asesinos
This poem creates some very strong images having to do especially with the culpability of the United States in the violent outcome of the Riots (again, the vampire metaphor: "un vampiro invasor dejando casas solas"). It is especially edifying to note the insistence of Martínez Ortega to describe to Rosa the events of 1964 and to make sure that she knows that the yanquis are responsible. This is nothing less than the engendering of anti-Americanism in the youth of Panama and shows the importance of that ideology in establishing a base for national identity. Nationalism is, in large part, inherited in a child’s primary socialization. Poems like this with the messages they contain are simply another step in fomenting anti-Americanism in Panama.

This discussion of the products of the poesía joven movement continues with Aristides Martínez Ortega. This poet published his anthology A manera de protesta in 1964 and one of the poems, Balada de las contradicciones con sentido describes how the United States has trapped Panama in a pattern of regression rather than progress. One of the head quotes of the poem evokes the powerful image of being a stranger in one’s own nation. This type of estrangement is an expected result of the military intervention of a foreign power in the domestic affairs of another and was exactly the outcome of the 1964 military intervention of the United States in Panama.

_un imperio sofocando rebeliones_
_y una penosa dura violenta estricta muerte_
_para saldar un día._ (Orestes Nieto, Dar la Cara 33-36)

_En brazos de tío Sam estamos en el suelo_
_La sardina puso en su lugar al tiburón_
_Buscando la libertad encontré el calabozo_
_El mundo sigue su marcha_
_dos pasos adelante - cuatro pasos atrás_

FRANCOIS VILLON
El buen vecino es mal amigo
Aliados para el progreso vamos retrocediendo
Caza negra quiere decir casa blanca
El mundo sigue su marcha
dos pasos adelante - cuatro pasos atrás
(Martínez Ortega, A Manera 15)

It is clear from this poem that development programs like the Alliance for Progress and the Good Neighbor Policy are not enough to reverse Panama’s dire situation. Martínez Ortega seemed to realize the fact that ultimately any plan the United States produced to placate Panama was self-serving to the North Americans. It is safe to say that the clamor for Panamanian sovereignty in their own nation will not soon fade away so long as the Republic continues to be trapped in a situation of underdevelopment, as the last line of the poem indicates.

The poetry of Aristides Martínez Ortega speaks well to the politics of underdevelopment in Latin America, especially his own country. His poetry appears to be a search for answers to the question of why Panama suffers from such marked economic and political trouble. His poem Experiencia personal echoes to a certain degree the image of liberty brought out by Korsi in Block. The poem describes Martínez Ortega’s search for liberty.

Desde ese entonces
oí hablar de la libertad
“ante nada aprenderás a conocerla impresa”
Sacaron varias letras del abecedario
y aplastándolas como acordeón
ví exactamente lo que deseaban mostrarme:
Libertad

Avancé remolcado como los barcos que cruzan Panamá
a otros niveles del saber
donde se engorda con fechas y teorías de libertad.
“consideréte afortunado - dijeron -
vives en el hemisferio de la libertad.
Nació a orillas del Sena;
actualmente reside en Nueva York
contemplando Wall Street
y dando la espalda al Sur’
Decidí conocerla con no menos obsesión,
que los embarcados a la Atlántida. . .

El primer impulso fue recordarles al templo del saber,
citar fechas, exponer teorías,
más caí en cuenta que todo había sido una broma;
la Libertad no es otra cosa que una estatua en Nueva York
contemplando Wall Street y dando la espalda al Sur.
(Martínez Ortega, A Manera 27)

Most intriguing in this poem is that the destination at which liberty is found is the United States. Liberty, as the poem indicates, has been a salient characteristic of the Western hemisphere because of the United States presence there. It is as if Panama is contingent on the definition of liberty as put forth by the United States and couldn’t win it, much less define it, for themselves. It is poems like these that support even more so the idea that Panamanian national identity has not been allowed to fully develop. The Panamanians, as this poem shows, are still dependent on the United States even for their definition of liberty. As Correa Vásquez maintains, Panama is a dependent nation which has produced dependent poetry. The poem ends with the poet discovering that liberty is just a sham. It is only a ploy used by the United States to justify their actions in the Latin American sector of the hemisphere, or so the Panamanian poet sees it.

Another poem by the same writer is called Palabras antes del Final. These verses get at the problem of titular sovereignty much more directly as well as exposing the imperialist actions of the United States in Panama. The poem recounts one after the other of many of the neo-colonialist features of the United States involvement with this isthmian nation. The final verse is
key in that it exposes the lie of titular sovereignty by pointing out that although the United States owns the Canal and operates it as such, on the postcards for tourists, the waterway is touted as Panama's. It is against these deceptions that Martínez Ortega writes his poetry. The emphasis in the poem is mine.

Antes que destuyas la tierra
buscando la paz
con tus bombas atómicas,
buscando la paz
con tus cohetes
lanzados como fuegos artificiales en honor a tus Dioses,
¡Escúchame tío Sam!
atiende viejo de Río Grande, gigante
metido en payasesco chaqué. . .

¡Oh los incomparables muchachos del Army!
atentos, planchados, lustrados, peinados.
Y cómicos. Nos llegan por aire o por mar
sin pasaporte pero con su MI.
No lo discuto: son tu orgullo
y el del por ti tan ayudado mundo

¡Al César lo que es del César!
El por ti tan ayudado mundo no puede olvidar
que nos ayudas a mantenerte poderoso.
El por ti tan ayudado mundo no puede olvidar
que nos tienes aliados para tu progreso.
El por ti tan ayudado mundo no puede olvidar
que con facilidades de pagos nos vendes nuestras riquezas. . .
El por ti tan ayudado mundo no puede olvidar
tus minas en nuestra tierra. . .
El por ti tan ayudado mundo no puede olvidar
que siendo tuyo el Canal accedes a darlo a conocer como
de Panamá en las postales para turistas.

(Martínez Ortega, A manera 41)

There is in this poem another biblical reference. This time, the poet draws an analogy between the Roman Empire in Jerusalem (Al César lo que es del César). Caesar might be represented by
the United States and the Panamanians as the people unfairly burdened by Caesar's policies.

As Martinez Ortega continues fighting for sovereignty through his poetry, I will turn to another woman poet to illustrate the poetry of this period that called people to action. Dimas Lidio Pitty's 1965 poem *In the Canal Zone* is demonstrative of several elements that surface in the poetry of this era. First, it demonstrates the principle of "engaging poetry" in which the poet admonishes other Panamanians to act in defense of the Patria.

Tú
mi yo
cruza la cerca y corre
detrás de esa alambrada está la muerte
captúrala y rómpelo el pescuez
Luego podrás irte a acostar con tu mujer
y vivir
o morir
o no hacer nada. (Mancera 62)

This poem demonstrates a very important characteristic of the protest poetry that predominated the *poesía joven* movement which is simplicity. Ernesto Cardenal, once- Nicaraguan Minister of Culture, was at the forefront of the protest poetry movement in Latin America and was among the first to use this important element of simplicity in his poems. Leslie Bethell explains the necessity of simplicity thus: "...a poem must be clear, and immediately understood" (Bethell 271). Thus through simplicity, the poem becomes more accessible to the people. The poem above from Lidio Pitty is quite simple. It establishes the characters (*tú*, *mi*, *yo*), describes the Canal Zone in a few words and then states the options once the characters have entered and returned from the Zone. The poem is meant to inspire fellow Panamanians to action, especially to that which serves to challenge the United States hegemony in the isthmus.

Another salient characteristic of the protest poetry movement of the 1960's is its attack of
American capitalist values. This more class-conscious poetry is reflective of the anti-oligarchy mood that went hand-in-hand with Torrijos’ rule. Leslie Bethell makes an important observation about the poetry of an Argentinean Juan Gelman: “[His] poems do not end with poetic emotions, but lead to action... The poet also had doubts about capitalism’s egoism...” (Bethell 268-269). This description could also aptly describe a Panamanian poet, Benjamín Ramón. Panamanian poetry like that of Ramón and many others could be considered class-conscious in that many poets see capitalist values as being the destructive force in their nation. An example is Ramón’s poem, Rocco y sus hermanos.

John D., III es el «filántropo»
Encabeza
la fundación Rockefeller.
Nelson, el «servidor público» de la familia
Gobernador de Nueva York y ex-rival de Nixon
posee un particularísimo interés sobre Latino América.
Laurence es el «capitalista arraigado»...

President del Chase; es el «amigo»
que dicen en la televisión. (Saz Sanchez 524)

The point of this poem is to make a mockery of the supposed benevolent nature of U.S. capitalism when in reality it is a bane of the Panamanian life throughout this century.

I will close this section of poesía joven with two poems from Ramiro Ochoa López which demonstrate yet one more parallel with the Latin American protest poetry movement of the same time period. This similarity is the combination of love poems with anti-American elements.

Hace ya tanto y tanto y tanto tiempo
que la palabra amor se dejó de escuchar
en las habitaciones de esta tierra!
Amor mío, vamos a rescatarla!

Tú tomarás mi corazón y le harás frente
a los que nos obligaron a callar su nombre.
Yo tomaré de tus poros y tu sangre
el agua necesaria para resistir...

Recorreremos el Istmo aunque nos detengan
en el puente que separa las américas. (Ochoa Lopez, Poesía 31)

Another poem from the anthology Poesía Furiosa, also shows this same mixing of love and
inventive. The juxtaposition of the two elements in this poem is so striking that it is almost
comical.

Te digo que me quitaría este vestido en nieblas
para que toda Tú pases a mirarme por dentro,
a contemplar el barquito doloroso que hay en
mi corazón
y vieras así mismo la insula prometida
y vieras que antes de tí arribaron al Istmo
de estos llantos,
ciudadanos de lejanías y garras,
e implantaron en nuestras venas amargos
soliloquios
y además se llevaron el oro del abuelo
y violaron la pureza del maíz y los árboles
y al agua la rodearon en la infancia!

No me cansaré de repetirte, amor,
que están abiertas todas las puertas de mi casa...

(Ochoa Lopez, Poesía 61-63)

I assert that this poetry reflects the actual situation of Panama in which the political life,
ever entrenched in the struggle against the United States, could not be divorced even from the
romantic life of the people. It is important to note that the sexual metaphor of rape appears again
in this poem. Bethell notes a similar trait in the poetry of Cardenal and explains it as his tactic
for being able to write political poetry under the guise of romance so as not to incur the wrath of
the dictatorial government of his country. While Ochoa Lopez may have followed the pattern of
Cardenal, it would be difficult to say that he did it to avoid direct political statements considering
the anti-American stance taken by most Panamanian governments and the general acceptance of
disapproval for the United States on the isthmus.

*The Political Consequences of the Flag Riots*

The poetic ramifications of the Flag Riots in the development of the protest poetry of the
*poesía joven* movement have been shown but there were also very significant political
consequences. There is no doubt that the Panamanians used the 1964 riots and the ensuing
international criticism of the United States presence in Panama as a stepping stone to demanding
more of the North Americans. The most significant gain the Panamanians won was the
agreement by the United States to negotiate the issues bringing the two countries into conflict.
At first the United States agreed to nothing more than just that—negotiations. However, later in
1964, Lyndon B. Johnson granted the possibility of revision of the 1903 treaties. This action was
a major victory for the Panamanians.

In September of 1965, presidents Robles and Johnson together stated what the new
treaties would tentatively include and that the drafting of them would soon begin. The
Panamanians were very eager for new treaties and did not expect the negotiations to last long.
Finally, in June of 1967, the governments announced the new treaties. Three treaties were
drafted; one dealing with defense of the zone, the second with the operation of the canal, and the
third with the conditions under which the United States would construct a sea-level canal. The
new treaties, if they had been accepted, would have abolished the United States’ sovereignty “in
perpetuity” clause of the 1903 treaty. An expiration date in 1999 or completion of a new sea-
level canal, whichever came first, would signal the end of United States control in Panama. The
treaties would also have created a compensation system for Panama based on tonnage shipped through the canal, sizeably increasing the annuity the United States paid to Panama. Neither Panamanian nor United States reaction to the treaties was entirely favorable.

To begin with, Panamanian pride was offended once again by the yanquis because of the fact that the treaty drafts arrived only in English. Also, “the opposition [to the treaties] in both Panama and the United States saw their respective governments as granting too much” (Farnsworth 47). Particular opposition by the Panamanians was focused on the United States’ rights under the defense treaty to continue to operate military bases in the zone as well as to conduct military maneuvers in any part of the republic. Panamanian opposition notwithstanding, President Robles signed the treaties in 1968. Public disapproval quickly followed Robles’ decision.

Popular nationalist groups were the first to attack the 1967 treaties on the grounds that they were simply revisions of the 1903 treaties that did not give the Panamanian people the sovereignty they demanded and deserved. Even a Panamanian formerly on the negotiating team for the treaties declared that the United States had, in truth, “created a masterpiece in defense of their nation’s interest” (Farnsworth 50). The failure of the government to be expedient in the official release of the treaties was also problematic. Opposition groups demonstrated and declared the treaties blasphemous, although the actual contents of them remained unknown. The opposition groups were acting on rumors of the treaties’ content. Among the sources of opposition was a politically influential group, that of the university and high school students. This group was known for their radical political tendencies throughout Latin America, especially in support of nationalistic causes. The students, who were among the initial instigators of the
1964 flag riots, staged political demonstrations in opposition to the treaties.

Bureaucratic obstacles to releasing the treaties, as well as continued opposition in the National Assembly, caused Robles to rather suddenly shift his position on the treaties only months after the announcement that they had been drafted. The president declared that the treaties didn’t fully satisfy the desires of the Panamanians and that the United States was again receiving a disproportionate benefit from the canal.

Anti-American sentiment abounded and it was clear that the new Panamanian president to be elected in the 1968 elections would certainly need to be a strong nationalist. Marcos Robles’ chances at carrying out a ratification of the treaties were eliminated when he was impeached. The aging Arias was elected and in less than two weeks was removed from the presidency, for the third time, by the National Guard. The coup d’état of 1968 took place under the leadership of General Omar Torrijos.

The United States did not react favorably to Torrijos’ overthrow of the incumbent president. “The State Department saw the coup as removing a president who was likely to support the draft treaties... and placing in power a government of unknown quality” (Farnsworth 54). The United States broke diplomatic relations in Panama in protest of the overthrow of Arias’ constitutionally-elected government. However, neither country was prepared to approve the treaties of 1967, especially the Panamanians. United States–Panama relations since the 1964 flag riots had generated such intense anti-Americanism that Torrijos wouldn’t dare to propose signing the treaties and risk appearing to compromise Panamanian pride to the United States. Even the poor economic conditions of the late 1960’s were not serious enough to warrant a settlement with the United States. By 1969, when Torrijos firmly established himself in the presidency, the
United States saw that his government would endure and again established diplomatic relations with Panama.

**The Character of Torrijos**

Considering the importance of Torrijos’ regime to United States-Panamanian relations, a discussion of his ideals and characteristics is merited here. The General was brazen and bold, typical of Latin American firebrands like Bolívar, Perón, Castro, and others. According to Latin American political analyst Paul Ryan, he fit the role of the Latin American *caudillo* who would use his military force and stage a coup if that was what he perceived as necessary to restoring control to the government (Ryan 64). Torrijos was a very strong nationalist that recognized the extreme importance of the support of the masses. General Torrijos organized a power base comprised of students, political groups, and the rural masses that was centered on nationalism. Torrijos’ brand of nationalism, however, was focused on erasing the American presence in the Canal Zone. This anti-yanqui nationalism was the unifying factor among the members of the power base he constructed for himself. The more strident the public clamor for Panamanian sovereignty over the canal, the greater Torrijos’ power became. The military president’s nationalist movement, like many others, identified an evil force and fought against it. For Torrijos and his movement, this force was the United States. “Having disposed of one devil in the person of the oligarchy and crooked colonels, Torrijos next chose to fight an even greater devil, the gringo, ready-made and embodied in the canal...” (Ryan 69). Torrijos remained close to the people and in him they saw someone who would deliver on the promise of social programs as well as defend Panama’s pride against the United States.
La Batalla de Panama, a collection of the speeches and writings of the General is very revealing of the ideology that drove this leader. I begin with the text of a speech that concluded “Anti-imperialist Week” in 1971. (The fact that there is such a week at all is very telling of Panamanian nationalism.) As has been shown before, economic programs and aid never could serve to satisfy Panama’s demands for justice in U.S.-Panamanian relations. Torrijos echoes this same sentiment in addressing the negotiators of a new treaty by proclaiming the Patria far more important than economics could ever be.

It would seem that we have taken them by surprise, now that we are not talking to them about economic benefits but rather. . . the problem of the Canal is a problem of feelings, and we give much more importance to the flag than to any economic benefit. (Torrijos 63)

Torrijos also makes a point to indict the United States on the charge of being a corrupting influence working against pure Panamanian nationalism. This, of course, is a fitting theme for Anti-imperialism Week.

The United States, generally, consider as aggressors all who defend themselves from their attacks. That is why you constantly see congressmen and representatives wanting to mix our pure nationalism with influences outside the borders of our motherland” (Torrijos 63).

The General then includes in his speech an invocation of the sacred martyrs of Panama as so many poets have done before him, showing again the dialectic between politics and poetry. This is yet another example of the potential for nation building found in the martyrs.

Many of our cemeteries are full of innocents, full of students, full of workers, full of
Panamanians that believe in the dignity of the *Patria*. It is exactly here that we must be prudent, to know how to distinguish, who is it that says [to the *pueblo*] to leave me alone and who is it that says to follow me. And I am one of those that says follow me. I don’t say leave me, this you know. (Torrijos 64)

The speech ends with a commentary on the struggle against nationalism in Panama. Torrijos once again, like the poets of “engaged poetry” reminds the people of the importance of giving all they have for the homeland.

May the culmination of this anti-imperialist week, which really isn’t a week but rather one more task in the 68 year-old struggle in which we in this country try to free ourselves from imperialism so that everyone makes an examination of their conscience and understands that the day the *Patria* asks of us all we have, that on the *Patria* we don’t impose conditions. (Torrijos 64)

Another speech from the same anthology entitled *La Batalla de Panamá* was given to the United Nations Security Council in 1973. I will cite only a very brief segment but one that is extremely important in that it illustrates well the urgent regard with which Torrijos held the issue of Panamanian sovereignty in the Zone.

High commanders of North America: it is more noble to mend an injustice than perpetuate an error. To the world today we ask that you support us morally because the struggle of the weak is only won where there is support of the moral of the world. . .

Because our country is quickly arriving at a limit of patience. (Torrijos 121)

The last line above in which Torrijos warns that Panama is “arriving at a limit of patience” certainly leaves no room for ambiguity. The message is clear: Panama will not rest until she has
gained sovereignty over the entire geographical area of the Republic and claimed the resources which are rightfully hers. Undoubtedly, the anti-imperialist sentiment of Torrijos will be a major influence on the entire nation as well as the poets of the 70's and into the 1980's also.

*The Influence of Antipoesía*

The name given to the poetic movement throughout Latin America in the 1970's that in Panama co-existed with Torrijos' power was *antipoesía*. This movement was a radical transformation of poetic thought that built off the foundations of the engaged poetry of *poesía joven* in the 1960's. Agustín del Saz Sanchez quotes Bertalicia Peralta's commentary on anti-poetry: "It eludes rhetoric to go directly to the topic at hand: ambiguity. The intention of the author is to disgust and set the reader in a different reality without any false beauty to which we are so accustomed" (Saz Sanchez 85). Gone entirely is flowery and sweet poetry; it will be replaced by bitter invective and violent critique of modern society that challenges the comfortable reality of the reader. This violence, Saz Sanchez explains, is the natural result of the tumultuous experience the Panamanian people were living in this decade (Saz Sanchez 86). The movement, in Panama's case specifically, was largely the product of the violent atmosphere and tense U.S.-Panamanian relations which the 1964 Flag Riots produced and the struggle for revised Canal Treaties perpetuated. In truth, the movement was nothing less than a struggle against the contemporary situation in their nation.

Leslie Bethell identifies three specific elements of Latin American anti-poetry which are narration, humor (*irony* in the case of Panama), and colloquial language (Bethell 278). Certainly all of these elements are present in the *antipoesía* of the isthmus. Examples of colloquial
language, especially in poetry that inserts English words to describe conditions in the Zone, are demonstrated in this poetry. The anti-poets use these elements in their writing to accomplish its central purpose which is to “make poetry more important by making it demotic [i.e.- relevant to common people]” (Bethell 278). Indeed, the poetry does become more important precisely because it embodies the feelings of the majority of the Panamanian community during the 1970's.

This survey of anti-poetry begins with verse from journalist, storyteller, and poet Ricardo Turner. His poem On limits (note the colloquial language) is an excellent example of the curt and blunt poetry of this movement.

\[\text{Hoy - viernes -}  \\
\text{es día de pago}  \\
\text{en el Canal Zone}  \\
\text{las putas}  \\
\text{se visten de gala}  \\
\text{para el magno evento.}  \\
\]

\textit{Al amanecer la ciudad se desanga.} (Saz Sanchez 574)

\textit{On Limits} is also very telling of the dependency relationship the United States has created in the economic and social life of the Republic. The imagery of \textit{putas} receiving their checks from the U.S. government and the city letting its blood on payday to the American vampires is very strong and serves to depict the economically and culturally dependent situation created by the United States in Panama.

Manuel Orestes Nieto is another anti-poet whose poems may seem incongruous with the poetic movement he belonged to in that they are deeply moving and inspire in the reader a sense of loss and suffering the Panamanians have suffered at the hands of neo-colonialism. There is also in his verse an image of total isolation in one’s own homeland, the same theme brought out
Uno cree tener un territorio un país
un pueblo grande un pueblo corazón esperanza
algo por lo cual dar la cara
las manos y las piernas
uno cree defender cosas justas exactas bondadosas
uno es capaz de romperse el pecho
a pleno mediodía en su lucha
en sus motivaciones en su amor verdadero penetrado...

uno cree en su nación
se sabe de una patria y hay orgullo en eso...

pero a uno un día le echan de su territorio
le persiguen en su país
intentan cortarle las manos y las piernas
hacen que de verdad uno se rompa el pecho
que engolfe el amor penetrado de la sangre
que se llee uno de rabia
que haya y se esconda y que la patria duela en el escape
y que la nación que uno lleva a todas partes
la pisoteen la abran para ver que tiene dentro
la asesinen sólo para tener la dicha de hacerle la autopsia
(Orestes Nieto, Reconstrucción 10)

The opening stanza which outlines the deception of titular sovereignty is especially powerful in that it establishes exactly how far the Panamanians will go in defending their nation, their homeland. They do believe that they have something to be proud of, that there is something worth defending. For this nation, that is to say that for the sake of the imagined community, they will be willing to break open their chests in a demonstration of pride for the patria. The reference to the nation is very relevant to the topic of this paper in that it is set in the context of a penetrated nation. The penetration of the Canal through the isthmus is quite literal while economic and cultural penetrations, though symbolic, are nevertheless very real for the Panamanians and are expressed in poetry. Nieto is reaffirming the impossibility of discussing
national identity without simultaneously dealing with the issue of the United States presence in the _Patria_.

Toward the end of the poem, Nieto outlines the actual violence suffered by his countrymen at the hands of the Northerners. The same foreigners who “step on the nation and open it up to see what’s inside and kill the nation just to have the joy of performing the autopsy” are also the violent people who cause the Panamanian to “break open his chest in reality.” The United States, quite obviously, is depicted here as the destructor of the Panamanian nation. It is probably more accurate to say that the United States is the force that simultaneously impedes the formation of a national identity based on things Panamanian and encourages the growth of a nationalism based on _anti-yanqui_ feeling.

José Franco is one of the most prolific writers of the anti-poetry period. His work reflects a strong patriotism that is based, as might be expected, on exposing the harms of the United States presence in Panama. His poem _Patria de Dolor y Llanto_ from 1973 is an offering to the motherland of the bitterness of his poetry. This is an important theme as it necessarily implies that the poet, who doubtless represents many Panamanians during this time, could offer bitter feelings of hatred and spite toward the United States as a fitting contribution to the national identity and pride of his country.

_Vuelvo Panamá a ofrendarte_  
la angustia de mi poesía.  
_Despojo la melodía_  
del pueblo para cantarte.  
_Elijo el verso que parte_  
el alma de tu quebranto.  
_Masticó mis penas tanto_  
que desgajo mi emoción,
que muero en tu corazón,
Patria, de Dolor y Llanto...

De mi pecho me levanto
para mi vida ofrecerte.
Libre, Panamá, he de verte,
Patria, de Dolor y Llanto. (Franco, Poemas 73-77)

Copla, also from the anthology Poemas a mi patria by Franco is an example of the direct
and brief poetry produced during the anti-poetry movement. The four-line long poem serves only
to send one direct message. Franco seeks to create a hard-hitting image of the Patria as wrapped
up in the morbid and fatal bonds of the Canal Zone. Direct and to the point, Copla does indeed
create an image that Panamanians can identify with.

Patria olorosa a fanal
de crepúsculos vencidos,
moribunda en los latidos
de la Zona del Canal... (Franco, Poemas 185)

Poetry like this in its simplicity can create a direct and immediate impact on the people.

The last poem of José Franco from Poemas a mi patria discussed here is entitled Lago
Gatun. It is so named for the lake that comprises a major portion of the trans-isthmian seaway.
In this poem another oppressive factor of Panamanian life, the Canal, is presented in a way that
many Panamanians will be able to resonate with and thus anti-Americanism will continue to
build.

Cuando transite ese lago
piense el noble navegante,
que abajo, al fondo sangrante,
vivió antaño un pueblo aciago.
Hoy la muerte ha sido el pago
de aquellas tristes regiones
de aquellas dulces canciones
que son para hoy perdidas
que ayer murieron heridas,
que ya son evocaciones. (Franco, Poemas 196)

Franco is seeking to bring to the fore the suffering that the Zone has caused and also demonstrate how the people of the area surrounding which once was Lago Gatún have been disgraced by the United States’ exploitation of the region.

One of Bertalicia Peralta’s poems is especially fitting for the time period being discussed here. The poem, titled Cualquier día de 1972, serves as a barometer for the anti-American attitude that was so pervasive in Panama at the beginning of the decade of the 1970’s.

En Versalles Francia
inauguran asamblea antibética. . .

Estados Unidos y la Unión Soviética
acordaron cooperar en la investigación del cáncer

acá en mi país
(un poco más de 1.500.000 habitantes)
el cáncer se llama USA
y en La Habana dijo Fidel que la política exterior de Nixon pende como una amenaza en América Latina

el “Camino de Pekín” ocupa cuatro columnas diariamente
en el periódico más conservador desde que la Casa Blanca redescubrió el ping-pong (Peralta, Libro 77)

This poem, describing what might be the newspaper headlines from “whichever day in 1972” clearly portrays the United States as a threat to Latin America while at the same time portraying the Northern power as being exceedingly nonchalant in its exercise of foreign policy with Panama (as evidenced by her line that the White House “rediscovered ping-pong”). More telling still is that Peralta describes the United States as a cancer growing on her small country. Anti-
American attitudes such as those seen in this poem were pervasive worldwide during the early part of the 1970's. The source of such attitudes was mostly the Vietnam War which had embittered almost the whole world against the United States.

Panama finds Anti-American Allies

By the mid-1970's significant changes began to affect the move toward new canal treaties. At a United Nations Security Council meeting in 1975, a resolution called on the United States to negotiate a more equitable treaty with Panama which the United States vetoed. Nevertheless, this action served to dramatize the canal issue and focus international attention on the United States actions in Panama. While the major shipping nations were worried about the possible Panamanian takeover of the canal, "many mini-states...were happy to join in the general denunciation of the 'colonial' attitude of the United States" (Ryan 111). During this era there was heightened sensitivity surrounding the United States involvement in Vietnam. Many nations, especially those of the third-world, were attacking the United States colonial power.

Panamanian nationalism and sensitivity to the canal issue had not subsided by the mid-1970's. Secretary of State Kissinger commented in a speech in 1975 that the United States must defend its right to protect the canal indefinitely in the future. This comment, touching on the very sensitive issue of perpetual rights for North Americans, provoked fury among Panamanians. So much so, in fact, that another uprising of six-hundred students was produced in which they stoned the United States Embassy. The anti-American climate once again intensified and, following the pattern of the entire history of the nation, the results of political events are often reflected in the poetry of the Republic.
Though it began much earlier than the date that these poems were written, the Vietnam War remained an important catalyst in the production of anti-American poetry. The Panamanians also saw in the worldwide anti-colonial feeling an opportunity to assert even more strongly their demands for sovereignty in their own nation and denunciation of United States imperialism. Diana Morán takes the lead in the production of such poetry in her works such as *Viet-nam Cinco Cuadros.*

**VOZ:**

Pájaros agresivos  
- película de Hitchcock -  
Pájaros B-52.  
Pájaros hueycobra  
Pájaros de redacción,  
cabeza verde.  
¡El hongo,  
otra vez el hongo!  
¡Tropel de humo y  
alaridos,  
1 200 toneladas de  
infierno!

**CORO:**

¿Qué nido?  
¿Qué árbol?  
¿Qué alpiste les dió vuelo?  
Árbol de paz.  
Cerezo blanco, alas blancas.  
Amigas alas blancas.  
Defendemos tu casa.  
Repartimos queso.  
Una rama de olivo,  
palomas de Corn Flakes,  
hermana blanca.  
(Mancera 21-23)

*Carta a un niño de Vietnam,* by Dimas Lidio Pitty is actually from 1964 but the anti-American message remains the same.

*He sabido que ha muerto la magnolia de tu casa  
Ahora no podrá defenderse de la nieve cuando el invierno llegue y torture  
Será como un niño muerto  
o como una piedra sembrada en el jardín...*

*Ah mi pequeño hermano de Viet Nam!  
Ah, mi lejano camarada!  
También aquí hemos visto las caras y la muerte  
y las ametralladoras enemigas*
También aquí hemos llorado a los difuntos

Ah mi cercano camarada!
Es mundial el dolor
Es nuestro el llanto
Pero no hablemos más
No lloremos otra vez la misma muerte
Que cada cual entierre su cadáver y entregue su
su fusil antes de irse... (Mancera 72-74)

Lidio Pitty does make strong connections between her plight and that of the poor child in Vietnam. She draws parallels between the sufferings they have both suffered at the hands of the United States and creates such a strong identification with this small victim of U.S. imperialism that she calls him “comrade.” The poem concludes with a call to armed resistance.

Panamanian anti-poets did not stop at drawing connections with Vietnam to foment hatred toward the United States. Rather, they saw in Puerto Rico and all of Latin America allies that could identify with their plight. Let us look first at another of Bertalicia Peralta’s poems entitled A Puerto Rico.

A Puerto Rico quisiera yo llegar
para meter un hombro
el otro
ya lo tengo acá en mi patria

a Puerto Rico quisiera
decirle que tenemos tanto en común:
bank of america / chase manhattan bank
coca-cola y sobre todo
estas ansias furibundas de sacarnos
de encima el made in usa

a Puerto Rico le digo hermano
déjame acompañarte y acompañame (Peralta, Libro 113)

The same vestiges of United States imperialism that are found in Puerto Rico are also shared in
large part by Panama. There is in this poem a fleshing out of similarities which ultimately leads to the identification of a common enemy which is the United States. The theme of cultural penetration rises again in this poem in the use of English.

Another poem by Manuel Orestes Nieto is entitled just that: Enemigo común. The poem may be speaking of a common enemy of either all of Latin America or just the Panamanian community specifically. Whichever the case, it is important that the poem seek to create unity by identifying elements of Panamanian society that ultimately build anti-American feeling. More than anything else, the poem challenges the reader to confront the reality of the country as it is, a common characteristic of anti-poetry. The poem begins in a bar on the edge of the Canal Zone, an area known for being affected by the demoralizing influence of the United States. The opening scene of the portion I have selected depicts a prostitute in a bar. This scene could be seen as depicting the nation as a whore, indicating more politicizing of sexuality in poetry.

\[\ldots\text{y recién presientes} \\
\text{que Rosaura te observa} \\
\text{pegada al bar} \\
\text{junto a un pálido ciudadano} \\
\text{de los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica} \]

\[\text{ah la hermosamente caliente y enfermiza de Rosaura} \\
\text{antioqueña pura} \\
\text{de dos hijos lejanos} \\
\text{y mil y una noches de desamor.} \ldots\]

\[\text{Es triste} \\
\text{pero aquí también hay algo de mi país} \]

\[\text{«a cuatro cuadras del Canal Zone y de la muerte»} \]

\[\text{esto es aquello de Panamá crossroads of the world.} \ldots\]
pero hay noches en que bajas olvidando la poesía
a tu país
yo hay un país ni una ciudad ni un bar
ni una mujer
ni un territorio
porque aquí se volvió todo tráfico hasta los sueños...

cómo sería el cielo
y sus ministros y sus ángeles y sus arcángeles
y my God en persona
discutiendo sobre un Canal sominado por satanás...

y yo
te pienso verdaderamente in
verdaderamente tránsfuga
y mucho más hermosa
si dieras la espalda al norte
y miraras un poco desmaquillada nuestro país.

(Orestes Nieto, *Dar la cara* 12)

There can be no doubt that the United States significantly influenced Panamanian society
and as the people of the isthmus see it, that influence has been overwhelmingly for the worse.
The control that the United States has significantly impeded the development of Panama’s own
national identity and has successfully coopted many Panamanians into the North American
values system. This, of course, is destructive to the formation of a genuinely Panamanian
national identity and can help explain the backlash of anti-Americanism in the Republic. The
role of the United States in Panama is paradoxical in that while it is a significant catalyst for
definition of nationalism, it is a national identity based on that which is not Panamanian. One
poem that illustrates well the cultural and economic dependence created by the United States is
*Fiel servidor del tío Sam* by Manuel Orestes Nieto.

*El negro Arthur English trabaja en Diablo Heights
vestido de blanco
a 0.75 la hora - precio silver roll -*
vive a solas en calle Estudiante
ciudad de Panamá
se pasea en su Chevrolet 59 todo niquelado
se sonrió con su chapa de tres dientes de oro
y anulamente vuelve a Jamaica
en un jet de la Pan-Am.

El negro Arthur English
fie el servidor del imperio de su majestad el Tío Sam
tiene la cabeza casi blanca
de tanto ser tratado como negro
de tanto decir: yes of course my job
I understand the Law... (Orestes Nieto, Dar la Cara 40)

In the face of such North Americanizing influences, it is understandable that there is a significant challenge in the development of a clear and strong image of Panamanian nationalism.

Toward Revised Canal Treaties

During the second half of the seventies, the Panamanian political arena was predominantly focused on achieving ratification of the Canal Treaties. The ultimate success in ratifying these documents was due in large part to the constant force of anti-Americanism which would not back down from its demand that the United States presence be erased in their nation.

Poets like Manuel Orestes Nieto contribute significantly to this feeling in the late 70's by highlighting the violent actions of the United States in the isthmus.

Orestes Nieto's poem Tanques en el Puente presents the reader with a vivid description of the military force that the United States is willing to use in Panama. Remembering the characteristics of anti-poetry laid out earlier, this poem is a good example of the poet describing the reality of the life of the country with the intent of stirring up emotion in his reader.
Un día cualquiera
esta ciudad te ahoga
y sales a las playas
y sabes que tu país es también puro mar...

un día regresas
y debajo del puente está tu país dividido
y sobre él
cinco tanques imperiales
desfilan en fila india

cinco tanques zonians camino de sus fuertes
cinco tanques del imperio en la América Latina
cinco tanques todos verdes con sus estrellas blancas
cinco tanques USA

un día regresas a la ciudad
invasión de nostalgia
y te la encuentras invadida en sus puertas:

los tanques 44 45 46 47 48
a plena tarde
a cinco minutos de tu casa
a cinco minutos de tu pueblo
a cinco minutos de todas las esquinas
donde cayeron nuestros muertos. (Orestes Nieto, Dar la Cara 21)

This poem shows the ability of the United States, through their military might, to steal and then subjugate a nation like Panama. It is especially important to focus on the issue of subjugation since it is this element that especially fosters anti-Americanism in the Republic. The reality Orestes Nieto paints is clear. The imperialist tanks are dangerously close to destroying the patria and this requires action by the Panamanians. The last line once again is a memorial to the martyrs who have already died as a result of the tanks. The invocation of the martyrs is one of the most powerful elements, as I have pointed out, to unite the Panamanians against the injustice that caused the martyrs’ wrongful death. Again, the host of Panamanian martyrs is invoked to
foment nationalism.

Anti-American poetry continued to build in poets like Sydia de Zuñiga who wrote her *Memorial de la Casa Grande* in 1975. The title itself is an important image of the imagined community because, as is shown in the poem, the title refers to all the people of Panama, including the national heroes, living together in one big house. The poem lays out many of the violent acts the United States has committed in Panama, focusing on the Flag Riots of 1964. The memory of the Riots is invoked once again to precipitate change in the governing structure of the Canal Zone. Specifically, this author demands the reclamation of Panama’s sovereignty over her national territory. De Zuñiga also tries to create an image of the entire people of the isthmus, tied together by fraternal love, together conquering the imperialists.

*Caminaremos juntos jóvenes de mi patria
una sola semilla nacerá por los campos.
Haced que fortalezcan las manos y la idea
de nuestra libertad
que la casa se agrande con su propio canal...

Ese nueve de enero es el único grito
que cambió todo el techo de nuestra triste casa,
de Panamá y su angustia de país estratégico...

¡Gringo! se ve que no comprendes saberse fuerte y pobre
en la infinita hacienda
Abusas de la estúpida y la débil libélula que cortará los vientos
que pondrá sus amarras en cada brazo y piernas
al ave de rapina cuando llegue la hora.
Nueve de enero: tú eres para los que te amamos
un muro y un eslabón en la cadena de los sueños
de nuestros soberanos sueños.

*Jovenes de mi tierra
Subamos al Ancón para que vean
Estamos frente al mar, cerquita del mar*
llegamos hasta el mar.
Nuestra casa la empujan 
hacia el mar. . .

Lucha y libertad de héroes se necesita en esta hora.
En esta hora

En la única hora. (De Zuñiga 25-28)

One of Panama’s important national symbols which was discussed earlier, *el cerro* Ancón, is presented again in this poem as a symbol that serves to create unity simply by its being called to mind. This is one example of a definitively Panamanian object being utilized in nationalist poetry to create unity rather than anti-Americanism. This poem, in its call to seize the moment and claim for Panama what is rightfully the nation’s own, serves as a natural transition to a discussion of the revised Canal Treaties which were eventually won in 1979.

*The New Canal Treaties*

The American president announced on August 10, 1977, that an agreement had been reached between the United States and Panama on two new treaties. The first treaty abrogated the 1903 treaty and all other agreements concerning the Canal Zone. Sovereignty of the Zone was to be gradually transferred to Panama over twenty years with complete control given to Panama on December 31, 1999. Panama was also to receive 10 million dollars annually. One more provision of the treaty was the establishment of the Panama Canal Commission which still today seeks, as one of its aims, to increase employment of Panamanian nationals in the zone while also involving Panamanians in the canal’s administration. Without a doubt, this was a much more equitable treaty that satisfied many of the Panamanian demands.
More problematic, however, was the second treaty concerning permanent neutrality of the canal. This treaty was especially controversial as there was no expiration date put on it. The treaty guarantees the canal remains secure and open to peaceful transit of vessels and expeditious passage in times of war. The pact made Torrijos as well as most Panamanians uneasy in that it could become a legal aid to permanent intervention of the United States Army in Panama. To calm Torrijos' fears and expedite ratification of the treaties, Carter and Torrijos signed the Statement of Understanding in 1977. This statement guaranteed that although the United States could act militarily against a threat directed against the canal, she may not intervene whatsoever in the internal affairs of Panama. Unfortunately, it will be another two years until the treaties are ratified because they are held up by a certain De Concini Condition.

The De Concini Condition stated that the United States could intervene in the internal affairs of Panama only if the canal is faced with closure or its normal operation interfered with. This condition would remain in force permanently. The De Concini Condition received a storm of protest from Panamanians at all levels. Torrijos wrote letters to Carter and other heads of state and student protests took place at the United States Embassy. Although Torrijos couldn't guarantee the non-intervention of United States military forces after the year 2000, by 1979 he realized that the United States would not cede any more concessions. After adding a clause to counter the De Concini Condition that Panama would reject any outside intervention in her internal affairs, Torrijos signed the instruments of ratification of the treaties in June of 1978 with President Carter. The treaties were ratified by slightly more than two-thirds of the Panamanian population and became effective in October of 1979.

Torrijos remained in control of the National Guard, acting as de facto chief of state until a
plane crash took his life in 1982. Not only did his death have a significant impact on Panama but it “deprived Central America of a potential moderating influence when that region was facing increased destabilization” (Meditz 59). Gerardo Maloney, a poet writing in 1985, produced el Pie Descalzo as a paean to the beloved Torrijos and a memorial to the good he had done in the country.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Este era un país ayer} & \ldots \\
\text{abundante en mariposas} \\
\text{hoy es un país} \\
\text{que ha perdido un zapato} & \ldots \\
\text{Porque desde que se fue Omar} \\
\text{todo mundo anda con un pie descalzo} \\
\text{izquierdo hoy} \\
\text{derecho mañana} \\
\text{de acuerdo como aparecen} \\
\text{las piedras en el camino.} & \text{ (Maloney 48)}
\end{align*}
\]

The poem reflects the tumult and confusion that permeated Panama after Torrijos’ death.

The loss of such a unifying force as Torrijos was meant for the people of the isthmus a significant lack of direction toward which to channel their national energy. In Torrijos they had found the right mix of progressive thinking and anti-Americanism. President Royo, who served with Torrijos from 1978 to 1982 was considered even too nationalistic and anti-American in his rhetoric (Meditz 59). This in itself shows that the revision of the Canal Treaties did have a significant effect in reducing the level of invective against the United States. However, the presence of the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) in Panama and perceived violation of the treaties continued to fuel Panamanian nationalism. Most of the 1980's remained calm as far as the United States’ relations with Panama are concerned though the National Guard of Panama
continued to remove and replace presidents throughout the decade which strongly hindered political continuity.

Panama After the Canal Treaties

As stated, anti-Americanism did experience a significant decline once the new treaties were ratified but this hardly eliminated invective and protest in literature. Salgado writes, “Overall... it [the poetry of the 1980’s] is a literature more concerned with universal problems than with local ones... there are still those who continue to emphasize a regionalistic approach with strong elements of social protest” (Foster 465). This concern for regional affairs is reflected in the writing of such poets as Gerardo Maloney and Arysteides Turpana in the 1980’s. Another concern that many of Panama’s nationalist poets address in their verse is for the apathy they saw among their countrymen. There appears to be a fear on the part of the poets that with the waning of the threat of the United States, the Panamanians are losing their nationalist convictions, which in Panama usually means diminishing hatred for the North American giant.

Maloney writes two poems in which he expresses his deep concern for what he perceives to be apathy among his fellow Panamanians in light of the continued oppression of the United States. I begin with his 1983 poem, País.

País
vuelvo a tí
nuevamente
ahora
después de los años
de Omar Torrijos Herrera
años... después de todo, mejores...
Porque se habló de la patria
construyendo con todo el aliento
un homenaje a la dignidad misma,
el orgullo que nace en todo aquel
que camina convencido
de que el destino hay que llevarlo a veces
agarrada por nuestras manos
enseñándole uno mismo el camino
años... después de todo mejores...
Porque las gentes en estas tierras
hablo por sí misma
con fuerza
creatividad
y con inteligencia
fue más fácil
juntar en uno solo
los problemas
las soluciones
las denuncias, y
las protestas
el clamor: Soberanía total
¡No a las Bases Militares!
reviviendo a viva voz
los amores y los sueños
los días duros
y las tardes de verano.

Ahora hierves, mi querida Panamá
y solo lanzas como ráfagas momentáneas
el sonido que a voces hacen
lo que hoy hablan en el nombre de todos
igual como pasaba antes... (Maloney 43)

This poem expresses Maloney’s longing for the past when Torrijos effectively led the state and with that leadership was created a national consciousness of responsibility in the face of United States hegemony in the Republic. There can be no doubt that Maloney sees nationalist thought and action as essential to Panama’s progress as a nation. Now, as the bard points out, Panama boils, occasionally erupting in a flash of protest. This stands in contrast to the past decades in which Panamanians never tired in the struggle against North American hegemony. However, the
nation is stirring as if in anticipation of the events that were to come in 1989.

Another of Maloney's poems, this one from 1985, is titled *Mi tierra*. The verse is, at the most basic level, a description of Panama and her people but in reality contains much deeper messages within the lines.

\[
\begin{align*}
Mi tierra \\
es pequeña \\
desconocida \\
y lejana . . . . . . \\
pero tiene hijos \\
de grandes corazones \\
y sangre tan caudoloso \\
como el propio amazona \\
no gritan \\
no llaman \\
solo claman \\
cuando la dignidad está en juego. \text{ (Maloney 41)}
\end{align*}
\]

Most intriguing about this poem is that while it describes the nationalist response of the Panamanians when dignity is in the balance, there is a veritable absence of the violence that was so predominant in the years before the revision of the Canal Treaties and during the era of Torrijos. Undoubtedly, anti-American invective has softened somewhat and the poetry has become slightly more positive. In his description of the people, the lyricist offers a compliment that might be simultaneously a criticism of their apathy. For example, Maloney describes the sons of the nations as having "big hearts" but hearts so big now in the mid-80's that there is no violent response to injustice, just lament and complaining. Such a contrast to anti-poetry!
The Perspective of Panama’s Native Americans

Arysteides Turpana, Panama’s most popular Cuna poet, provides some clues as to the political and national orientation of Panama’s indigenous population. This lyricist writes with a biting invective wholly absent from the poems of Maloney from the 1980’s which were presented in this paper. The first poem, Dule, from 1983, depicts the burial of a Panamanian martyr.

Compañeros
Cuando me asesinen
Entiérrenme de cara al sol y en el País Dule
Y al “contrabandear” en la frontera
Saluda la “bandera nacional”
Si los extranjeros te preguntasen
Dule
¿Por qué lloras?
Di
“Mi patria es tan justa
Y la conciencia me hace llorar” (Turpana 52)

The last line shows the extreme weight that taking into consideration the pride of the patria puts on one’s conscience. It is fitting that there should be tears when the homeland is denigrated precisely because “it is so just.” Like the engaged poetry of the 1970’s, this is a poem that urges doing what is right and acting on the personal responsibility as a Panamanian in the face of assaults on the fatherland. In this sense, Turpana, like Maloney, is continuing the theme begun early on which calls for action from his countrymen.

A second poem, Enero 9 1962 is a bitter lashing out at the topic which lies at the heart of this current project: nationalism. Especially, nationalism as it relates to the native Americans of Panama.

Comienzan por catecismo para desindigenizarte el alma
Y luego te enseñan las letras del “Himno Nacional” escritas en el idioma
(de los conquistadores que nunca lograrás dominar)
Y encuentras en tus cursos de historia a tus supuestos ante-
pasados...
Y defender tu derecho a la soberanía vigorosa como un elefante
Y por todo ello te ganas una nacionalidad confirmada en una
cédula de identidad personal.

Descubres que eres extranjero hasta en tu propia tierra
Y que la famosa cultura occidental cristiana y capitalista
Te la metieron a crízanos y himnazo en el cacumen tal como
se mete un vómito en un basurero.

(Turpana 59)

This poem makes an important commentary on the subject of nationalism in Panama. All the while I have been asserting that anti-Americanism is the great equalizer in Panama; the lever that makes the people of tiny Panama strong in the face of the United States. Turpana presents quite the opposite view. There should be no mistaking the fact that he is an anti-American; his other poetry confirms that. However, recalling once again the great problem facing Panama at the beginning of the century of uniting all the classes in Panama reminds us that there, as in most of Central and South America, a significant gap exists between the mestizos and Spanish on one hand and the natives on the other.

Anti-American nationalism has not been enough to incorporate the native Panamanians into the imagined community of the nation. The symbols of the flag, Cross, and national anthem are foreign to a Cuna like Turpana. They belong to a different class of Panamanians who hold these things closer to their own hearts. For Turpana, nationality means nothing more than possessing a government-issued card of identification. What, then, allows Turpana to attack the United States in his poems? The answer to that question is that he also, as well as his entire Cuna nation (with its own signs, symbols, values, and heroes) has felt the effects of imperialism in his home country. Thus, I end up where I started with my original question and realize that although Turpana may not be able to share the meaning of symbols like the flag and national
anthem, victimization by the United States is one wound that all the people of the Republic have in common. It is just that it is not recognized as an official nationalism. More than likely, however, it is the true base of Panamanian national identity.

*Nationalism in the Late 1980's*

The last years of the decade of the 80's brought many significant and unexpected changes to the Republic. There is another poem of Gerardo Maloney titled *Dignidad* that in many ways is an ominous foreboder of things to come in 1988 for Panama. The most important elements of the poem for my present purpose are the references to the United States as protector of the isthmus.

```
Cuando la patria
se vio amenazada
y del cielo
llegaron marines
halcones negros y
perros amaestrados
El olor a sangre
de pueblo inocente
despertó temor y nerviosismo
como presagio de un catástrofe...
y en estas tierras de Bayano
circularon listas negras
¡Los condenados a muerte!
Y también rosarios sin colores
invocando al gringo
héroe y redentor
a ordenar la patria
Sólo aquellos que por honor
y en defensa propia
besaron la bandera
empuñaron un arma
abonando con sus vidas
```
The "truth of this hour" is whether or not the Panamanians will stand up for themselves in the face of challenge to the dignity of the patria. All too often, Maloney communicates in this last poem, his people rush to protection under the wing of the United States, furthering the dependency relationship already created. The major change here is that this time the United States is not the aggressor, the threat comes from within the state. What concerns Maloney is that the Panamanians are not taking responsibility for their own destiny but rather relying on their traditional foe to complete such a task for them. Undoubtedly, this is problematic and anomalous considering the long tradition of spite for the United States that has been fostered in this Republic. This may be nothing less than the breakdown of anti-Americanism as a unifying force when finally, the North Americans cannot be implicated in any offense to the Panamanian people, at least through 1988 when this poem was written.

Further building on Maloney's concern for the apathy he perceived among his countrymen is his poem En pocas palabras. These lines are a very brief reminder by the poet to his fellow isthmians of what could happen should the people lose their consciousness of the imperialist relationship the United States has created with Panama. Again, I should emphasize that the concern for apathy among Panamanians is a common theme running through the poetry of the 1980's.

Disculpe usted,
hoy alcancé una estrella.
No me hable de Patria.
Por favor.
¿Y, si mañana
nos declaran la guerra...? (Maloney 21)
The poet sees a very potential danger in ceasing to talk about the *patria*. He challenges his reader to think about what, then, would happen if tomorrow some force (which can be assumed is the United States) declared war on the isthmus. In an era of declining anti-Americanism and increasing resignation to the status quo, Maloney's fear is not unwarranted, especially when considering what was to happen in Panama in 1989. First, a historical context.

**Operation Just Cause**

Operation Just Cause is the name given to the United States military invasion which took place on December 20, 1989. At the center of the entire ordeal was the Panamanian general Manuel Noriega whose relationship with Washington was a long and sometimes sordid affair. The North American link with Noriega began in 1959 when the future Panamanian leader was in military school in Chile. From there, he supplied information to the United States about the communist leanings of his classmates. The relationship continued through the 80's when Noriega was perceived as a useful ally in fighting the leftist influences in nearby Nicaragua and El Salvador. However, the tide was turning by 1986 when more right-wing elements of the United States government, and Jesse Helms in particular, began vociferous attacks on Noriega in congressional hearings. Along with these challenges in the U.S. Legislature, newspaper articles denouncing Noriega's actions in his home country led him to be regarded less and less as a reliable ally in the war against subversion in El Salvador and Nicaragua. The cooperative relationship between the United States and Noriega was severed completely in 1987 following the Iran-Contra affair.

Washington then set as its goal the demonization of Noriega blaming him for the United
States drug problem as well as internal trouble in his own nation (Beatty 99). The main concern of the United States was that Noriega and the troops he commanded in the former National Guard, the current Panamanian Defense Forces (P.D.F.), would endanger United States lives and the canal. To eliminate this threat, U.S. economic and military aid was cut off to the nation first. Following this, Washington supported a coup attempt in October of 1989 by dissident officers of the P.D.F. combined with psychological operations, economic destabilization, political-opposition building, and C.I.A. plots which all failed to depose the Panamanian general (Beatty 100). After these failures to topple Noriega’s government, President Bush and his administration began making plans for Operation Just Cause in December. The Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center cites four of Washington’s justifications for the invasion: “protection of U.S. lives, promotion of democracy, protection of the canal, and prosecution of Noriega for drug trafficking” (Beatty 101). The commentary that the same Resource Center offers about the post-invasion effects is significant and I quote at length.

The U.S. invasion, justified as an effort to remove one strongman, pushed Panamanian political history back more than half a century. Once again both the government and the security forces were heavily controlled by Washington. The unifying principles of populism and nationalism, which had served for more than two decades to stabilize Panamanian politics and society, lay shattered. So egregiously violating the 1977 treaties’ prohibition of U.S. intervention in the country’s internal political affairs, an old wound was reopened. Not only did the future control of the canal once again become an unresolved issue but the country’s very sovereignty also became an open question” (Beatty 7).
Considering the imperialist nature of the Operation Just Cause, Panamanian anti-Americanism will again flare and this, as before, is reflected in the poetry of 1989 and into the 1990’s.

Gerardo Maloney, who provided many examples of the poetic development of nationalism in his anthology En tiempo de crisis, offers another poem relevant to the decade of the 80’s. The next poem is titled with the Spanish translation of the name Washington gave to the December, 1989 military operation, Causa Justa. The poem was written in January of 1990, immediately following the invasion of the twenty-nine thousand United States troops in Panama.

*Cuando los gringos
ocuparon la ciudad...*

*Ardió Chorillo,*

*saltaron en pedazos los cuarteles
niños y mujeres*

*aprendieron por fin*

*el sonido de las cañones*

*ráfagas escandalosas de ametralladoras*

*gritos de horror...*

*y cuando retornó el silencio*

*bajo la rutina vigilante*

*de hummer e infantes*

*de rostros camuflageados...*

*los corazones se hincharon de gozo y algarabía...*

¡Viva la Causa Justa!

Y un viejo militante de izquierda

*con las lágrimas contenidas en los ojos...*

*se repetía a sí mismo*

¡Nadie sabe para quien trabaja! (Maloney 56)

Maloney again repeats his sentiments about the compromised nationalist sentiment of the Panamanians in accepting to a degree the United States presence in the isthmus. Certainly the saddest line, or the one that imparts most meaning, is the last in which it is indicated that nobody knows which side, Panamanian or North American, could be shouting “Viva la Causa Justa.”

This idea of the Panamanians supporting the United States is reflected poignantly in a
photograph of two Panamanian children printed in a publication of the United States Marine Corps. The children are holding a banner that reads: “U.S. WELL DOING [sic], THANKS” (Reynolds 37). Undoubtedly, as this picture shows, at least some Panamanians did support the “just cause” of the United States, something that will certainly alarm more extreme Panamanian nationalists. It may be argued that the people in the photograph were not representative of the entire nation but there is undoubtedly a shift toward a more moderate anti-American stance in Panama during this time period.

Another picture from the same publication shows a sign hanging outside a Panamanian military installation commemorating the 25th anniversary of Flag Riots (Reynolds 25). The last line of the sign reads “NI UN PASO ATRAS.” This sentiment of not ceding even one step backward in the face of the military sent by Washington is reflected in a poem by Maloney also called _Ni un paso atrás._

_Soldados de plomo_
_Rutina, ejercicios y disciplina..._
_para hacerte de fierro_
_biceps, torax y tu entereza_
_y en lugar de tu metal_
_mostrastes cobre..._
_Moraleja simple_
_¡Que plomo!_ (Maloney 57)

This poem is an indictment of the soldiers of the United States whose morality is based on nothing more than the simple use of brute force. Maloney, without doubt, is one of the poets that represents the most anti-American feelings and encourages that in others even into the 1990’s.
Looking Forward from 1990

The poetry of the 1990's also shows the attitude of Panamanians as they prepare for the complete turnover of the Canal Zone to Panama. One poet who contributes significantly to this body of literature is Ramiro Ochoa López. His poetry is very relevant to the time period in which he is writing as he lays out attitudes that should be adopted among the Panamanians as well as confronts the resignation that was pervading the isthmus in the decade of the '90's after Operation Just Cause. All of the poems cited here come from an anthology of Ochoa López's poems entitled Pasajero Fin de Siglo. The first does express the attitude of resignation yet contains elements of sadness still.

Mi país es un cerro abierito
por el corazón.

El poquito de agua que salía
de sus ojos
se ha ido secando.
No tengo que decirte por la culpa
de quién.
La tierra se raja
y cruje para enterrar
en su centro
nísperos
y olvido... (Ochoa Lopez, Pasajero 17)

Another of his poems is called Una Nueva Canción and is very appropriate for the time period in which Ochoa López was writing. There is a clear message that there needs to be a new song for the '90's which demands certain things of the United States.

Participo del aire y de la luz,
vo y retorno,
reclamo los derechos de mi tierra,
pido No Intervención, exijo canto,
una nueva canción
One last poem from Ochoa López reaffirms the importance of his role as a poet in the advancement of the Panamanian nation. The poem is titled Un Verso con tu Nombre.

Pueblo mío

te quiero y sé

que me necesitas

desde siempre.

Después de todo qué

hice todo el tiempo

que no te dije ven.

Tú buscarás la silla

para sentar el alba.

Tú serás el martillo que construye

y la boca que llama.

Yo haré la poesía

si tú me prestas

tu hacha y ternura. (Ochoa Lopez, Pasajero 34)

I selected this poem because it not only shows poetry's change in its return to the more tender verse of love for the nation that was seen in the earliest part of the century but also the continued importance of the lyricist in helping to define the national identity of Panama. Leslie Bethell speaks to this theme of the enduring importance of poetry in saying, “poets and poetry continue to matter in a continent where most poets pay for their own editions, and where poets still represent a symbolic position in society” (Bethell 286). Through poems like this last one from Ochoa, it is seen that the poet does retain a position in Latin American society from which he or she can be a nationalizing influence, as is demonstrated in the case of the Republic of Panama.
Changing Definitions, Changing Identity

I titled this concluding section, "Changing Definitions" to reflect the change in the definition of Panamanian national identity that occurred in the 1980's, and over the century in general, from bitter invective focused on the United States to introspection on the part of the Panamanians. Several factors contributed to this. The Canal Treaties of 1977 promised sovereignty for Panama over her territories beginning the last day of 1999. Also, the Panamanian people did suffer from the absence of Torrijos' unifying nationalistic presence and the corrupt government of Manuel Noriega. In short, the malicious force acting against the Panamanians which had for so long been the United States was becoming, in the late 80's, more a domestic than foreign problem. This diminishing anti-Americanism was cause for alarm in some poets who still saw the United States as a significant threat to the well-being of the Panamanian nation.

In a last poem cited here from Maloney, he expresses through his sarcastic verse his feelings both about the presence of the United States military and the apathy he continues to see in the Panamanian community. The poem is written on the eve of the new year 1991.

Aquí estamos
nuevamente
Un año más
un año menos...
La patria ocupada...

Un año más
un año menos
Comenzará el ciclo
y veremos como viene...
Con las plumas desprendidas
o el temor aferrado a las manos...
Amanecerá y veremos
Bienvenido año nuevo...
bregaremos nuevamente, sin descanso
hasta recuperar nuestro paisaje
Un año más... un año menos... (Maloney 59)

The Panamanians in this poem are becoming accustomed to the presence of the United States military in their nation. It is just “one more year” of acceptance of Washington’s stronghold on isthmian affairs. This attitude of resignation is being shown again now as we approach the year 2000 in which the Canal and all its operations will be turned over to the Panamanians.

More and more, the people of the Republic are contemplating the benefits of the United States’ continued presence in their country and asking themselves if this presence wouldn’t be best for the prosperity of their nation. According to a December, 1995 New York Times article titled “Panama Changes Tune to ‘Yankee Don’t Go Home,’” eighty-six per-cent of Panamanians wanted the United States military bases to remain even after the year 2000. This in itself, the mere contemplation of asking the United States to remain, is a sign of the weakness of building a national identity of hate. The bitter invective stands on nothing more than blaming a foreign force, in Panama’s case the United States, for the shortcomings of the nation. When faced with a decision that requires Panamanians to chose pragmatically or defend national pride, the pragmatists will often win out and the fortress of anti-American nationalism comes crashing down.

Indeed, many Panamanians are becoming more cognizant of the reality that it is impossible to blame the United States for all of the nation’s problems. The reality is that Panama has massive internal problems of her own to face. Mark Falcoff of the American Enterprise institute writes: “generations of Panamanians have been told by politicians that widespread poverty and unemployment were due solely to the fact that the country’s most important resource
was owned by foreigners” (56). This idea has been demonstrated again and again in the anti-American poetry produced in Panama over the past century. However, after 2000, this will not be the case as Panama will, in fact, own the Canal.

The cohesion of the Panamanians as a nation is critical at this period of nationalization of the Canal. However, the isthmian national identity has been so formed by anti-Americanism that without that force to react against, the Panamanian people find themselves scrambling to hold themselves together and retain their unity as a nation. This lack of cohesion is even demonstrated in Panama’s attitude toward its governors. Panamanian governmental leadership is severely lacking the trust of its constituents which is indicated by the fact that sixty-six per-cent of Panamanians believe that the Canal Zone should be operated by both Panamanians and United States nationals (Falcoff 57). This is another demonstration of the fact that not since Torrijos’ era has a Panamanian government been able to create such strong national unity. Certainly the lack of a clear Panamanian identity, one not based on hatred for the United States, has played a significant role in hindering Panama’s strength as a nation at this crucial period of transition.

As Panamanians and North Americans both await the dawn of the new century and transfer of the Canal, there are a lot of unknowns. It is difficult to predict whether the United States will remain in some capacity or if another troublesome figure like Noriega will arise on the Panamanian political scene and inflame once again U.S.-Panamanian relations. Isthmians are realizing, however, that anti-Americanism in itself cannot solve the nation’s woes. After a century of constructing a nationalism based on hatred for a common enemy, there is a shift to more introspection as the people of the isthmus realize solutions will have to come from within the imagined community, not a foreign source. I will conclude this discussion of Panama’s
nationalism and literature with a final poem from Ochoa Lopez written in 1991. This poem is a summary of Panama’s national development over the years and ends with the important question of how Panama is to act and what attitudes are appropriate for the nation facing the intrusion of the United States in their territory. This question is not relevant just to the poet himself, but to the entire nation.

Antes de 1903 fuimos provincias.
Desde 1846 gringos hijos de Walker
andan por nuestra tierra.

Fuimos semi-república oligárquica
cuyos errores enterramos en la Bahía
donde se formó una especie de lama
antinacional.

Somos Panamá
dos millones y medio
de hermanos.

Estamos decididos a no ser más colonia.
Hemos aprendido la lección
monetaria.
Ahora discutimos cómo vamos a hacer
con el intruso. (Ochoa Lopez, Pasajero 45)

The poet reaffirms the reality of the imagined community by describing Panama as “two and a half-million brothers.” The last strophe most poignantly describes the present Panamanian attitude, at least in the eyes of this poet. There is a decision to not be a colony any longer; Panamanians have realized that money cannot compromise national dignity. The most enigmatic problem is that of how the Panamanians will retain their national pride, the development of which has been significantly hindered by Panama’s focus on anti-Americanism, while dealing
effectively with the United States presence on the Isthmus of Panama. To effectively and successfully face the future without the United States, Panamanians will have to claim responsibility for their own failures and successes and rebuild their sense of national unity with building blocks that represent what Panama truly is as a nation, rather than reactions against a foreign element.
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