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Ethnic identity and elite idyll: a comparison of carnival in Buenos Aires, Argentina and Montevideo, Uruguay, 1900–1920

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This article compares the transformation of carnival celebrations in Buenos Aires, Argentina and Montevideo, Uruguay at the beginning of the twentieth-century. It argues that changes in carnival practices in the River Plate region, a geography shared by these two national capitals, cannot be understood without taking a comparative stance since the demise of carnival in Buenos Aires was linked to the rise of a vacation culture in Montevideo. In addition, the more dramatic urbanization process experienced by Buenos Aires and the longer political stability of the nineteenth century here enabled elite politicians, commercial interests, and the middle and upper classes to regulate carnival behaviors to such an extent that the festivities became increasingly lackluster. In contrast, the slower urbanization process in Montevideo combined with the government’s close but not overzealous regulation of carnival, allowed Montevideo’s carnival to flourish. The disparate nature of Montevideo’s carnival celebration that included the involvement of the city’s diverse neighborhoods was also an important aspect of this carnival’s popularity and success. This article also assesses the historiography on Montevideo’s carnival which has cast a negative light on the impact of modernization and the festival. In comparison to Buenos Aires’, carnival in Montevideo was fomented by governmental regulation. Finally, this article examines the relationship between carnival and each of the city’s African-descent populations.

Keywords: Montevideo; Buenos Aires; carnival; popular culture; urbanization; tourism

Montevideo sustains the ancient custom of keeping carnival, masked and with illuminations, flower-throwing and costumed corsos (parade routes), in a fashion which entirely throws into the shade, the now moribund carnival in Buenos Aires… Thousands of porteños cross the river each carnival season to enjoy Montevideo’s elaborate and unrestrained street celebrations. (Ross, 1916)

Carnival in the Americas has most often been studied as a legacy of the Afro-Latin American cultural heritage. The most vibrant carnival celebrations have and continue to occur largely in those regions or nations with significant African-descent populations, such as the Caribbean (Bettelheim & Nunley, 1988; Aching, 2002; Scher, 2003) and Brazil (Da Matta, 1991; Ergood, 1991; Crook, 1993; Chasteen, 1996; Dunn, 1999). This article explores the ways in which carnival experiences in two countries known more for their inhabitants of European descent, rather than African
or indigenous populations, became transformed in the early part of the twentieth century. It shows how carnival in two South American capital cities transformed as a result of the process of modernization and urbanization that took place most markedly at the beginning of the twentieth century. Ultimately, this article seeks to understand why and how carnival celebrations faded away in Buenos Aires, Argentina, while they continued to flourish on the other side of the River Plate area, in Montevideo, Uruguay, a transition that took place most notably between 1910 and 1915.

Carnival in these capital cities, which ranged from three days to an entire month of pre-Lenten celebrations, experienced similar histories as it moved from largely popular unrestrained street celebrations during the colonial eras to increasingly commercialized and regulated ones between 1880 and 1920. Despite sharing similar historical trajectories, however, the carnival celebrations of Montevideo, Uruguay have shown great stamina and resilience, rebounding from moments of political repression, notably during the dictatorship of 1973 to 1985 (Remedi, 2004; Xosé de Enríquez y Vidal, 2004). In contrast, the carnival celebrations of Buenos Aires have experienced the opposite trajectory, declining almost to the point of disappearance through much of the twentieth century. The municipal government of Buenos Aires only recently re-introduced two days of vacations for city employees during the days of carnival in an effort to stimulate tourism linked to carnival's global popularity. In addition, the province of Buenos Aires recently voted in an ordinance that for many years had been the cornerstone of the city's anti-carnival policy – legalizing the throwing of water and paper on the city's streets during carnival (The Economist, November 2005). While The Economist blamed Buenos Aires' moribund carnival on the military dictatorship of the 1970s, this article argues that one needs to look back further to understand how carnival faded away here. Ultimately, this article argues that the disparate transformations of carnival in the Río de la Plata region can be traced back to the early 1900s, when Argentine elites began to forego their own celebrations in favor of those across the Río de la Plata, a hundred and thirty miles away, in Montevideo. The demise of carnival in the early 1900s in Buenos Aires coincided with and contributed to the expansion of such celebrations in Montevideo.

Most studies of carnival celebrations in their many guises have tended to focus on national histories and the ways in which these annual pre-Lenten festivities either defied or reified the existing social order (Bakhtin, 1984; Stallybrass & White, 1986). In this volume, Piers Armstrong summarizes the complex theoretical history and debates about the role of carnival and the carnivalesque, emphasizing the polyvalence of carnival in the Americas:

Carnival presents contrary energies. On the one hand, it is a centripetal rite whose conservative effect in reiterating and implicitly celebrating existing order is greater than the contrary centrifugal effect of opening up space for dissidence. On the other hand, in the long term the conservative effect is strongly countered – not only by conspicuous and conscious dissidence, but also by the gradual assimilation to the national mainstream of imported references and local ‘bottom-up’ expressions.

Similarly, carnival in the Río de la Plata had fluid meanings which shifted depending on the historical era, demographic reality and dominant power structure. The contours of carnival were often controlled by a regulatory elite political body
which, as Armstrong suggests, co-opted elements of the lower classes. Yet, the diverse expressions of carnival also permitted resistance and response to the elite’s version of the ideal celebration. In Buenos Aires and Montevideo, the meaning of carnival changed over time but it always embodied a negotiated series of rituals that were shaped and contested by political and economic elites, the burgeoning middle classes, commercial interests, and the popular classes. A recent spate of scholarship has focused renewed attention on carnival in Argentina and Uruguay as a way to gain insight into the modernization of their capital cities and the concomitant transformation of social relationships in the era following national independence (Alfaro, 1991; Anderson, 2005; Andrews, 2007; Chamosa, 2003a, 2003b; Chasteen, 2004; Remedi, 2004; Seigel, 2000). These scholars show how the meanings of carnival in the Río de la Plata region were continually debated, redefined, and contested amongst social classes, ethnic groups, and urban regulators during the nineteenth century.

Part of the way in which carnival presents a complicated ritual with shifting meanings is the fact that carnival, itself, embodies a series of events, performances, and rituals. Each component of the celebration may contrast in meaning with other parts. In the Río de la Plata, carnival activities ranged from unregulated street play where citizens engaged in pranks of throwing water, or confetti-filled or rotten eggs on unsuspecting passers-by, to official parade routes designed, implemented and regulated by urban elites, to masked carnival balls in the commercial spaces of theaters, to carnival groups parading, unregulated, through suburban neighborhoods. In most of the Río de la Plata region, this pre-Lenten festivity in both cities drew a great deal from Carnevale in Venice, Italy with continual reference to the stock Commedia dell’Arte figures of Colombine, Pierrot and Harlequin. In Montevideo, in particular, the celebrations were personified around the figure of Momo, the carnival king, and the Marqués de las Cabriolas (Marquise of Capers) who ceremonially opened carnival, in Montevideo. Momo was ritually ‘buried’ during a final celebration. As will be discussed below, these European antecedents melded and merged with Afro-Latin American music to form a new hybridized cultural expression arising from the complex power relationships and inter-actions between the different ethnic groups that shape Latin America (Chasteen, 2004; Andrews, 2007).

While carnival experiences have largely been studied as national histories, in the case of the Río de la Plata, one cannot fully understand how carnival practices became transformed over time without taking into account the larger regional geographical and demographic context. Here, carnival celebrations in the early twentieth century were shaped by the transforming relationship between Montevideo and Buenos Aires. Transnational, more than national, concerns shaped carnival into a point of destination for porteños (residents of the city of Buenos Aires) to visit Montevideo, as Uruguay and its southern beaches transformed into a tourist destination.

Justification for comparative value

Uruguay and Argentina and their capital cities have followed similar historical trajectories and, indeed, during the colonial era belonged to the same administrative region, known as the Río de la Plata. During the colonial era, neither city was prominent. The first notable division between the two regions occurred in 1776, when
Buenos Aires was chosen to be the seat of the viceroy of the Río de la Plata, an area that included the territory of Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay. This administrative decision placed Buenos Aires in a dominant position, and since then it has outnumbered its eastern counterpart in population and economic activity. In the national era, both Argentina and Uruguay followed similar paths, achieving their independence from Spain around the same time. Montevideo and Buenos Aires were established as their respective national capitals due to their ports, which stimulated economic and demographic growth. As port cities, they both received a number of European immigrants at the end of the nineteenth century, and saw their already relatively small African-descent populations decrease in size and visibility as a result of the flood of primarily Spanish and Italian arrivals (Andrews, 1980, 2004). Both cities shared the same vision at the turn of the century: that the progress of the nation would be symbolized through the material development of its national capital (Needell, 1995; Rosenthal, 1996).

Despite the similarities between these cities, Buenos Aires’ population always greatly outnumbered that of Montevideo, a point crucial to contrasting the disparate trajectory of these cities’ carnival celebrations. At the turn of the century, the population of Buenos Aires averaged about four times that of Montevideo. In 1884, for example, Montevideo’s population numbered 164,028 (Rilla, 2005) and in 1887 Buenos Aires had about 433,373 inhabitants (Moya, 1998). Both cities grew dramatically over the next thirty years, due to the arrival of thousands of immigrants to their shores, primarily from Spain and Italy. In 1908, the year of Uruguay’s national census, Montevideo had a population of 309,231, and Buenos Aires had a population of 1,176,480, about four times greater.

In addition to demographic differences, these southern cone nations also had divergent experiences in terms of late-nineteenth century political stability. Francisco Panizza details Uruguay’s political disruptions during this era, noting that 27 men occupied the presidency in the hundred or so years between independence and José Batlle y Ordóñez’s second presidency from 1911 to 1915 (Panizza, 1994). In addition, the country suffered civil wars in 1897 and 1904. While Argentina experienced some political instability at the same time, Panizza argues that, in general, almost 70 years of constitutional continuity prevailed. In terms of carnival, Argentina’s political stability enabled city regulators to exert control over the local shape of carnival (Panizza, 1997). In Montevideo, lack of political stability resulted in a lack of political interference in carnival that allowed it to retain a shape defined and embraced by its most numerous practitioners, the working classes (Andrews, 2007). When political stability prevailed, during the era of Battle, Montevideo’s carnival benefited from an organizational structure that supported its growth and did not try to constrain it. In relationship to carnival, Gustavo Remedi shows that Battle began to foment public performances by ‘using community money to build [neighborhood] stages’, beginning in 1904 (Remedi, 2004, p. 64).

**Carnival regulation in Buenos Aires**

As Patricia Anderson convincingly argues, carnival ‘reflected the tensions that underlay [Buenos Aires’] growth and transformation. Instead of drawing attention to the sophistication of the city and its inhabitants, the festivities highlighted the deep
divisions that threatened the attainment of progress and “civilization”’ (Anderson, 2005, p. 40). Indeed, the demise of carnival in Buenos Aires can be seen as resulting from these tensions, exacerbated even more by the intense urbanization demands and conflicts of the late nineteenth century. During the post-colonial era, carnival evolved from a popular street activity to one that was increasingly regulated and restrained, symbolized by its transformation from predominantly outdoor to largely indoor celebrations. The spatial transformation of carnival had deliberate social class ramifications as it was removed from the street, a public space accessible to all social classes, into commercial theater buildings, areas that economically included primarily the middle and upper-middle social classes. Almost all of the political elite of Buenos Aires shared a disdain for the outdoor festivities, resulting in prolonged attempts to restrain, regulate, and control them. By 1920, the previously well-known and popular street activities of carnival here, where *comparsas* (carnival groups) joined *corsos* (parade routes) on the city’s streets, had faded away.

Buenos Aires’ elite had attempted to control pre-Lenten ‘excesses’ dating back to the colonial era. Commonly, the earliest administrative concerns about carnival were clearly linked to the celebratory activities of the city’s African-descent populations. Carnival celebrations provided a visible and lasting venue from which African Nations, the name given to membership organizations created by African ethnic groups in the Americas, blended their own ritual festivals and cultural expressions with those of the culturally Christian peoples who first enslaved them in Latin America. That is, Catholic practices, such as the celebration of religious festivals and rituals, were one of the ways in which Spanish and Portuguese slave-holders attempted to acculturate their African-descent populations to the dominant mores of their belief system. These same festivals provided a social space in which local African traditions could also be incorporated, resulting in a syncretic mixture of African and Christian rituals. George Reid Andrews and John Charles Chasteen have both noted the deep African roots of carnival celebrations throughout the Americas. (Andrews, 2004, p. 123).

During the colonial era, slaves in Buenos Aires routinely held a variety of social activities that were often related to religious activities resulting from their being organized into *cofradias*, or lay brotherhoods, by the church. Black dances were often conflated with religious holidays, especially carnival (Andrews, 1980, p. 161). There were several times when colonial administrators issued regulations attempting to prevent African slaves from paying homage to Momo, the lord of carnival, by prohibiting traits of their celebration such as dancing and drumming (Andrews, 1980, pp. 156–157; Puccia, 1974, pp. 57–68).

Despite an attempt to curtail African-descent peoples and traditions in carnival festivities, the role of African cultural practices continued to be an important component of carnival in Argentina until the latter part of Juan Manuel de Rosas’ rule. A regional strongman whose close ties with the popular classes and strong arm techniques enabled him to ‘restore’ order to the nation, Rosas was well-known for supporting the festivities of the popular classes (Lynch, 1981). Despite this reputation, Rosas himself prohibited carnival celebrations during the final years of his rule, 1845 to 1852. Ironically, he employed the same language that those before him and those after him would use in order to stifle carnival celebrations – these unrestrained festivals were violent; they damaged public order and the good customs of the people; and they threatened to destroy an ‘enlightened’ society. Rosas also felt
these celebrations were contrary to a hard-working people, that they damaged the economy, and were unhygienic (Puccia, 2000, p. 94). Patricia Anderson argues that once Rosas had consolidated his political rule he no longer needed carnival celebrations to reach out to the popular classes. John Charles Chasteen notes this as a moment of important transition since it was after the Rosas era that carnival in Buenos Aires reflected the interests of the elite rulers over the popular classes (Chasteen, 2000, p. 49).

**Carnival in the era of modernization**

By the onset of the era of modernization in 1880, which coincided with Buenos Aires becoming the nation’s capital, the governing and popular attitudes towards carnival were long established: The city’s inhabitants continued to embrace the polyvalent forms that carnival took, while city administrators lamented the lack of control displayed by the city’s revelers. Beginning in the 1880s, complaints about the African cultural traditions of carnival celebrations had been replaced by a new fear: that carnival could unleash urban disorder in this epoch of rapid demographic growth. Between 1880 and 1920, carnival in Buenos Aires would no longer belong to the popular classes but would be absorbed and experienced most fully by the middle and upper social classes. Carnival became an important way in which these social groups made manifest and consolidated their social status.

The strong ideological stance of Argentina’s elite and its emphasis on reforming the national capital explain why this era focused so intently on taming carnival celebrations. Elite attempts to shape Buenos Aires into the Paris of South America drew upon the ideological proclivity of statesmen like Domingo F. Sarmiento who opposed ‘civilization’ with ‘barbarism’, claiming that civilization occurred in the cities and all that was barbaric took place in the countryside (Sarmiento, 2003). As a result, especially after 1880, when Buenos Aires was chosen as the site of the national capital, the city served as an important symbol of the nation’s ‘progress’. City administrators wished to remake Buenos Aires into the Paris of South America by destroying remnants of the city’s colonial past and introducing new wide avenues based on Georges Haussmann’s designs for Paris. Jeffrey D. Needell has noted that this attempt to remodel the city was also meant to ‘represent (or induce) the change in public consciousness’ of its citizens (Needell, 1995, p. 519). Given the intellectual project of this elite whose attention centered on Buenos Aires as a showcase of material progress, it was no wonder that carnival celebrations were a recurring problem, a reminder of the city’s ‘unfortunate’ past as an uncivilized backwater.

While the era of modernization saw carnival celebrations becoming more regulated, especially as the city council began to exert greater control over parade routes, Buenos Aires’ carnival retained its most problematic feature, that of the entrado, the practice of throwing water, and other objects such as flour, confetti, and streamers with small stones embedded in them, onto pedestrians. Such pranks resulted in violent confrontations between ‘prankster’ and victim (Puccia, 2000, pp. 72–73). The entrado was not native to Argentina. It was also the subject of great consternation in the nineteenth-century in Argentina’s neighboring countries, Brazil and Uruguay. For example, Sandra Lauderdale Graham gives a vivid description of the entrado (meaning, she notes, ‘to mock or make fun of”) in early nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro (Graham, 1992, pp. 66–71). She remarks that these pranks
were ways in which the lower classes could claim and make the street, or public space, their own by subjecting all social classes to their surprise attacks. In Argentina, traveler accounts invariably complain about the annoyance and outright danger of unrestrained carnival celebrations during this era:

Carnival is the event of the year. Everything looks forward to it. Everything stops for it. For weeks preceding [carnival], the windows of business houses were filled with masks of all descriptions and other appliances for its proper observance. Chief among these appliances is the *pomo*, a small can or bottle of soft, flexible tin, with screwed cap over the small neck. The *pomo* contains perfumed water. Every variety of perfume is discernible. It is said that poisoned *pomos* [tubes filled with stagnant water] are used as a means of taking vengeance on an enemy or settling an old grudge. The top being removed, and the *pomo* squeezed through the finger and thumb, a fine, steady stream of water is poured upon the object of attack. The chief aim is at the eye... The many murders committed in retaliation caused the interference of the civil power. (Clemens, 1886, p. 174)

The majority of discussions and debates around carnival practices centered on these water games, or *juegos de agua*, as the *entrudo* was called in Buenos Aires. Over the years, seemingly countless pieces of regulation were debated, promulgated, overturned and re-introduced once again in largely unsuccessful attempts to control mayhem on the city streets which inevitably followed the aftermath of the throwing of water onto passersby. For example, water vials were first prohibited in 1876. In 1881, they were legalized, although it was still illegal to throw water onto passersby from anything larger than an eight-inch vial, a law that targeted the frequent use of jars and buckets. Carnival pranks also intersected with public health concerns especially in 1887 when a cholera epidemic hit the city. City officials outlawed even the water vials which were imported from England, and many charged that the vials tubes contained unhygienic dank water. In addition, the city regulated that property owners would be held responsible for any objects thrown from their premises (Buenos Aires, 1887, pp. 472–474).

The upper-class broadsheet, *La Gaceta Musical* (20 February 1887) described the impact of this legislation as follows:

Water, merry-makers, and *pomos* have been shut down this year by our tyrannically great police; no one will show their heads during the day, nor throw water, or do any of the other thousand 'tacky', entertaining and characteristic things our carnival is known for. Decorative lights, painted figures, flowers and the immense human wave of the population surrounded by the streets Victoria, Peru, Florida, Rivadavia and Piedad [streets of the main downtown area] will not turn Buenos Aires into a universal Babel during three days of carnival fun. The Judas Errante is not permitted. Only the clubs will celebrate carnival. *Momos* instead of being dressed in cardboard sandals and a flecked mess of colored clothes, will wear a velvet mask, don suits of satin, or sport a tuxedo.

The quote gives insight into the transformation of carnival from a popular street celebration to an event more designed for the elite, as it becomes privatized into a celebration for social centers.

As carnival grew increasingly commercialized, a group of manufacturers wrote a petition to the city council urging them to re-think their ban on these vials (Buenos Aires, 1901, November 15). In their petition to the city council, they explained that
the current prohibition regarding the sale of these items was anachronistic, since it was only in the past when the police were ‘indifferent to carnival activities’ that the vials caused problems. In fact, they creatively argued, the legalization of vials would actually improve public safety, since liquids squirted from a vial were not as likely to cause injury as those thrown down from above via pails and buckets.

Debates over the reintroduction of water vials, a seemingly frivolous topic, shed light on deeper concerns about carnival on the part of its regulators. Indeed, the city council’s views of carnival intersected with three primary issues: hygiene, public order, and commerce. Sometimes these concerns overlapped. Debates regarding disorder easily turned to philosophical discussions about the role that carnival should play in the city and in the nation. Those members who argued for the legalization of the sale of water vials and for the retention of carnival argued that historically people had sought to amuse themselves in a variety of ways that had not always met the approval of their rulers. Using the positivistic language of the time that stressed the importance of Europe as a center of civilization, one council member argued that most ‘civilized’ parts of the world had ‘barbaric’ traditions: ‘Even France, a beacon of civilization, has bullfighting in Nime and Nantes. Furthermore, do we really want to imitate the tyrant Rosas who for a decree in the year 1845 prohibited carnival in the entire nation in all of its forms?’ (Buenos Aires, 1900, January 22).

The council members also decided to prohibit serpentine streamers manufactured in France and England, that were rolled up and thrown into crowds. Many of them were thrown with a hard object, like a stone, wrapped in the middle. The streamers were also visible reminders of the disorder of carnival since they littered the city’s streets for months, and they reportedly interfered with the functioning of phone lines, since so many were thrown onto wires. While many council members had felt that outlawing streamers was a bit excessive, since every ‘civilized’ country in the world allowed these streamers to be thrown, they were nonetheless prohibited. Councilmember Varela, for example (jokingly, one assumes) declared that he would vote against the prohibition of serpentine, ‘because I do not want to be more civilized than the Europeans’ (Buenos Aires, 1900, January 22).

In addition to restricting the use of water vials and confetti, the city council also increasingly regulated the location and length of parade routes within the city. As the city grew in population, the central streets were increasingly congested. In 1905, for example, the city passed an ordinance which prohibited carnival parade routes from passing through the city’s center. The magazine, La Ilustración Sud-Americana (20 February 1905), commented that the current year’s carnival celebrations would ‘not be much’ due to increased regulations. Increased traffic in the era of the automobile contributed to congestion exacerbated by carnival celebrations. Many newspapers reported that this ordinance was the one that ultimately killed carnival in Buenos Aires. La Razón (10 January 1910, Buenos Aires), for example, noted that Momo ‘died in Buenos Aires not only a victim of his own vices but also due to an inopportune municipal ordinance’.

Of course, city regulations would not mean much if there had been no attempt to enforce them. The period between 1880 and 1910 shows a marked increase in police surveillance and presence during carnival. The police’s primary role was to maintain order along the various carnival parade routes. As early as 1881, police had detailed directions about how to monitor parade routes in all twenty police districts of the
city (Buenos Aires, 1881). Internal police publications note the lack of success in this arena since they had to threaten individual agents with the loss of their jobs if they were seen dancing while on duty, suggesting, of course, that such occurrences were not uncommon (Buenos Aires, 1923, p. 57). This image of a lackadaisical police force transformed into one that had a reputation for overzealously carrying out its role. Between 1900 and 1915, it became increasingly common to read complaints directed towards the police in relation to their carnival duties (7 February 1910, La Razón, Buenos Aires, p. 3). Municipal funds helped increase the number of police on duty during carnival, and individual agents even received overtime pay. Many press accounts questioned why the Buenos Aires police force could not achieve what police departments everywhere else had supposedly managed to do – maintain public order without choking all of the life out of festivities (1 and 7 February 1901, La Razón, Buenos Aires, p. 3).

Overall, increased city regulations and their strict enforcement transformed carnival in Buenos Aires by ending street festivities and moving carnival into the interior social spaces of theaters and social clubs (12 February 1910, La Prensa, p. 2). Attending theater was already a well-established custom in the city, which had over twenty theaters operating at any one time. Profit-driven theaters were well positioned to receive carnival revelers as well, since they regularly hosted ‘special event’ evenings throughout the year, which garnered larger entrance fees. Carnival, that most special of celebratory events, offered lucrative opportunities. Indeed, enterprising managers quickly extended carnival balls on weekends to cover the entire month. Because carnival coincided with the summer months of the southern hemisphere, the off-season for theater performances, theater managers made the most of this opportunity to increase their box office sales by hosting masquerade balls.

Beginning in the late 1890s, the transition of carnival celebrations into indoor theaters was frequently noted in the press. For example, in 1893, La Ilustración Sud-Americana (18 February, p. 3) remarked that theaters were places of great fun and animation during carnival, with the exception of the Opera where ‘our golden youth have caused a drunken spectacle’. On 8 February 1910, La Prensa reported, ‘The scarcity of parade routes has caused people to look for their entertainment in dancing that took place in the city’s theaters’. In the early 1900s, the central role of theaters in carnival celebrations had been further cemented due to the rise of dance craze fads in Buenos Aires such as the Cake Walk and tango (McCleary, 2002, pp. 223–243; Puccia, 2000).

Carnival also became increasingly marked as an expression of growing consumerism and the commercialization of leisure time activities. Theaters, rather than parade routes, were social spaces able to integrate the commercial dictates of the time with carnival. For example, carnival began to be defined by contests in which participants would compete for money prizes awarded for best costumes and best dancing. Responding to the pressures of competitions, contests and commercialization, homemade costumes gave way to store bought ones, and people were encouraged to buy all sorts of carnival paraphernalia that they had previously done without or produced at home. Magazines and newspapers began carrying advertisements for all sorts of carnival merchandise in addition to costumes, such as confetti, serpentines, masks and other costume accessories.

The local press contributed to the consumer frenzy by publishing photos of children who showed up at theaters and social clubs to compete for costume prizes.
Indeed, contests seemed deliberately to target children who came dressed up as the era’s typical characters such as ballerinas, gauchos, gypsies, dominoes, Pierrots, Colombines, and washerwomen. Upper middle class magazines, such as Fray Mocho and Caras y Caretas, regularly devoted a few pages to photo spreads of costumed children. The transformation of carnival costumes also reflected the Europeanization and ‘Argentine-ization’ of these celebrations. The sad clown Pierrot, his object of desire, Colombine, and Harlequin, the object of Columbine’s desire, were well-known figures in European carnival balls, and they dominated the adult costumes in Argentina. Children, however, provided a unique space for the society to incorporate costumes of Argentine identity, notably gauchos. Both transformations, however, were clear moves away from the Afro-Argentine inspired costumes and cultures of carnivals past. Photographs of carnival during the pre-1910 era show Afro-Argentines and European-Argentines dressing up in stereotypical ‘mammy’ costumes quite frequently. But during the first years of the twentieth century those costumes gave way to European ones and distinctively Argentine ones. Micol Seigel has shown how carnival provided a social space that allowed the numerous immigrants new to the city, the opportunity to become Argentine with the rise of centros criollos between 1900 and 1910 (Seigel, 2000, p. 59). Composed largely of immigrants, these criollo groups came together to perform ‘authentic’ Argentine history, acrobatics, and music.

The increased role of children in carnival celebrations went beyond the transformation of immigrants into Argentines. This newly targeted audience also promised theater owners additional sources for profit. They increasingly held balls for children as part of the relatively new addition of using afternoon times for matinee events. Matinees, in general, targeted women and children as a way to increase theater attendance in the city. Theaters, in sum, were venues that offered to contain carnival celebrations in a limited space that was easier to control than festivities taking place on city streets, and they accommodated and defined the commercial nature of carnival that had now become inextricably linked to a middle and upper-middle class consumer culture.

**Rise of carnival in Montevideo**

This commercialization of carnival coincided with the development of a summer vacation culture, especially pronounced for the upper and upper-middle classes of Buenos Aires. Summer vacations began to link the citizens of the Río de la Plata together. This was not a two-way exchange, however, as porteños frequented Montevideo and its surrounding beaches, rather than the other way around. Montevideo, in particular, responded to the arrival of tourists by developing a relatively solid tourist infrastructure that involved developing water-front hotels and restaurants and also coordinated the development of fluvial and urban systems of transportation to carry porteños and other tourists from place to place. Transportation especially was coordinated to accommodate the arrival of thousands of visitors during carnival season. Expanded train schedules were regularly reported in the city’s newspapers during carnival celebrations (1914, January 30, La Razón, Montevideo, p. 1). The port was also expanded and improved in 1915 to accommodate more visitors. In addition, Montevideo began to promote carnival in other cities through the use of posters. For one season, over two hundred such advertisements were
posted throughout Buenos Aires, and fifty each in the Argentine cities of Rosario, Santa Fe, and La Plata, in addition to other cities in Uruguay (1912, February 7, *La Razón*, Montevideo).

The increasing commonality of spending January and February in Montevideo and its beaches including Pocitos, Ramírez, Piriápolis, and, eventually, Punta del Este, was reflected in the coverage of Buenos Aires’ magazines such as *Caras y Caretas*, *P.B.T.* and *Fray Mocho*. These publications, targeted to the upwardly mobile middle classes and already ‘upward’ classes, regularly covered elite social events in Montevideo during the summer months. The development of tourism in Uruguay also coincided with the demise of outdoor carnival activities in Buenos Aires. As a result, summer vacations began gradually to introduce porteños to an alternative carnival experience. Gordon Ross, the English journalist who resided in Buenos Aires, and whose epigraph opens this article, gives a detailed account comparing the two capital cities, carnival, and the rise of vacations in Montevideo as a destination for Argentines (Ross, 1916, pp. 79–85), remarking that with its beautiful white beaches, Uruguay should have ambitions to become the seaside resort for all of South America. As more and more porteños began to leave Argentina for their vacations, the Argentine government and businesses attempted to stem the flow of tourist dollars by offering reduced-price vacations at their national vacation spots, such as Mar del Plata (1917, January 5, *La Tribuna Popular*, p. 4). In particular, a tourism war erupted between 1914 and 1915 as the two national capitals each competed for tourist dollars in light of a diminishing economy resulting from the onset of World War One.

A number of factors resulted in the migration of vacationing Argentines to the beaches near Montevideo. Economic growth in the early twentieth century in Argentina resulted in an increase of porteños with both the time and money to vacation. Montevideo quickly responded to a demand in tourism by developing restaurants, beach-front hotels, and transportation systems linking Montevideo to its beach communities. Vacations to these beach towns were promoted in Buenos Aires as a result of an increase in public health awareness that stressed the need for people to seek out ‘salt baths’ and fresh air. The concept of vacation itself was clearly linked to public hygiene. For example, the Buenos Aires city council often noted the poor air quality of its downtown especially during the summer months when wind and dust made the city almost uninhabitable especially in combination with the modernizing efforts of the city to repave central streets. One traveler also saw the social class tensions that had exploded in Buenos Aires in the 1919 Semana Trágica as a reason for Argentines to vacation in Montevideo:

> The traveling Argentino finds here [in Montevideo] a pleasant haven of refuge from the slings and arrows of his Republic’s outrageous socialism, a sport where efficient service and civility are not considered to be beneath the dignity of waiters, porters and housemaids. (Koebel, 1920, p. 229)

The increase in summer vacations was a result of modernization and urban growth, and it was socially and politically promoted within the Argentine capital. Leisure time and the concept of vacation became socially prescribed antidotes for the upper classes to escape from the pressures of living and working in an overcrowded and unhygienic city.
Comparing carnival on both sides of the Río de la Plata

From the early 1900s, the Buenos Aires press had commented on the shifting shape of carnival in their own city, usually in a way that suggested the present celebrations were mere shadows of past ones. Utilizing the positivist language of the time, albeit sarcastically, *La Ilustración Sud-Americana* summed up the state of affairs: ‘The newspapers and other official documents say we are progressing and probably this, our dying carnival celebration, is the sign of how much progress we have achieved’ (1908, March 15, p. 2). One journalist in Buenos Aires published an ‘interview’ with the symbolic representative of carnival, Momo. The journalist asked him, ‘Sr. Momo, we thought you were in Mar del Plata, Montevideo or Nice this season!’ Momo: ‘No, I am here dressed up like someone who is bored. It truly is amazing. You people are even capable of killing off the immortal Phoenix!’ Journalist: ‘But surely you have had some fun, Momo?’ Momo: ‘I threw some serpentines on the phone wires, I lit a torch on a balcony, and I threw some water at people’. Journalist: ‘But all that is prohibited sir!’ (1920, February 9, *La Razón*, Buenos Aires, p. 1). Of course, both of these examples and numerous others acknowledge that the city’s administrators had finally won their battle to tame carnival celebrations by, in effect, over-regulating it. They had, so to speak, thrown the baby out with the bath water. The baby, however, had landed safely in Montevideo. *La Razón* noted, ‘Momo has been thrown out of our lands. Now he feels like royalty in Uruguay where he is treated well’ (1910, January 31, *La Razón*, Buenos Aires, p. 1).

Montevideo’s *La Razón* ran a series of articles in 1914 explaining the reasons why carnival in Buenos Aires was ‘dying’. The articles responded to Buenos Aires city council attempting to revive carnival there by overturning the ordinance that had prohibited parade routes from taking place in the city’s center (1914, February 14, p. 1). Uruguayans explained that carnival in Buenos Aires had died, in part, because porteños had a tendency to import ideas and fashions and, as a result, overlooked and undervalued their own cultural traditions. In addition, the newspaper said that carnival could not be celebrated in such a large city as Buenos Aires, which had a population of ‘strangers’ and was all ‘chaos and confusion’. These traits were anathema to the warm camaraderie that formed a necessary part of authentic carnival celebrations, such as those that occurred in Montevideo. Rising worker unrest furthermore fueled the chaos of carnival on the other side of the Río de la Plata, since the police were not able to control labor strikes and carnival crimes at the same time. In sum, Buenos Aires had itself ruined its own carnival since the city council had tried to eliminate central parade routes, and the population of the city destroyed any semblance of fun by committing acts of violence throughout the days of revelry.

The same newspaper noted a few days later:

Every city in the world will be celebrating these next three days of carnival. Everywhere that is except for Buenos Aires, a city full of serious men, a boring metropolis, that capital of solemnity that has no room for fun. It is the 19th of February, and you do not see one single preparation for carnival in that great city. You do not even see a single flag. There is no sign that indicates the upcoming days of revelry and exaltation. Carnival is now dead thanks to the declaration of the chief of police that they will be out in full force to supervise the carnival parade route in the central city that the city council has attempted to organize in an effort to infuse life back into the celebration. (1914, February 19)
While porteños arrived in great numbers to enjoy Montevideo’s beaches and carnival celebrations, it appears that they were most often observers rather than active participants. For example, newspapers often described murgas (small groups of carnival revelers) in relationship to the neighborhood from where they originated. There were very few mentions of murgas composed of people from Buenos Aires. The one time a murga was mentioned as being composed of ‘thirty young Argentines’, it was noted that the Carnival Commission was aware of that fact, suggesting it was indeed out of the ordinary (1917, February, La Razón, Montevideo, p. 2).

**Montevideo**

Was carnival in Montevideo so different from that of its rival? If so, how and why did carnival differ? Milita Alfaro has shown that carnival in Montevideo underwent transformations parallel to those of the celebrations of Buenos Aires (Alfaro, 1991). The regulations of both cities were surprisingly similar with each city prohibiting water play, the use of religious or military outfits, and carnival revelers from making fun of national institutions, such as singing the national anthem. Alfaro’s assessment of carnival in Montevideo during the era of modernization is one in which carnival became restrained, co-opted by the government, and commercialized. She casts these transformations in an almost wholly negative light, drawing from a Foucaultian vision of a society being disciplined and controlled by its regulators.

In comparison to carnival in Buenos Aires, however, one can argue that many of the changes that carnival underwent in Montevideo, here carried out under the administration of José Batlle y Ordóñez’ social welfare government, somehow contributed to a more positive carnival experience. The form that carnival took in Montevideo suggests that a negotiation took place in which government, police, and public shaped a carnival that not only was no threat to public order but also offered the public an acceptable form of diversion.

Perhaps the most important feature of carnival in Montevideo was the diversity of activities that took place throughout a wide swath of the city: tablados (neighborhood stages) were built, and people joined carnival societies, attended masked balls at social centers, hotels, and in theaters, went to costume contests, and attended parades during the day and the evening where they could watch allegorical floats, decorated cars and carriages pass by. The activities were always kicked off with a parade that was led by the Marqués de Las Cabriolas (1915, February 15, La Razón, Montevideo, p. 2), who was performed by a popular shoe shiner and janitor, named Eduardo Lametz. During his 13-year tenure as King of Carnival, Lametz in his role of Marqués was often a figure of public ridicule. Lametz was a local celebrity, albeit a dubious one, who regularly received press attention. Reporters noted his demands to have protective bars around his float to protect him from all of the objects thrown at him on the annual kick off parade (La Razón, Montevideo, 1915, February 15, p. 2). This is significant because Montevideo’s festival had curtailed the unruly aspects of entrudo not by erasing it altogether but by symbolically transferring it towards the figure of a scapegoat. In this way, street disorder was controlled but the subversive element of social catharsis was retained. Ironically, Lametz’ working class status suggests that the middle classes were the group using carnival as a realm of social catharsis.
The press commented on the growth of carnival in Montevideo with about the same frequency they reported on its demise in Buenos Aires. The amount of actual space in each newspaper devoted to carnival coverage greatly expanded between 1910 and 1915. *La Razón* (Montevideo), for example, devoted three full pages of about a ten-page paper to carnival, including the ‘above the fold’ section on the front page. It also used a reduced-sized font for regular carnival coverage on the days immediately preceding the events, in order to fill in as much detail as possible. One editor commented, ‘We confess that we do not have enough space or time to summarize all of the carnival activities that we know of, so we can only offer you the following updates in the space allotted’ (1915, February 12, *La Razón*, Montevideo, p. 1). On 23 February 1914, the same paper reported, ‘*Murgas* are invading the city. Seven boys get together (why are they always groups of seven?) This year there are hundreds of them. From every *conventillo* [tenement] to every street corner’.

The municipality government of Montevideo exerted a great deal of organizational control over carnival in the city, making sure that most of its participants registered with the city’s Carnival Commission. Both cities had a number of social centers organizing different carnival activities, but only in Montevideo did the city require all such groups to register their activities with the city government in an effort to provide a larger organizational structure. This organization facilitated the smooth operation of carnival throughout the city’s many neighborhoods. Not surprisingly, Buenos Aires’ carnival was consistently criticized for its lack of organizational structure.

In addition, the municipal government of Montevideo worked smoothly in conjunction with the city’s police to ensure that regulations were streamlined and posted throughout the city. Regulations monitoring carnival were printed annually in the city’s newspapers during carnival season as a seemingly friendly reminder. At times the Carnival Commission actually held meetings at the police station, suggesting a fluid relationship between these two entities (1905, February 22, *La Tribuna Popular*, p. 2). Montevideo’s police had special training sessions to prepare them for maintaining order during carnival (1905, March 4, *La Tribuna Popular*, p. 3). This implies that Montevideo’s city and police understood that the revelry of carnival presented special policing challenges, requiring subtle rather than overt forms of social control.

In direct contrast to the press coverage of policing in Buenos Aires, most of the Montevidean press reported on the actions of the police in relation to carnival in a laudatory manner. For example, after carnival, *La Razón* (1914, February 21, p. 3) reported, ‘Police service was impeccable. Parade routes were well organized and the police heads and officers all carried out their jobs very well ensuring public safety. The great number of people and traffic make it difficult, however, to maintain perfect order in the city’. Indeed, the stereotype that carnival in Buenos Aires had deteriorated as a result of the scandalous activities of its own inhabitants seems to have also been embraced by Montevideo’s police, who took an active role in apprehending known criminals from Buenos Aires as they disembarked in Montevideo. In 1917, the Montevideo police force was doubled so that agents could identify known porteño criminals. The police reportedly detained 16 of these figures and told them they would be under heavy surveillance, if they chose to stay. Most were ‘convinced’ to return to Buenos Aires.
Role of neighborhoods

One of the most important differences between carnival in Buenos Aires and Montevideo had to do with the disparate nature of Montevideo’s celebrations throughout the city’s neighborhoods where tablados, or neighborhood stages, were an important part of carnival. A commission was first charged with organizing the neighborhood commissions in 1892 (Remedi, 2004). More important, perhaps, was the fact that José Batlle y Ordóñez’ government subsidized these stages, beginning in 1904, to gain political support from the popular classes (Remedi, 2004, p. 64). Montevideo’s press commented on the funding. In 1914, 50,000 pesos were set aside for the festivities (1914, January 17, La Razón, p. 3). This is a notable departure from the practice of Buenos Aires’ governmental officials who did very little fiscally to promote any cultural practices during the same time period. While the Argentine magazine Caras y Caretas noted that working class neighborhood celebrations in La Boca and Flores, for example, were growing in size, these celebrations operated entirely outside of the realm of governmental support. Indeed, it is notable the degree to which the Argentine government (municipal and national) ignored cultural issues outside of the realm of the elite opera house, the Teatro Colón (McCleary, 2002, pp. 362–419).

In Montevideo, tablados seemed to arise almost spontaneously in most city neighborhoods, reflecting the great degree to which the culture of participating in carnival celebrations had reached there. These neighborhood commissions registered with the city’s Carnival Commission and newspapers announced their locations, amount of prizes to be awarded and times of contests. Tablados served as more than mere stages in a couple of ways. First, the construction of tablados was a serious undertaking, and they were approached as works of art. Neighborhoods competed to win the best tablado prizes citywide. Each community organization chose a theme for their tablado that was incorporated into the physical design of the stage. Many tablados, for example, celebrated the tourism of Montevideo by having a theme such as ‘Montevideo’s best beaches’. Therefore, the construction of stages was a great undertaking which required that local inhabitants meet over a variety of decisions and then spend a great deal of time together building the stages. The preponderance of tablados forced carnival participants to move throughout the city. Rather than gravitate towards the main parade routes in the city center, people who made up carnival groups, moved from tablado to tablado, from neighborhood to neighborhood, that is, in order to compete for prize monies given out by each neighborhood commission (1917, February 27, La Razón, Montevideo, p. 4).

Tablados targeted the two main groups of carnival societies in Montevideo, the traditional comparsas, large groups of between 60 and 80 dancers and musicians who dressed up and performed during carnival, and the more informal, murgas, who began to appear in carnival celebrations here in the early 1900s. Murgas grew in popularity over time while comparsas began to decrease in quantity. Originally formed of small groups of seven to eight young men, they easily moved from one tablado to another to compete for prizes. They usually had some sort of comedic and oftentimes nonsensical name such as, ‘Bad Boys of the Street’, ‘I want to be Where I was Last Night’, and ‘Nocturnal Bums’. The names imply that they derive from local, inside jokes, once again reflecting their neighborhood base. Around 1910 newspapers began to devote more and more space to the murgas and less and less to
the *comparas*. The smaller size of the *margas* made it much easier to move throughout the city.

Reading the history of Montevideo through popular press accounts and in comparison to the morose Buenos Aires celebration offers a new perspective on carnival in that city. Paulo de Carvalho-Neto, Milita Alfaro, and Abril Trigo all present a picture of carnival that stands in stark contrast to the celebration presented in this article. Carvalho-Neto views Montevideo’s festival as one which was ‘tightly controlled by the government’, including censorship that was implemented through the awarding of prizes that reinforced prevailing notions of cultural norms (Neto, 1967). He notes that *comparas* had to adapt to rules which banned, ‘sad or melodramatic scenes and disguises that do not belong to carnival’ and ‘all indecent words, gestures, or allusions’. Yet in my research, I have found numerous newspaper accounts that disparagingly noted when a particular *murga* or *compara* sang especially vivid or controversial lyrics. Reviewing 10 years of newspaper accounts of carnival reported by two of the main newspapers revealed no complaints that the city was heavily exercising its censorship duties. Indeed, the rapid growth of *tablados* and *margas* between 1910 and 1920 suggests that such an undertaking would have been virtually impossible. The flexibility of *margas* to move throughout the city and the ability of all of carnival participants to improvise suggests that the city would have a very difficult time exercising its authority in this manner. In fact, if the city had over-regulated carnival it would most likely have suffered a similar fate to the celebration on the other side of the Río de la Plata.

**Role of race/ethnicity**

Current scholarship on carnival celebrations has stressed the important role that African-descent populations played in maintaining and preserving a vibrant carnival celebration. Did carnival die in Buenos Aires as a result of the loss of a visible Afro-Argentine cultural heritage at the end of the nineteenth century? Did it grow in Montevideo due to the larger presence of Afro-Uruguayans, who remained an important component of carnival? What role, that is, did ethnic and cultural traditions play in preserving the legacy of carnival in the Southern cone? It is problematic to make direct connections between late nineteenth and early twentieth-century carnivals to contemporary ones, since the meanings of these celebrations are inscribed within their particular temporal and social contexts. In fact, many contemporary carnival celebrations in the Caribbean and Brazil, for example, arose out of the emergence of nationalist movements that merged with a recuperation of African cultural traditions in attempts to reclaim and re-insert Afro-Latinos into the nation-building project (Chasteen, 2004; Scher, 2003; Trigo, 1993).

Race and ethnicity have been tied very closely to carnival celebrations in Uruguay and Argentina from the beginning of the arrival of Africans and Europeans during the colonial periods. Most popular press accounts of carnival in the early twentieth century continue to acknowledge a visible organized Afro-Uruguayan population who continue to play active roles in carnival there. In Buenos Aires, in contrast, there is very little acknowledgement of a similar phenomenon. If current-day carnival practices are strongly linked to the areas in the Americas which had strong African-descent populations, could the answer as to why Uruguay was able to maintain its carnival tradition be found within this segment of its population? Abril Trigo argues,
‘Despite the fact that Uruguay is known for its Europeanized culture, the black minority, which constitutes about two percent of the population, has exercised an influence on urban popular culture that greatly exceeds its numbers’ (Trigo, 1993, p. 716).

George Reid Andrews has excavated the history of Afro-Argentines, calling into question the degree to which this segment of the population ‘disappeared’ at the beginning of the twentieth century, and more recent scholarship is uncovering the various organizational societies that Afro-Argentines participated in during the early twentieth century (López & Dominga Molina, 2001, pp. 332–347). Andrews illustrates how the promotion of whiteness was intricately linked to the erasure of blackness (Andrews, 2004). For example, he shows how most cultural expressions linked to an African cultural tradition or to its African descendant purveyors were outlawed and heavily repressed. These laws had greatest effects where individual Latin American countries had the largest Afro-American populations, but they were, nonetheless, felt everywhere and contributed to the erasing of not only Afro-Latin American cultural traditions but also to this group’s visibility in society. This erasure of blackness can be seen most visibly in carnival celebrations, since they have garnered a great deal of attention from legislators as well as the popular press, as mentioned at the outset of this article. The transformation of carnival in Buenos Aires from a celebration that reflected Afro-Argentine traits into one that reflected European ones was strong enough and fast enough to be captured in Domingo F. Sarmiento’s description of how carnival in Buenos Aires was no longer celebrated with the display of flags representing African nations. Instead, the flags of the nations of the European immigrants had replaced them (Andrews, 2004, p. 106).

Between Buenos Aires and Montevideo, the clearest signs of the maintenance of African culture and populations were seen in Uruguay, where it is estimated that two percent of the population has African heritage – double that usually estimated for Argentina at the same time period. While mainstream newspapers very rarely commented on the role of Afro-Argentines in Buenos Aires during carnival, their presence in Uruguay was noted regularly and thoroughly, suggesting a prominent role in carnival celebrations for both Afro-Uruguayans and black face Lúbolo groups. Andrews discusses relationship between these minstrelsy groups and social constructions of race in Uruguay’s carnival in the 1880s (Andrews, 2007, pp. 704–709). Comparsas which had evolved from African-based candombes, retained the participation of many Afro-Uruguayans, although the majority of them were composed of people of European descent. It was not unheard of to see mixed-race comparsas either. Newspaper ads continue to describe comparsas by their ethnic components, often noting when black comparsas were particularly ‘organized and professional’, probably code for those comparsas which had responded to the dominant cultural norms of the mainstream political and social classes.

It would be an overstatement to argue that carnival in Argentina did not retain Afro-Argentine elements only it was found more strikingly in the increasingly popular tango music rather than in carnival’s candombes or comparsas. Many scholars have traced the roots of tango back to the candombe or slave dances of the early colonial era (Castro, 1991; Rossi, 1926; Chasteen, 2004). The dances of slaves transformed over time and the new dance form that they practised was originally referred to as the tambo then the candombe and eventually the tango. Chasteen suggests that the tango arose out of the practice of elite Argentine youth imitating
the dance of Afro-Argentines (Chasteen, 2000). At the end of the nineteenth century, for example, as the Afro-Argentine population was decreasing at a rapid rate, it became common for the Argentine elite to dress up in blackface for carnival celebrations. An article in 1902 Caras y Caretas, ‘El Carnaval Antiguo, Los Candomberos’ (cited in Anderson, 2005), traces the rise of the elite youth, or niños bien, who imitated Afro-Argentine candombes by dressing up in blackface to 1870. An Afro-Argentine woman, wife of one of the organizers of the Benguela nation, interviewed for the article, reminisced that in the carnival of yore, when African nations participated, ‘even the stones danced’. This all changed, she said, after young white men took to imitating the speech and dance of Afro-Argentines. A notable difference between Argentina and Uruguay was the fact that Afro-Uruguayan candombes continued to participate in carnival in Montevideo, but their counterparts disappeared from carnival in Buenos Aires (Andrews, 2007, p. 694).

The degree to which a stronger Afro-Uruguayan cultural tradition preserved carnival in Montevideo cannot be known. It does seem reasonable to suggest, however, that the same elements that fomented the maintenance of carnival there, notably the inclusion of the city’s many diverse neighborhoods in primary participatory roles, also allowed the city’s Afro-Uruguayan population to maintain and continue a strong organizational culture that, in turn, was able to preserve its own unique traditions and components which could then expand as political and social spaces embraced them. The disappearance of carnival in Buenos Aires served as yet another example of how the Afro-Argentine participation and presence in this city were forgotten.

Conclusion

Carnival in Buenos Aires, Argentina and Montevideo, Uruguay, experienced similar transformations as a result of the era of modernization, which stressed the ruling elite’s desire to maintain public order and to foment consumerism in popular celebrations. Yet carnival in each city experienced these processes very differently. Buenos Aires’ carnival shifted from city streets into theaters, and Montevideo’s outdoor carnival continued to thrive. The two carnivals were clearly linked by the movement of the middle and upper classes from Buenos Aires to Montevideo, as a result of the commercialization of leisure time, and the development of a tourism industry in Montevideo.

Buenos Aires’ carnival faded away due to a variety of reasons. The strong ideological position of its elites to propel its citizens on a strictly defined path of what it meant to be civilized resulted in a centuries-long attempt to control carnival revelry. Over time, city officials and the police force chipped away at the celebration’s outdoor and spontaneous expressions. It is likely that the most consistent form of popular form that carnival took in Buenos Aires – throwing water and other objects onto passers-by – annoyed more citizens than it entertained. The rapid growth of the city which consistently outpaced that of its eastern neighbor fourfold is perhaps the most compelling reason to explain the demise of carnival in Buenos Aires. As a result of modernization, carnival began to fit in less well with the characteristics of an urban center and more and more with the traits of a ‘gran aldea’ (or ‘large village’ the descriptor most used to define Buenos Aires’ up until about 1880), qualities that Montevideo retained. Academics have argued that the elite over-regulated carnival in
Buenos Aires but it is more accurate to argue that the emerging middle classes also rejected many aspects of outdoor carnival celebrations that hampered business as well as threatening personal security. In Montevideo, government regulation, rather than strangling popular festivities, served as a means by which the city’s inhabitants and regulators could negotiate a functional form of carnival. The commercialization of leisure time and the way in which Montevideo responded to the new opportunities that tourism presented also promoted the retention and expansion of carnival activities here.

Notes
1. I reviewed issues of Caras y Caretas, P.B.T., and Fray Mocho, middle to upper-middle class magazines, which included annual coverage of carnival, between 1900 and 1915.
2. Matinees arose in many cities about the same time due to the conflation of the rise of commercialization of cultural activities and the increase in leisure time afforded to urban workers. Matinees were especially prominent in Buenos Aires after 1900 where theaters catered to children by handing out candies during afternoon performances.
3. Almost every issue of P.B.T. in the summer of 1905, for example, included photos of Montevideo celebrations, most including the participation of Argentines. Fray Mocho and Caras and Caretas between 1910 and 1915 regularly covered events in Montevideo including, carnival celebrations for its Argentine audience.
4. Until recently, many more book-length studies have been devoted to carnival in Montevideo than to its counterpart in Buenos Aires. The most important books related to carnival’s development in Uruguay include Alfaro (1991), Neto (1967), Remedi (2004), and Plácido (1966). Oscar Chamosa has noted that carnival has generally been a side note to Argentine historiography (Chamosa, 2003a).

Newspapers and magazines
Caras y Caretas
The Economist
Fray Mocho
La Gaceta Musical
La Ilustración Sud Americana
La Razón (Buenos Aires)
La Razón (Montevideo)
P.B.T.
La Prensa
La Tribuna Popular

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