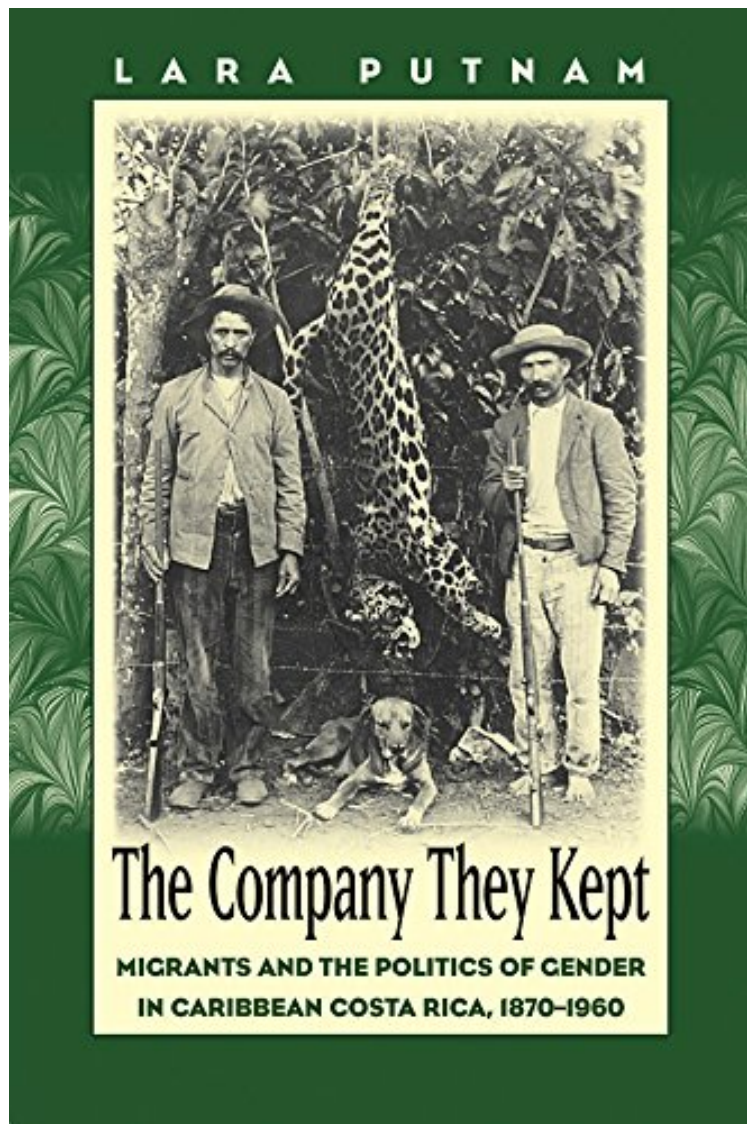


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## The Company They Kept: Migrants and the Politics of Gender in Caribbean Costa Rica, 1870-1960

Lara Putnam

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## They Kept: Migrants and the Politics of Gender in Caribbean Costa Rica, 1870-1960:

In the late nineteenth century, migrants from Jamaica, Colombia, Barbados, and beyond poured into Caribbean Central America, building railroads, digging canals, selling meals, and farming homesteads. On the rain-forested shores of Costa Rica, U.S. entrepreneurs and others established vast banana plantations. Over the next half-century, short-lived export booms drew tens of thousands of migrants to the region. In Port Limon, birthplace of the United Fruit Company, a single building might house a Russian seamstress, a Martinican madam, a Cuban doctor, and a Chinese barkeep--together with stevedores, laundresses, and laborers from across the Caribbean. Tracing the changing contours of gender, kinship, and community in Costa Rica's plantation region, Lara Putnam explores new questions about the work of caring for children and men and how it fit into the export economy, the role of kinship as well as cash in structuring labor, the social networks that shaped migrants' lives, and the impact of ideas about race and sex on the exercise of power. Based on sources that range from handwritten autobiographies to judicial transcripts and addressing topics from intimacy between prostitutes to insults between neighbors, the book illuminates the connections between political economy, popular culture, and everyday life.

"An engaging and stunningly well-written work that dissects invented traditions with powerful anti-essentializing effects. In this welcome brand of social history we learn just how culture and values interact with choice and individual personality. (Lowell Gudmundson, author of "Costa Rica Before Coffee")" "A vivid, beautifully written, sophisticated, and insightful book. By focusing on the intersections of gender, migration, work, community, and the subjective dimensions of honor and violence, Putnam provides an entirely new perspective on the history of the banana region of eastern lowland Costa Rica. (Catherine C. LeGrand, author of "Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations")" A vivid, beautifully written, sophisticated, and insightful book. By focusing on the intersections of gender, migration, work, community, and the subjective dimensions of honor and violence, Putnam provides an entirely new perspective on the history of the banana region of eastern lowland Costa Rica. The book will interest historians and sociologists of gender, of labor, of the Caribbean and Central America, of the African diaspora, and of comparative banana regions.--Catherine C. LeGrand, McGill University Full of case histories and graphic descriptions of daily life, Putnam's study puts a human face on the history of a boom and bust plantation economy. The result is a dramatic social and cultural history of migration, community formation, and economic development that will broaden readers' perspectives on the regional history of the western Caribbean.--American Historical "An engaging and stunningly well-written work that dissects invented traditions with powerful anti-essentializing effects. In this welcome brand of social history we learn just how culture and values interact with choice and individual personality, quite without much in the way of the State policy or intervention usually thought to shape the arena of family values. Putnam is as 'facety' as her best subjects in showing just how fluid and changing both cultural values and gender roles can be in migrant communities of all kinds.--Lowell Gudmundson, Mount Holyoke College [The Company They Kept: Migrants and the Politics of Gender in Caribbean Costa Rica] is also truly innovative in its use of gender in rethinking race relations and ethnic identities in Costa Rica. . . . This is a terrific book. It is well researched, well written and analytically sophisticated.--Journal of Social HistoryA book . . . that will change the way we think about the histories of the Caribbean and Central America.--International History From the Inside FlapPutnam analyzes labor migration and the politics of gender on the the banana plantations of coastal Costa Rica, which drew tens of thousands of migrants from the Caribbean and Central America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.