Callaloo People: The Designs of Robert Young and Celia Ledón

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Introduction

Callaloo primarily relates to a leafy vegetable dish prepared in a variety of ways across the Caribbean. Although the origin of the word is somewhat contested, the understanding that callaloo relates to food that is often mixed with other food is regionally understood. For this reason, the concept and preparation of callaloo can become symbolically synonymous with particular Caribbean identities and the desire they have to be authentically represented across the world. Accurate representation is incredibly important for Caribbean people, who wish to be known as more than the inhabitants of former slave colonies. While western media often limits discussions of Caribbean achievement to those who succeed in sports or in the music industry, many seek to be recognized for their multifaceted creative and intellectual output. In order to facilitate this, the Costume Institute of the African Diaspora (CIAD) has sought to represent the sartorial and cultural developments within the Caribbean through the collation of research and collaborative projects. CIAD has been established to broaden academic discourse around the development of fashion studies from the perspective of people within the African Diaspora. In so doing we have worked with cultural custodians and designers across the region in order to build a clearer picture of the Caribbean fashion landscape.

The countries included in the region known as the Caribbean are defined in a number of ways, depending on various perspectives. The colonial moniker of the "West Indies" speaks primarily to the island chain of the Greater and Lesser Antilles and the Lucayan Archipelago in the northern Atlantic. However, the whole area is more commonly

known by its inhabitants as the Caribbean. The official understanding of this term includes the countries that maintain a coast bordering the Caribbean Sea, which includes some of the countries in Central and South America. Although most of the countries are independent, they maintain strong connections to European or North American socio-political or socio-economic interests.

Before the end of the fifteenth century, the region, lush with wild natural growth, was populated by many different indigenous communities, including the Taino, Kalinago, Ciguayo, and Guanahatabey peoples, amongst others.[1] After the invasion of European forces, the region was populated with an influx of enslaved Africans through the European slave trade, who were used as the apparatus to develop colonial economies. From the three hundred years of enslavement that ensued and the approximately one hundred and fifty years of colonialism and indentured servitude that followed, the region became synonymous with slavery and, most notably today, as a vacation destination that ties local economies to the tourism industry. This economic reliance on tourism becomes problematic in practice because the historical legacies of servitude do not so much cease to exist but rather continue in a different form. The population of the Caribbean is in excess of forty-four million people,[2] the large majority of whom are people of African heritage and the descendants of enslaved Africans. Because of this, many people in and of the region tend to

[1] Paul Albury, *The Story of the Bahamas* (London and Basingstoke: MacMillan Education Limited, 1975); Barreiro, 1989; Johnson, 2005; Lawler, 2020); José Barreiro, "Indians in Cuba," *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1989): 56-60; Andrew Lawler, "Invaders nearly wiped out Caribbean's first people long before Spanish came, DNA reveals," *National Geographic*, December 23, 2020, accessed January 2, 2023, https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/invaders-nearly-wiped-out-caribbeans-first-people-long-before-spanish-came-dna-reveals.

[2] "Caribbean Population Live," *Worldometer*, accessed May 19, 2023, worldometers.info/world-population/caribbean-population.

carry historic mental, emotional, economic, environmental, and political baggage that often predetermines how they are perceived by the wider global society.

The political machinations of European and North American powers have resulted in varying levels of discord that continue into the twenty-first century. Former colonial powers who have not been able to reconcile the loss of economic viability from slavery and colonialism have continued to invade the region with socio-political policies that are largely detrimental to Caribbean people. This can be seen recently in the week-long tour of the Caribbean and Central America by the then-Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, which saw the couple visiting Belize, the Bahamas, and Jamaica where they were met by protests and calls for reparations along with an apology and acknowledgement that slavery was a crime against humanity.[3]

There has been a difficulty in convincing former colonial powers to recognize the need for the people of the region—the descendants of the enslaved—to be self-determinant and autonomous in the development of their own countries, while they also repair the psychological damage of enslavement and servitude that has left them in their current state. The destabilization has led to the devaluing of Caribbean currencies, the interference in Caribbean political processes in favor of the interests of former imperialist parties and the disruption to daily life, liberty, and independence. This is not only demonstrated in the example above of the royal visit to the Caribbean, which saw immediate infrastructural change in the form of mended and resurfaced roads in the Bahamas—actions which only seem to take place when foreign officials visit—but also in the

[3] The Associated Press, "As British royals visit Jamaica, protesters demand slavery reparations," *NPR,* March 23, 2022, accessed May 19, 2023, https://www.npr.org/2022/03/23/1088167278/protesters-in-jamaica-spurn-british-royals-ahead-of-official-visit.

continual involvement and undermining influence of various United States administrations in Haitian politics for over a century.[4]

Additionally, the yolk of religious convention in the form of Christianity (arguably a colonial remnant) seeps into the projected and expected behavior of people in the region and works as a type of community- and self-policing force. Far from the stereotypical images of the Caribbean as a place of eternal sunshine, hedonism, and extreme violence, the region is a religious and pious place where people tend to be deeply superstitious and very strongly wedded to their cultural beliefs. One example, is the expectation that women should cover their heads while in church.[5]

Cumulatively, this historical legacy leads to the politicization of the Black body, which negates the humanity of Black people (another colonial remnant). This is an incredible cultural state to come to terms with and on which to build the foundation of a Caribbean identity, particularly, when one is aware of the skewed perceptions that are promoted of this region, such as the beliefs around hypersexuality which align with the stereotypes of women wearing tight-fitting or overly revealing clothing. Yet, this legacy has created a strength of character that is a testament to the ability and skill of Caribbean people to triumph over adversity and make something from nothing. Caribbean people are proud of this tenacity, proud and loud about their ability to stand up for themselves, that they are survivors and thrivers despite the centuries-long abuse and torture that was slavery and colonialism. As a Black British academic of Jamaican heritage, I have been raised believing this skill and ability is inherent to Caribbean culture. I have understood that the capacity to

[4] Katz, 2022

[5] David Dunlap, 1994. Not all denominations of Christianity in the Caribbean require women to cover their heads, however, covering the hair with a hat or headwrap (for traditions with conjoined African beliefs) is a consistent expectation of women when it is required and stated in the Wesleyan church doctrine.

“tun han mek fashan” was inherent and commonplace. This Jamaican patois phrase literally translates to “turning your hand to make fashion,” which means using creativity and innovation to turn meagre resources into something new and useful. I mention several times throughout this essay the ability of Caribbean people to triumph over adversity and how that has made them strong-willed and proud. Although I believe this statement to be true, I must acknowledge the cliché of the strong Black person and the strong Black body being able to take any problem and spin it into gold. This is a problematic notion that I do not wish to perpetuate. It does not acknowledge the pain and suffering caused by continued discrimination or the lasting psychological damage that is detrimental to Caribbean people. It also suggests that Caribbean people have no recourse for moments of weakness, softness, or gentility, which is another incredibly harmful stereotype. The purpose of referencing the triumph over adversity is to demonstrate that, despite the many shortcomings, humility, tenacity, humor, and an unquenchable desire for more and better have driven creativity within the region.

This chapter will discuss two fashion designers who have taken this principle and have used these historical legacies and socio-cultural circumstances to create designs that represent specific cultural aspects of their respective Caribbean countries. The use of carnival, ancestral spiritual retentions, and the notion of Callaloo people, a Trinidadian culinary term applied to the mixture of different people, will be explored in the fashion of Robert Young, designer of The Cloth. The effects of the sixty-plus year embargo on Cuba and how this has promoted a move towards sustainable design will be discussed through the work of artist and costume designer with training in industrial design Celia Ledón.

Trinidad and Tobago: Robert Young

Previous research trips to Trinidad and Tobago have helped me understand that fashion on this island is strongly connected to West African ancestral retentions and spirituality, as well as an integration of different cultural influences. This can be seen in the work of Robert Young, founder and creative director of The Cloth fashion label. The Cloth, which has been in operation for over thirty-five years, uses the textile practices of appliqué and silk screen printing in many of its pieces. This has since become a recognizable characteristic of the brand and is seen as a signature of their designs. Young's design work incorporates elements and concepts of folk, revolution, restoration, and innovation. These make up the storytelling aspects of his brand and reflect his personal beliefs and experiences. Young is invested in the beauty and grace of the Caribbean environment and wants to make beautiful things. His personal experiences have shaped his design work and tie it directly to his Caribbean identity. As the son of trade unionists, he is politically conscious, and describes himself as a feminist, activist artist, designer, historian, and "Caribbeanist,"[6] someone who studies and makes the Caribbean the focus of their life's pursuits and interests. The principles of restoration are incorporated through his body of work and were on display in his 2009 collection shown at Trinidad and Tobago Fashion Week which included long and short sweeping airy off the shoulder dresses of white and cream sea island cotton with ruched sleeves allowing the body the privilege to luxuriate and feel carefree in masses of soft fabric.

The activist attitude that Young infuses into his designs is reminiscent of the political slogans often seen in East African kanga textiles or the subtler monikers attributed to

[6] Joan Rampersad, "Young celebrates 32 years of The Cloth," *NewsDay,* May 24, 2018, accessed January 3, 2023, https://newsday.co.tt/2018/05/24/young-celebrates-32-years-of-the-cloth/.

Ankara cloth in West Africa. An example of how Young's design practice centers all of these aspects of his mission can be seen in his Project Blue collection. This collection, created during the COVID-19 pandemic, focuses on the environment, ritualistic practice, and the history of spirituality. It utilizes hand-spun and hand-woven, hand-painted, hand-dyed indigo fabrics made into layered appliquéd structures that are simultaneously beautiful, mysterious, and functional.

Being a proud Trinidadian, Young's creative work also engages carnival—a holiday occurring every February before Lent for which Trinidad and Tobago is known. The annual event provides a buzz of electrical energy that permeates every occasion. Alongside running The Cloth, Young is the costume designer and band leader for his own j'ouvert band, Vulgar Fraction. The carnival is a massive cultural and international event that many islanders spend all year preparing for and is one of the dominant influences within the fashion landscape of the island. The carnival dates back to the nineteenth century when plantation owners threw masquerade balls before the Catholic Lent fasting period. In 1845 formerly enslaved Africans created their own celebrations. However, the authorities tried to stop the festivities and rioting ensued. The name Canboulay is a derivative of the French cannes brulées (burnt sugar cane) for the burning of the sugar plantations that took place during the rioting. Canboulay became the foundation for Trinidad and Tobago's carnival and is remembered and celebrated every carnival Friday with a re-enactment of the riots.[7] J'ouvert is the first day of carnival and is celebrated the day before the annual costume parade usually in a band t-shirt or something that the reveller won't mind getting messy as there is often paint and water being thrown around as part of the opening celebration. The Vulgar

[7] Michael Anthony, "South's Canboulay Riots Hotter than North's" Triniview.com (1984) http://www.triniview.com/articles/canboulay.html

Fraction costumes for 2022 explored the ideas of using wreaths, dried flowers and mourning as a way of commemorating the people who had passed during COVID became new ancestors. The costumes consisted of dried leaves and flowers adorning the arms, legs or body, with masks that covered the whole head and face made from white and colored fabric and lace. The masks and flora used in the costumes are reminiscent of the Egungun costumes of the Yoruba from West Africa which is a masquerade character used in the remembrance of the dead*. Because of these layered concepts and meanings Young prefers to call himself an artist working with cloth rather than a fashion designer.[8]

The racial and cultural demographic of the island lends itself to the creative expression of fashion practice as the population is mostly made up of the descendants of enslaved Africans and indentured laborers from India. In practice, this often means a healthy mix of West African retentions and Indian cultural symbolism that manifests not just in the cooking but also in design, dance, and music. I do not suggest, however, that the socialization of these two cultures is seamless or without struggle. While undertaking research on the island, I came across many discussions that suggested that when one group attains political and economic dominance, they forgo and ignore the needs of the other group, and there is certainly a cultural and racial element to the discrimination that is seen among the people. Whether such things can be overcome through creative assimilation and cultural integration remains to be seen. Some would say no, but Young has been making strides to offer restoration and representation since 1986.

* Smithsonian Learning Lab https://learninglab.si.edu/resources/view/258317 accessed May 31 2023.
[8]Laura Dowrich-Phillips, "Robert Young: man of the Cloth," *Caribbean Beat* 98 (July/August 2009): https://www.caribbean-beat.com/issue-98/rober-young-man-cloth#axzz7pRfzYnZx, accessed January 3, 2023.

Young had intended to join the priesthood in his youth, a calling reflected in the name of his brand, The Cloth. It acts as his pulpit, his place of worship and devotion.[9] This connection to religion echoes the voracious religiosity in the Caribbean, which, as noted above, is not widely discussed outside of the region, but plays a big part in how people engage with fashion and even social class. Young's perspective on fashion and production is also influenced by time spent in India learning how textile artisans work with their environment. His interest in Indian textiles undoubtedly fuels his aforementioned desire to foster understanding and harmonious relationships between the two main racial groups in Trinidad through his work. In India he observed clothing that can take months to produce as it travels around the country being worked on by different craftspeople. This led to an understanding by Young that people want to feel like their clothing is helping rather than hindering their surroundings, which could suggest a shift towards slow fashion within the consideration of sustainability.

The rising sea levels and the onslaught of climate change that continue to erode island nation states such as Trinidad and Tobago bring crucial relevance to Young's design philosophies.[10] His clothing consists mostly of airy, non-form fitting pieces, using quality materials, functional, and comfortable. Young recognizes that among its many problems, the COVID-19 crisis has not only caused an economic deficit, but also a huge mental and emotional deficit amongst the global population. He remarks in a 2021 interview with the *Jamaican Observer* that he was due to expand his business to Barbados, St Lucia, and the United States, but the pandemic conditions meant that those opportunities would not be

[9] Dowrich-Phillips, "Robert Young: man of the Cloth."
[10] Amelia Moore, "Tourism in the Anthropocene Park? New analytic possibilities," *International Journal of Tourism Anthropology* 4, no.2 (2015): 186-200.

possible.[11] Those prospects will undoubtedly materialize again, but he has since realized that the lockdown and isolation caused a loss of human interaction that he is hoping his next collection can help remedy. In July 2020, The Cloth produced a fashion film called *Self Help* which featured elements of this collection. It was set against the backdrop of his late father's house in the Trinidadian countryside that had been destroyed by fire some time ago. Although not directly related to Christianity, the film relays a spiritual resonance, using the aesthetics of rural existence and African retentions through drumming and chanting that accompanies the piece and are preserved from the period of enslavement.[12]

From an understanding of Young's practice, it becomes clear that he has not restricted himself creatively, nor let the adversity of political, economic, cultural, or global health crises dampen his enthusiasm for his work. He remains ever engaged and as much an activist as ever. However, being a Caribbeanist means that concerns for one's natural habitat become a central focus of the work. This can be seen in his use of materials like linen, which is often used in the Caribbean because of its cooling properties, and the flowing aesthetic of his designs which allow for airflow around the body.

Similarly, as we rebuild our lives after the pandemic, we come to a greater appreciation that everyone, of all genders and designations, deserves respect and to be able to live peacefully. Sexism, homophobia, and transphobia remain huge concerns in the Caribbean, and, unfortunately, violence against members of the LGBTQ+ community remains rife in the region.[13] Young demonstrates his allyship by including people from the

[11] Clarke, 2021

[12] This film, *Self Help,* is posted on the homepage of The Cloth's brand website, accessed May 31, 2023, thecloth.com.

[13] Delores E. Smith, "Homophobic and transphobic violence against youth: The Jamaican context," *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 23, no.2 (2018): 250-258, DOI: 10.1080/02673843.2017.1336106 (accessed January 3, 2023); Amy Braunschweiger, "I Have to Leave to Be Me" Discriminatory Laws against LGBT People in the Eastern Caribbean," *Human Rights Watch*, March 21,

LGBTQ+ community in his work, whether that is as employees in his design studio or as models for his photoshoots. This is important as people from the community can often be ostracized from the wider society, making it difficult to support themselves. When speaking with the *Jamaican Observer* about understanding and respecting each other within this current era, Young states:

> How do we navigate this period of restoration using our relations with bodies — black ones, female ones, trans ones, gay ones, religious ones. That is what is begging to be answered in some way and any new answer that informs us in that space has to be uncomfortable. Force and noise don't make us see each other; we have to find a better way of navigating and bridging that space.[14]

The history and rise of Caribbean people is a story of the oppressed and marginalized, so Caribbeans understand as well as anyone what it feels like to have one's voice erased. It is therefore necessary to address these prejudices, and enable other marginalized groups space to be. Far be it for me to suggest that fashion and creativity are a way forward with that conversation, but it could certainly be a start. With his Caribbeanist activism, his historical and spiritual knowledge, and his incredibly well-respected longevity within the field of carnival costume and Caribbean fashion, Young is well placed to be the "voice of reason for the voiceless on the Caribbean Fashion scene.[15]

Cuba: Celia Ledón

The island of Cuba holds a unique position in the story of the Caribbean, having successfully enacted a revolution against their own government on the first of January 1959. The country nationalized all business and development interests, creating massive domestic and

2018, accessed January 3, 2023, https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/03/21/i-have-leave-be-me/discriminatory-laws-against-lgbt-people-eastern-caribbean.

[14] (Clarke, 2021)

[15] (Clarke, 2021)

international ramifications, the most debilitating of which has been United States sanctions on Cuba's trade, travel, business, and international relationships with other countries. The United States has imposed increasingly restrictive sanctions on Cuba since 1958, and although there have been efforts to reduce these sanctions and ease the relationship between the two countries over the past twelve years, the restrictions remain. While the United States labels the sanctions an embargo, Cubans see them as a blockade.[16] The difference between the two words is subtle, but "embargo" suggests that the action is simply a prohibition on commercial interests. This does not fully acknowledge the consequences or human cost of the injunctions in the ways that the word "blockade" speaks directly to the perspectives of the people experiencing the repercussions. Either way, the sanctions are restrictive to daily life and freedom of movement for most Cuban people. Despite these sanctions, triumph over adversity is the Caribbean way, and the work of Celia Ledón embodies that ideology.

Due to the restrictions on materials in Cuba, fabric for fashion production can be difficult to obtain and expensive when available. Being able to utilize cheap or free materials is a sensible way to sustain a creative fashion practice. This is where Ledón excels. Celia Ledón is described as a "costume designer who makes wearable art from found materials and re-used objects, decontextualized from their original purpose."[17] These include a dress made entirely from ring pulls from drinks cans. The dress which has a high collar and form-fitting bodice with cap sleeves and a ring pull crochet looking skirt, also comes with a

[16] Oxfam International, "Right to Live without a Blockade," *Oxfam Report,* May 2021, accessed January 2, 2023, https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621191/bp-cuba-blockadewomen250521summen.pdf;jsessionid=2A43A76CAB566A6D86A19AE45A1C2DC1?sequence=4.
[17] "Celia Ledón: Costume Designer: A Kennedy Center Digital Stage Original," video (3:39), The Kennedy Center, accessed January 2, 2023, https://www.kennedy-center.org/artists/l/la-ln/celia-ledon/.

matching hat also made from ring pulls; and a high collar, laced backed bi-pedal play suit made from heavy duty industrial suede gloves.

She does not describe herself as a fashion designer as she does not make clothes that people regularly wear.[18] Distinct from ready-to-wear or mass market fashion, her work is considered haute couture, in line with the avant-garde designs of couturiers such as Iris van Herpen or Hussain Chalayan. Ledón's work spans fashion, costume design, and other creative practices and has featured in catwalk shows at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. in May 2018,[19] and Doral Museum Miami in June 2021.[20] From 2018 to 2020, Ledón worked as a designer with the Cuban fashion company Clandestina.[21] She has made costumes for theatre and dance companies and film productions and also works as a filmmaker and producer. Ledón is a creator, and like Robert Young, does not restrict herself in her creative output, therefore labelling her work is difficult. What is clear is her leadership in Cuba's sustainable fashion movement.

Ledón uses industrial waste materials, as well as everyday waste materials, such as plastic bags and ring pulls from drink cans, to create her pieces. She uses these materials because they are free, but also because she does not want to contribute to the waste created by the fashion industry.[22] Preferring to work alone, her construction methods are not always conventional—although she uses a sewing machine, she is more often seen with pliers, a hairdryer, or zip ties. This raises the consideration that methods of construction and

[18] "Celia Ledón The Legacy Video," video (3:30), Doral Contemporary Art Museum, accessed January 2, 2023, https://dorcam.org/celia-ledon-project.
[19] Joel de Rio, "Cuban designer Celia Ledón chosen by Vanity Fair and the Kennedy Center," *CiberCuba*, May 23, 2018, accessed April 2, 2023, https://www.cibercuba.com/noticias/2018-05-24-u80279-e80279-s27315-disenadora-cubana-celia-leon-elegida-vanity-fair-kennedy.
[20] Ezequiel de la Rosa, "The World of Celia Ledon's artful costume designs," *Jez,* June 1, 2021, accessed May 30, 2023, https://www.jezmagazine.com/2021/06/01/the-world-of-celia-ledons-artful-costume-designs/.
[21] "About," Celia Ledón website, accessed May 30, 2023, https://www.celialedon.com/about.
[22] " A Peculiar Conversation with the Outstanding Celia Ledón," Ecosteel, 2022, accessed May 30, 2023, https://www.ecosteel.pt/article-celia-ledon.

creating may need to change to support sustainable design, along with access and engagement with materials.

In a 2018 interview with the Kennedy Center, Ledón said that she does not like to think too much about her creations beforehand or the message she wants to send. It is within the creation of the piece that the message, if there is one, becomes clear.[23] In that respect she allows her creative thoughts to flow, and again, does not limit herself to the conventions of design or fashion construction, but instead obeys the physics of the materials she is working with. Her practice absolutely embodies the phrase "tun yuh han mek fashan" as she is literally collecting waste materials and turning them into beautiful wearable art.

Henry Navarro Delgado, assistant professor of fashion at Toronto Metropolitan University, has suggested that if Cubans had access to fast fashion and global brands, they would not be as interested in sustainable fashion. He attributes interest in sustainability to necessity, rather than altruism or concern for the environment.[24] Although this may be true, the necessity of developing a sustainable fashion practice has always been relevant in the Caribbean. Indigenous people across the world have developed plant fibers and waste materials into textiles and ingenious upcycling has occurred for centuries as a way of life deeply connected to the earth and its natural resources. Only the label of "sustainability" is new. As indigenous people moved across the world, they took their knowledge of textile manufacture with them and adapted these skills to their new surroundings using whatever materials and fibers were available. The Cuban straw hat known as the yarey hat can be

[23] "Celia Ledón: Costume Designer: A Kennedy Center Digital Stage Original."
[24] Phineas Rueckert and Erica Sánchez, "Cuban designers at the forefront of the sustainable fashion revolution," *Global Citizen,* June 8, 2018, access January 2, 2023, https://www.globalcitizen.org/es/content/cuba-sustainable-fashion-celia-ledon/.

seen as an example of this practice. Straw hats are seen and worn all over the Caribbean and were developed through the memory retentions of enslaved Africans who would weave them out of local dried palm leaves. However, in Cuba, the yarey hat has particularly significance as it has arguably become a symbol of Cuban identity. The hat, once worn by both the enslaved and the plantation classes, was a subject in a novel by Cirilo Villaverde and a song by Manzanillo Original Orchestra.[25] It worn by Cuban guerrilla soldiers during the war for independence against Spain, and, today, is a regular souvenir of tourists who visit the island.[26]

Despite rich legacy of sustainability in the Caribbean, the majority of the literature written about sustainable textiles and clothing published in the last twenty years is based on aesthetics, practices, and innovations that have been developed in Europe or the United States. These works include *Well Dressed? The Present and Future Sustainability of Clothing and Textiles in the United Kingdom* and *Sustainable Fashion: Why Now? A conversation about issues, practices, and possibilities*.[27] They often do not consider the needs or histories of people outside of Eurocentric demographics. Speaking to Delgado's point, Ledón's sustainable practice admittedly may have arisen as a matter of circumstance, but that does not mean it should be dismissed as *only* circumstantial action. Her method has the potential to be incredibly impactful for Caribbean designers, inspiring less conventional

[25] Cirilo Villaverde, *Cecilia Valdés or La Loma del Angel* (1882), Louisiana Anthology, accessed May 3, 2023, https://louisiana-anthology.org/texts/villaverde/villaverde--cecilia_valdes.html; "Yarey hat," *Cuba Tesoro,* undated, accessed, May 3, 2023, https://www.cubatreasure.com/yarey-hat/.

[26] "Yarey hat."; Guadalupe Yaujar Diaz, "Yarey's hat, who says it was lost?" *Kaleidoscope*, January 26, 2017, accessed May 3, 2023, https://www.radiohc.cu/de-interes/caleidoscopio/119593-el-sombrero-de-yarey-quien-dice-que-se-perdio?_x_tr_sl=es&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=sc.

[27] Julian Allwood, Søren Ellebæk Laursen, Cecilia Malvido de Rodríguez, and Nancy M P Bocken. *Well Dressed? The Present and Future Sustainability of Clothing and Textiles in the United Kingdom* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Institute for Manufacturing, 2006); Janet Hethorn and Connie Ulasewicz (eds), *Sustainable fashion: Why now? A conversation about issues, practices, and possibilities* (New York: Fairchild Books, 2008).

approaches to design, construction, and materials through the lens of sustainability and putting the Caribbean on the map as the foremost region for sustainable dress innovation.

The United States' sanctions on Cuba have led Celia Ledón to innovate, using her background in industrial design and her creativity to develop a sustainable practice that can be adapted as a blueprint for design practices around the world. Her practice, whether circumstantial or not, proposes a change to the fashion system that has been long overdue and is a benefit to Cuba and the Caribbean as a whole.

Conclusion

This essay has provided a brief snapshot of the fashion landscape in the Caribbean. From clothing relating to spirituality, ancestral retentions, and carnival, to items created from waste materials, and designs that embody elegance and sophistication, the Caribbean is a treasure trove of different styles and creative ideas. However, innovative fashion design from the region does not often break through to western media that focuses on sport, music, violence, or illegal activity. As someone of Caribbean heritage, I can attest to the reductive and narrowmindedness of this media bias, especially in light of the immense potential for creative development. There is difficulty in maintaining the legacy of innovation and creative output against a bias that continues to undervalue and disregard Caribbean dexterity beyond the pigeonholes that have been attributed to the region or its people. Understanding how these legacies effect daily life and self-perception can wear on the spirit and can steer some younger people away from design if they do not feel it will yield potential dividends.

The designers discussed in this essay are working with ever-present adversity within their respective countries, and, yet, they have found ways to use their heritage and

circumstances to be successful. The stories and the backdrop to their creativity is exciting, admirable, and truly inspiring, and their work provides a great template for those of us who work with young people to inspire innovation that will bolster Caribbean fashion into a more accessible and well-received field. Through the development of fashion exchange programs run by my organization, the Costume Institute of the African Diaspora, I continue my work with Caribbean designers highlighting the passion and creativity of the region through collaborative work between students and cultural custodians across the oceans.