

# *The best workers. The image in the US press of the Gallegos laborers in the Panama Canal (1906-1915)*

*The best workers.* La imagen en la prensa estadounidense de los obreros gallegos en el canal de Panamá (1906-1915)

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## ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the image of the Galician workers who participated in the construction of the Panama Canal in the United States press. The main objective is to find out what are the most relevant aspects of their ethnic characterization and to what extent the American newspapers reproduced or departed from the stereotypes of Galicians, both in Spain and Latin America. And, at the same time, to investigate the causes of these ethnic characterizations and possible propagandistic interests, since the construction of this seaway arose not only out of a need for communication between two oceans but also as a project for the image of this country as a new world power. Through qualitative techniques and a wide selection of news and reports on the object of study, several categories of analysis are established, that show that the profile of Galicians who represented most newspapers tried to avoid the negative stigma that, in general, it was attributed to the Spaniards after the military confrontation in 1898, as backward and lazy people. Influenced by a campaign led by the Canal construction company and the US government, some American newspapers recognized Galician immigrants with broad work qualities, to prevent public opinion from relating them to the decadent image of Spain that anti-Spanish propaganda had spread in the late nineteenth century.

**Keywords:** Galician Emigration; Panama Canal; Press; United States; Propaganda; Public Relations

## RESUMEN

Este trabajo analiza la imagen de los obreros gallegos que participaron en la construcción del Canal de Panamá en la prensa de Estados Unidos. El objetivo principal es averiguar cuáles son los aspectos más relevantes de su caracterización étnica y en qué medida los periódicos norteamericanos reprodujeron o se apartaron de los estereotipos que había de los gallegos, tanto en España como en Latinoamérica. Y, al mismo tiempo, indagar las causas de estas caracterizaciones étnicas y posibles

intereses propagandísticos, ya que la construcción de esta vía marítima surgió, no sólo por una necesidad de comunicación entre dos océanos, sino también como un proyecto de imagen de este país como nueva potencia mundial. Por medio de técnicas cualitativas y una amplia selección de noticias y reportajes sobre el objeto de estudio, se establecen varias categorías de análisis que demuestran que el perfil de los gallegos que representaron la mayoría de los periódicos intentaba evitar el estigma negativo que, en general, se atribuía a los españoles tras el enfrentamiento militar en 1898, como gente atrasada y holgazana. Influida por una campaña dirigida por la empresa constructora del Canal y el gobierno norteamericano, algunos periódicos estadounidenses reconocieron en los inmigrantes gallegos amplias cualidades laborales, con el fin de evitar que la opinión pública los relacionase con la imagen decadente de España que la propaganda antiespañola había difundido a finales del siglo XIX.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Inmigración Gallega; Canal Panamá; Prensa; Estados Unidos; Propaganda; Relaciones Públicas

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Translation by **Paula González** (Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, Venezuela)

## 1. Introduction

The Galician emigration to Panama to work on the construction of the interoceanic canal was an alluvial phenomenon limited to a temporary space of 8 years duration and, due to its seasonal nature, did not have a significant continuity in time, which differentiates it from the main migratory currents that developed in the period of the great migrations to America, between 1870 and 1930 (Moya, 1998, p. 45, Moya and McKeown, 2011, p. 17). From the beginning of 1906 to the end of 1908, 8,298 Spaniards<sup>1</sup> left legally for the Central American country, of which 5,983 were Galicians, 72.7 percent, according to the calculations of Juan Manuel Pérez (2007, p. 105). According to this author, to this figure should be added some 3,000 more, which after the government ban in mid-November 1908, did so illegally from different ports in France and Spain, via Costa Rica and Cuba, until the end of 1912, which adds up to a total figure of 11,298, of which, if the previous percentage were maintained, around 8,000 would come from Galicia. Another contingent must be added, without known figures, of clandestine emigrants during the first three years of the works, made up of those under the age of twenty-five, the minimum age authorized by the Spanish government to be able to emigrate because they were of military age.

The need for workers was pressing, so the company in charge of the construction, the Isthmian Canal Commission<sup>2</sup> (hereinafter ICC) was an active accomplice of this illegal labor emigration, as it paid 25 *pesetas* per person shipped to Panama to the Vigo consignee Estanislao Durán, who alleged that part of that amount was used to bribe the authorities (Park, 1906, September 17<sup>th</sup>). In January 1906, those responsible for the ICC began recruiting Spanish workers in Cuba, and, once their efficiency was proven, they continued in Spain until mid-November 1908, when the government headed by Antonio Maura prohibited recruitment. From that date on, the number of Spanish workers gradually

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<sup>1</sup> Figure published by the Isthmian Canal Commission (ICC) in its official newspaper *The Canal Record* (1914, p. 3), a figure to which should be added 500 more brought from Cuba, almost all Galicians.

<sup>2</sup> Public company dependent on the United States War Department.

decreased until 1912, when the workload was significantly reduced. Only a few more immigrants arrived before the end of the construction, in August 1914.

Taking into account the influence of the press in the construction of identities (Máiz, 2003, p. 106), the object of study is the information published of Galician workers in the Panama Canal in a large sample of US newspapers between 1906, when the recruitment of Galician workers began, and in 1915, shortly after the works were finished, although it is in the first two years when the greatest amount of news on the subject is concentrated. Faced with the coverage of the Spanish press, which adopted, in general, a very critical attitude towards the working conditions in the Canal and the treatment received by Spanish workers (Formoso and Pena-Rodríguez, 2018, p. 39), the discourse of the North American media, influenced by the role of their country as a new colonial power and administrator of the Panamanian isthmus, could have a different approach. Especially, if the analysis is made within the framework of the differences between the political models of Spain and the United States and their bilateral relations.

In those years, the American press as a whole was a flourishing business outside the public powers, with its lights and shadows. As a relevant fact in its development, it is worth highlighting the birth at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century of modern investigative journalism, known by the pejorative name of *Muckraking*, in which the novelist Upton Sinclair and journalists Ida Tarbell, Lincoln Steffens, Jacob Riis, Nellie Bly, Charles Edward Russel, and Edwin Makham (Feldstein, 2006, p. 107) stood out. A phenomenon that coexisted with the sensationalism of the headlines of William R. Hearst, who put sales before journalistic ethics (Procter 1998). The number of newspapers doubled between 1892 and 1914, going from 1,650 to 2,250 and, if all of them are included, in 1900 it reached 5,500 titles. This magnitude of the press business led to two opposite effects from the point of view of journalistic quality: on the one hand, it facilitated their effective independence from the public powers, but at the same time, frequently, the ambition to increase the volume of turnover was imposed to the most serious news line of the newspapers, abusing sensationalism (Wagenknecht, 1982, p. 195).

## 2. Objectives

Within the framework of analysis of this singular migratory phenomenon, the main objective of this work is to study the most relevant ethnic and cultural traits of the Galician workers who worked in the Canal and their representation in the United States press, within the general context of Galician emigration to America, where peninsular stereotypes about Galicians were reproduced in their migratory destinations, particularly in Argentina (Núñez-Seixas, 2015 and 2017, Lojo, 2017, Farías, 2010; Guidotti, Lojo, and Farías, 2008) and Cuba (Vidal-Rodríguez, 2003 and 2005).

As no less important objectives, it will be analyzed in the first place, if the North American press assumed the negative stereotypes about the Galicians existing in Ibero-America or, on the contrary, given the peremptory need for labor for the construction of the canal, a different image was divulged, less pejorative or even positive about them, and, at the same time, inquire about what the causes could be. Secondly, the aim is to find out to what extent the ethnic identity of the Galician workers survived and was manifested in the Canal Zone, differently or not, from that of other Spaniards, and if this differential mark was reflected in the most relevant newspapers in the United States.

The work is based on the hypothesis that faced with the coverage of the Spanish press, which adopted, in general, a very critical attitude towards the working conditions in the Canal and the treatment received by the Spanish workers (Formoso and Pena-Rodríguez, 2018), the discourse of

the North American media, influenced by the role of their country as a new colonial power and administrator of the Panamanian isthmus, could have a very different approach. Mainly, if the analysis is done in the context of the notorious differences between the political models of Spain and the United States.

Starting from this frame, several questions are raised that we will try to answer:

- a) What were the main features of the representation of the Galician workers in the canal in the North American press?
- b) What was their ethnic archetype? Was there a distinction regarding the rest of the Spaniards? If there was, what did it consist of?
- c) Was the image of the Galician workers in the journalistic discourse of the United States a reflection of the stigma or social stereotypes associated with immigrants from Galicia in Latin America?
- d) Was their overall image positive or negative?, and
- e) Did the North American government develop a Public Relations strategy or campaign concerning its management of the construction of the isthmus that affected the perception of the Galician workers?

### 3. Methodology

The media have played -and still have- a major role in the reproduction, construction, distortion (and even dissolution within the framework of an inter-ethnic or intercultural society) of a collective identity, be it of an ethnic, religious, or national community (or idea of a nation) or any other nature. The concepts, traditional rituals, and symbols, elaborated by cultural, political, and economic elites, when they are disseminated through certain media narrative formats and codes, do so following interpretive frameworks, a perspective from which facts are valued and selected (the media agenda), as well as the aspects that frame them in a specific context (*framing*) (Ardévol-Abreu, 2015). A process in which the forms of language and the gaze based on cultural or ideological values or prejudices are a means that can determine the representation, perception, and creation of reality, which journalists adjust based on the feedback from the editors and the public (Rodrigo-Alsina and Medina, 2009, p. 29).

To study the North American press, qualitative techniques based on discourse and content analysis have been applied, which have served to interpret the image of Galician immigrants according to the following categories or analysis frames:

1. The existence (or not) of stereotypes about Galicians in the reference newspapers of the United States.
2. Their ethnic representation in comparison with the Spaniards in the framework of the complex Spanish-North American relations.
3. The assessment of their work performance in the Panama Canal works.
4. Their archetypal characterization from a racial and cultural perspective.

The collection of hemerographic sources has been carried out through the catalog of the Library of Congress of the United States and the *Newspaper Archive* databases, complemented with the consultation of the repositories of the great newspapers of the time: *The Washington Post*, that of greater circulation in the capital, and *The New York Times*, which at that time opted for rigorous journalism in contrast to the tabloids *New York World*, by Joseph Pulitzer, the *New York Journal*, by William Hearst, and the late *The Outlook*, which in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was, together with *The Independent*, one of the most influential weekly newspapers (Wagenknecht, 1982, p. 216).

General searches have been carried out based on specific terms such as “Panama Canal”, “Galician immigrants”, “Gallegos”, “Galicia”, or “Spanish Immigrants”, which have made it possible to locate up to 42 headlines that mentioned (in some way) the Galician canal workers, fourteen of which were limited to reproducing pieces previously broadcasted by other newspapers. This study focuses its analysis mainly on the most extensive and relevant information or articles published by the US press. The newspapers that referred to the Galician workers in the canal are the following: *The New York Times*, *New York Tribune*, *The News-Herald*, *Tazewell Republican*, *The Holt County Sentinel*, *Coffeyville Daily Record*, *The Louisburg Herald*, *Suburbanite Economist*, *The Burlington Free Press*, *The Portsmouth Herald*, *The Washington Post*, *The Outlook*, *The Washington Herald*, *San Francisco Call*, *Oakland Tribune*, *The Outlook*, *The Charlotte News*, *The Daily Telegram*, *Boston Evening Transcript*, *The New York Times*, *The Sun*, *The Canal Record*, *The Pittsburgh Press*, *The Washington Herald*, *The Wichita Daily Eagle*, *The Boston Globe*, *Dayton Daily News*, and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

The participation of Spanish workers in the construction of the isthmus canal was previously studied in various works, among which authors such as Juan Manuel Pérez stand out, whose monograph on Galician immigrants from the canal (2007) focuses on the figures and origins of Galician emigration and their difficult integration into life and working conditions imposed by the North American authorities. Greene (2004 and 2011) researched the location of Spanish laborers in a racist system. A topic that was also addressed by Yolanda Marco Serra (1997 and 2012), who also described the informative treatment of the Spanish newspapers *El Liberal* and *El Socialista*, which is complemented by a work by the authors of this article (2018), in which the phenomenon of the image of Galician emigration in the Spanish press is extensively analyzed.

Within this framework of analysis, this article proposes a novel object of study, which aims to approach, in an interdisciplinary and transversal way, the knowledge of the history of Galician emigration to America through its image in the North American press at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **4. Discussion of results**

### **4.1. The stigma of the immigrant. Identity and stereotypes of Galicians in America**

To put into context the representation of the Galician workers in the Panama Canal made by the North American press, it is necessary to refer to the identity of the immigrants from Galicia and how their social image in Ibero-America has evolved, although their media or popular representation has always shown a tendency towards their cultural stigmatization. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Galicia was the territory with the most extensive and homogeneous differentiated ethnicity in all of Spain, although this circumstance operated as a negative social marker (Beramendi, 2002, p. 121).

The origin of this stigma is mainly located in the Spanish Golden Age, where three fundamental factors converged for its social construction: a strong identity, accentuated by the use of their own language (Galician), an illiterate rural origin, and an unskilled labor occupation in the capital of the kingdom, in Madrid, where many emigrated. Literature, particularly popular theater, helped to spread, consolidate, and exaggerate these features. In this way, a derogatory image of Galicians became popular, similar to the contempt of the English for the Irish, or of the French for the Gascons (Murado, 2008, p. 73).

But not all literary descriptions stigmatized Galicians with offensive language. In the selection of literary fragments in which Galicia and the Galicians appear, elaborated by Teijeiro Fuentes (1996, p. 203), to the negative attributes of disloyalty, naivety (in a negative context), stinginess, lewdness, lack of religious commitment, ugliness, dirtiness, or sloppiness, others such as beauty, goodness, sincerity, restrained ambition, nobility, and courage, the latter two generally referring to powerful characters, often Galician nobles with positions in the Court, were opposed, although to a very lesser extent. Social categorization, therefore, generally imposed a stigma that placed Galicians in an inferior place compared to other Spanish identities, such as Castilian, Basque, Catalan, or Andalusian.

With time, the especially infamous stereotype was softened, both in Spain and in Europe. This is at least what emerges from the compendium of sentences on Galicians and Galicia, collected by Alonso Montero (1974) and in the German encyclopedias analyzed by Johannes Kramer (1997, p. 152). From the grotesque clichés of the Golden Age that appear in the manual by Johan H. Zedler, published in the 1730s, one passes to a positive look in the dictionary of Friedrich A. Brockhaus, published in 1884 and 1908, which describes them more similar to the Portuguese than to the Spaniards, strong, vigorous, serious, industrious, honest, respectable, and thrifty.

The stereotypes of the Galicians reached Latin America in times of the Spanish empire through literary production and, above all, by the Galician immigration of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, coming from agrarian environments, lacking socialization of urban habits, which again favored their stigmatization. In Argentina, negative clichés from the Peninsula evolved and were revitalized at certain historical moments (Moya, 2008). Among them, it is worth highlighting the independence process, when the Galician demonym began to be applied to all Spaniards as a contempt, the same thing that happened on the occasion of the War of the Pacific that confronted Spain with Peru, Chile, and Ecuador (Núñez-Seixas, 2015, p. 218). Other reasons for its revitalization were the reproduction by the Argentine press, in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, of the jokes published in Madrid about Galicians, or the labor conflicts in which they were signified, which led to the demonym becoming an insult or disparaging word, which made many deny their origin (Núñez-Seixas, 2013, p. 26).

As in the Golden Age, in Argentina, and in other destinations of Galician emigration, those who held positions, qualified professions, and intellectuals were left out of the negative stigma. The others could be the subject of offensive or positive references, depending on the context. The most common virtues attributed to Galicians were honesty, industriousness, and moral integrity (Lojo, 2016, p. 3). In Cuba, where Galician immigration left a cultural imprint on local society, negative stereotypes faded after independence. Previously, the term Galician (*gallego*), which meant pig to Cubans, was extended to all Spaniards in its pejorative sense (González-Suárez, 2005, p. 207).

After the US occupation, the new administrators were concerned about the labor shortage in the development plans for Cuba's economy. A preemptory need for the sugar industry since the abolition of slavery, which was aggravated by the loss of hundreds of lives during the war of independence (Sánchez-Cobo, 2008, p. 63). Demand also grew with the improvement and construction of infrastructures, putting Spanish immigrants in value against the Cuban workforce.

William J. Clarck's guide for business people highlighted the industriousness and commercial initiative of the Galician and Catalan peasants, as well as their resistance and self-denial (Vidal-Rodríguez, 2003, p. 37). In particular, the elites of the Galician colony avoided negative symbolization, always cultivating close proximity to the present power. In the two periods of the island's North American administration, they maintained close ties with them (Iglesias-Cruz,

2012, p. 366), sometimes even showing their support for the integration of Cuba into the United States and using their economic power so that the local press stopped criticizing the occupying forces (Cuadriello, 2004, p. 209).

In fact, the Galician Center in Havana collaborated with the North American authorities in improving the image of their labor management in the Panama Canal. In the solemn act of laying the first stone of the new building of this institution, to which the governor, Charles Magoon, who had previously been governor of the Canal Zone, attended, the president of the Galician entity personally introduced him to the complacent commissioners that would report on the unfortunate situation of Spanish workers on the island, the majority Galicians (Magoon, 1907, December 12<sup>th</sup>). A matter, moreover, denounced by the Spanish press and the National Civic Federation (NCF), despite this being an entity created and financed by several North American trusts to reduce the influence of the workers' unions (Rothbard, 1996, p. 210). The report prepared by Guerrero and Lorente (1908) was very favorable to the government interests of the United States by pointing out only small problems, avoiding the poor employment and health situation (Navas, 1979, p. 141).

In the Canal Zone, the middle cadres of the ICC used to differentiate Galicians from other Spaniards, as the reports of the Zone's Police Chief Edward Sandrad (1907, February-March) attest. However, while the Galicians maintained a clear ethnic identity in Cuba, in Panama they adopted one that was more permeable to circumstances, with their Spanish brand prevailing in the public sphere. The situation there was more hostile due to the enormous cultural, language, social, and labor differences, which stimulated a feeling of solidarity among Spaniards from different regions. In its racist approach to the labor organization, the ICC placed workers of Iberian origin in an intermediate and fluid stage between whites (mostly North Americans) and blacks<sup>3</sup>, thus facilitating, in different circumstances, the management of their own racial prejudices to promote competition and rivalries with other ethnic groups<sup>4</sup> (Greene, 2011, p. 218). The claim of their identity of the Galician immigrants focused on their being considered white workers, since, in their perception, it implied status and rights inherent to that quality, besides those recognized in the promises of working conditions. These aspirations provoked strikes and other protests that served for Spaniards to unite and put aside their regional identities (Greene, 2004, p. 79).

Anarchist leaders also collaborated in this strategy of identity cohesion (Shaffer, 2011, p. 13), who preferred to overcome ethnic origins by defending a universalist proletarian identity, typical of the working mentality of the time. Among the most active were some Galicians such as Aquilino López, Bernardo Pérez, José Novo, and Juan Lóuzara (nicknamed Rudolf Lone) (Alonso, 2013, p. 51), who were grouped around the newspaper *El Único*. The continuous arrival of immigrants and the re-migration of those who were already in the Canal Zone was another of the causes that weakened the affirmation of Galician identity, expressed by Galician immigrants mainly in their leisure spaces, around inns ran by families from Galicia, where they spent part of their free hours and socialized in an endogamous environment (Pérez, 2007, p. 197).

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<sup>3</sup> In the context of the fantasy of racial purity of the time, the Anglo-American mentality placed Spaniards as a mixed-race, morally blackened whites, or hybrids (see De Guzmán, 2005, pp. 23-24).

<sup>4</sup> This strategy of dividing and making immigrant workers of different ethnic groups or nations compete was also practiced by other companies in the United States. This was the case of the *Graselli Chemical Company* of Virginia (Varela-Lago, 2008, pp. 156-157).

#### 4.2. Galicians before Antilleans. Hiring workers for the Canal

After the questioning of the Panama Canal project by Congress and part of the United States press<sup>5</sup> due to the terrible management of the first ICC (Araúz and Pizzurno, 2003, p. 108; Mack, 1978, p. 469), at the end of 1905, the North American government carried out urgent recruitment of workers to advance in its construction. The delay of the works was a major setback in the policy of President Theodore Roosevelt, who shared Alfred Mahan's theory of maritime power (Baqués-Quesada 2018, p. 114), who considered the isthmus route as a strategic objective. Its creation was also a great propaganda opportunity to show the world the superiority and effectiveness of American technology, as well as their political leadership (Greene, 2011, p. 37), favoring not only the country's external image but also its internal prestige of the federal government before its citizens, within the framework of a centralizing policy towards the federated states (Missal, 2009, p. 54).

For these reasons, the labor aspect of the construction of the canal became one of the priorities for the US government and the ICC given the labor shortage, as this could tarnish the project's image. The new executives and engineers of the body in charge of carrying it out considered at the end of 1905 that it was essential to hire large contingents of efficient workers. They considered that the Antilleans, whom they saw as indolent and lacking motivation, monopolized the demand for pick and shovel labor in the isthmus (Roediger and Esch 2012, p. 74). The initially proposed solution was to employ Chinese operatives, whom Chief Engineer John Stevens singled out as the best after working with them on the construction of the Western Railways. Despite Roosevelt's support, his claim failed due to the 1892 ban on Asian immigration (Stevens, 1915, p. 213), the opposition of the North American unions (Shonts broke ... 1906, p. 4), and, above all, the Chinese government (Chou, 2002, p. 27). A good alternative to the Asian option was therefore necessary, that gave guarantees in the face of public opinion.

After a failed recruitment attempt among European immigrants arriving in New York, the ICC directed its search towards Cuba, recruiting half a thousand Spanish immigrants, almost all of them from Galicia (Pérez, 2007, p. 78), whom the reports of the North American administrators defined as manageable, docile<sup>6</sup>, good workers, ambitious, and intelligent white men to some extent (Greene, 2011, p. 205; Vidal-Rodríguez, 2005, p. 333; Marco-Serra, 2012, p. 71). Qualities that, in their opinion, equated them with Asians. The president of the ICC, T. Shonts (1915, p. 206), sought to recruit workers of different ethnicities and nationalities to promote competition between them and, above all, to end the Antillean labor monopoly. In order to reinforce their purpose and from a racist mindset, the ICC classified the labor force in lists of gold (basically American workers) and silver, with various sub-classifications, in which it classified the others. In this way, the aim was to prevent a movement of collective solidarity among wage earners to avoid the damage of a possible general strike (Navas, 1979, p. 97).

A large part of the Galician workers recruited in Cuba came from the public works that the United States implemented after the Cuban independence, a sector in which many immigrants from Galicia worked at that time (Vidal-Rodríguez 2005, p. 145; Sánchez-Cobos 2008, p. 67). However, the opposition of North American businessmen with investments on the island to the hiring of Spanish workers, supported by the government of Havana (Greene, 2004, p. 82. Navas, 1979, p. 10), forced the ICC to look for other options; This led them to Galician lands, where other US

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<sup>5</sup> One of the harshest and most controversial criticisms was published by the journalist Poultney Bigelow (1906). An extensive summary of it was reproduced by various newspapers.

<sup>6</sup> The negative stereotype of the docility of Galicians was also reflected by the Spanish newspaper *Madrid Científico*, (Los esclavos modernos, 1907) which cites reports from the ICC.

companies had previously hired workers with good results. One of them was *The Cuba Company*, which, in the autumn of 1901, had sent agents to Galicia who hired 300 workers to complete the central railway. In general, the large North American companies preferred to employ Spanish immigrants rather than Cubans, and for the most sacrificed and lowest-paid tasks, particularly Galicians (Vidal-Rodríguez, 2005, p. 231).

To attract workers in Spain without bothering the Spanish government, which did not frontally oppose, but did not want to be seen as a collaborator either when the wound of the 1898 war had not yet healed (Park, 1906, November 14<sup>th</sup>), the agent of the ICC Leroy Park established a recruitment office in Paris. One of his places for recruitment in Galicia was the offices of the ship agent Estanislao Durán, in the port of Vigo. In almost two and a half years, between June 1906 and November 1908, he managed to embark 8,298 Spaniards with the complicity of some relevant authorities and personalities, such as the former president of the government Eugenio Montero Ríos (1906, July 12<sup>th</sup>), or the reluctance of his successor, Segismundo Moret (Varela-Lago, 2008, p. 193), as part of the political game of the time and probably in the context of the negotiation of a commercial agreement between Spain and the United States. Leroy Park, however, always remained hidden from the eyes of the Spanish public opinion, despite attending some social events in the Galician city, he managed to pass before the local press as an "American capitalist"<sup>7</sup>.

#### 4.3. "North Spanish Blood". Galician workers in the American press

The first news of the hiring of Galician workers appeared in newspapers in the United States as early as 1906. For the average American reader, the word "Galician" was possibly unknown and, in the best of cases, perhaps he was aware of the pejorative meaning that, since the occupation of Cuba, was applied in the form of synecdoche to all Spaniards. However, from the point of view of the image, for the US authorities "Galician" was an opportune demonym because it disguised their Spanishness since the traditional bad image of the Spaniards in their public opinion had worsened during the war of 1898 and successive propaganda campaigns of delegitimization as a former colonial power.

The American press had then represented the Spaniards as indolent, weak, and uncivilized people, not only through literary narrative but also through iconographies and caricatures such as the one that paradigmatically represented Spain as a decrepit bullfighter, with a white beard, a symbol of the past, old, decadent, unable to face its responsibilities (Payne, 2003, p. 156). This was a common profile in the image of Spaniards disclosed throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century by historians such as William Prescott, who was highly influential in North American historiography, in contrast to the values that American society attributed to itself (Boyd, 2002, p. 319).

When the recruitment of immigrant workers in Cuba began, the newspapers that published information about this fact highlighted two racial singularities of Galicians: that they had an ethnic identity different from that of Spain and that their physical and psychological profile was suitable for working in the Panama Canal. These traits can be archetypally observed in an extensive chronicle published by the New York Tribune on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1906, which also reflects many of the negative clichés with which Galicians were stigmatized in Spain. However, this newspaper, owned by the journalist, republican politician, and negotiator of the Peace of Paris, Whitelaw Reid (Barral-Martínez 2000, p. 630), considered the Galician workers as appropriate for this project: "*they are well adapted to physical labor on the canal, (...) besides being strong and able to work hard and*

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<sup>7</sup> This is how the *Faro de Vigo* (Fiesta artística, 1906, p. 2) adjectives him when citing him as one of the prominent attendees at a party offered by Estanislao Durán.

*long under a hot sun, they are accustomed to going away from home to perform manual work*". (Gallegos at home, 1906, p. 2).

Most of this chronicle<sup>8</sup>, published in the following 5 months by 11 newspapers, deals with highlighting their ethnic characteristics, presenting them as the strongest peasant race in Spain. After highlighting their work qualities and the need to emigrate due to poverty, he describes them as people who love their land, close to the Portuguese, and different from the Spaniards due to their cultural characteristics, traditions, and language. That is to say, implicitly, it was communicated that they did not share the negative stigmatization of Spaniards, extended after the Spanish-American war.

Despite placing them in a different category than Spaniards, the social stereotype that the *New York Tribune* outlines of Galicians is, for the most part, a compilation of the most negative clichés. To exaggerate their poverty, it picks up one of the derogatory sayings that circulated throughout the Peninsula: "*when they celebrate a wedding, feast on bread crusts*". And it adds attributes typical of the Golden Age literature, as has been outlined above: "*If the Gallego were only as clever as he is crafty, he would be well to do instead of a hewer of wood and a drawer of water. Lacking in cleverness, he is an artful dodger.*" The *New York Tribune* even points out that they were unreliable and their word was worthless. It described them as coarse, who took courtesy as a sign of weakness, which is why, when negotiating contracts, it recommended intimidating them: "*It is essential that one assume from the beginning that it will be necessary to browbeat him.*" And in another paragraph, to make the character attributed to the Galicians more expressive, it makes a comparison with oxen and bulls: "*The people of Galicia have been likened to bullocks -heavy, plodding, occasionally vicious- without the charging courage of the bull.*" This chronicle was reproduced by eleven newspapers in cities in the South, Midwest, and one in New Hampshire. As was usual in journalism at that time, no sources were cited in the chronicle, and "it is said" was used to draw conclusions, which leads to thinking that the information could have been extracted from an encyclopedia, a travel book, or indirect testimonies, perhaps collected in Cuba.

This negative portrait of Galicians is not reflected in the other newspapers analyzed, which emphasize their work qualities for the construction of the canal and their ethnic differences with other Spaniards. The *New York Times* represented Galicians with some values similar to those of the United States, especially in the north (Boyd, 2002, p. 319), highlighting their austere sense and attachment to work: "*[they] are notable all through those parts as laborers of industry, sobriety and hardiness*"<sup>9</sup>. Besides being industrious, they were also pragmatic and not superstitious, as represented by *The Daily Telegram* in a story published and set in Lisbon, one of the traditional destinations of Galician emigration in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Twiss, 1907, p. 3).

To the American mind, these qualities might not go well with living in poverty to the point of having to cross an ocean to get a modest pick and shovel job. This contradiction was clarified by *The New York Times* by pointing out their origin from remote mountains, marginalized by the Spanish governments in the distribution of the gold of the American colonies: "*that once poured into the country had little or no effect upon them, for little or none of it was allowed to reach their*

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<sup>8</sup> Those newspapers were: *Coffeyville Daily Record*. (1906, March 26<sup>th</sup>), p. 6. *Spring Hill New Era*. (1906 April 6<sup>th</sup>), p. 1. *The Louisburg Herald*. (1906, April 12<sup>th</sup>), p. 4. *The News-Herald*. (1906, April 12<sup>th</sup>), p. 7. *Westphalia Times* (1906, April 12<sup>th</sup>), p. 4. *The Dwight Tribune*. (1906, April 13<sup>th</sup>), p. 5. *The Portsmouth Herald* (1906, April 13<sup>th</sup>), p. 3. *The Leavenworth Times*. (1906, April 14<sup>th</sup>), p. 5. *Tazewell Republican* (1906, May 24<sup>th</sup>), p. 3. *The Holt County Sentinel*. (1906, June 22<sup>nd</sup>), p. 3; and *Suburbanite Economist*. (1906, June 27<sup>th</sup>), p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> A similar description is also published in the chronicle of *The Star Press* (Seeking Spaniards, 1906, p. 4), in which it was claimed that the Galicians were one of the few civilized races that could withstand malaria and tropical heat.

*mountains.*” In other words, besides having qualities comparable to those of the workers in the United States, they were represented as victims of the unjust Spain that led to its decline.

This newspaper makes an implicit defense of the ICC's decision to hire Galician immigrants for the works of the Central American canal. Both this and other periodicals appealed to the mental framework then present in the American reading public, which would facilitate the establishment of a certain parallel between citizens of the north of the United States and those from Galicia, in defense of free work as a synonym of responsibility and attachment to individual rights in the face of slave labor (Bender, 2011, p. 170). It placed the Galicians as the inhabitants of the north, without further clarification: “*the Spaniards of the north, or Gallegos, as they are commonly called from the name of their ancient kingdom*”. And it highlighted their differences with those of southern Spain: “*they have a practicality sometimes missing in their brothers -or cousins, rather- of the southern parts of the peninsula.*”

This idea of the north where the “superior race” was located, the white, in front of the south inhabited by the supposedly inferior races, was part of the racist ideology of the time, formulated by the social sciences when including in their doctrinal body concepts of Darwin's theory of the evolution of species (the so-called biologization of the social sciences), and which obeyed to the economic and social needs of Western societies at the time of imperialist expansion (Hering-Torres, 2007, p. 25). For those mentalities, the best-endowed races, that is, the most virtuous for human development, would be found further north, losing purity as one descended towards the south (the Latin). They were ideas that widely penetrated the North American social imaginary (Reid-Merritt, 2018, p. 37). In this sense, several Latin American authors also elaborated a narrative on the independence of the subcontinent and the conformation of its nations based on supposed different values originating from the former metropolis. Frequently, they pitted a virtuous and altruistic Spanish north against poor and greedy south, assimilating the liberators and creoles to a northern peninsular origin, and the conquerors and oppressors to the southernmost part. Perhaps the paradigm of this Latino racial vision is the work of the versatile Venezuelan writer Arístides Rojas (Núñez-Seixas, 2017, p. 423).

Other North American newspapers that published news about the recruitment of Galician workers for the canal works adopted an informative discourse similar to that of the New York newspaper, focused on describing the Galician worker's aptitude for this job and his origin from northern Spain. These are the aspects that LeRoy Park extols in a statement to *The Washington Herald*: “*For centuries, these northern Spaniards have been renowned as working men. They are not of extra size, but muscular and strong and very excellent in sticking to their jobs*” (*At the hotels*, 1907, p. 4). Particularities that the journalist and writer John Foster-Carr had underlined a year before in the weekly newspaper *The Outlook* when analyzing the work experience with Galicians brought from Cuba: “*The best of all that have yet been tried are the Gallegos. There are life and spirit in their North Spanish blood*” (Foster-Carr, 1906, p. 120). In other words, besides being workers, the Galicians did not share the supposed weak spirit and laziness with which the American press stereotyped the Spaniards in the Cuba war, using the racist categorizations of the time.

In the campaign to try to reassure public opinion about the works of the canal after the serious lack of effective pick and shovel workers, besides LeRoy Park, middle managers and engineers, civilians, and soldiers of the ICC participated together with Republican politicians. Lieutenant Colonel Perkins appeared in the *San Francisco Call* satisfied with the work performance of the Galician workers, predicting that they would easily integrate into the gangs of the “blacks” (Thinks Panama..., 1907, p. 3, 4). A statement with a clear propaganda intention, as it was false, since Galicians, like other Spaniards and Europeans, soon also showed a racist attitude, protesting, sometimes harshly, when

they were required to mix in transport or dining rooms (Pérez, 2007, p. 156). This forced the ICC to take some measures, such as replacing the black Caribbean policemen who guarded the dormitory barracks with white agents (Goethals, 1915, p. 71). In short, it was the racist expression of a substantive confrontation over racial status, work, and wages, sponsored, as already explained, by the construction company itself.

This racial rivalry was corroborated by Congressman John C. Chaney, after a visit by a commission of the Congress to the canal works. In an interview with *The Washington Herald*, he confided that one of the purposes of hiring Galicians was to stimulate the "indolent" black workers of the Caribbean through labor competition (*At the hotels*, 1907, p. 6). Meanwhile, the engineer C. Alexander revealed to *The Burlington Free Press (Conditions in Panama*, 1906, p. 4) that the good salary they received (compared to the Antilleans) was due to their qualities, like other newspapers that pointed them out among the best manual operators in the canal (Wallace, 1910, p. 6) also affirmed. An opinion shared by the English geographer Vaughan Cornish (1909, p. 108), who considered the Galicians as resistant as the Italians, qualified in the United States as the best European workers.

This image of Galician immigrants circulated in the North American press between 1906 and the first semester of 1907, a period of intense recruitment of workers for the canal. Subsequently, except in some specific cases before the end of the works, the media referred to the Spaniards without further ethnic or geographical details. Some circumstances may have influenced this change: recruitment had spread to the entire north of the peninsula, leaving the Galicians from being almost the only ones from Spain. By then the figure of that strange Spaniard, almost non-Spaniard, hard-working, tireless, and docile had ceased to have propaganda utility with which to cover up the fiasco of hiring Chinese workers, and the need for workers was no longer pressing.

The protests, strikes, and riots, carried out in the spring of 1907 by Spanish workers, without distinction of regional origin, demanding better working conditions, did not have a place in the pages of the North American newspapers as the labor problems of the canal were no longer present on their agenda (Diebold, 2013, p. 16). This was helped by the arrival in March 1907 of Colonel George Goethals to the direction of the canal's works, who surrounded himself with military engineers, concentrated and hierarchized power in the military-style, and, with the help of journalist Joseph Buklin Bishop, controlled the dissemination of information about the works in the Zone (López-Cerezo, 2014, p. 67).

#### **4.4. Creating new perceptions. Image campaign on the Canal works**

The recurring statements to the media from people with responsibilities in the construction of the interoceanic crossing -often military engineers- seem to respond to the existence of a planned propaganda campaign to improve the image of the project, which had been called into question by the press in 1905, prompting interpellations to the government in Congress. In this sense, the axis of the media operation included the diffusion and praise of the labor capacities of Galicians as unskilled workers with a reputation as docile and hardworking workers in Cuba. They are attributes different in appearance from those received by Galician immigrants in the usual destinations of emigration in Latin America, but they are still the reverse. The main difference is that the term "Galician", besides the immigrant from Galicia, for the North American press meant Northern Spaniard, a distinctive ethnic nuance, not attributable to all the others, as has already been pointed out.

There are no data that allow measuring the result of this image operation in favor of the Galician workers. But the general dissemination of information with a favorable orientation towards the recruitment of Galician immigrants, published mainly in newspapers in the geographical areas of the northeast of the country, the so-called Midwest, California, and, occasionally, in some southern states is noteworthy. That is, the territories most interested in the future maritime route because of its potential for the development of trade in these areas and because, through their representatives, they had supported the Panama route instead of Nicaragua. This was the option of the former southern states, which considered it more appropriate to their interests (Díaz-Espino, 2004, p. 35).

The person in charge of directing and monitoring the image of the canal's construction was Joseph Bucklin Bishop, a trusted journalist and personal friend of Roosevelt (Missal, 2009, p. 58)<sup>10</sup>, who in 1905 appointed him secretary and head of communication for the ICC, at a time when criticism of the management of the Panama Canal project was raging. Bishop initially carried out his work from Washington and, beginning in 1907, from the Canal Zone (Bishop, 2011, p. 27). His task was to improve the image of the work and prevent “*false and the misleading reporting on the Canal*” (Parker 2010, p. 80). In his dealings with newspapers, he relied on two important tools: the ICC’s reports on the progress of the works and the creation of a weekly newspaper, *The Canal Record*, which since 1907 was massively distributed.

In this way, Joseph Bishop managed to divert the center of attention from labor and technical problems towards construction advances or achievements in the fight against yellow fever that decimated workers (Sutter, 2016, p. 257), avoiding that most of the deaths were due to pneumonia and infections associated with poor working conditions and not to that endemic tropical disease (Sánchez, 2006, p. 86). Bishop managed to provoke other distracting debates in the press on aspects such as whether the organization of work and the coexistence of thousands of people to build a mega-work constituted or not a model of a miniature state (Foster-Carr, 1906, pp. 435- 445); a matter on which various journalists expressed their opinions, who sometimes saw it as an example of centralization, other times as a cooperative commonwealth, or even as an example of modified socialism that could mean the materialization of some social utopias (Missal, 2009, p. 136).

The image of Galicians as efficient workers returned to the news at the end of the canal works when authorities and journalists recalled the difficulties of the process. On the occasion of the 1915 San Francisco Universal Exhibition, George Goethals, who had been the chief engineer in the Canal Zone, published a series of articles in which he presented his point of view of the keys to the success of his management. Among other aspects, he highlighted the vicissitudes of managing the enormous labor force throughout seven years. He placed the workers from Galicia among the best, highlighting their resistance and vigor, considering them intelligent but obedient, downplaying the protests they staged alongside other Spaniards and Europeans (Goethals, 1915, p. 71).

Several writers also contributed to forging this positive stereotype. The adventurer and police chief in the Canal Zone, Harry Franck, who recounted his experience in Panama in a book, rejected the racist classification that placed Galicians in an inferior position (Franck, 1913, p. 27). Along with the rest of the Spaniards, Franck highlighted their work, honesty, and intellectual acuity, “although 70 per cent of them are wholly illiterate, and he finds them to be, almost universally, such honest, capable workers and upright citizens” (*A Zone Policemen*, 1913, p. 27). A testimony shared by the son of the person in charge of the public image of the construction of the canal, Farnham Bishop, who recalled in the *Boston Evening Transcript* (*An account in...*, 1913, p. 15), that the recruitment of several thousand peasants from Galicia, strong and healthy, had been a success for the United States.

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<sup>10</sup> The friendship and collaboration were public. (*The Isthmian Canal*, 1907, p. 1).

Meanwhile, *The Sun* journalist, Rene Bache (1914, p. 11) recounted in a chronicle that Galicians "have shown themselves to be very efficient" as workers, and accompanied the text with a symbolic photographic pose of a group of "Galician workers" who conveyed seriousness, sobriety, and honesty, three of the most frequent traits recognized by the US press.

The start of World War I on July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1914, just fifteen days before the inauguration of the Panama Canal, reawakened interest in Spain in public opinion, due to its position as a neutral power and its geostrategic situation. (Páez-Camino 2014, p. 14). The press, besides analyzing Spanish politics regarding the war, again symbolically appreciated the Galician participation in the works of the canal, possibly influenced by the image campaign for their hiring (The Workers at..., 1915, p. 48). When the Panamanian isthmus was already beginning to be history, in an extensive report on the neutrality of Spain signed by the editorial director of the relevant *The Boston Globe*, James Morgan (1915, p. 45), the Galician workers in Panama were once again most recognized. In a reflection inspired by the news published by the US press during the works, Morgan concludes that "the Gallegos were among the most tireless diggers that the American engineers enlisted for the construction of the Panama Canal"<sup>11</sup>.

Thanks to these praiseworthy comments that responded, essentially, to an opportunist and conjunctural media strategy of the United States government, the rough but strong Galician workers were able to achieve a certain work prestige in the North American public sphere and some Central American business circles; However, the stigma as uneducated rural immigrants, docile, and hard-working workers persisted in the collective imagination as an indelible mark of their origins and idiosyncrasies.

## 5. Conclusions

In the framework of the verification of the hypothesis and in response to the specific research questions formulated at the beginning of this work, the following can be concluded:

1. The hypothesis is confirmed that, compared to the coverage of the Spanish press, which focused on the terrible working conditions of the emigrants, the North American newspapers carried out a very different coverage, in which the "Galicians" were the subject of an image campaign that highlighted their work virtues for ideological and strategic reasons. It can be concluded, in general, that the image offered by the main US newspapers about the Galician immigrants who worked in the isthmus was positive, as evidenced by the analyzed reports and chronicles of *The New York Times*, *The Washington Herald*, *The Boston Globe*, or *The Outlook*.
2. This favorable view of the "Gallegos" contradicts some pejorative stereotypes that the American press had created of Spaniards, especially because of the intense anti-Spanish propaganda deployed during the Spanish-American war of 1898. At that time, Spain was seen as an underdeveloped and colonialist country, whose decadence was the antithesis of North American modernity, both from the technological or economic point of view and in the context of social and human development.
3. It is important to note that North American anti-Spanishism, truffled with clichés and negative prejudices about the supposedly indolent and overdue character of Spaniards, was inspired by a racist discourse that placed them in a lower category, below a higher racial ideal with an entrepreneurial mindset linked to United States citizens. The anti-Spanishist imaginary was essentially fueled by a marked feeling of delegitimization towards Spain as a

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<sup>11</sup> This report was published in full days later, on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 1915 by *The Washington Herald*, (p. 31) and *Dayton Daily News*, (p. 45).

colonial power and cultural model for Latin America, in a clear attempt to displace the influence of Spain from the American continent and assume a position of political and economic leadership, as well as a progressive socio-cultural preponderance from the field of symbolic discourse and media representation.

4. Regarding the identity of Galician immigrants, the American press established a curious ethnic differentiation concerning Spaniards. This favorable image of the American press towards the Galician immigrants from the Panamanian isthmus should be seen as a singularity, especially if one takes into account that the Galicians, traditionally, had been the object of a stereotypical vulgarization of their character, behavior, and qualities, associated to scarce socialization, illiteracy, and their rural origin, bearing a negative stigma that extended to the destinations of the Galician emigration in America. The friendly and differentiated characterization of the US press towards the Galician workers must be interpreted as propaganda and an opportunistic strategy in the context of the US authorities' own management of the construction of the Panama Canal.
5. The virtuous image that spread of the Galician workers must be part of the image campaign promoted by the United States government since mid-1905, after its failure during the first year and a half of management in the works of the isthmus. To change the negative perception of public opinion in his country, President Theodore Roosevelt tried to create a climate of opinion favorable to the development of the project. The political impossibility of hiring Asian workers led to the recruitment of hundreds of Galician immigrants in Cuba and, later, in Galicia, the result of which was satisfactory. However, to disassociate them from their negative Spanish origin, the ICC decided to affirm and publicize their Galician identity.
6. Regarding the ethnic profile of Galician immigrants, it is relevant to highlight the category that some media used to refer to them as "*North Spanish blood*". This framing obeyed, within the framework of the racist imaginary of the time, which placed the "virtuous" races in the north, to an intention of differentiating Galicians ("northern Spaniards") from the negative stereotype of Spaniards, existing in the US. Most of the newspapers analyzed influenced their ethnic differences with other Spaniards, generally disqualified as decadent and lazy, while the Galicians were seen as strong, manageable, and intelligent workers.
7. The representation of the ethnic archetype of the Galicians was accentuated in two specific moments during the construction of the canal. The first, between January 1906 and mid-1907, a period of an intense need to hire workers in which the press describes them as excellent and tireless workers. And the second, in the final stretch of the works and on the occasion of the San Francisco fair in 1915, when the press recalled the useful and efficient work of the Galicians, whose image would still be projected with that same laudatory tone in books published then and in later years.
8. This positive representation centered on their labor value, although apparently different, is related to many of the negative stereotypes built about Galicians in the Latin American countries to which they emigrated *en masse*. However, paradoxically, despite their marked ethnic profile in the US press and being the majority contingent among Spanish workers in the Canal Zone, Galician workers preferred to maintain a fluid or binary identity, generally leaning toward assuming their Spanish nationality, motivated above all by the racial policy of the North American government towards the laboring mass, which relegated all peninsular people and, in general, Europeans to a subordinate position in front of the white men of the United States.

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