EXPANDING PERSPECTIVES ON RACE, NATION, AND CULTURE IN CUBAN HISTORY

Matt D. Childs
Florida State University

THE SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY CUBA. By Sherry Johnson. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001. Pp. 267. $55.00 cloth.)

CUBA, LA ISLA DE LOS ENSAYOS: CULTURA Y SOCIEDAD (1790–1815). By María Dolores González-Ripoll Navarro. (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1999. Pp. 259. Euros 23.12 paper.)

WINDS OF CHANGE: HURRICANES AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY CUBA. By Louis A. Pérez, Jr. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2001. Pp. 199. $49.95 cloth, $17.95 paper.)

CON EL LÁTIGO DE LA IRA: LEGISLACIÓN, REPRESIÓN Y CONTROL EN LAS PLANTACIONES CUBANAS, 1790–1870. By Manuel Barcia Paz. (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2000. Pp. 115.)

WIZARDS AND SCIENTISTS: EXPLORATIONS IN AFRO-CUBAN MODERNITY AND TRADITION. By Stephan Palmié. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002. Pp. 399. $64.95 cloth, $21.95 paper.)

REYITA: THE LIFE OF A BLACK CUBAN WOMAN IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. By María de los Reyes Castillo Bueno. Introduction by Elizabeth Dore. Translated by Anne Mclean. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000. Pp. 182. $49.95 cloth, $17.95 paper.)

ESPACIOS, SILENCIOS Y LOS SENTIDOS DE LA LIBERTAD: CUBA ENTRE 1878 Y 1912. Edited by Fernando Martínez Heredia, Rebecca J. Scott, and Orlando F. García Martínez. (Havana: Ediciones Unión, 2001. Pp. 359.)

CUBA, THE ELUSIVE NATION: INTERPRETATIONS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY. Edited by Damián J. Fernández and Madeline Cámara Betancourt. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000. Pp. 317. $55.00 cloth.)

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The decades of the 1990s have historically been marked by important changes in Cuban history, whether it was the landing of Columbus in the 1490s, the beginning of sugar monoculture in the 1790s, the War for Independence in the 1890s, or the strategies to survive in a brave new post-Soviet world in the 1990s. While it is still far too early to determine the long-term consequences of understanding what has been called the "special period," or even how long it will last, the only thing that is certain, is the uncertainty of the future. The drastic changes undertaken in the 1990s have resulted in a radical transformation of Cuban society, calling into question and debate the most fundamental beliefs about economic organization, national myths, political goals of the nation, the role of government in everyday life, and even what defines Cuban identity.[1] Not surprisingly, this lack of confidence in the present has opened up new avenues for scholarly investigations of the past. As Cuban society began to collapse on itself without external support, and with the tightening of the embargo with each U.S. presidential election in the 1990s, the 1959 Revolution (as well as its origins and consequences) no longer commanded the huge scholarly interests it had for the previous three decades.[2] Historian Louis A. Pérez Jr.'s insightful characterization that the first three decades of post-revolutionary "Cuban studies—'Cubanology'—proceeded from the central but never fully explicit assumption that the study of Cuba was, in fact, principally the study of the Cuban Revolution" no longer seems to define the field.[3] As evidenced by the books under review in this essay, scholars have begun to turn their attention with earnest to topics far removed from the 1959 Revolution.

In somewhat typical Cuban irony, the economic collapse of the 1990s made it easier for foreigners (especially U.S. academics) to conduct research on the island, while Cuban scholars faced greater obstacles in conducting their own work and publishing their findings. The economic shortages of the 1990s had a devastating impact on Cuban academic life as basic research tools, such as paper, pens, and pencils, became scarce items. As the tourist sector became the dominant force in the Cuban economy, this opened up possibilities for foreign scholars to work in Cuba. Academic "tourists" sponsored and generously assisted by Cuban research institutions increasingly became regular visitors to the José

1. For a review of some of the most recent literature on Cuba in the 1990s, see Michael Snodgrass, "Assessing Everyday Life in Post-Soviet Cuba," *LARR* 36, no. 3 (2001): 204–20.

2. Alejandro de la Fuente also points to the crisis in the 1990s for the recent attention to race and racism in Cuban Studies, "Race, Ideology, and Culture in Cuba: Recent Scholarship," *LARR* 35, no. 3, (2000): 199–210.

3. Louis A. Pérez, Jr., "History, Historiography, and Cuban Studies: Thirty Years Later," in *Cuba Studies Since the Revolution*, ed. Damián Fernández, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1992), 53.

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Martí National Library, the Cuban National Archive, and provincial libraries and archives throughout the island. Out of these interactions emerged new opportunities for collaboration between Cubans and foreigners, with support from such important funding agencies as the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Social Science Research Council, and even the Fulbright-Hays program. The increased access to Cuban literature and archival sources has allowed Cuban studies to move from polarized positions where academics in Cuba and abroad asked entirely different questions to a greater unity in seeking out answers to commonly shared research agendas.[4]

THE EMERGENCE OF CUBA IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Cuban colonial history began in the 1490s and spread over four centuries, yet the historiography has overwhelmingly focused on the nineteenth century with the rise of the plantation economy worked by slave labor and the long struggle for independence from 1868 to 1898. The first three centuries of Spanish rule in Cuba have only been sketched in the broadest terms, making Sherry Johnson's *The Social Transformation of Eighteenth-Century Cuba* (2001) a welcome addition to the literature. Arguing that colonial Cuban historiography has focused too narrowly on sugar cultivation, Johnson investigates the social and political transformation in Cuba from the end of the Seven Years War until the 1790s. As Spain suffered a humiliating defeat with the British occupation of Havana in 1762, Cuba became the primary laboratory for the numerous military changes in colonial policy known to historians as the Bourbon Reforms. Drawing upon a rich array of primary sources from Cuba, Spain, and the United States, Johnson examines how the increased Spanish presence on the island through the expansion of the military produced "not an army of occupation but rather an army of co-optation" (40).

Framing her analysis through an institutional study, Johnson explores the multiple interactions between the military and society, providing one of the most detailed examinations of the eighteenth century to date. The military catalyzed a massive building process, most notably through the numerous military forts that can still be found across the island. Spanish soldiers stationed in Cuba often elected to retire on the island by settling in the countryside, significantly contributing to the growth of rural areas outside of Havana. The increased immigrant population from Spain resulted in Peninsular-Creole marriages outnumbering Creole-Creole unions as Cubans became linked to Spanish military families. The Creole sons of Spanish military

4. For a description of one program see, Alejandro de la Fuente, "Teaching History in Cuba," *LASA Forum* 30, no. 3 (1999): 12–13.

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officers often took up positions in the colonial bureaucracy, which tied them to the Spanish state through employment and patronage. Similar to Allan Kuethe (1986), Johnson argues that the elevated role of the military in eighteenth-century society provides a key to explaining loyalty during the era of independence as Cubans became ever more firmly connected to Spanish rule, rather than alienated as their Creole counterparts elsewhere in Latin America.[5]

Yet the strengths of Johnson's study as a detailed institutional history and its revisionist thrust to rectify how "Cuban historiography has been held hostage to studies of sugar, slavery, colonialism, and dependence" cause her to minimize important social and economic innovations beyond the military (1). She often adopts uncritically the perspective of the military when she disparagingly describes the Cuban Governor Luis de Las Casas (1790–96), who curtailed military benefits, as a "tyrant without equal" and his supporters as "henchmen" (124, 150). Also, she employs the rather broad term of *el pueblo* to describe the opposition to Las Casas' rule and Francisco Arango's expansion of slavery and agriculture without clearly defining what sectors of the population she has in mind other than the military. While these two figures have long been heralded in Cuban hagiographies for their promotion of Cuban agriculture (and Johnson should be commended for identifying opposition to their economic and social plans), that they only had minimal support is hard to rectify with the rapid increase in slave imports and plantation agriculture. In addition, her conclusions that free people of color distanced themselves from the slave population may have been qualified by looking beyond military sources. For example, Philip Howard's (1998) pioneering study of the African fraternal and mutual aid societies known as *cabildos de nación*, uniting both slaves and free people of color who shared a similar African ethnicity, found that militia soldiers often served as the elected leaders of the organization.[6] But these considerations only qualify some of Johnson's findings. Her book will have an important and long-lasting contribution to the historiography because it reminds scholars that there was much more to colonial Cuba than sugar, slavery, and opposition to Spanish rule.

Where Johnson's study chronologically ends, María Dolores González-Rippoll Navarro begins in *Cuba, la isla de los ensayos: cultura y sociedad (1790–1815)* (1999). González-Ripoll provides a detailed analysis of the crucial decades in the rise of the Cuban plantation economy

5. Allan J. Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753–1815: Crown, Military, and Society*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986).

6. Philip A. Howard, *Changing History: Afro-Cuban Cabildos and the Societies of Color in the Nineteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 31–36.

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and the decline of the military's social prestige studied by Johnson. The Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) destroyed France's position as the leading sugar and coffee producer in the Caribbean. Cuba quickly expanded slave labor and plantation agriculture to became the dominant producer in the region. Whereas Johnson focused on the military to understand changes in Cuban society, González-Ripoll examines how government polices, especially during the rule of Governor Las Casas, furthered the expansion of plantation society and especially sugar cultivation. González-Ripoll traces out these various policies from 1790 to 1815 with archival documentation from Cuba and especially the Archivo General de Indias, Seville.

The emergence of Cuban plantation society during the last decade of the eighteenth century and its rapid rise in the slave population and economic importance to the Spanish crown have been well covered in the historiography. The novelty and important contribution of González-Ripoll's study rests with the examination of how innovations in the sugar industry brought about new forms of social organizations. She wants to understand how the group she labels the "dominant minority" (white Creole elite), tied as it was to plantation agriculture, came to govern Cuban society. She looks beyond the traditional domain of economics and political leaders such as Governor Las Casas and focuses on social institutions. Similar to Johnson, González-Ripoll finds that family associations were crucial to study the elite. In contrast to Johnson, however, military families that initially expressed limited opposition to Las Casas' policies quickly moved into plantation agriculture once the boom began and military prestige declined. Equally important was the rise of institutions and organizations to further the interests of the Creole plantation elite, such as the *consulado* and the philanthropic organization known as the Sociedad Económico de Amigos del País, which provided education, medical, and social services to create an ordered and hierarchical society. Taken together, the books by Johnson and González-Ripoll broaden our understanding of the important changes in Cuban society and culture during the second half of the eighteenth century that has long been ignored by historians.

TRANSFORMATIONS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY CUBAN HISTORY

Similar themes of societal transformations in Cuba's colonial history explored by Johnson and González-Ripoll for the eighteenth century can be found in the recent work of Louis A. Pérez Jr., *Winds of Change: Hurricanes and the Transformation of Nineteenth-Century Cuba* (2001). Given that destructive hurricanes batter the Caribbean every year in September and October, and have long caught the imagination of writers like William Shakespeare in *The Tempest*, it is surprising that they have not

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commanded the attention of more historians.[7] Drawing upon sources from the Cuban National Archive, scientific journals, and literary texts, Pérez skillfully demonstrates that hurricanes offer a

> flash point . . . to illuminate the colonial landscape during a brief but revelatory moment, when complex relations—between the moral and material, between production systems and political structures, between national character and historical context—suddenly appeared with a clarity never before imagined. (11)

Pérez's book is not simply a history of Cuban hurricanes, but an analysis of how hurricanes changed the lives of nineteenth-century Cubans. After broadly surveying the role of hurricanes in the greater Caribbean, Pérez turns his attention to the major storms of October 1844 (San Francisco de Asis) and of October 1846 (San Francisco de Borja), named for the saint's day they landed. While hurricanes did not single out individuals by class or race in the destruction they wrecked on the island, how Cubans were able to cope with life during and after the storms revealed the social inequalities that governed society. Slaves on plantations fared the worst materially; their housing and provision grounds were destroyed, while wealthy white Creoles and Spaniards in urban areas with houses made of stone and concrete survived with damage but without total destruction. After the hurricanes passed, Cubans reexamined their own situations and began to assert a heightened degree of independence. Slaves took advantage of the chaos to run away as opportunities for flight abounded, with masters and colonial officials preoccupied with their own problems. The lack of interest on the part of Spain to assist in the rebuilding process resulted in Creoles taking matters into their own hands, pointedly revealing how their own political goals conflicted with Spain and the inadequacies of the colonial relationship during a time of desperate need. The strength of Pérez's analysis rests with his insightful examination of how hurricanes affected each sector of Cuban society in different ways.

The most important historiographical contribution of *Winds of Change* and the central point of the book is Pérez's nuanced interpretation of the decline of coffee production and the expansion of sugar plantations in the nineteenth century. The hurricanes of 1846 and 1848 destroyed sugar and coffee plantations, but coffee planters faced more challenges in deciding how to rebuild their estates. Coffee trees require three to seven years to mature before berries yield a harvest, whereas sugar plantations require only a year or two. Numerous masters facing financial ruin from hurricanes converted from coffee to sugar for a quick profit.

7. For an interesting analysis of the wreck of the *Sea Venture* that provided the historical material for Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, see Peter Linebaugh and David Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 8–35.

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Other coffee plantation owners facing bankruptcy decided to sell their slaves to *ingenios*, disrupting family relations and forcing upon the laborers longer and more devastating work regimes. Pérez is careful not to credit hurricanes as the sole explanation for the rise of sugar and the decline of coffee. Rather, he judiciously makes a strong and innovative case for how environmental history can provide new insights into well-covered topics in Cuban history.

While hurricanes have been largely ignored in Cuban historiography, slavery has been one of the most heavily studied topics ever since the pioneering works of Fernando Ortiz in the early twentieth century.[8] As the plantation economy rapidly expanded at the end of the eighteenth century, Spain issued a series of laws to regulate slave treatment that specified food and clothing provisions, limited work hours, required religious instruction, protected marriages, and limited punishments for slaves. Comparative historians of slavery such as Frank Tannenbaum (1946), Stanley Elkins (1959), and Herbert Klein (1967) focused on the laws to argue that slaves in Cuba did not receive the same "harsh treatment" as their North American counterparts.[9] Subsequent studies by Franklin Knight (1970) and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall (1971) convincingly demonstrated that the rosy picture of slave rights rarely conformed to the reality on plantations.[10] Since the 1970s few scholars have examined in detail the Cuban slave codes. The brief book by Cuban historian Manuel Barcia Paz, *Con el látigo de la ira: legislación, represión y control en las plantaciones cubanas, 1790–1870* (2000) is therefore a refreshing perspective on a long-standing historiographical debate.[11]

Barcia Paz approaches Cuban slave laws by examining in detail the 1789 and 1842 codes. While aware of how Cuban laws compare with other slave regimes in the Americas, his primary task is to explain how

8. See Fernando Ortiz, *Los negros brujos* (1906, Reprint; Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1995); Idem., *Los negros esclavos* (1916, Reprint; Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1975).

9. Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave & Citizen: The Negro in the Americas* (New York: Vintage, 1946); Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 63–80; and Herbert S. Klein, *Slavery in the Americas: A Comparative Study of Virginia and Cuba* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 77–85.

10. Franklin Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba During the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), 36; and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Social Control in Slave Plantations Societies: A Comparison of St. Domingue and Cuba* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 111–12.

11. While not focusing exclusively on the slave laws, both Howard, *Changing History*, 3–4, 125–26, 187–88, and Robert L. Paquette, *Sugar is Made With Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict Between Empires over Slavery in Cuba* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 77–80, 231–32, 267–74, provide important insights that show the discrepancy between the law and practice.

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they operated in Cuba. Consequently, he avoids the rather difficult argument of explaining which slave regime in the Americas was "more brutal" or "less harsh" (awkward terms to describe the treatment of human chattel regardless of its variation across space and time). Barcia Paz dissects the slave laws by over twenty themes such as work hours, food, religious activities, clothing, children, marriages, runaways, punishments, and others in an encyclopedic entry format to analyze how they attempted to regulate the master-slave relationship. He includes the 1789 and 1842 slave codes in an appendix that makes them easily accessible by scholars who require more details and prefer to consult the original documents. The second part of the study returns to the familiar debate of the efficacy of the laws in shaping the slave experience. Overall, Barcia Paz reinforces the previous conclusions of Knight, Midlo Hall, and others that the laws did not extend to the plantations, but makes the case all the more stronger with documentation from Cuban archives. His insightful study also sheds light on future areas of research by examining how slaves understood the laws and attempted to use them, however unsuccessfully, to place obstacles between themselves and their masters. Building on the work of Barcia Paz, studies of Cuban slave codes are poised to move from a master's perspective of the law to the slave's perspective that will provide a more balanced understanding of how they defined the institution of slavery for all involved.

EXPLORATIONS IN THE STUDIES OF RACE AND NATIONALITY

While slavery has long been a constant theme in Cuban historiography and continues to attract the attention of scholars, studies of race relations and more specifically racism have recently undergone what historian Alejandro de la Fuente has described as a "scholarly boom," with more "written about race and racism in Cuba during the last ten years than in three previous decades combined."[12] In theoretically driven and empirically enhanced original essays, Stephan Palmié offers a complex critique of various approaches to studying what he titles *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition* (2002). Palmié purposely states that his book is not intended to reach any conclusions (or what he labels "solutions") in reference to scholars who attempt to solve historical problems. Rather, he "takes some comfort in thinking that raising questions may be more important, politically as well as epistemologically" (14). Apparently aware of the difficulty readers may have in understanding a book with no central thesis, he warns

12. De la Fuente, "Race, Ideology, and Culture in Cuba," 199.

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"that such an answer to the question, What in the world is Palmié trying to argue? is not just unproductive, but ultimately arrogant" (14). Despite his caveat, readers should not dismiss the important points that are well worth reading closely for the insights they provide in studying the Afro-Cuban experience.

Palmié's book could best be described as a critique of the historiography through a study of key "episodes"—he purposely eschews the title "case studies" for its implied claim to a scientific model—when historical actors and subsequent scholars simplified the Afro-Cuban experience by placing their thoughts, actions, and identities into what he argues are rigid procrustean categories for analytical simplicity. According to Palmié this tendency in the literature demonstrates

> the need to shift our focus away from conventional emphases on intgration [sic], homogeneity, boundedness, and seemingly passive 'endemic' reproduction of social and cultural forms and toward perspectives capable of analytically accommodating constellations of heterogeneous but contiguous, perhaps overlapping, forms of knowledge and practice: 'syndromatic' clusterings of cultural material whose distribution in local social space at specific temporal junctures need coincide neither with their historical origins nor with structurally identifiable collectivities, nor even with the boundaries maintained by self-identified groups. (139)

While critics of the post-modern turn in the humanities may have a problem with his language and will unfairly dwell on style, much can be learned from slowly digesting Palmié's prose to get to the substance of his insights.

He begins with a fascinating account of a book of drawings compiled by a free black artisan, painter, and sculptor named José Antonio Aponte, who was arrested, interrogated, and executed for leading what authorities described as an island-wide conspiracy to end slavery and colonial rule in 1812. Aponte's book of drawings contained maps of streets and military garrisons in Cuba and depictions of black soldiers defeating whites, among many other images. Authorities concluded, in the context of revolts across the island, that it represented a blueprint for revolution. While the book of drawings has never been found, Palmié analyzed a portion of the court testimony published by Cuban historian José Luciano Franco (1977) in which Aponte explained the meaning of his drawings to judicial officials.[13] Unlike colonial officials and subsequent historians, Palmié argues that Aponte's description of his book of drawings provides little evidence of an intended rebellion when examined in its entirety. According to Palmié, Aponte's executors as well as historians, whom he labels as "ventriloquists" for

13. José Luciano Franco, *Las conspiraciones de 1810 y 1812* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1977).

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"filching" the book's images for insurrectionary meanings to make it speak for Aponte's revolutionary intentions, ignored the more ambiguous drawings that did not contain subversive meanings.

Palmié more than any other scholar has contextualized Aponte's drawings by placing them within early nineteenth-century Havana and by tracking down some of the books from Aponte's personal library that most certainly informed the images he constructed. But if previous historians are guilty of "filching" for revolutionary meanings and ignoring the other images that lend little evidence to a single-minded committed rebel, Palmié's approach ahistorically separates the book of drawings from the rebellion by relying almost exclusively on Franco's published testimony. The published transcribed testimony that Palmié creatively and insightfully analyzes consists mainly of Aponte's description of his book, not the much larger corpus of archival documents about the conspiracy housed in the Cuban National Archive. As Franco's purpose was to draw attention to Aponte's book of drawings in the hope that other scholars would study the images, and not present a comprehensive set of documents about the rebellion, any scholar who only consulted the published transcribed material would only naturally begin to question Aponte's involvement in the rebellion. This is more than a criticism related to sources. Palmié chastises historians who have written on the Aponte Conspiracy for a failure to accomplish "what members of their craft usually consider their major task and scholarly responsibility: close empirical assessment of the documentary record" (22). In addition, one wonders why Palmié did not consult Franco's original and more widely known book on the Aponte Conspiracy (1963) to qualify some of his conclusions about the historiography. For example, citing Franco's (1977) brief twenty-four-page introduction to the document collection that only had two footnotes as it was intended for a general and not a scholarly audience, Palmié writes:

> Franco makes rather vague references to what he thinks may have been prior seditious activities on the part of Aponte. He thus claims that Aponte dictated an inflammatory proclamation that was posted in Havana in early March 1812 but fails to cite any evidence. (80–81)

Had Palmié consulted the more detailed 1963 study he would have found not only did Franco cite evidence of the proclamation for the rebellion, but an actual photo of the document that Aponte dictated.[14]

These criticisms, however, do not detract from Palmié's epistemological point that when historians use essential and universal categories such as "Black," "African," "traditional," or "revolutionary," they

14. José Luciano Franco, *La conspiración de Aponte* (Havana: Publicaciones del Archivo Nacional, 1963), 20–21.

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minimize the creative process that resulted in the "growth and transformation of distinctly Afro-Cuban forms of knowledge" (77). Not only does Palmié illustrate this point through an examination of Aponte's book of drawings that stubbornly resists concise explanation, but he also demonstrates that scholarly examinations of Afro-Cuban religious practices have not utilized the language and concepts of the practitioners themselves. Investigations of the African origins of *regla ocha, reglas de congo*, and *Abakuá* emphasize their similarity with "traditional" Old World belief systems traced through the trans-Atlantic slave trade. These studies have tended to downplay how belief systems changed over time as a result of New World experiences in Cuba. Overall, Palmié forcefully reminds scholars that placing the Afro-Cuban experience in categories derived from other times and places has resulted in minimizing the degree to which the innovations and creative process in formulating new identities were part of what he would label "modernity," and not an unchanging and static "traditional" past.

Scholars of race relations have often relied on personal testimonies and autobiographies to study the intricacies of the Afro-Cuban experience. Without a doubt, the most famous and perhaps foundational book in the Latin American testimonial genre is Miguel Barnet's extended interviews with the former slave Esteban Montejo titled *Biography of a Runaway Slave* (1963).[15] Barnet's rendering of the life of Montejo as a runaway who sought the solitary existence of life in the woods instead of the disciplined labor regime of the plantation resonated and served as a metaphor for the Cuban political experience of the 1960s. Just as Cuba remained committed to forging the first socialist state in the Americas against hostile actions of a powerful overseer represented by the United States, Montejo actively resisted his enslavement and proudly asserted his own independence. Historian Michael Zeuske (1997) has recently challenged with archival documents critical points of Barnet's biography of Montejo that should warn any scholar to approach the narrative as a historical source with extreme caution.[16] While the degree to which Barnet consciously fabricated the story or Montejo manipulated his interviewee by telling him what he wanted to hear remains unsolved, few would disagree that some embellishing of the events described in the *Biography* occurred for dramatic effect. Regardless of what Barnet's biography of the runway Monetjo can tell us specifically about slavery and the larger debate about testimonials as authentic histories of the exploited or fictionalized accounts, the important point is

15. Miguel Barnet, *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1963, Reprint; Havana: Editorial Academia, 1996).

16. Michael Zueske, "The Cimarrón in the Archives: A Re-Reading of Miguel Barnet's Biography of Esteban Montejo," *New West Indian Guide* 71, nos. 3–4 (1997): 265–79.

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for scholars to recognize that how the past is remembered and portrayed is mediated by the expediency of the present.

The changing shift in Cuban politics from the 1960s to the 1990s can be found in the recently translated *Reyita: The Life of a Black Cuban Woman in the Twentieth Century* (2000). The testimony is the fascinating narrative of María de los Reyes Castillo Bueno as told to her daughter Daisy Rubiera Castillo when she was in her mid-nineties. Unlike the Montejo biography that focused on slavery and resistance to Spanish colonialism as seen through the prism of the radical politics of the 1960s, Reyita examines the multiple and personal experiences of life as a poor female of color in twentieth-century Cuba as she struggles to overcome racism, sexism, and poverty that were common to the vast majority of Afro-Cuban women. The complexity of Reyita's life and contradictions is told in fascinating detail that in many ways mirror the equally complex and contradictory politics of Cuba in the 1990s.

Reyita takes great pride in her Blackness through recalling the stories of her mother's experience in Africa, meeting the leaders of the Partido Independiente de Color before they were massacred in 1912, attending meetings at a local chapter of the United Negro Improvement Association founded by the pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey, practicing "spiritualism," folk-healing, and maintaining a shrine to the Virgin of Cobre. Despite the pride she displays in her African heritage throughout her life, she married a white man in the hope that her children would not face the same racial obstacles. Reyita struggles with these contradictions as she realizes marrying a white man did not make her or her children "white" in the eyes of others. Equally telling in the narrative are the jobs Reyita takes on to carve out a greater independence for herself and her family from working as a school teacher, washing clothes, operating an informal restaurant out of her house, and other jobs that show the multiple strategies poor women of color employed to survive and provide for the family. Interestingly, Reyita is noticeably quiet on race relations after the 1959 Revolution, likely indicating hidden unresolved tensions. Overall, however, she provides a picture of greater integration in society and improved opportunities evidenced by her children and grandchildren receiving formal education and attaining jobs in the professional sector. Historian Elizabeth Dore has provided a concise introduction that situates the historical context of the narrative and the debate over Latin American testimonial literature that will appeal to the expert as well as the beginner. Reyita's story should find a wide audience because of the fascinating details it provides for those interested in the topics of gender, racism, family relations, religion, the working poor, and broader transformations in twentieth-century Cuban history through the life history of a single woman.

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THE CONTESTED TERRAIN OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

As part of the new interest in the study of the Cuban population of African descent, scholars have increasingly devoted their attention to how race and racial politics have figured in the construction of national identity from abolition in 1886 to the present. Aline Helg's (1995) pioneering study of the formation and subsequent massacre of the Partido Independiente de Color in 1912 pointedly revealed the discrepancy in the nationalist rhetoric of creating a nation in the Martí image, free of racial discrimination, and the political rights accorded to the population of African ancestry.[17] Ada Ferrer's (1999) examination of the thirty-year struggle for independence from 1868 to 1898 explored how racism was silenced, subverted, and reinforced during the anti-colonial struggle.[18] The anti-colonial ideology inspired by Martí to create a nation free from racism provided an opening for political mobilization by blacks in concert with whites to overthrow Spanish colonialism, but limited the degree to which organization by race alone could be used to challenge social inequalities after independence. Louis A. Pérez Jr.'s (1999) massive study of Cuban identity from 1860 to the 1959 Revolution found the Cuban middle class's identification with U.S. culture and its racism served to limit the participation of Afro-Cubans in defining the nation.[19] Robin Moore's (1997) innovative analysis of music and dance from the 1920s to the 1940s revealed the tension in Cuban identity over exalting the distinct contribution of African aesthetics in defining the nation, while at the same time elites displayed an aversion to forms of artistic expression that served as reminders of an African past they regarded as "backwards" and "degenerative."[20] Alejandro de la Fuente's (2001) examination of racial politics throughout the twentieth century similarly found an ongoing and unresolved tension between racism and anti-racism in Cuban nationalism that he argues neither completely silenced protest or allowed for autonomous organization by race.[21] While historians continue to debate to what degree the state, intellectuals, and, above all, the foundational myth of the Cuban nation

17. Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuba Struggle for Equality, 1886–1912* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

18. Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868–1898* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

19. Louis A Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, & Culture* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999).

20. Robin Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness:* Afrocubanismo *and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920 to 1940* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1997).

21. Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

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as a society free from racism have served to catalyze and neutralize racial politics, all of the scholars working on post-abolition society regard race as a central topic of study. Indeed, Lynn Stoner's remark in 1996 that Cuban historiography has tended to deny "the participation of black Cubans in any part of national history other than slavery" has been completely reversed by recent scholarship.[22]

The intersections between race and national identity inform many of the essays that are part of *Espacios, silencios y los sentidos de la libertad: Cuba entre 1878 y 1912* (2001). This edited book by Fernando Martínez Heredia, Rebecca J. Scott, and Orlando F. García Martínez represents a testament to the increasing collaboration and closer relations between foreign and Cuban scholars over the last decade. The volume consists of chapters originally presented at a conference in 1998 that examined the regional history of Cienfuegos during the crucial years of the struggle for independence, the abolition of slavery, and the first decades of the republic. While space limitations do not permit a detailed analysis of each chapter, most share a common grounding in records from regional archives united by the themes of regionalism, the sugar plantation economy, racism, political mobilization, and the transition from slave to wage labor.

Cuban historians Hernán Venegas Delgado, Fe Iglesías Gracia, Irán Millán Cuetara, and Orlando García Martínez examine different dimensions of the rapid growth of the plantation economy in the Cienfuegos region during the nineteenth century by emphasizing the concentration of land and agricultural production in larger and more expansive *centrales* (sugar plantations). Rebecca Scott, David Sartorious, and Michael Zeuske focus on the everyday strategies slaves and ex-slaves employed to provide concrete meanings to their new freedom by claiming political rights and economic opportunities that they had been denied in the past. The chapters by Ada Ferer, Fernando Martínez Heredia, and Blancamar Rosabal León offer detailed portraits of Quintín Bandera and Ricardo Batrell, black leaders of the War for Independence. Combined with Orlando F. García Martínez's examination of the rebel army in Cienfuegos, these chapters show how the struggle against Spain provided political and military positions of authority for Afro-Cubans. Yet to varying degrees, blacks and mulattos remained restricted in their activities because of the directives of white superior officers. The chapters by Alejandro de la Fuente, Alejandra Bronfman, and Jorge Ibarra reveal the centrality of race in the contested meanings of nationhood, participation in national and regional political struggles, and reactions

22. K. Lynn Stoner, "Recent Literature on Cuba and the United States," *LARR* 31, no. 3 (1996): 240.

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to U.S. imperialism during the first decades of the Cuban republic. The authors of *Espacios, silencios y los sentidos de la libertad* have provided a valuable contribution to Cuban historiography by demonstrating the benefits of studying the important years that witnessed the abolition of slavery, the struggle for independence, and the trials of forming a new nation through the detailed lens of Cienfuegos' regional history.

The complexity of Cuban national identity and its contested meanings can also be studied in the edited volume by Damían J. Fernández and Madeline Cámara Betancourt, *Cuba, the Elusive Nation: Interpretations of National Identity* (2000). The strength of the volume rests on the diversity of topics connected to national identity. As reflected in the title, the editors and the contributors regard Cuba as an *Elusive Nation* where identities are "socially constructed and contested" and "transcend territorial boundaries"(2). As a result, the book considers equally the constructions of Cuban identity outside of the island, as well as on it. The title *Elusive Nation* also provides autobiographical insights into the perspectives of the authors, almost all of whom are of Cuban ancestry, but live outside the island. The book stands in contrast to much of the literature on national identity because it displays a "post-Martí and anti-Martícentric" focus to "decenter the national discourse" and to take attention away from unity, commonality, and closure "to engage in an open, decentering fluid process of thinking and rethinking" (7). Consequently, the chapters are not so much concerned with what Martí's concept of national identity emphasized or even attempted to silence, but highlight important topics that stand outside of the Martían framework of what constituted Cuban nationhood. Moving away from the dominant and, some would even suggest, hegemonic role of Martí's writings, has freed the authors to examine national identity from new and innovative perspectives. The contributors represent different scholarly disciplines from political science, history, anthropology, international relations, visual arts, and literature as ruminations about national identity, which have been most commonly examined from a literary perspective.

The need to "rethink" meanings of national identity are illustrated by María Elena Díaz's chapter on the patron saint of Cuba, the Virgin of Charity, and Ada Ferrer's analysis of the independence struggle. The symbol of the Virgin of Charity and the cross-racial alliances in the revolt against Spanish colonialism, which have long been triumphed in Cuban history to argue for racial harmony among blacks and whites, actually served to conceal contentious relations at the time. The most innovative chapters in the volume that widen the debate on *cubanidad* deal with how gender, sexuality, and desire have figured in the discourse on national identity. Madeline Cámara Betancourt demonstrates that the celebrated role in Cuban literature of the lusty *mulatta* as a symbol of national unity, fusing black and white cultures, neutralized

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discussion of sexual exploitation. The essays by José Quiroga, Ruth Behar, and Emilio Bejel are all connected by their concern over how the masculine construction of Cuban identity both on the island and in the Diaspora has served to silence discussions of homosexual contributions to the nation. Chapters by Jorge Duany, Antonio Vera-Leon, Adraiana Mendez Rodenas, and Rafael Rojas examine the tropes of nationalism and its contested meanings in the classics of Cuban literature by such authors as Fernando Ortiz, Jorge Manach, Cirilo Villaverde, Fredrika Bremmer, and Alejo Carpentier among others. Raul Fernández's chapter on the role of musicians and Juan A. Martínez's examination of painters in the 1940s provide readers with nuanced perspectives to consider national identity beyond the more familiar perspectives of literature, history, and politics. The book concludes with an insightful essay by Max Castro that criticizes Cuban-American intellectuals such as Gustavo Pérez Firmant, author of *Life on the Hyphen* (1994), and Cuban Americans more broadly for the failure to consider post-1959 changes in the formulation of Cuban identity on the island. What Castro points out is not an accidental silence about race: "has not exile produced that criollo utopia, a Cubanness nearly devoid of blacks, as Enrique Patterson has argued?" (304). Taken as a whole, the contributors to *Cuba, the Elusive Nation* are representative of the rapidly growing literature on national identity that has significantly expanded the debate by including perspectives of sexuality, gender, art, music, race relations, literature, anthropology, and politics to reconsider the foundational myths of what it means to be Cuban.

Collectively the eight books under review all offer expanding perspectives on the roles of race, nationality, and culture in the Cuban past. With the recent proliferation of doctoral students in the field of Cuban Studies in the United States, and now that the Cuban economy has begun to stabilize after the shock of the 1990s, the next ten years should witness a dramatic increase in the literature by a new generation of scholars both in Cuba and outside the island.[23] Topics such as early colonial history, environmental history, legal history, race and ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and nationalism will continue to command a scholarly interest for decades to come. The 1959 Revolution that most clearly singled out Cuba as a country to study from historical, political, sociological, intellectual, and economic perspectives, now is overshadowed by analyses of race and nationality. As much of the history written on Cuba during the 1960s and 1970s focused implicitly and often explicitly on explaining the origins of the 1959 Revolution, the new direc-

23. For some of the recent work done by the latest generation of Cuban historians see, José A Piqueras Arenas, ed., *Diez nuevas miradas de historia de Cuba* (Castelló de la Plana: Publicacions de la Universitat Jaume I, 1998).

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tions are a welcome revision to the existing literature. Cuban Studies has now matured to the point that is no longer defined solely by the 1959 Revolution. Scholars, however, should not abandon the 1959 Revolution as a topic of investigation. Perhaps now with the passage of more than forty years, scholars can incorporate the recent innovations on race, ethnicity, gender, class, and national identity to write a new chapter in the historiography of the Cuban Revolution.

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