

RECENT HISTORIOGRAPHY OF CUBA *

Avi Chomsky
Bates College

- AZUCAR E INMIGRACION, 1900–1940.* By Rolando Alvarez Estévez. (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1988. Pp. 290.)
- EL NEGRO EN CUBA, 1902–1958: APUNTES PARA LA HISTORIA DE LA LUCHA CONTRA LA DISCRIMINACION RACIAL EN LA NEOCOLONIA.* By Tomás Fernández Robaina. (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1990. Pp. 225.)
- LOS SOVIETS OBREROS Y CAMPESINOS EN CUBA.* By Angel García and Piotr Mironchuk. (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1987. Pp. 227.)
- LORDS OF THE MOUNTAIN: SOCIAL BANDITRY AND PEASANT PROTEST IN CUBA, 1878–1918.* By Louis A. Pérez, Jr. (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989. Pp. 267. \$29.95 cloth.)
- CONTRIBUTION A L'ETUDE DU BANDITISME SOCIAL A CUBA: L'HISTOIRE ET LE MYTHE DE MANUEL GARCIA, "REY DE LOS CAMPOS DE CUBA" (1851–1895).* By Maria Poumier-Taquechel. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986. Pp. 459.)
- LAWLESS LIBERATORS: POLITICAL BANDITRY AND CUBAN INDEPENDENCE.* By Rosalie Schwartz. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1989. Pp. 297. \$44.50 cloth.)
- FROM THE HOUSE TO THE STREETS: THE CUBAN WOMAN'S MOVEMENT FOR LEGAL REFORM, 1898–1940.* By K. Lynn Stoner. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991. Pp. 242. \$42.50 cloth, \$16.95 paper.)

In a 1991 critique of "Cubanology," Marifeli Pérez-Stable lamented the extent to which the field of Cuban studies has been distorted by the ideological perspectives of scholars, whether supporters or opponents of the Cuban Revolution.¹ Happily, ideological polarization has not had the same effects on the field of history. Although huge gaps remain in scholarly knowledge of Cuban history prior to the revolution in 1959, the group of works under review here demonstrate the depth and breadth of the field of Cuban history. Most of these authors reveal some sympathy for

*I would like to thank Barry Carr for his helpful suggestions while this essay was being written.

1. Marifeli Pérez-Stable, "The Field of Cuban Studies," *LARR* 26, no. 1 (1991):239–51.

the goals of the revolution. But their sympathy for the suffering and the struggles of ordinary Cubans, particularly Afro-Cubans, and their recognition of the intense inequalities inherent in the social organization of Cuba before the revolution have strengthened rather than distorted these authors' commitment to understanding and analyzing these complex social phenomena.

The areas in which politics has seriously undermined scholarship on Cuban history are contact among scholars and access to sources. Given the fact that Cuban history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is intimately intertwined with that of the United States, historical works on almost any topic would be enriched by being able to consult archival sources in both countries. Although the authors of some of the works under review have managed to do just that, the works as a group indicate that access is still severely limited on both sides. Several of the Cuban scholars included here were educated in the former Soviet Union or in Eastern Europe, and most lack access even to secondary sources published in the United States, to say nothing of archival materials. Secondary sources published in Cuba are generally available to U.S. scholars (although they are not always utilized to the fullest extent), but travel to Cuba is still inhibited by U.S. government restrictions. Nor is access to Cuban archives automatic.

Unfortunately, historians themselves are not doing as much as they might to overcome these limitations. Few works on Cuban history have been translated from Spanish into English or vice versa, and U.S. and Cuban scholars engage in virtually no collaborative work. Worse yet, little scholarly dialogue has taken place between Cuban and U.S. historians on the topics under review here, and they rarely cite one other.² Nevertheless, the works under review reflect the vitality of the field of Cuban history and the significant advances being made in constructing the history of previously ignored social groups: three of the works focus on social banditry, two on the social dynamics fostered by the sugar economy, one on blacks, and one on women.

Social Banditry

Despite a recent outpouring of scholarly work on rural banditry in response to the thesis proposed by British historian Eric Hobsbawm more than twenty years ago, scholars have not reached any consensus regard-

2. A notable exception to this lack of scholarly dialogue is the issue of the transition from slavery to free labor. Manuel Moreno Fraginals's *El ingenio* has become a classic in its English translation and has sparked extensive debate in the U.S. literature. See Fraginals, *El ingenio: complejo económico-social cubano del azúcar*, 3 vols. (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1978); and *The Sugarmill: The Socioeconomic Complex of Sugar in Cuba, 1760–1860*, translated by Cedric Belgrave (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976).

ing either the character or the causes of this phenomenon.³ Regarding banditry in Cuba, the debate has followed two axes that represent the main currents of debate in the historiography as a whole. First, scholars have debated over the very existence of the “social bandit.” Do bandits represent or participate in protest at all? If so, is the protest social or class-based? Second, what are the socioeconomic roots of social banditry? Hobsbawm argued that bandits emerge among peasants who have been dispossessed by expanding capitalism. One major thrust in studies of Latin American banditry has been to document the complexity of rural social relations in the region. The Latin American countryside has been populated not by a homogenous “peasantry” but by a plethora of different groups variously defined by ethnicity, culture, and class. Does this Latin American reality undermine or expand Hobsbawm’s formulation?

Three of the works under review focus on bandits and banditry in Cuba. All illuminate significant and fascinating aspects of the phenomenon of banditry in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Cuba, but they also show how much still needs to be discovered to arrange the seemingly contradictory aspects of the puzzle into a coherent whole.

Louis Pérez’s *Lords of the Mountain: Social Banditry and Peasant Protest in Cuba, 1878–1918* and Rosalie Schwartz’s *Lawless Liberators: Political Banditry and Cuban Independence* clearly exemplify two opposite approaches to the study of banditry.⁴ Their goals differ, the questions they ask differ, the sources and evidence they turn to differ, and thus it can come as no surprise that they reach divergent conclusions. Pérez began by looking for social bandits, hence he searched for evidence of rural social dislocation caused by rapid economic change and bandits with intimate ties to rural communities, and he found both in abundance. Schwartz was looking for political bandits, individuals out for themselves with ties to a national political program that was not based on class, and she too found plenty of evidence.

Contrasts in the two interpretations are related to fundamental differences in the authors’ approaches to historical interpretation. For example, Schwartz views the Cuban struggle for independence as a political movement, led primarily by elites outside Cuba with little popular

3. The debate among Latin Americanists on banditry has burgeoned in recent years. The most direct challenge to Hobsbawm’s thesis is Richard Slatta’s edited collection, *Bandidos: The Varieties of Latin American Banditry* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1987). Gilbert Joseph responded critically to Slatta’s challenge in “On the Trail of Latin American Bandits: A Reexamination of Peasant Resistance,” *LARR* 25, no. 3 (1990):7–53. The debate was continued in comments by Slatta, Peter Singelmann, and Christopher Birkbeck, with a reply by Joseph in *LARR* 26, no. 1 (1991):145–74.

4. Pérez and Schwartz have also debated these issues directly in the *American Historical Review*. See Pérez, “Vagrants, Beggars, and Bandits: Social Origins of Cuban Separatism, 1878–1895,” *American Historical Review* 90, no. 5 (Dec. 1985):1092–1121; and the exchange of letters between Pérez and Schwartz in *AHR* 91, no. 3 (June 1986):786–88. A revised version of Pérez’s article became the first chapter of *Lords of the Mountain*.

support on the island (pp. 120–21).⁵ Her description of the War of Independence (1895–1898) is a chronicle of military leaders and the campaigns they planned (pp. 237–39). Pérez, in contrast, perceives the war as a popular and social revolution (pp. 27, 44). More specifically, Schwartz hypothesizes that Afro-Cubans took little interest in independence (p. 120), while Pérez asserts that Afro-Cubans played a critical role in the movement (p. 44). These contrasting approaches to the War of Independence mirror their distinct approaches to banditry: Schwartz chronicles the exploits of individual leaders while Pérez looks for the socioeconomic roots of conflict.

Both approaches have their value—and their limitations. *Lawless Liberators* reads like an adventure novel and does an admirable job of bringing late-nineteenth-century bandit leaders to life. It also amply documents the fact that these bandits were by no stretch of the imagination moral heroes: many were self-interested, profiteering, and ruthless. Yet by focusing so narrowly on individuals, Schwartz's analysis fails to illuminate the social and historical context of banditry. Why does banditry occur in particular times and places? Convenience is not an ultimately satisfying explanation (pp. 159, 225). She also fails to provide an explanation for (and at times even to acknowledge) her own evidence that the peasant population indeed provided moral and material support for the bandits (pp. 172–73). Schwartz speculates at various points that peasant support for bandits could have been based on self-interest, envy of bandits' "ill-gotten gains and their freedom," admiration of their machismo, or fear (pp. 97, 131, 153). But she provides no convincing evidence to support any of these speculations.

Pérez's *Lords of the Mountain* forms an almost diametric contrast to *Lawless Liberators*. Individual bandits rarely appear in Pérez's study, which focuses instead on social structures and social change. Compared with Schwartz's focus on Havana province in the nineteenth century, only two chapters of *Lords of the Mountain* discuss that time and place, with most of the book centering on Oriente province in the period that followed independence.

Previously the backwater of Cuba, Oriente had been a magnet for the poor and land-hungry for generations. Small farms dominated the countryside, where victims of Western sugar monoculture, whether slave or free, could hope to attain access to their own plots. With plenty of land available, Oriente had become the land of opportunity by the end of the

5. Part of Schwartz's antipathy toward the independence movement seems to stem from her sympathy with her main source, Camilo Polavieja, the Spanish governor general charged with doing away with banditry and separatism in Cuba. Her language often seems to reflect Polavieja's own perspective. In describing "the good intentions and dedication of Polavieja's forces" and calling them a "committed, inspired team of law enforcement officials," Schwartz reveals a sympathy that few Cuban patriots would endorse (pp. 173, 199).

War of Independence, as well as the land of equality (pp. 78–85). But the end of the war also brought economic “development” to Oriente in the form of U.S. investment, which transformed virtually the entire province into sugar plantations. Thus Oriente’s promise was lost. This outcome set the stage for endemic banditry in the early twentieth century, which peaked in rebellions in 1912, 1917, and 1959.

Pérez’s discussion of banditry in Oriente brings the important issue of race into consideration. This question is curiously absent from Schwartz’s analysis, which suggests only in a roundabout manner that all of the bandits she describes were white (p. 89). For Pérez, race was a crucial factor. He emphasizes the socioeconomic situation of the large Afro-Cuban population in Oriente and their heavy participation in all the uprisings there (starting with the struggle for independence) as well as their disproportionate representation among the victims of repression after the rebellions, especially the one in 1912 (p. 149).

The biggest lack in *Lords of the Mountain* is precisely what *Lawless Liberators* presents with such vividness: individual bandits. Pérez outlines the social conditions that can be expected to give rise to banditry and shows that banditry in Cuba corresponded with these social conditions, but he never explains how any individual actually became a bandit because of the social situation. Thus readers do not know, for example, whether bandits in areas around the huge plantations were peasants dispossessed by corporate land grabs or workers angry about their treatment on the plantations—or whether these individuals were one and the same (pp. 28, 147–48, 185). Did the migrants go to Oriente to find land and become bandits because no land was available, or were they attracted by the wages paid by U.S. plantations? Were the bandits longtime residents of Oriente or new migrants? Moreover, the connection between bandits and rebellion is sometimes unclear. Yes, outside observers referred to rebels and bandits in the same breath, but whether individual bandits joined the rebellions and for what reasons is left somewhat unresolved.

This element of confusion is related to another unresolved question stemming from Pérez’s emphasis on general rather than specific explanatory factors. Oriente was the site of major rebellions in Cuba from 1868 until 1959. Yet the socioeconomic situation of the province changed dramatically during those years, as Oriente was transformed from the most backward to the most modernized region of the country. In each case, Pérez argues convincingly that the socioeconomic situation led to rebelliousness and banditry, but he does not really address the fact that each time period presented a very different socioeconomic situation.

In some ways, *Lords of the Mountain* is more valuable as a study of social change in Oriente province than as a study of banditry. Pérez’s use of statistical material and the observations of residents and travelers in Oriente brings out the texture of rural life and the changes brought by the

growth of sugar for the population. Cause and effect with respect to banditry are less clearly delineated.

Maria Poumier-Taquechel approaches the issue of banditry from yet another perspective. For her, what makes banditry "social" is not the social background of the bandits, nor their goals, nor even their relationship with the peasantry but rather "the fact that [social banditry] gives rise to myths . . . , and these myths in reality have little to do either with the bands or the leaders of the bands" (p. 12).⁶ Thus the bandits themselves are less important to *Contribution a l'étude du banditisme social a Cuba: L'Histoire et le mythe de Manuel García, "Rey de los Campos de Cuba" (1851–1895)* than the imprint that they made on society. Although the first two sections of Poumier-Taquechel's book (a reprint of her 1986 dissertation completed at Lille University) chronicle colonial banditry in Cuba and the life of late-nineteenth-century bandit Manuel García, the heart of the study is found in the last two sections. They examine the growth of the myth surrounding García after his death in 1895 until the 1940s, citing popular and elite texts. In carefully examining the social and historical context of each text, the image of García it presents, and how changes over time in this image reflect changes occurring in Cuban society, Poumier-Taquechel makes an important contribution to a little-studied aspect of social banditry and to Cuban intellectual history. She explains, "I see in his person a fundamental element in the growth of consciousness of a Cuban national identity. He is apparently the only collective creation recognized by the people as their own, transcending the frontiers of economic class and strict political ideology, of the republican period. Born of the desperation of a collectivity that could not enforce its rights when faced with various illegitimate oppressors, he became the projection of what the Cubans aspired to, by the use of force" (p. 33). Thus Manuel García, or the myth of Manuel García, represented a precursor of the 1959 revolution.

Some of Poumier-Taquechel's conclusions may be overdrawn. To what extent can Cuban artistic production, even art produced for a mass audience, really be said to reflect the "collective mentality" of Cubans (p. 269)? Does the 1921 outburst of attempts to find proof of García's heroic deeds and locate his remains really show that Cubans were looking for a spiritual father (p. 202)? Similarly, does the revolution of 1959 prove that, having found a "spiritual father," Cubans could then put their autonomy into practice (p. 35)?

Contribution a l'étude du banditisme social a Cuba makes a significant contribution nonetheless to the study of social banditry in providing a detailed and convincing study of the development of the myth of one social bandit over several generations. Certainly, the myths that sur-

6. The translations of the citations in French are mine.

rounded García reflected Cuba's history after independence as much as they did García's life. Those who admired him saw themselves as victims of social change and had no political or organizational means to defend themselves (pp. 273–74). As Poumier-Taquechel explains, "If one can speak of a national myth about Manuel García, then one must not forget that it is the myth created by opponents of the colonial and later the republican regimes, and that it was forged in the course of an ideological war" (p. 276). In this regard, *Contribution a l'étude du banditisme social* confirms and adds immeasurably to Hobsbawm's discussion of social banditry and the popular culture surrounding it.

Sugar and Society

Two of the works under review contribute significantly to understanding the social dynamics of a society based on sugar as free labor replaced slavery. Rolando Alvarez Estévez's *Azúcar e inmigración, 1900–1940* and Angel García and Piotr Mironchuk's *Los soviets obreros y campesinos en Cuba* focus on the workers in the newly organized sugar industry in the twentieth century. These two works are best read in the context of another recently published work on the topic during the nineteenth century, Laird Bergad's *Cuban Rural Society in the Nineteenth Century: The Social and Economic History of Monoculture in Matanzas*.⁷ This richly detailed examination of the changing organization of the sugar industry contributes to several historiographical debates over the nature of dependence, the economic viability of slavery, the changing nature of the Cuban elite, and the effects of monoculture on the land and the Cuban people. Bergad describes the sugar industry in Matanzas as founded on the twin pillars of slavery and the existence of an expanding frontier. The first generation of Havana-based sugar growers moved into Matanzas at the beginning of the nineteenth century when the exhaustion of soil and forest reserves in Havana province led them to seek new territory for sugar production. They simply transferred an existing technical and productive complex, in which each *ingenio* owned enough land to grow all the sugar it could mill, to the new area.

In the 1830s, a second generation consisting of the offspring of the original pioneers and a new group of immigrants from Spain and the United States with investments in railroad building and the slave trade moved eastward into new, higher-yield virgin areas of Matanzas (Cárdenas and Colón). This group built new state-of-the-art mills and imported hundreds of thousands of slaves to supply the mills with sugar, which was still being grown on *ingenio* land. Railroads allowed new areas to be brought into production and reduced the mills' dependence

7. This work was published in 1990 by Princeton University Press.

on forest reserves because the railroads could be used to transport coal for fuel. The Ten Years' War caused little physical damage to Matanzas sugar production, but its challenge to the slave system signaled the beginning of the end—not for the sugar industry per se but for the sugar-growing elite whose fortunes depended on the continuation of slavery. This impact on sugar growers was especially grave because technical advances had affected only processing and not the agricultural side of production, which was still labor-intensive.

After 1878 the sugar industry was threatened by the end of slavery but also by competition with European beet sugar, a situation that forced planters to find ways to lower costs. Some of the old planters gave up their mills and turned their capital over to growing sugarcane, while others invested their capital in the mills and turned the growing over to *colonos* (semi-independent farmers). But most of the capital that revived the sugar industry came from yet another generation of immigrants from Spain, who took over the bankrupt mills and invested the capital necessary to keep them producing. The new system relied on *colonos* to grow the cane (which they could do more cheaply than wage workers because they mobilized previously unused family labor) and on new internal railroad systems to transport more cane faster to fewer but more efficient mills. Whereas the mid-nineteenth-century sugar boom had simply extended existing systems of production, the late-century technical advancement and separation of the agricultural phase from the industrial part of production represented a fundamental change.

Just as this new system was consolidating, however, it was shattered by the War for Independence. After 1898, U.S. investors moved in and built new *centrales*, but that is another story. As Bergad explains, while sugar enriched a few, it also impoverished many and caused untold human suffering:

Although uncounted hundreds of millions of pesos were generated by the Matanzas economy, there were virtually no improvements in the standard of living for the vast majority of *matanceros*. Masses of slaves, forced to live and labor in the most extreme human degradation because of sugar, experienced no long-term improvement in their lives, material or otherwise. Free whites, blacks, or mulattos could perhaps contrast their experiences with the unfortunate conditions of those enslaved, but over the long haul they fared no better. Sugar may have generated fortunes for the elite of Havana, but by the end of the nineteenth century most people in Matanzas lived no longer, their health was no better, their diets no richer, their homes no sturdier; they remained largely illiterate, and they entered the twentieth century having enjoyed few improvements in their collective condition. (P. 337)

Bergad shows that absolutely no inherent contradiction existed between modernization of the sugar industry and slave labor. Here he is implicitly challenging Manuel Moreno Fraginals's argument about the incompatibility of slavery and mechanization, while adding further docu-

mentation to support Rebecca Scott's position that planters in western Cuba remained committed to slavery until it was abolished. Hence abolition caused the crisis for the Matanzas elite, not vice versa. Bergad also argues convincingly that monoculture and economic dependence were developed and controlled by Cubans: "There were no foreign villains here, ransacking the local economy and repatriating profits to their countries of origin. . . . [D]ependence was created by Cubans responding to their own carefully defined class interests" (pp. 336, 338).

Bergad also adds to the debate on social banditry in describing bandits in Matanzas who fit neither Pérez's nor Schwartz's model. Bergad cites several accounts suggesting that toward the end of the Ten Years' War (in 1876 and 1877), slaves and Chinese contract workers responded to the arrival of rebel forces in Matanzas by deserting the plantations, often taking to banditry and attacking the plantations where they had once worked. Thus according to Bergad's account, banditry could be an aspect of rebellion by slaves and contract workers.

Cuban Rural Society offers an illuminating portrait of the sugar industry in nineteenth-century Cuba and is already an essential reference point for any future work on the subject. My only regret was that the discussion ended with the year 1900. The studies by Rolando Alvarez Estévez and by Angel García and Piotr Mironchuk carry the story into the twentieth century, although they focus almost exclusively on the experiences of sugar industry workers. Alvarez Estévez's *Azúcar e inmigración, 1900–1940* is the first book-length work on the enormous West Indian (primarily Haitian and Jamaican) migration to Cuba in the first part of the twentieth century. The book examines this migration from various angles. Brief chapters on Haiti and Jamaica provide some background on the "push factors" in the sending countries, while the main section chronicles the experiences of these workers in Cuba. Alvarez Estévez pays special attention to the socioeconomic context of political decisions affecting migration and repatriation along with the interaction of racism, nationalism, and class consciousness among different sectors of Cuban society and how these factors affected Cuban responses to migrant workers. Thus *Azúcar e inmigración* is not only a social history of migrant workers but an intellectual history of Cuban conceptualizations of race, nation, and class and the role played by migrant workers in shaping them.

Alvarez Estévez argues that U.S. government and corporate efforts to bring migrant workers to Cuba, far from being an attempt to overcome a labor shortage, responded to a desire to lower costs by creating a labor force that could be controlled completely. The new U.S. sugar companies that proliferated in eastern Cuba, and whose modern mills required huge amounts of cane, were the main employers of seasonal migrants, which gave them a competitive advantage over Cuban mills in western Cuba (p. 181). Contracting seasonal migrants and repatriating them after the

harvest thus assured U.S. sugar companies of an endless supply of workers. The companies did not have to support the workers during the *tiempo muerto*, nor did employers have to worry about the workers entering other sectors of the Cuban economy and being unavailable for the next harvest: "If returned to his place of origin, the West Indian worker was very likely to be recruited again by the labor contractors, due to the experience acquired and his high output. Moreover, repatriation allowed the foreign companies to employ year after year a selection process based on the work record of West Indian workers and the powerful economic interests of the companies" (p. 89).

Cuban elites in the government and in the press walked a thin line between fomenting racist agitation that blamed migrants for Cuba's economic troubles and reaffirming an ongoing commitment to serving the interests of the sugar planters, on whom their power depended (pp. 116–21). At the end of the 1921 *zafra* (harvest), the two stances coalesced and the government organized a mass expulsion. Alvarez Estévez documents the disastrous circumstances of the deportations, when migrant workers were expelled from plantations without their paychecks, crowded into quarantined barracks, subjected to racist violence and official mistreatment, and finally shipped home under deplorable conditions. British colonial officials made some attempts to alleviate the conditions for Jamaicans, but Haitian authorities did not provide even this limited degree of support (pp. 124–30). Despite the highly publicized expulsions, the Cuban government continued to authorize importation of Haitian and Jamaican migrants.

Jamaicans participated in Cuban workers' organizations from the 1920s on, along with some Haitians (who as cane cutters tended to occupy the lowest positions in the occupational hierarchy). Elites remained divided between those whose economic reliance on immigrant workers outweighed their racial and class hatred and those who hysterically opposed "unsanitary" West Indian immigration and accused Haitians of witchcraft and human sacrifice. The latter group typically included the urban middle classes and planters on the western side of the island (pp. 178–84).

The reformist government that replaced dictator General Gerardo Machado in 1933, during a wave of strikes and occupations on sugar plantations all over Cuba (in which West Indian migrants played an important role), charged Colonel Fulgencio Batista, as head of the army, with repatriating unemployed migrant workers. In the hands of the army and paramilitary groups organized by it, this effort turned into what Alvarez Estévez characterizes as "a merciless human massacre" (p. 217). At the same time, "Via an intense campaign to undermine the unity of the working class and using demagogic and chauvinist means, the dominant classes utilized thousands of unemployed workers; they taught them that their real enemy was competition from foreign laborers" (p. 230). It is not clear

from Alvarez Estévez's discussion, however, to what extent this campaign succeeded in co-opting Cuban workers. It was formalized by passing the Ley de Nacionalización del Trabajo on 8 November 1933, which required that at least half of the workers in any establishment be Cuban. The last chapter shifts abruptly to detailing another expulsion of Haitians in the late 1930s and its impact on the coffee economy.

Azúcar e inmigración presents a valuable account of the situation of Cuba's migrant workers and situates the issue impressively in the socio-economic, ideological, and intellectual contexts. It is regrettable, however, that the work does not discuss Afro-Cubans and their place in the large picture. "Cubans" are presented as a whole, differentiated according to class but not race. Yet race and racism are key issues in the story narrated by Alvarez Estévez, and attention to the role played by Afro-Cubans in the struggles he describes would have added an important dimension.

Whereas *Azúcar e inmigración* ends rather abruptly in discussing the events of 1933 and 1934, García and Mironchuk's *Los soviets obreros y campesinos en Cuba* focuses entirely on this period, making only passing references to migrant workers and their place in "los soviets" (worker councils). The authors state that their goal is to place the Cuban soviets in a comparative context, and thus they begin by looking at the successes and failures of workers' and peasants' attempts to seize revolutionary power through establishing soviets worldwide, from the Russian revolution onward. The study ends by discussing how Cuban historiography has dealt with the soviets. To this reader, at least, the most lively and useful aspect of *Los soviets* is not its comparative or historiographical sections but rather its narrative account of the soviets formed in central Cuba as workers organized strikes, occupied mills, and began to implement popular power by setting up schools, redistributing land, and distributing food. In the words of one participant, "In reality, we didn't understand much about what a soviet was, but the truth is that we ruled for forty-five days" (p. 137). Yet as García and Mironchuk acknowledge in their final historiographical essay, their work is really a synthesis enlivened by interviews and testimonies that reiterates analysis developed by others.

Perhaps for this reason, *Los soviets* raises more questions than it answers about how this phenomenon in Cuba is to be understood. Testimonies and memoirs make wonderful sources, all the more so in Cuba where workers' memories of struggle have not been erased by fear and repression but are celebrated. Yet celebration too can shape the way events are recalled, and historians should read testimonies as critically as they analyze other sources.⁸

8. For excellent discussions of how subsequent events can shape memories, see Philippe Bourgois, *Ethnicity at Work: Divided Labor on a Central American Banana Plantation* (Baltimore,

The worker's comment just cited makes a perfect case in point. It could have been used as a starting point for interpreting the relationship between urban Communist organizers and rural workers, their understandings of the political and economic crisis, and their goals—but it was not. The whole issue of the relationship between the Communist party and events at the sugar centrales is skimmed over. In case after case, the authors hint that Communist organizers actually arrived on the scene after mill occupations had already taken place (pp. 132, 141, 160, 166). Yet one finds no analysis of the interactions between party organizers and workers. García and Mironchuk claim an astounding and unprecedented solidarity between Spanish, Cuban, Haitian, and Jamaican workers (groups that Alvarez Estévez showed occupying different levels on the occupational hierarchy), but they never explore how this unity was achieved (pp. 143, 149). The Communist party had little success in organizing Jamaican migrant workers in Costa Rica during the same period, which leads one to ask in what ways did the Cuban case differ? Thus the generalized celebration of the Communist party's history (albeit with strong criticism for its pre-1935 ideological "leftism") has led to a Cuban labor history that downplays not only the cultural formation of the working class and its everyday life but also noncommunist forms of working-class organization. Cuban anarchism, for instance, has been very little studied.⁹

The tension between celebrating the history of the soviets and criticizing the "infantilism" and "sectarian leftism" of the pre-1935 period (p. 195) yields to a further contradiction in a work that seeks to present the history of the soviets sympathetically while explaining their failure to achieve what the authors believe should have been their goal: "the conquest of power by means of the agrarian and anti-imperialist revolution" (p. 175). Was this really the workers' goal? How did the results of the strike shape worker consciousness and subsequent activism (or lack of it)? It is unclear how García and Mironchuk interpret their own argument that such a wrongheaded policy could have succeeded so well at mobilizing workers, and how such a successful mobilization could have failed. Less attention to the party and more attention to the workers might cast the whole episode in a different light.

Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 52, 102–9; Jeffrey Gould, *To Lead as Equals: Rural Protest and Political Consciousness in Chinandega, Nicaragua, 1912–1979* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); and Jan Rus, "Whose Caste War? Indians, Ladinos, and the 'Caste War' of 1869," in *Spaniards and Indians in Southeastern Mesoamerica: Essays on the History of Ethnic Relations*, edited by Murdo MacLeod and Robert Wasserstrom (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

9. For further comment on this subject, see Barry Carr, "Sugar and Soviets: The Mobilization of Sugar Workers in Cuba, 1933," paper presented at the Latin American Labor History Conference, Duke University, 23–24 Apr. 1993, Durham, North Carolina. Carr's forthcoming book on Cuban sugar workers from 1920 to 1935 explores some of these issues.

Marginalization and Politics

The last two books focus on the political activities of two social groups who have been notably ignored by twentieth-century historiography: women and Afro-Cubans. Tomás Fernández Robaina's *El negro en Cuba, 1902–1958* examines the enduring impact of racism and the organized responses of the black Cuban population in the aftermath of abolition. A fascinating parallel to this study is Lynn Stoner's *From the House to the Streets: The Cuban Woman's Movement for Legal Reform, 1898–1940*, which traces the often comparable organized political action of women in the same period. Previous works have tended to view the machinations of the "neocolonial government" (ruling from 1902 to 1959) with disdain. But in tracing Cuban feminists' and Afro-Cubans' attempts to gain legal rights during this period, both Stoner and Fernández Robaina show how those marginalized from the government took it seriously. Unfortunately, however, race and gender issues, which have been illuminatingly analyzed as part of a single ideological system by Verena Martínez-Alier, are disturbingly separate in these two works: Fernández Robaina virtually ignores gender, while Stoner essentially chronicles the struggles of elite white women.¹⁰

In some respects, these books focus on the mundane rather than the extraordinary, on the everyday, long-term efforts of group members who considered themselves leaders to secure rights through the legal system rather than on dramatic uprisings and strikes. But in other ways, the topics themselves are extraordinary. The protagonists were exceptional members of these social groups: educated individuals who used means like intellectual debate, writing and publishing, and political activism, which by their very nature were beyond the reach of the poor, illiterate majority. Moreover, the persistently optimistic and in many ways successful struggles of these two small groups of individuals also had an enormous impact on the whole society, including those for whom these individuals claimed to speak.

Stoner's *From the House to the Streets* is not a history of Cuban women, or of gender, or even of women's activism in the broad sense.¹¹ Rather, it focuses on Cuban feminists—and their movements and organizations that sought changes in the legal system, both in terms of political rights for women (the vote) and social goals like protective labor legislation. Stoner chronicles the sometimes dramatic achievements of these feminists (never more than a thousand, she says), who made pre-

10. See Verena Martínez-Alier, *Marriage, Class, and Color in Nineteenth-Century Cuba* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989; originally published in 1974).

11. Thus women's participation in collective action not defined as feminist is not included. See Helen Icken Safa, "Women's Social Movements in Latin America," *Gender and Society* 4, no. 3 (Sept. 1990):354–69.

revolutionary Cuba one of the most advanced countries in the hemisphere in social and labor legislation. Stoner is careful to note, however, that progressive law is not the same as social change and that many of these laws were not enforced (p. 184).

The goals and ideology of the Cuban feminist movement were shaped by Cuban culture and history and also by the class position of the women who led it. In particular, Cuban feminism fits the model of “difference feminism” in basing women’s claim to rights on their special moral characteristics, particularly as mothers, which should enable them to purify and humanize traditionally male spheres by their presence.¹² Stoner argues persuasively that the elite composition of the Cuban feminist movement meant that its leaders shared a “culture of privilege,” which allowed them to view motherhood and domestic values as perfectly compatible with activism and careers because their own access to servants allowed them to enjoy both at the same time. Thus the class position of the Cuban feminists “helped produce a feminism centered on motherhood, cooperative with patriarchy, and respectful of class ordering” (p. 85).

Stoner is careful not to imply that these elite white women in any way represented Cuban women as a whole. But the absence of any other type of Cuban women in her book is troubling. A central theme underlying the book is the way in which the construction of a feminism based on women’s difference is related to acceptance of both patriarchy and class divisions. But to explore this issue more fully, one would need to know how non-elite women—and men—conceived of these issues and their interrelationships. Even the chapter entitled “Fields, Factories, and Feminists” fails to bring the majority of Cuban women into her picture, despite its vivid portrayal of the conditions of urban working-class women (the chapter title should have omitted “fields” because rural women are not even mentioned). How many women lived and worked in rural areas? How many worked in the informal economy? How many poor women were active in their neighborhoods rather than in a workplace? All these questions fall outside the central topic of *From the House to the Streets*.

Stoner appears to accept the argument made by Martínez-Alier that in nineteenth-century Cuba, control of female sexuality was an integral component of maintaining class privilege. The debate over the rights of illegitimate children was the issue that bitterly divided the left from the right in the feminist movement until the 1930s, and Stoner suggests that the reason was that it posed a threat to social stability as well as to “moral purity” (p. 64). She explains further on, “Conservatives believed distin-

12. See Deborah L. Rhode’s introduction to *Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference*, edited by Rhode (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990).

guishing between legitimate and illegitimate children was appropriate because it preserved the symbols of marriage and the properly registered family" (p. 94). In other words, this practice preserved class privilege. But again, the study would have been enriched by explicit engagement with Martínez-Alier's arguments and discussion of how the abolition of slavery and the end of Cuba's colonial status affected these issues.

The women Stoner describes were clearly influential far beyond their numbers, and this study is an important one in bringing them to center stage while examining their ideology and actions critically. Certainly, *From the House to the Streets* will be the guiding framework for future studies of Cuban women and women's activism in early-twentieth-century Cuba. Unfortunately, however, it is virtually the only study on Cuban women during this period, and I therefore wish that it filled more gaps than it does. Stoner is to be commended for making her papers available to scholars on microfilm (distributed by Scholarly Resources) and thus providing future students of Cuban women's history with easy access to this primary material.

Like Stoner, Fernández Robaina mines periodical sources from the early twentieth century in writing his fascinating intellectual and political history of a social group divided by class and ideology but united in its exclusion from access to social, political, and economic rights. The protagonists of *El negro en Cuba, 1902–1958*, like those in Stoner's study, are not truly members of the lower classes, although given the socio-economic reality in Cuba at that time, black "elites" were artisans, professionals, or small landowners rather than the relatives of bankers, large landowners, businessmen, and members of the political ruling class like many of Stoner's feminists (see Fernández Robaina, pp. 95–102; and Stoner, pp. 78–86). All of Stoner's feminist activists were white; all of Fernández Robaina's black activists were male. Women and blacks alike were aware that laws were not necessarily enforced (Stoner, p. 184; Fernández Robaina, pp. 129, 147). Yet feminists as well as black activists remained committed to legal means of reform.

Just as Stoner cites the words and actions of feminists and their opponents to get at Cubans' conceptualizations of gender, Fernández Robaina uses the words and actions of black activists and their opponents to analyze currents of racial thought in Cuba. Both feminist and black activists used the press extensively to air and debate important issues in defining the problems faced by their communities and to discuss possible solutions. The press served as one of the primary vehicles for organization in the black community, although Fernández Robaina does not provide enough information about the actual reach of this press. One wonders how large an audience it touched, whether it reached rural areas, and what proportion of the black population was literate. Citing the black press itself, Fernández Robaina outlines the themes that dominated black

intellectuals and organizations in their struggle against discrimination. Most proclaimed their commitment to the Cuban republic and racial harmony but maintained that the republic had failed to fulfill José Martí's dream of "una patria para todos" (p. 104). Hence arose their protests against overt discrimination and job discrimination in particular. Most prescribed education as the route to individual advancement, and individual advancement as the route to equality.

Despite the accommodationist stance of Afro-Cuban leaders, virtually any attempt by blacks to organize in support of their rights was greeted with charges of fomenting race hatred. White elites insisted that no discrimination existed, and the further black organizations went in identifying the existence and nature of racial discrimination, the more these groups were accused of being racist themselves and betraying the principles of Cuban nationalism. As a result, black organizations expended a good deal of energy defending themselves against charges of racism (pp. 32, 70).

A substantial part of *El negro en Cuba* focuses on the Partido Independiente de Color (PIC) and its predecessor, the Agrupación Independiente de Color (formed in 1908). Like previous black organizations, the PIC insisted on its Cuban nationalist—as opposed to black separatist—character and stressed its desire to "show the world the culture and civility of the race of color" (p. 64). At the same time, the party program clearly addressed the economic and social components of racial discrimination in calling for free compulsory education, trial by jury, an eight-hour workday, and other goals that were based as much on class as on race (p. 65). The party did not call for fundamental economic change, however: the issue was access rather than transformation. Thus the party did not attack the economic structures that led to discrimination and continued to emphasize individual advancement. Fernández Robaina argues that the so-called uprising in 1912 was really no more than a protest aimed at achieving legalization for the party, but it turned into a massacre in which thousands of blacks were hunted down and killed (pp. 77–93). Yet even after this tragedy and on through the 1930s, Afro-Cuban intellectuals like Gustavo Urrutia continued to frame their protest in terms of assimilation and Cuban nationalism.

Although some Afro-Cubans were radicalized toward black separatism in the early 1930s by U.S. influence, a strictly Leninist view of "the nation," and white Cuban racism, by 1935 many Afro-Cubans were joining the Communist party in conceptualizing the struggle against discrimination as part of a larger struggle for social transformation, "adopting it as a particular struggle linked to the general struggle that had to be fought to achieve a more just society" (p. 140). The party's role in defining and supporting the struggles of Afro-Cubans is outlined in the last three chapters of *El negro en Cuba*. The contrast with the trajectory of the femi-

nist movement in the 1930s and 1940s is striking. Although both groups fought for the equal rights law in 1940, its passage essentially ended feminists' focus on legal reform and had little impact on the forms or goals of black organizations.

El negro en Cuba does an admirable job of tracing the development of racial thought with regard to Afro-Cubans, but it makes no mention of the virulent racism toward Haitians that Alvarez Estévez described vividly in *Azúcar e inmigración*. In fact, the PIC program outlined in 1912 called for the nationalization of work and free immigration for all races (p. 65), which according to Alvarez Estévez's discussion appears to be a contradictory stance regarding immigrant workers. It would be interesting to explore how white racism toward Haitians was reflected in attitudes toward Afro-Cubans and how Afro-Cubans responded to Haitians in Cuba.

In conclusion, as the seven works reviewed here demonstrate, scholars of Cuban history are tackling historiographical issues at the forefront of the field. Yet these works as a group also show that available sources for the study of Cuban history have only begun to be tapped. Some areas, such as U.S.-Cuba relations, have been well studied, but social history (including the study of women, labor, and race) is an area where much remains to be done, despite the promising beginnings shown in the works reviewed here.