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the promotion of violence was to strengthen “his and his party’s power and preserve the prebendary and clientelistic characteristics of the state he had vowed to dismantle in 1991, [relying on] armed gangs, the police, and authoritarian practices to suppress his opponents, all the while cultivating a self-serving image as defender of the poor” (p. xv).

He also joins the debate on whether Aristide had a direct role in the creation of armed groups known as chimèses which terrorized Haiti during the crisis preceding his downfall and in their role during the latter part of the Aristide period making less compelling distinctions between the Tontons Makout that operated under the Duvalier dictatorships and the chimèses that terrorized the population under Aristide. Dupuy proposes that while the former were structurally connected with the Haitian military and the dictator, chimèses were a convenient political force of disaffected youth operating within the less formal organization of Fanmi Lavalas.

The Prophet and Power is a key source for understanding the intricate set of factors that contributed to the dynamics of this turbulent period and an important contribution to Haitian and Caribbean studies.

References


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La Revolución Cubana del 30: Ensayos by Fernando Martínez Heredia is a work in the finest tradition of Cuban Revolutionary scholarship. This is its greatest strength and greatest weakness.

The assumption of the essays is that Cuba in the 1930s is a revolutionary society in search of a genuine path to social justice and equality.
The journey is fueled by the two wars of independence in the nineteenth century and then propelled further by some visionaries in the first third of the twentieth century. As the author notes most eloquently, since the triumph of the Revolution of 1959, the struggles of the 1930s have been largely forgotten and overshadowed, except by a small cadre of scholars inside and outside of Cuba.

Few have done more to explain the importance of the revolutionary struggles of the 1930s and their implications for the Cuba of today than Martínez Heredia. He has spent the better part of 40 years lecturing and writing about the period and his expertise is evident throughout the book. This compilation of essays is his latest effort to illuminate the period, but, as with much of the scholarship produced in Cuba, it shines light only along the historical paths clearly traveled by the revolutionary government. Those paths outside the version of history acceptable to the revolution still remain in the world of shadow as far as these essays are concerned.

The historical narrative of the book is a familiar one. There are good guys in the revolutionary struggle for Cuba’s soul—those with the foresight to see that revolution, and specifically a Communist revolution, are what is needed to lift Cuba out of the imperialist clutches of the United States. There are the confused and muddled reformers, who sometimes act out of good faith, but fail to see that drastic measures must be taken. And, there are, of course, the villains, who the author periodically refers to as esbirros (henchmen or lackeys of the Cuban neo-colonial government or the United States depending on the context).

Towards that end, the author has selected five revolutionaries from the period, a task which Martínez Heredia concedes is problematic (pp. 5-6). The five—Antonio Guiteras Holmes, Julio Antonio Mella, Rubén Martínez Villena, Pablo de la Torriente Brau and Raúl Roa García—were ultimately chosen for inclusion because they were exemplary and “radical” revolutionaries. The Cuban obsession with political martyrdom is evident in the selection process, since three of them (Guiteras, Mella, and Torriente Brau) were either killed in combat or murdered. Martínez Villena died at age 35 of tuberculosis. Only Roa García lived long enough to see the triumph of the Revolution of 1959, serve in the revolutionary government, and die of ailments associated with old age.

To his credit, Martínez Heredia notes that others with revolutionary, but less radical, credentials could have been chosen such as Ramón Grau San Martín, president from September 1933 to January 1934 and then again from 1944 to 1948, Eduardo Chibás, a student revolutionary of the period and later a candidate for the presidency, and Carlos Prío Socarrás, another student leader and future president (1948-1952). The author writes that a study could also be done selecting individuals “opposed”
to the revolution or those who “betrayed” it. This is an important point and indicates that Cuban scholars, like Martínez Heredia, are seeking to incorporate alternative views of history, however, they must tread carefully when the revolution’s official interpretation is the subject of debate.

Occasionally, the author tries to stretch the official version of permissible history or reveal internal struggles within the Cuban academy. These insights constitute some of the finest contributions of the book. One can find such an instance in the essay on Guiteras (pp. 76-77) when he tries to put the career of Grau San Martín in context rather than turn him into a caricature of a villain. He writes about Grau: “Si se recuerda que no tenía militancia previa ni ideas radicales, y que era veinte años mayor que la mayoría de sus compañeros en aquella aventura, hay que admitir que Grau no hizo un mal papel.” Another revealing passage comes at the end of the book (p. 195) when he urges his readers to try and recover the revolutionary history of the 1930s so it can help them in understanding the struggles within today’s Cuba between an “anti-capitalist socialism” and a “conservatism with new clothing” that argues for the necessity of capitalism.

The selection of individuals with credentials pleasing to the revolution ensures that the essays will focus on the development of a Cuban brand of socialism, as opposed to one dictated by Moscow, during the 1930s. There is little room in these essays for an exploration of other possible resolutions to the crisis over Cuban sovereignty created by the economic and political role played by the United States.

As for the specific essays, the one on Guiteras, which accounts for almost half the book is by far the strongest of the five. Of all the political figures from the 1930s, Guiteras has always received the most attention by revolutionary scholars, although Martínez Heredia notes that he is frequently not given enough credit and events celebrating his life are usually modest (p. 40). However, compared to other political figures of the period, the attention given to him seems impressive, if ideologically motivated.

The comparisons to Fidel Castro are just too irresistible to ignore. Both struggled against Cuban Dictator Fulgencio Batista, both emerged as political leaders at a very young age (Guiteras was in his late 20s when he was named Interior Minister in the revolutionary government of 1933), and both favored armed struggle to overturn a Batista-led government. Guiteras has the added allure of having died in a shootout with the army in May 1935. As a result of this, Cuban revolutionary scholarship has produced several biographies of Guiteras, most notably the 1990 work by José Tabares del Real and the 1998 book by Newton Briones Montoto. Revolutionary Cuban scholars of the period have declared him
one of their own and created a narrative of Guiteras foreshadowing the struggles of the 1950s. This is despite the fact that Guiteras frequently squabbled with communists of the period and never declared himself a Marxist, although he was clearly anti-imperialist.

The elevation of Guiteras to iconic status by some needs further historical assessment. Martínez Heredia takes the position that Guiteras is one of the “founders of Cuban Communism” (p. 81). He argues that Guiteras could not support the Cuban Communist Party of the time because they, guided by the Soviet Union, rejected armed struggle in Cuba as the path to revolution. Martínez Heredia notes that Guiteras was a man of action not of the written word, but his actions reflect a commitment to putting “socialism into practice” (p. 60). The author meticulously combs over Guiteras’ few writings and the documents left behind by his political movement Joven Cuba (Young Cuba) for indications of his socialist leanings and he reminds his readers that one does not need to be a member of the Communist Party to be a Communist (pp. 103-104). Martínez Heredia gives readers much to think about and debate in this essay.

The remaining essays attempt to put the other leaders within the context of this effort to create Cuban socialism during a period in which revolution and armed struggle were not the preferred methods of bringing about political change. Mella was responsible for “creating a new revolutionary space” within the Cuban political world by fostering the development of a university student movement and helping establish the Cuban Communist Party in 1925. Mella understood, according to the author, that in Latin America “anti-imperialism would only be viable if it was anti-capitalist” and the most advanced ideology to bring this about was Communism (p. 26). As he developed, Mella incorporated the ideology of José Martí to create a Cuban brand of socialism. When the Cuban Communists expelled Mella from the party they did so as a result of international pressure from the Soviet Union not reflective of conditions in Cuba and therefore he remains a figure of national unity even today, the author notes.

Roa contributed to the development of Cuban socialism through his writings, specifically Bufa subversiva and his work as a scholar and teacher by offering a vision of a future Cuba free of imperialist influences “far superior than his contemporaries” (p. 140). He does not deal with Roa’s later career. The essay on Torriente Brau concentrates on his accomplishments as a student revolutionary leader in the struggle against Machado, his later efforts as a journalist, his break with the Communist international movement, and finally his death in December 1936 fighting against the forces of fascism in the Spanish Civil War. We are reminded again of the doctrinal underpinnings of the work when Martínez Heredia
tries to explain Torriente Brau’s work as a journalist in 1934 and 1935, rather than as a political leader, by noting that he is not a revolutionary that has become a journalist but rather a “revolutionary that employs journalism” (p. 173). The essay on Martínez Villena is the weakest of the group and is really not an essay but a journalistic interview of Martínez Heredia discussing a variety of issues with regards to the subject’s life. The bibliography contains almost exclusively works produced on the island and indicates little engagement with other scholarship.

In summary, the essays by Martínez Heredia contribute to the flowering debate about the importance of the revolutionary struggles of the 1930s, even though they do not take the debate far enough.