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Reseña de "La Otra Historia Dominicana" de Frank Moya Pons


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halves of the Spanish imperial experience together, and as a result—for all that it remains enclosed by the boundaries of Spanish empire—this study succeeds in achieving a more global perspective.

References

Gómez, Juan Gualberto. 1892. “Crónica política.” Revista Cubana (October 31).


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A skillful blending of analysis of socioeconomic developments and cultural dynamics, La Otra Historia Dominicana is a collection of articles originally published in Rumbo, between January 1994 and October 2000. The text presents an innovative and refreshing historical perspective from precolonial time up to 2000.

A well-known scholar, Moya Pons has published twenty books and hundreds of articles, edited forty other texts, and directed the publication of EME-EME, a journal published by the Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra (known then as Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra or UCMM), in Santiago, the Dominican Republic. As mentioned on the back cover of La Otra Historia Dominicana, the articles published in Rumbo, under the subtitle “La Historia tiene otra Historia,” responded to Moya Pons’ desire to bring attention to people who have been active agents of historical development, but have not been appropriately recognized.

The author’s approach matches the new trend of historical research, which places less emphasis on political ideologies, political parties, and political leaders, and more emphasis on common people and ordinary
events. La Otra Historia Dominicana, is organized in seventeen topical chapters. Each chapter includes subjects that are seldom, if at all, discussed in previous publications.

Recognizing the author’s work during the ten years that he took to publish the articles, friends and colleagues suggested to Moya Pons to arrange the material and to produce a book. Initially he rejected the idea because, among other reasons, to assemble a book from a collection of previously published articles responds to a Dominican practice: “armar un libro que casi nadie lee con artículos de periódicos y revistas que se leyeron muy poco o simplemente pasaron desapercibidos” (to prepare a book that almost no one reads from newspapers and magazines articles that only few read or were unnotice). Despite the initial rejection, because of the high quality and freshness of many articles, his friends did not give up. As indicated in the Introduction, one of those friends, José Chez Checo, a former President of La Academia Dominicana de la Historia, had a sweeping vision of arranging the articles by chapters and organizing the periodical publications into a solid volume.

Within the topical framework, one can see that the organization of the collection was a laborious job. The first article, “Los comienzos del Banco Central,” published in Rumbo on January 24, 1994, appears almost at the end of Chapter 15, on page 464, in La Otra Historia Dominicana; on the other hand, one of last articles, “Las provincias de los Indios,” published in Rumbo on May 8, 2000, appears on Chapter I, on page 25, in La Otra Historia Dominicana.

In the first chapter, readers acquire fundamental knowledge about of the Tainos, their political and geographic division, and the devastating impact of the Europeans on the inhabitants of La Española. This chapter, as well as others, includes subjective, provocative, even sexy subtitles, such as “La isla ya no era virgen.” Chapter two deals with the colonial era, describing the economic conditions, disparities in bathing traditions between Tainos and Europeans, the interrelation between corsairs and tobacco production, and the rise of fur as “the international coin of contraband.” Adding to the history of slavery, chapter three offers valuable information about the cultural role of the slave society and its influence and presence on the Dominican genealogy. “Gentes sin Historia” is the title of chapter four. The naming of the chapter is a clear indication of the author’s main goal: to call attention to groups and/or individuals with a rich history, such as the buccaneers and those distinctive sexual lifestyle demands examination.

Chapter five discusses the nature and evolution of the criollo figure and its subdivision into four categories. The description offers interesting portraits of “one of the less studied elements of the [Dominican] national culture.” Questions of national identity, racial typology, immigration,
and ethnicity are some of the themes of chapter six. Origins and global interchanges of plants and fruits, agricultural production and economic changes are central issues of chapter seven. Chapters eight and nine are a blend of human and natural history. In chapter eight, Moya Pons, who once held the position of Secretario de Estado de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales in the Dominican Republic, draws on his ecological knowledge and familiarity with environmental conditions to describe problems derived from overuse and/or misuse of natural resources. How chronologically, economically, and socially natural disasters and epidemics have affected the historical development of the Dominican society are discussed in chapter nine.

To better understand Haiti's real and symbolic representations and its relations with the Dominican Republic, as well as the relations between Cuba and the Dominican Republic, readers will find interesting and important data in chapters ten and eleven.

A fresh reappraisal of demographic growth and geographical expansion of the Dominican Republic, chapter twelve highlights the importance of local and regional history. This chapter, for example, argues that the city of La Romana is older than commonly supposed, and that Santo Domingo, compared to Santiago or Puerto Plata, was a small town by 1920. In chapters thirteen, fourteen and fifteen, Moya Pons provides curious and valuable information about the transportation systems, the modernization process, economic development, and origins and developments of financial institutions and offers peculiar details about rural and urban lifestyles, including the economic and cultural influence of the United States in Dominican society.

The last two chapters, sixteen and seventeen, provide a wealth of well-known and new historiographical data. Discussing the traditional trend of historical research and offering his advice on scholarly methods, Moya Pons backs up the material of *La Otra Historia Dominicana* with 52 pages of bibliographical and historiographical references. Although the topical organization of the references does not match the topical organization of the text, the author provides numerous sources that help readers to locate documentation on specific topics. In chapter seventeen, for example, interesting is the description of the valuable work of Vetilio Alfau Duran, “one of the most prolific Dominican historians,” who during a career of more than 50 years published several books and innumerable articles in journals and newspapers.

In regard to references, readers would be appreciative if some primary sources cited in the text would have the complete bibliographical data. For example, in chapter one, “Lo que vio y dijo Gerardini” or in chapter two, “Quién era Benzoni,” the author mentions the titles of the books where the quotations are cited, but page numbers, for example,
would help readers to look at the complete reference. This is not to overlook the great value of the collection, which provides groundwork for future studies.

Indeed, drawing on his scholarly and academic expertise, Moya Pons offers a rich “manjar” that will stimulate readers to research issues of Dominican society and culture that are unknown or unfamiliar. The novelty of *La Otra Historia Dominicana* is indicative of Moya Pons’ dedication and determination to enhance Dominican historiography, and this contribution has been the hallmark of his historical production. The work is a significant contribution to research not only to Dominican but Caribbean and Latin American cultural and social history.