

Book Review

- Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, *Racial Migrations: New York City and the Revolutionary Politics of the Spanish Caribbean*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019. Pp. 408. \$24.95 (paper).

The Spanish Caribbean teemed with social unrest throughout the nineteenth-century as Cuban and Puerto Rican revolutionaries joined forces to mobilize toward independence. The reconciliation of racial tensions within Cuba and Puerto Rico's multiracial landscapes was crucial in their pursuit of self-determination. Consequently, non-Black independence leaders such as José Martí were tasked with uniting socially and racially fragmented populations to fight for Antillean sovereignty. Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof's *Racial Migrations* employs a microhistorical approach to depict how Cubans and Puerto Ricans of African descent negotiated with non-Black revolutionaries to secure their full rights as citizens. Rather than being tethered to a series of arguments, *Racial Migrations* presents a series of intersecting narratives to illustrate how people of African descent forged bonds of solidarity.

Guiding questions prompt a scrupulous investigation of the biographical, social, and cultural contexts that encompassed *Racial Migrations*' historical actors and the social clubs they formed. These revolutionary clubs transcended national, racial, and social lines across the circum-Caribbean. Organizations such as La Liga de Martí and Club Borinquen, for instance, facilitated transnational nation-building processes as Afro-Cuban and Afro-Puerto Rican freedom fighters participated in intellectual exchanges (13). Further, revolutionary clubs subsequently became points of convergence for Black people throughout the diaspora to further their education and social elevation. Throughout the late nineteenth-century, intricate webs of Afro-Cuban and Afro-Puerto Rican social clubs in New York City were vital to incorporate anti-colonial and anti-racist ideologies in creole national projects.

Racial Migrations is divided into six chapters. Chapters one through three establish the sociopolitical background for Cubans and Puerto Ricans of African descent in their respective places of origin. Further, chapters four through six present the convergence between Cuban and Puerto Rican exiles in New York City as they organized towards independence. *Racial Migrations* draws to a close the United States' invasion of Puerto Rico in 1898 and the culmination of Cuba's War of Independence in 1902.

Chapter one delves into nineteenth-century Cuba and Puerto Rico's racial politics to delineate the differences in their racializing mechanisms. According to Hoffnung-Garskof,

Cubans and Puerto Ricans of African descent utilized the term “class of color” to denote their African ancestry while “mitigating the fear that all people of African descent, free pardos, and morenos as well as enslaved people, would unite in rebellion” (6). Interactions between the Cuban journalist of African descent, Rafael Serra, and Afro-Puerto Rican typesetter, Sotero Figueroa, illustrate how “a class of color” developed cross-racial and cross-social revolutionary clubs. Further, Hoffnung-Garskof highlights how Gertrudis Heredia, Serra’s wife, navigated the Spanish Caribbean’s fluid racial politics and the United States’ unwavering color line to showcase how racializing mechanisms influenced people of African descent’s mobility. For instance, while Gertrudis Heredia could obtain an education and become a licensed midwife in Cuba, employment and residential segregationist practices in the United States limited her socioeconomic mobility (55).

Chapter two, titled “The Public Square,” presents La Liga de Martí’s foundation as an institution of self-improvement and social elevation for people of African descent. Liberal movements sweeping through the Spanish Caribbean enabled revolutionaries of African descent to become men of public reputation. Afro-Cuban and Afro-activists’ evolution from humble artisans to navigators of the circum-Caribbean’s political sphere throughout the 1870s demarcates the differences in opportunities granted to people of African descent. Hoffnung-Garskof emphasizes the importance of racialized trades, such as cigar-rolling and typesetting, in the development of Afro-Cuban and Afro-Puerto Rican revolutionary circles. Afro-Cuban and Afro-Puerto Rican freedom fighters like Rafael Serra and Sotero Figueroa, for instance, engaged in typesetting as a trade and mode of political resistance through the publication of anti-colonial literature (42). Hence, racialized professions like typesetting facilitated Cubans and Puerto Ricans of African descent’s organization across racial lines. The ways in which revolutionaries of color navigated diverging racial paradigms in Key West, Cuba, and Puerto Rico elucidate how they formed their respective views against racism and colonialism. People of African descent in Cuba and Puerto Rico, for instance, navigated racial boundaries that at times could change or fluctuate. In contrast, people of African descent in Key West maneuvered the United States’ rigid color line.

Chapter three analyzes how La Liga de Martí functioned as a multiracial and cross-social point of convergence for people of African descent in New York City. The city’s multicultural landscape served as a point of convergence for the African diaspora and facilitated La Liga de Martí’s expansion across racial, social, and national ties. People of African descent’s experiences “migrating while black” changed their self-perception and political ideologies after arriving in New York City as shared experiences under U.S. racism strengthened bonds across ethnic ties between Afro-Cubans, Afro-Puerto Ricans, and African-Americans. Further, the chapter explores how the experience of merchants, political dissidents, and exiles of African descent varied greatly upon their confrontations with the United States’ stark demarcation of the color line. Exchanges between African-Americans,

Afro-Cubans, and Afro-Puerto Ricans within La Liga subsequently fostered the creation of transnational ties while shaping anti-colonial and anti-racist national discourses.

Chapter four expounds upon the convergence of multiple insurgent groups comprised by people of African throughout multiple New York City-based social clubs that lobbied for Cuban and Puerto Rican liberation. Moreover, this chapter traces the evolution of José Martí's philosophy as he immersed himself in predominantly Black social networks intrinsically tied to Cubans and Puerto Ricans of African descent. Black freedom fighters were tasked with denouncing the anti-Black social order while negotiating the preservation of a collective anti-colonial identity. Hoffnung-Garskof interrogates why Afro-Cubans conceded their roles in creating the anti-racist and anti-colonial ideologies José Martí professed as his own. Consequently, he posits that Afro-Cuban revolutionaries like Serra downplayed their involvement in the development of racially inclusive nation-building projects to facilitate calls for national unity. Afro-Cubans' attempts to reconcile Cuba's history of racial discrimination illustrates the Cuban national project's complexity and fragility among its multiracial population. An analysis of the multiracial social clubs that Afro-Cubans and Afro-Puerto Ricans founded delineates how Black and non-Black independence leaders expressed their interpretations of post-colonial national projects.

Chapter five analyzes the formation and expansion of anti-colonial clubs in New York City by centering organizations such as the Club Las Dos Antillas and Club Guerrilla de Maceo. Newspapers such as *La Doctrina de Martí* played a crucial role in the conceptualization and dissemination of anti-racist philosophy. However, frictions within revolutionary clubs arose as freedom fighters disagreed on the approach toward racial reconciliation in the call for national unity. Serra and Martí consequently strove to mend relations between "white Cubans, willing to dispense with their privileges, and black Cubans willing to dedicate themselves to self-improvement and the welfare for all" (178). Moreover, the author expands upon how multiracial audiences converged within New York City's social clubs and placed discussions about racism and classism at the forefront.

Chapter Six and the last chapter, *Endings*, explore how New York City-based revolutionary clubs dissolved after the U.S. invaded Puerto Rico in 1898 and Cuban War of Independence culminated in 1902. Some New York City social clubs, such as The Study Group, disbanded after tensions between them and the Cuban Revolutionary Party increased because of their attempts to seize power over the Cuban national cause (256). In contrast, other groups dissolved as their members reorganized under different movements. Hoffnung-Garskof expounds upon the changes across party lines upon José Martí's death in 1895 and contends that people of African descent's approval was integral to unify under Cuban revolutionary leader Tomás Estrada Palma (259).

Racial Migrations provides an introspective view into how people of African descent envisioned racially democratic futures while navigating the nineteenth-century circum-Caribbean's definitions of race. Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof illustrates how the Spanish

Caribbean's definitions of race fluctuated by denoting the differing ways in which Afro-Cubans and Afro-Puerto Ricans maneuvered their identity and forged transnational anti-colonial networks. In this regard, *Racial Migration's* scope faces its limitations when examining how mixed-race people encountered the Spanish Caribbean and United States' oscillating color line. Further, centering the United States as the basis of comparison for Cuba and Puerto Rico's racial politics obscures the influence of broader Caribbean racializing mechanisms. Cubans and Puerto Ricans across racial lines, for instance, became key organizers and proponents of pan-Antillean unification projects. Yet, *Racial Migrations* does not emphasize the roles revolutionaries of African descent placed on pan-Antillean politics and their identity as Caribbean men. Hence, solely identifying Afro-Puerto Rican and Afro-Cuban freedom fighters as "Afro-Latinos" obfuscates their commitment to pan-Antillean politics and experiences with South American notions of anti-Blackness.

Nonetheless, *Racial Migrations* eloquently explores how people of African descent from different walks of life and nationalities united under cross-social and multiracial social clubs. Hoffnung-Garskof's portrayal of the revolutionary clubs comprised of people of differing shades, socioeconomic standing, and gender underscores Afro-Cubans' and Afro-Puerto Ricans' participation in the pursuit of full citizenship, a sense of personhood, and self-determination. In turn, *Racial Migrations* is an apt recommendation for instructors who are interested in matters relating to Latin American studies, Caribbean history, and Afro-diasporic studies. Given its style and content matter, undergraduates would benefit the most from engaging in this text as introductory material for Latin American and Caribbean history. In addition, graduate students would find the author's methodologies and historiography useful if they are interested in examining labor movements, transnational networks of resistance, and Black liberation movements.

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