Lauren Derby

The Dictator's Seduction: Politics and the Popular Imagination in the Era of Trujillo.

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The Dictator's Seduction revisits the history of one of Latin America's longest authoritarian regimes, General Rafael Trujillo's dictatorship in the Dominican Republic (1930–1961). Lauren Derby argues that while Trujillo and his secret police used terror to establish control over the population, Trujillo also consolidated his rule by embracing “popular [cultural] forms such as gossip, gift exchange, fictive kinship, and witchcraft into the repertoire of domination” (p. 7). The book shifts attention to subjects that other scholars have dismissed as “window dressing” by considering the regime's “political liturgy” (the state's mass politics), Trujillo's “theater state” (the grand processions and celebrations that marked important dates or events), and Trujillo's “vernacular politics.” These cultural formations made power both negotiable and terrorizing for those who found themselves outside Trujillo's or the Dominican Party's graces.

As Derby explains in Chapter 1, U.S. occupation was particularly important in creating a crisis that provoked critical reflections among Dominicans about the state and political culture. Standard narratives of this period focus on the political instability that erupted in the wake of U.S. control, but Derby argues that U.S. intervention destroyed the edifice of Dominican liberalism. Dominican liberal elites lost control over the state and, as a result, access to its financial resources. This lack of political power transformed into the loss of their cultural hegemony, precipitating, Derby writes, a crisis in masculinity. As a result of the occupation, violence and repression became legitimate mechanisms of rule.

In Chapter 2, Derby details how Trujillo's rise to power was assisted by the San Zenón hurricane, which struck Santo Domingo in September 1930. An event that could have ended Trujillo's nascent regime became, instead, the “founding myth of the Era of Trujillo” (p. 69). The hurricane's devastation provided an opportunity for Trujillo to define himself as a leader when he proved adept at supplying much-needed services during the hurricane's immediate aftermath. Most important, though, Trujillo's reconstruction scheme allowed him to define and make concrete Dominican modernity in Santo Domingo's new landscape.

Chapter 3 makes the compelling argument that sexual conquest “brought [Trujillo] respect and was a key element in his legitimacy as a caudillo-turned-statesman” (p. 111). Trujillo's young daughter Angelita, and his lover Lina Lovatón, served as especially powerful symbols of the regime. Through their whiteness, femininity, and respectability Trujillo was able to express his power and domination. While Angelita represented the regime's nurturing side, Lina sym-

bolized Trujillo's masculine prowess, especially as a man of questionable racial ancestry who sexually conquered a white woman from the elite. Derby's interpretation of Trujillo's "theater state" in this way has serious implications for how we understand states as gendered regimes. As she notes, Trujillo's dictatorship is unique in that the iconic female figure of the regime was not the First Lady. Moreover, as symbolic figures, Angelita and Lina did not "engender popular loathing of women in the public sphere or an obsessive concern with [Trujillo's] sexual exploits" (p. 112). Instead, displaying the daughter and the mistress helped create a myth around Trujillo as a man who consolidated his role as the leader.

In Chapters 5 and 6, Derby completes her examination of Trujillo's self-fashioning through the popular vernacular of the *tíguere*. In contrast to a tradition of presidential image making rooted in an erudite, liberal respectability, Trujillo embraced another kind of masculine idiom, *tígueraje*, "to enable non-white, lower-class men to identify with the regime" (p. 174). The *tíguere* is an urban-based man who earns *respeto* and achieves some social mobility on the basis of his street smarts, sexual conquests, and overall success at transgressing social boundaries of race and class. Trujillo's daughter, Flor Trujillo, and her husband, Porfirio Rubirosa (Rubi), became iconic figures of this new Dominican modernity defined by excess, glamor, and consumption. Rafael, Rubi, and Flor Trujillo redefined the mechanism through which social mobility could be achieved.

Nevertheless, even as the ceremonial state brought all Dominicans into the regime's modernizing embrace, power and authority within the state remained unequally distributed and was allotted at Trujillo's behest. Chapters 4 and 7 delve into aspects of Trujillista practice that have until now been dismissed by scholars of authoritarianism: public denunciations, exaggerated, honorific speech, and mythical descriptions of Trujillo's body. Taken together, denouncing corrupt, mid-level bureaucrats, praising Trujillo in formal speeches, even grappling with the metaphysical and mystical articulations of Trujillo's power were important parts of the culture of state terror that Trujillo and his secret police forces inflicted on the Dominican population. It is here that Derby confronts troubling questions in the study of authoritarian regimes: how does terror become normal, and does acquiescence to state terror necessarily mean compliance with authoritarianism?

For many decades and among many scholars of Latin American politics, Trujillo represented the ultimate *caudillo*; he imbibed fully the pretensions and tragedies of personalistic rule and charismatic statesmanship. By emphasizing personality, this scholarship ignored the Dominican public's complex relationship to the regime. Derby's book represents an important call for a renewed

attention to the relationships between quotidian exertions of authority and those engineered by the state.

April Mayes

Department of History, Pomona College

Claremont CA 91711, U.S.A.

April.Mayes@pomona.edu