Gerald Horne

Race to Revolution: The U.S. and Cuba during Slavery and Jim Crow. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2014. 429 pp. (Cloth US\$95.00)

Few historians have been as prolific as Gerald Horne. An author of more than thirty books, he has written extensively on the African American experience. His new book continues his long-standing interest in black internationalism by attempting to examine the impact of slavery and racial discrimination on Cuban-U.S. relations from the nineteenth century until the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. Although its topic and chronological sweep are welcome contributions, *Race to Revolution* is a disappointing text for scholars and students of Cuban-U.S. relations, as well as African American and Caribbean history.

The book is a paradox. It is copiously footnoted, yet it does not actively engage with the countless primary and secondary sources that it cites. Spanish-language sources in Cuba and Spain are mentioned, but less extensively than English-language sources, and the work of Cubanist historians on the island and abroad is virtually ignored. These odd omissions are significant, since racialization has been a major theme in recent Cuban historiography. Sadly, Horne's lack of engagement with Cubanists replicates the imperial dynamic that he seeks to critique throughout the text. He describes the goals of the text as a study of U.S.-Cuban relations "in the bitter context of slavery and Jim Crow" (p. 8). While Horne rightly warns that studies of racialization in Cuba that fail to account for the "gravitational pull exerted by the mainland seem shortsighted" (p. 9), his book does not adequately account for the ways Cuban racial formation shaped these encounters. Moreover, the introduction promises to focus "heavily on the words and deeds of U.S. Negroes" (p. 8), but the book actually devotes significantly more space to the "words and deeds" of U.S. officials and elites and pays scant attention to the now well-documented actions of Cubans of African descent in their own freedom struggles. Historians have labored tirelessly to uncover the actions of enslaved Africans in Cuba and the United States, yet in Horne's account they are little more than objects of the "heightened racism imposed by Washington" (p. 9).

The book's chronological scope takes readers from the U.S. Louisiana Purchase and the annexation of Florida at the turn of the nineteenth century to the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. The bulk of the book focuses on the nineteenth century, as Horne narrates the growing U.S. presence in Cuba during the era of slavery and abolition. His best contribution in these chapters is his attention to the linkages between Southern U.S. planters and Cuba, especially his reading of the Cuban-born South Carolinian annexationist Ambrosio Gon-

zales. The last five chapters skip briskly through the 1898 U.S. intervention and the “neocolonial” period (1902–58), as the United States consolidated power over a Republican client state. Here, Horne narrates the manifold interactions between African American intellectuals and activists and Cuba, a history that has been documented elsewhere.¹ The book ends with the now well-known account of the Cuban Revolution’s impact on the configuration of race and empire that was set in motion in the nineteenth century.

Horne’s sweeping text might work well for general readers interested in a history of Cuban-U.S. interaction, but it is not altogether clear whether the book is designed for them. The numerous footnotes suggest that scholars are the book’s intended readership, though its failure to engage the extensive scholarship on race, empire, and Cuban-U.S. relations that has emerged since the 1990s—by Tomás Fernández Robaina, Alejandro de la Fuente, Ada Ferrer, Aline Helg, Rebecca Scott, Matt Childs, Lisa Brock, and Digna Castañeda Fuertes, among others—leaves that in question. Furthermore, African Americanists will profit little from the book, given that it covers ground that Willard Gatewood, Michele Mitchell, and others have already explored. Other synthetic works of the African Diaspora experience, such as Michael Gomez’s *Reversing Sail* (2004), more successfully perform the difficult task of providing a synthesis of the African Diaspora experience while acknowledging the complexities of racial formation in different national contexts. In the end, *Race to Revolution* offers neither a novel interpretation of Cuban-U.S. relations nor evidence that raises new questions on these encounters. As Cuban-U.S. relations seemingly enter a new phase ushered in by the agreements between the two governments in late 2014, and as race will continue to cast a shadow over these interactions, the moment is at hand for historians to enrich our understanding of the past of these encounters.

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¹ See, for example, Lisa Brock & Digna Castañeda Fuertes (eds.), 1998, *Between Race and Empire: African Americans and Cubans before the Cuban Revolution* (Philadelphia PA: Temple University Press); Frank Andre Guridy, 2010, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press).