Stephen M. Park

The Pan American Imagination: Contested Visions of the Hemisphere in Twentieth-Century Literature. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015. xii + 269 pp. (Paper US\$ 27.50)

Observed since 1931, Pan American Day is notionally an annual American holiday commemorating the First International Conference of American States, which concluded on April 14, 1890. That conference created the International Union of American Republics, which soon became the Pan American Union (PAU) and eventually the Organization of American States (OAS). The holiday's low profile is probably a good indication of the low esteem in which the current OAS, and its associated Pan American ideology, is held across the continent, particularly south of the Rio Grande. Nonetheless, in recent years, fueled by the development of Hemispheric American Studies, there has been significant scholarly interest in Pan Americanism, particularly in its cultural manifestations.¹

Stephen Park's *The Pan American Imagination* is a welcome and wide-ranging contribution to that ongoing discussion. Just how wide-ranging can be gauged from the figures who feature prominently: William Carlos Williams, José Clemente Orozco, Alejo Carpentier, Carleton Beals, Ana Castillo, and Katherine Dunham. Park's technique in each of his six main chapters is to contrast the ideology of the PAU itself, based in Washington DC and largely controlled by U.S. interests, with more heterodox cultural explorations of Pan American perspectives. In some cases—the early- to mid-twentieth-century ones—the contrasts are telling; in others—the more recent—less so. But all the chapters are well researched and well argued, including the three—on Carpentier, Beals, and Dunham—that have a specific Caribbean focus.

Long neglected, and still not translated into English, Alejo Carpentier's first novel, *¡Écuela-Yamba-Ó!*, has received some recent critical attention, but Park adds a new dimension by unraveling the circumstances in which Carpentier began writing the book, as noted in its final lines: "*First version: Havana Prison, August 1–9, 1927*" (quoted p. 92). As it happens, Havana in 1927 was the site of the First Pan American Conference on Eugenics and Homiculture of the American Republics, which preceded by a fortnight the Sixth International Conference of American States. Carpentier was in prison precisely because of the crackdown

1 See Claire F. Fox, *Making Art Panamerican* (2013); Patricia García-Vélez Hanna (ed.), *Pan American Modernism* (2013); Robert Alexander Gonzalez, *Designing Pan-America* (2011); Pablo Helguera & Sarah Demeuse (eds.), *The School of Panamerican Unrest* (2011).

on dissidents that preceded these conferences, and the novel's championing of Afro-Cuban culture is read by Park as a deliberate counterpoint to Gerardo Machado's enthusiasm for the welcome ideological cover provided by the institutions and ideology of the PAU for his authoritarian regime. This is dense historicist reading at its best, alert both to the novel's textual complexities and to the contemporary entwined discourses of anthropology and criminology.

Whereas Carpentier's novel marked a sharp contrast with everything that the PAU stood for, the work of the journalist and travel writer Carleton Beals is, Park goes on to suggest, more implicated, if not complicit, with PAU approaches, despite apparently sharp political differences. Beals had made his name in Mexico and Central America, interviewing Augusto Sandino in 1928 under the noses of U.S. marines who were trying to find him. The following year Beals's close friend Julio Antonio Mella was murdered by Machado's agents in Mexico City, making Beals determined to see first-hand the brutality of the Cuban dictator's rule. *The Crime of Cuba* (1933) was actually published two weeks after Machado was ousted but, with Cuba in the headlines, the book became a popular success, its vivid picture of Cuban life bolstered by Walker Evans's telling photographs. Here, Park's analysis focuses on the contradictions between Beals's anti-imperialist critique and his deep-seated sense of racial and national superiority.

The chapter on Katherine Dunham is equally nuanced, suggesting that she imagined an alternative kind of Pan Americanism, "one that created networks of cooperation and understanding among peoples of the African diaspora" (p. 192); to which end he sets accounts of her Haitian travels in 1936 against the retrospective version in her *Island Possessed* (1969), written after she experienced the decolonizing movements of the 1950s and 1960s, which led her to live in Senegal and to take an active role in Léopold Senghor's Black Arts Movement.

All in all, *The Pan American Imagination* is a valuable contribution to the new transnational American literary and cultural history that is gradually being pieced together, a history in which the Caribbean has such a central place.

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