Andrea J. Queeley

Rescuing Our Roots: The African Anglo-Caribbean Diaspora in Contemporary Cuba.
Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015. xiv + 258 pp. (Cloth US\$ 79.95)

Philip A. Howard

Black Labor, White Sugar: Caribbean Braceros and Their Struggle for Power in the Cuban Sugar Industry. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015. xii + 303 pp. (Cloth US\$ 47.50)

These two books deal with a topic I've been researching for years. Such intimacy can lead to meticulous scrutiny and demands a balancing act between assessing the books properly and resisting the urge to advance personal views. With that dilemma in mind, I enter familiar territory for this review.

Historian Philip Howard examines the migration of thousands of Haitians and British Antillean workers to Cuba during the early twentieth century. Anthropologist Andrea Queeley studies the descendants of British Caribbean people in contemporary Cuba, focusing on the "Special Period." Together they cover a long twentieth-century story through opposite chronological routes.

Queeley's ethnography focuses on the eastern Cuban provinces of Santiago and Guantánamo, where the British West Indian Welfare Centre (BWIWC) was founded in the 1940s. Based on her fieldwork, and over 40 interviews, the book departs from the revitalization of the BWIWC after 1992, led by its Young People's Department. It reviews the lives of British Antilleans and their descendants during the Revolution and a "nesting" period during the 1970s and 1980s, as well as their efforts in the 1990s to rescue their Caribbean roots.

The introduction contextualizes the study theoretically, offering detailed insights on the methodology and its challenges. Chapter 1 provides a focused historical background that covers the history of British Caribbean migration to Cuba. Queeley is disciplined in building an efficient narrative and discussing only those aspects of a larger and more complex history that will be necessary for her study.

Chapter 2 looks into the lives of African Anglo-Caribbean migrants during the Revolution, including complex politics of belonging. Foreign black Caribbean migrants experienced varying degrees of racism and xenophobia during the Republican Era (1902–58). But still, by the 1940s, many remained in Cuba. With time, families flourished, ties to Cuba strengthened, and British Antilleans "became Cuban," as Robert Whitney and Graciela Chailloux Lafitta put it in *Subjects or Citizens* (2013). Queeley's research takes the "becoming Cuban" discussion into the Revolution, exploring to what degree migrants and their descendants would belong in Cuba and its ongoing political process.

In Chapter 2, the U.S. Naval Base in Guantánamo, as a labor site for British Antilleans, becomes part of the migrants' transitional history. Here, Queeley discusses the flow of information between the base and Guantánamo, including access to the television program *Soul Train* during the 1970s and 1980s. As an example of transnational connections, she sees this program as facilitating a "diaspora space" between her subjects in Cuba and African Americans in the United States. This Cuban-U.S. connection prompted me to wonder how the people she refers to as "African Anglo-Caribbeans" in Cuba connected to Michael Manley's Jamaica in the 1970s, with its embrace of democratic socialism and Fidel Castro. This is an intriguing silence in the book.

In Chapters 3–5 Queeley confronts the ways in which African Anglo-Caribbeans survived during the "Special Period," discussing, among other things, the simultaneousness of the revitalization of African Anglo-Caribbean institutions and increasing antiblack racism in Cuba during the 1990s and early 2000s. Also important in these chapters, and throughout the book, is her analysis of an "affirmative blackness" among her interviewees, and the contrast she draws between Rastafari and manifestations of respectability anchored in religion and Victorian values.

Rescuing Our Roots is an important intervention in two areas loosely linked to its main subject matter. First, any foreigner who has done scholarly work in Cuba during the "Special Period" will identify and recall the research pitfalls Queeley encountered. Second, the book provides insights about life in Cuba over the past two decades, but also captures, with impressive perceptiveness, important elements of the politics of race in Cuba, not only for African Anglo-Caribbeans, but also for Cubans themselves.

Black Labor, White Sugar provides the historical background for the African Anglo-Caribbeans in Queeley's ethnography, but adds Haitians into the mix. It aims to study the "socioeconomic and cultural experiences" of Caribbean migrants "as they labored and lived in the sugarcane enclaves of Cuba" (p. 5), looking at their activities in connection with the development of the Cuban sugar industry and the way their presence "informed Cuban society at large" (p. 9).

The book has an introduction, six chapters, an epilogue, and maps of Cuba (including sugar mills), Jamaica, and Haiti. Chapter 1 establishes the relationship between the sugar industry and Caribbean migrant labor after the U.S. military intervention in 1898. Chapter 2 examines how these workers were "subjugated" or made victims of "conjugated oppression" in sugar plantations. Chapter 3 looks at strategies of resistance, with emphasis on the 1910s. Chapters 4 and 5 cover the 1910s and 1920s, and present the migrant workers as militants

in the anarcho-syndicalist movement that allegedly converged with Garveyism. Chapter 6 looks at the way Cuban nationalism affected the lives of Caribbean migrants between the late 1920s and the early 1930s.

Admittedly, this is a complex history to build and write about, and one that can be told from various perspectives: migration history, history of Afro-Caribbean diaspora, and labor history. Howard does not provide a clear storyline and his narrative is at times fractured, but the chapters remain glued together and the pages of the book provide historical information about British Caribbean and Haitian migrants that is otherwise scattered in diverse publications. But at the same time, the book does not add much to what has already been written on the comparative analysis of these migrations to Cuba. (See, for example, Marc C. McLeod's "Undesirable Aliens" in the *Journal of Social History*, Spring 1998.)

Howard's emphasis is on his interpretation of migrants' struggles as part of the "anarcho-syndicalist" movement and, according to him, in "convergence" with Garveyism, but the book provides limited evidence. In a 303-page monograph, one would expect to find significantly more information than what we already know from publications by Barry Carr, Jorge Ibarra, Marc McLeod, and Robert Whitney. He provides little concrete information on labor unions' involvement and membership, their participation in strikes, or their concrete role in anarchist organizations. This is particularly evident in Chapter 4, where specific instances of working-class contention involving foreign workers seems blurred into a narrative that reads more like a general history of Cuban labor struggles. I know the frustrations of not finding enough evidence of black Caribbean working-class activism. But our historical accounts should be based on evidence, not desires, and Howard's broader claims of "anarcho-syndicalism" among migrants need more of the former. Chapter 5 discusses the important participation of black Caribbean migrants in Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, but evidence of the "convergence" of Garveyites and anarcho-syndicalism remains elusive.

Not only are Howard's statements and conclusions about the migrants supported by thin evidence, but when he makes them he repeatedly draws on studies of Caribbean migrants elsewhere (Central America and the Dominican Republic), rather than his evidence from Cuba. And his use of it is problematic. For example, when discussing debates in Cuban newspapers on immigration between two writers, "Billiken" and "Tristán," Howard identifies the latter as a "black Cuban and cook by trade." He thus takes "Tristán" as a real character in the main text narrative, hiding his identity as essayist Ramón Vasconcelos in an endnote. Vasconcelos was not a cook, and he was a mulatto—an important distinction in Cuba. And it's not clear why this discussion is presented in a

sequence that does not correspond to the sources' chronological order. Another example of Howard's management of evidence is his argument that sugar companies' decisions on selecting laborers "remain hidden due to the lack of documentation" (p. 42). In my experience, company records—including some used by Howard—contain much information about the preferences of sugar managers and administrators in labor recruitment. Finally, Howard makes no distinction between immigration legislation and presidential decrees on immigration, and dates William Preston Stoute's arrival in Cuba to 1917, though Stoute was in Panama from 1910 to at least 1920.

Howard's use of concepts and categories is also problematic. He treats all sugar plantations as "enclaves," without making distinctions or using the concept of the company town. I was left wondering about whether the use of the word "genocide" in 1912 was Howard's or his source's. At different points, references to ethnicity and culture are rather unclear, and the overuse of "ideology" throughout the text would concern any sociologist. Categories to describe black Caribbean workers are also misleading; not all of them were *macheteros* and *carreteros*. Howard cites the label *pichón* as one used for Haitians, without mentioning that it was also widely used for Jamaicans. And Howard should know that between *jamaicano* and *jamaiquino*, only the latter is pejorative.

Ideally, these two books would have made a perfect complementary duo about Caribbean peoples in Cuba during the whole twentieth century. But because Howard remains in the customary chronological treatment of Caribbean migration to Cuba, stopping in 1933 with the Nationalization of Labor Law, he does not cover events of the Caribbean migrant experience in the 1940s that would have bridged the gap, meeting Queeley's post-Revolutionary story. In the end, the rigor and conceptual sophistication of the anthropologist has surpassed that of the historian.

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