Aisha Finch & Fannie Rushing (eds.), *Breaking the Chains, Forging the Nation: The Afro-Cuban Fight for Freedom and Equality, 1812–1912*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2019. xvi + 321 pp. (Cloth US\$ 55.00)

Ever since the surge in Afro-Cuban studies within North Atlantic academia of the 1990s, I have longed for a book bridging the 1812 Aponte rebellion and the “Race War” of 1912. While I had in mind a monograph, *Breaking the Chains, Forging the Nation* fulfills part of my desire for a century-long coverage.

Editors Aisha Finch and Fannie Rushing must be commended for fostering a “communal dialogue and writing” that runs through the whole range of articles. The contributions include a healthy dose of North-Atlantic-based scholars at different stages of their careers as well as translations of work from Cuban-based authors such as the late Gloria García, Bárbara Danzén León, and Isabel Hernández Campos. The thoughtful organization of sections and chapters is a feature of the book that deserves praise. (LSU Press planned to put a related bibliographic essay by another Cuban researcher, Tomás Fernández Robaina, on its website, but as of February 2020 it was not available.)

Breaking the Chains is divided into three overlapping parts. The first two sections revolve around the “Era of Aponte” and the “Age of La Escalera,” two important landmarks for both the Afro-Cuban struggle against slavery and the racist repression of the Spanish colonial State. The third section covers the years of independence wars (1868–98), the postemancipation period, and the buildup to the uprising and repression of the Partido Independiente de Color (PIC) in 1912. The division between sections and chapters is not rigid, and the dialogue between authors is evident in most articles, facilitating historical and thematic connections for readers.

Beth Luey once described editing a book as “one of the most nerve-racking experiences of a lifetime” (*Handbook for Academic Authors*, 2010, p. 108). This one feels, rather, like a labor of love and intellectual camaraderie, leaving the nerve-racking weight to the reviewer. The fact that Finch and Fanning recruited leading scholars (Matt Childs, Ada Ferrer, and Aline Helg) to write introductions for each of the three parts and included a foreword by Gwendolyn Midlo Hall and an afterword by W.F. Santiago-Valles adds to the challenge. These five pieces help contextualize, connect, and digest the other contributions. Given this slate of contributors, my options were either a broad assessment of the book as a whole or nitpicking at its pieces. I lean to the former.

Readers should not be deceived by the reference to “the nation” in the book’s title. While contributors provide histories highlighting the role of Blacks in the Cuban national formation, they move beyond territorial boundaries. Manuel Barcia discusses warfare knowledge from West Africa in Cuba, a connection

between two locations that is also touched on by Michele Reid-Vázquez's examination of women during the La Escalera conspiracy. Bárbara Danzie León's assessment of José Luciano Franco considers the hemispheric dimension of his *oeuvre*, while Fannie Rushing addresses Afro-Cuban and U.S. transnational connections in pro-independence struggles and beyond.

A book dealing with race in Cuba's long nineteenth century must touch upon the theme of "Black fear," which is why I agreed to do this review. "Black fear" is often invoked in the historiography, yet rarely explained, and I wanted to read what the authors had to say. Indeed, they go beyond simple mentions of this fear to describe layers of its manifestation. Reid-Vázquez deals with the surveillance of women in the aftermath of La Escalera, Jacqueline Grant examines the reaction to public displays of *ñañigos* in urban spaces, and Joseph Dorsey tells the story of Gavino, an *emancipado* feared by Spanish colonial authorities even after his death. Aisha Finch's stimulating essay contains elements that go far toward explaining the "Black fear" sociologically by suggesting that the response of the elites was "technologies of black containment" (p. 140). Although she moves in other directions, elaborating the notion of "repeating rebellion" to assess the agency of the enslaved in early nineteenth-century rural Cuba, I think it's worth pointing to her (perhaps unintentional) contribution to explaining the "Black fear."

I cannot leave unmentioned the refreshingly gendered look at Afro-Cuban struggles that appear throughout the different essays, including those by Reid-Vázquez and Grant, but also Matthew Pettway, Melina Pappademos, and Takkara Brunson. From the poetry of Plácido (Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés) to the history of the PIC, masculinity and women's agency are insightfully interrogated.

The wealth of knowledge in this book far outweighs the few things that left this nit-picking reviewer unsatisfied. Teachers of Cuban and African-diaspora history should see *Breaking the Chains, Forging the Nation* as a house, one where a family of scholars lived and thrived, opening windows into their own work (many have their own books), but also into new landscapes of future research.

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