Rafael Ocasio, *Race & Nation in Puerto Rican Folklore: Franz Boas and John Alden Mason in Porto Rico*. New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2020. vii + 239 pp. (Paper US\$ 34.95)

Race & Nation in Puerto Rican Folklore assesses anthropological studies by John Alden Mason and Franz Boas in Puerto Rico at the turn of the twentieth century. Through an introduction, six chapters, and a conclusion, Rafael Ocasio places Mason's fieldwork as part of the North American interest in exploring the Caribbean territories of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Far from seeing it in a social and academic vacuum, he examines Mason's ethnographic research under the tutelage of Boas and, to a lesser extent, Boas's own anthropometric investigations against the political and social context in Puerto Rico during their respective stays on the island.

Ocasio goes to great length to document Mason's fieldwork through research in various archives in the United States and Puerto Rico, thoroughly examining communications between the young anthropologist and his mentor, Franz Boas. However, the book is more than a summary of Mason's time in Puerto Rico. It discusses the methodological and theoretical influences that guided his research under Boas's tutelage. Ocasio also outlines the challenges Mason confronted in the field and the editorial process with linguist Aurelio Espinosa, who published Mason's fieldnotes between 1916 and 1929 in the *Journal of American Folklore*.

Race & Nation in Puerto Rican Folklore joins studies by a group of scholars who have used Mason's ethnographic work to help raise awareness of the experiences of marginalized sectors in Puerto Rican society. Among these are Lillian Guerra's *Popular Expression and National Identity in Puerto Rico* (1998) and Jorge Duany's *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move* (2003). In that regard, Ocasio's book is not novel. For example, in Chapters 3 and 4, he presents an analysis of enchanting stories and other folktales to explore signs of Puerto Ricanness expressed in folklore. This follows Guerra's analysis of Mason's collected folktales, riddles, and songs. However, Ocasio does not offer a conceptual or interpretative tool—as Guerra put forward with the concept of “folkloric politics”—to analyze folklore in the national identity process in Puerto Rico at the turn of the century.

Nonetheless, Ocasio provides valuable and mostly unpublished information about the Afro-Puerto Rican population's folklore in the town of Loiza. There he met Melitón Congo, a man who claimed to have come in the last slave ship to Puerto Rico and shared with Mason an extensive Congo vocabulary that ranged from ordinary household utensils and animals to healing plants. He stresses that Mason examined and validated Black Puerto Rican culture that had been

silenced by native scholars of the period. However, as Ocasio indicates, neither Mason nor Boas published or continued their Afro-Puerto Rican culture research. It would have been great if Ocasio had explained his thoughts as to why neither Mason nor Boas felt that the interesting and unique information provided by Melitón Congo was not suitable for publication.

Despite having the influential name of Franz Boas in the title, the book focuses much more on Mason's work on the island. Indeed, Boas's work in Puerto Rico has been poorly acknowledged compared to Mason's. This is not surprising since Mason spent much more time (1914–15) in Puerto Rico than Boas did. Nevertheless, Ocasio examines Boas's influence on Mason's fieldwork and briefly considers Boas's anthropometric project. Boas, who arrived on the Island in May of 1915, set to explore the effects on the "environment upon the development of men" and the "race-mixture with reference to form of heredity in man" (p. 4). The research resulted in Boas's only publication about Puerto Rico, in 1920.

Race & Nation in Puerto Rican Folklore will be of interest to all those who wish to deepen their understanding of early twentieth-century American anthropology in Puerto Rico. Ocasio tries to rectify the lack of social and historical contextualization of work by Mason and Boas, and seeks to situate these scholars' research within the political and social reality of Puerto Rico at the time of their visits to the Island. However, despite the good intentions, the result is a fragmented book that leaves readers wanting to understand better how these anthropologists' fieldwork fit into the Puerto Rican reality of that time.

These last caveats should not deter any scholar of Puerto Rican history from reading this well-written and engaging book—in particular, those interested in a new chapter of American anthropology in the period following the acquisition of the Caribbean territories in 1898.

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