

Armando García de la Torre

José Martí and the Global Origins of Cuban Independence. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2015. xiv + 225 pp. (Paper US\$38.00)

Armando García de la Torre incorporates Cuban national hero José Martí's achievements as political organizer and literary talent into an important exposition of the global nature of Martí's political and spiritual sensibilities. This fills the historiographic and ideological gap between early nineteenth-century anti-colonial movements in continental Latin America and Cuba's independence struggles later in that century. Martí's admiration for both the anti-imperialist successes of other Latin American nations and the quest for sovereignty in Europe's Asian colonies serves to link historical periods, regions, and political objectives that could benefit from greater scholarly attention. Martí wanted his Cuban and other Latin American audiences to recognize the global commonality of their anticolonialism. His writings describe other valiant fights for national sovereignty in places such as Venezuela, India, and Annam (later Vietnam), whose people had been subjugated to colonialist oppression, but had either vanquished it or continued to struggle against it.

García de la Torre is most innovative in attempting a non-Eurocentric reading of Martí, depicting a man who actively sought to escape the confines of western political philosophy from Hindu and Buddhist philosophies. While earlier scholars such as José Ballón Aguirre and Philip Foner have noted Martí's engagement with transcendentalism, García de la Torre is the first to thoroughly interrogate it. He acknowledges that Martí's direct reading of classical Hindu texts is unprovable. However, Martí was unequivocal about his interest in the works of Boston Brahmins, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, and European philosophers such as Karl C.F. Krause. Martí's homage to Emerson serves as one piece of the project's evidence. Martí wrote with praise that it was sitting "in the blinding glow of those brilliant Hindu books" that allowed Emerson to find unparalleled insights for humanity's elevation (p. 73).

García de la Torre compares Martí's worldview with that found in the Hindu sacred poem, the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Instead of adopting a standard Judeo-Christian philosophy of a fully external divinity, he professed the divinity that lived untapped within most people. Life's purpose was to bring forth that divinity. García de la Torre argues that for Martí the struggle for Cuban independence was defined by that spiritual mission. "Martí conceived of the Cuban nation-state as divine, a 'God *patria*,' and not as a distinct entity composed of homogeneous ethnic, historic, or linguistic elements, in contrast to other nationalists of his time" (p. 21). Through sacrifice, he argued, people move closer to their individual divinity and that of the nation.

One limitation of García de la Torre's ambitious project is that it is so focused on defending its original arguments that it ignores some of the long-established interpretations and contextualization of Martí. It is overreach to say that Martí did not draw on Cuba's unique history in his effort to create political unity among its inhabitants. Caution is in order in discussing Martí's emphasis on sacrifice and martyrdom solely in terms of Hindu thought. He would also have been well versed in Classical and Judeo-Christian history. Similarly, García de la Torre's lack of recognition that Hindu philosophy sustained extreme social division in the form of a deeply entrenched caste system suggests a romanticization of Martí's reading of it. This contradicts his explicit efforts to avoid previous hagiographic approaches to Martí.

The book contributes to the continuing analysis of Martí's views on race. While there is consensus on Martí's rejection of biological racism, the extent to which his antiracism expanded into cultural terrains remains debated. By relying almost exclusively upon Martí's relationships with late nineteenth-century Afro-Cuban political leaders Antonio Maceo, Rafael Serra, and Juan Gualberto Gómez, García de la Torre's suggestion that his receptiveness to the "experiencing of African-derived Cuban culture" is insufficiently sustained. He leaves that term unexplained, and his readers may wonder how it pertains to the social behavior of the Afro-Cuban masses. He does not present any of these three Afro-Cubans as accepting or practicing worldviews outside of the dominant Eurocentric ones of their era. Nevertheless, the distinctions that he demonstrates in Martí's relationships with each of them are useful in further exposing the heterogeneity of Afro-Cuban political radicalism.

This is a valuable work. However, it faces some of the major challenges inherent in intellectual history, especially efforts to write it on a global scale. Intellectuals largely remain a very select class, regardless of their national origins. They are those whose thoughts survive in written texts. The philosophies of the masses remain unimagined and unaccessed. As Martí made intellectual efforts to link Cuban humanity to national sovereignty and to advance the welfare of its masses, especially Afro-Cubans, he lived with little knowledge of their worldviews. An irony of this book is that it ultimately demonstrates, against the protestations of its author, that even Martí's progressive engagement with non-European thought was authorized primarily through white men such as Emerson.

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