

ROBERT WHITNEY: *State and Revolution in Cuba: Mass Mobilization and Political Change, 1920-1940*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

Cuban historiography has been witnessing a rebirth of studies of the Cuban Republic (1902-1958). Scholars are now revisiting an era that had been neglected until recently, largely due to the barriers erected by the Cold War. Thanks to an acceleration of scholarly exchanges between researchers inside and outside Cuba, we are beginning to see the fruit of this resurgence. Moreover, the creation of the University of North Carolina Press's "Envisioning Cuba" series, the publisher of the book reviewed here, demonstrates that a prolific period in Cuban historical studies has now arrived.

Robert Whitney's *State and Revolution in Cuba* is a welcome addition to this trend. Drawing largely upon diplomatic correspondence, particularly from the Public Record Office in London, newspaper sources, as well as documents from Cuba's Institute of History, Whitney offers a political analysis that enriches our understanding of the critical 1920-1940 period in Cuba. To the author, the political significance of these decades lies in Cuba's transition from an "oligarchic" to a "modern" state. Whitney argues that this transition was prompted by the mass mobilization of the *clases populares*, a term he uses to characterize "urban and rural wage laborers, peasants, the lower middle-class groups of students, government employees, and those involved in petty commerce" (p. 4). Prior to the 1920s, oligarchic rule linked to the US dominated sugar export economy was maintained through local and regional power brokers, often called *caudillos* or *caciques* in the Latin American context. However, the edifice of oligarchic rule began to crumble as the Cuban sugar economy declined during the 1920s. The worsening economic crisis provided the backdrop not only for nationalist mobilization by student activists, but more importantly for Whitney, the mass mobilization of the *clases populares* during the revolution of 1933. As Whitney rightly argues, the eruption of the popular sectors in 1933 destroyed a government that had effectively maintained power through *caciquismo*, the hallmark of oligarchic rule. In September 1933, the oligarchic state was temporarily replaced by a fragile coalition of radicalized segments of the middle class and disaffected members of the military under the leadership of Ramón Grau San Martín. Whitney traces the collapse of the Grau regime, which caved in under the weight of a decimated economy along with political pressures from a hostile US Embassy and Cuban elite, as well as from the organized and spontaneous uprisings of the popular sectors.

In the reviewer's estimation, Whitney's most valuable contribution is his analysis of Cuban political culture after the revolution of 1933. Although more

---

aspects of these tumultuous years remain to be uncovered, ultimately he convincingly shows how the revolution dramatically changed Cuban political culture. The rise of the popular sectors ensured that a new nationalism linked to social reform would be the new hegemonic discourse that politicians could not ignore after 1933, even as the island remained under the thumb of US interests.

This political transformation was supervised by the unlikely figure of Fulgencio Batista. To Whitney, Batista continued the process of state formation that had been initiated by the Grau government. He accomplished this by first using his control of the army and police to “discipline” the popular sectors and eliminate his political competition on the right and left during the two years after the revolution. After 1936 however, the colonel was able to reinvent himself as a populist. The centerpiece of this transformation was his “Three Year Plan,” a political project that was noteworthy less for what it accomplished and more for what it promised to the *clases populares*. A man from the *clases populares* himself, Batista believed he was “appointed by destiny” to oversee Cuba’s transition to a modern state. However, Whitney shows that Batista was helped by a particular set of domestic and international circumstances that allowed him to achieve his goals of political stability and gradual social reform. Whitney’s interpretation sheds light on how a mulatto from the popular sectors championing social reform was able to rule a nation subject to US imperialism and a notoriously conservative domestic political elite.

Whitney’s analysis goes a long way toward unveiling the many layers of the ambiguous personality of Batista, a figure who, as the author points out, still deserves an in-depth biography. Some may quibble with Whitney’s centralization of Batista’s role in the reconstruction of the Cuban state after 1933. At points in the narrative, it seems that the colonel pulled off this magic act all by himself. And as Whitney himself points out, the persistence of forms of oligarchic rule, namely *caciquismo* in the post-1933 period and in particular how the Batista governments were able to graft themselves onto that structure, needs further explanation. Nevertheless, such unanswered questions do not take away from Whitney’s central point regarding Batista’s important role in the reconstruction of the Cuban state. The author shows how Batista managed to accomplish this by transforming himself from a ruthless military dictator to a “slippery populist” dedicated to social reform who eventually was elected president in 1940. Such reincarnations indicate that scholars need to cut through the image of a ruthless tyrant constructed by post-1959 propaganda and explore the many faces of this fascinating political figure and the times that he lived.

Whitney’s book not only is a valuable contribution to Cuban historiography, but also fits nicely into the ongoing debates on state formation in Latin America, particularly the scholarship on the reconstruction of the national state in 19<sup>th</sup>-

and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Mexico. Within the field Cuban Studies, the publication of Whitney's book is an encouraging sign that the clouds of the Cold War are gradually lifting. One hopes that the eventual political transition in Cuba will not curtail the production of such scholarly work, a fine example that is evidenced in *State and Revolution in Cuba*.

Frank A. Guridy

Wheaton College

MARY A. RENDA: *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism 1915-1940*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

Mary Renda's book about the United States occupation of Haiti between 1915 and 1934 addresses two different questions: how US culture was used in the justification of the occupation and how military presence in Haiti contributed to the transformation of culture in the US between 1920 and 1940. It is not a history of the occupation, nor does it purport to explain the causes or effects of it, although enough background is provided to make the book accessible to non-specialists on Haiti.

For those wanting to learn about Haiti, the most interesting part of the book is the one dealing with the occupation itself. Renda's analysis enhances our understanding of such conspicuous facts as the use of violence and the racism expressed by the marines when dealing with the local population. The (yet unproven) thesis has sometimes been advanced that a majority of the soldiers in the occupation force are likely to have been Southerners, who "knew" how to deal with blacks. Renda has an alternative explanation: paternalism. Underlying the perceptions and actions of the marines was the belief that Haitians were not capable of forging their own destinies but needed guidance from a more advanced nation.

This view was shared by major and minor actors alike, from President Wilson to the common marine soldier. It was used actively in the propaganda, both in recruitment campaigns and in the representation of the occupation in Haiti as well as in the United States. It allowed the marines to punish, and if necessary kill, Haitian "bandits," since this contributed to the protection of the "ordinary citizen." It also provided a rationale for stimulating American direct investment in Haiti and for spending on the development of physical infrastructure in the country, even with the aid of *corvée* labor. The tutelage by Uncle Sam was necessary and it was the contact with a more advanced economic system that would put Haiti on the road to sustained economic development. Unfortunately,