

## Book Review

**Anne Fountain. *José Martí, the United States, and Race, UP of Florida, 2014.* 161 pp.**

“Brevity is the source of wit,” claimed the Bard, and Argentine-American scholar Anne Fountain’s latest contribution to Martí studies, one of many, clearly exemplifies this adage. Almost any presentation or manual on how to turn a dissertation into a book conveys the same message: outside the most elite circles, academic books longer than 90,000 words are things of the past. The polysyllabic gobbledygook in which so many cultural studies scholars peddle simply does not sell. With an ever-smaller canvas on which to paint, one must choose her colors carefully. Fountain found a way to add many shades of Martí into her work, encapsulating the author’s entire twenty-seven volume oeuvre and adding perspective to a limpid, compelling argument: José Martí’s notions of race were, while sometimes inconsistent and contradictory, highly progressive and profoundly influenced by his exile in the United States, which lasted one third of his life (xii, 10). Overcoming racism was central to his vision for an independent Cuba and an autonomous Latin America (xii). These arguments make the book relevant to scholars on Cuba, race, the African diaspora, Native Americans, and Latino studies. While providing ample documentation for her arguments, she expresses herself in a way that is accessible and engaging not only for those who are not literary scholars, indicated by her endorsement by the *American Historical Review*, but also undergraduates. The ten to fifteen-page chapters are a quick read and a valuable resource for teachers with realistic expectations of how much students typically complete. Her reader easily remembers what each chapter is about, due to her clear, explicit headings, introductions, and conclusions.

Fountain’s first chapter describes Martí’s formative years in Cuba and Spain, mentioning new resources for further study and understudied works.

Among his rebellious early works is the play *Abdala*, an allegory depicting Cuba’s 1868-1878 struggle for independence, the Ten Years’ War. Based on the African heritage of most independence fighters, he establishes parallels between his country and a Nubian kingdom (4). The second chapter deals with the early days of Martí’s exile in the United States. He sees in the lynchings of the US South the repetition of a haunting leitmotif of his – and Fountain’s – work: the hanging of an escaped slave he witnessed as a boy in Cuba (16). These injustices were for him, along with many other abolitionists, a shameful example of the ills of slavery and racism. While Martí decried injustice, he also attempted to underscore the accomplishments, dignity, and, in many ways, agency, of blacks. For example, Martí’s journalism depicts Tomás Surí, an Afro-Cuban independence fighter whom he praises for his valor, for learning to read with few resources, and for his dedication to the nation, though she notes he does not advocate for marronage (30). I would add that, on this point, Surí is not Esteban Montejo, and Martí is not Miguel Barnet, but he can be seen as a nineteenth-century precursor in some ways. Fountain’s third chapter describes the Afro-Cubans Martí taught and inspired to support national independence while he was in the United States. Fountain highlights Afro-Cubans Rafael Serra, Martín Morúa Delgado, Juan Gualberto Gómez, and Paulina Pedroso, all of whom deserve further study due to their unique perspective as Afro-Latino immigrants and exiles *avant la lettre* (36, 43). Photos of most of them provide visibility for an often-invisible or distorted population, not just decoration. She does not mention Martí’s collaborator, Afro-Puerto Rican Arturo Alfonso Schomburg, perhaps because there are other studies on him. Fountain’s chapter on African Americans

during Reconstruction presents Martí's horror at lynching, described in his journalism, as a precursor to Nicolás Guillén's "Elegía a Emmet Till" (1955) (57). Her "Chronicle of the Crusaders" discusses the impact of abolitionists William Lloyd Garrison, John Brown, Wendell Phillips, and Harriet Beecher Stowe on Martí, who considered abolitionism humanity's "most noble crusade" (59). Fountain's inter-American perspective sheds an uncomfortable light on Frederick Douglass, though. She claims he "had sold out in his old age" by the time he was US ambassador to Haiti, echoing Martí's description (72). While the Cuban admired him as a former slave, orator, and abolitionist, he seemed afraid the US would attempt to invade Cuba as it was establishing a neo-Colony on Hispaniola (72). Here, Fountain could have added a sentence portraying Douglass as a puppet in an imperialist scheme, which might be more forgiving (72). Martí ties the abolitionist to the slaveocrat ambitions of William Walker in Nicaragua (73). On the other hand, he praises the nonviolent abolitionism of Henry Highland Garnet and John Greenleaf Whittier (74). Native Americans – and Guatemalans, and Mexicans – are shown in Chapter 6 to have influenced Martí personally and in his classic "Nuestra América" (77). In Mexico, he befriended the lawyer Manuel Mercado and penned an "Indian Drama" on Aztecs and Taínos for the Guatemalan government (78–79). He was sometimes frustrated by failed attempts to teach disadvantaged Guatemalans to read, indicating his deep, if not always realistic, faith that traditional, secular education would help others advance (79). On the other hand, US Wild West Shows, museum exhibitions of the Americas, and Helen Hunt Jackson's novel on the Mexican-American war *Ramona* (1884) presented a more stirring image of the indigenous (79). Martí sympathized with the injustices meted out on American Indians but expected them to assimilate through individual property and Western education (85). Fountain is wise to point out that Amerindians had ample reason to distrust the US government and educational systems and relates US Indian policy to Argentina's genocidal Guerra del Desierto (85). This context illuminates her claim that "Nuestra América" is not disparaging to Amerindians (94). "Immigrant Communities" puts the exile in context with other immigrants, whom Martí prophetically called "hebreos," since the term "diaspora" was, in the

late nineteenth century, used primarily for Jews (97). His American-ness is evident in his witnessing the unveiling of the Statue of Liberty, and Fountain ties the "huddled masses" of European immigrants to Martí's take on unions (96). Martí contrasted the relative welcome given to Europeans to the Chinese immigrants that, as Fountain adds, would form Havana's China town when they were (re)exiled from the United States (102). In her penultimate chapter, she presents the Cuban's "Responses to US Racism," showing that he disavowed Social Darwinism and Whitening discourse, and again making US and Argentine connections (113-14). His rejection of his time's dominant forms of racism was tied to his top priority: Cuban independence, which was challenged by the US's common justification for colonizing "inferior races" like those of the Caribbean (115). Fountain concludes by confessing: "I originally thought Martí was more ambivalent about race. . . but now I believe that his perspective is more revolutionary than ambivalent" (120), and her research shows that "contacts with many different ethnic groups in the United States informed and enriched Martí's writing about race" (126).

In a case of what appears to be serendipity, Cuban writer Miguel Cabrera Peña, writing in Chile, published in the same year as Fountain his *¿Fue José Martí racista? Perspectiva sobre los negros en Cuba y Estados Unidos (Una crítica a la Academia norteamericana)* (Betania, Madrid, 2014). As the title implies, he summarily rejects all US criticism on Martí (because, he claims, he is Latin American) since 1990 because it does not present him as being anti-racist. Fountain's book is so clear, so well-researched, and so definitive in its contradiction of this claim that it is not only a must-read for English-speakers but it should also be translated into Spanish to participate more fully in the polemic on Martí, the United States, and race.

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