

Clealand, Danielle Pilar. *The Power of Race in Cuba: Racial Ideology and Black Consciousness during the Revolution.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 2017. xi, 255 pp. (\$99.00 cloth).

Though the notion that racism is uniquely an “American” problem is globally prominent, scholars of race and politics have provided a great deal of evidence that racism knows no boundaries. As racial ideologies cross borders, they transform and become customized to suit the historical and contemporary reality of various places. Danielle Pilar Clealand prioritizes the voices of Black Cuban citizens to describe and analyze the shape of dominant and emerging racial ideologies in 21st century Cuba.

Sociologists like Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and Tonya Golash-Boza make clear that though there is often a dominant racial ideology in any particular society, there are often several existing at once, some of which are contradictory while others are directly oppositional. This becomes quite clear in *The Power of Race in Cuba*. Clealand’s book puts into conversation the ways in which the state has worked to entrench a particular set of ideas about the role of race and racism in the country with the perspectives of Black Cubans, many of whom have become increasingly aware that their reality does not match the dominant messages of the state, which emphasize that the Revolution has worked to minimize (if not eliminate) racism on the island.

By connecting literatures across disciplines (e.g. sociology, anthropology, history, political science), Clealand builds a two-part theoretical apparatus. From one end, she describes the working components of the dominant racial ideology, promoted by the state and perpetuated by citizens across racial groups who believe in the power of the on-going processes of the Revolution. Here, we learn that the prevailing account of race in Cuba relies on the institutional silencing of talk about race, what Clealand calls “anti-racialism,” and constraining definitions of racism to individual acts or attitudes of prejudice, rather than as structural or institutional. There are moments of clarity where the author is able to illustrate incredibly important nuances; for example, she explains, “racial democracy in Cuba is a political project of the revolution that has managed to convince citizens, perhaps not of its truth, but of the genuine desire of the government to make it true” (26). To be sure, Clealand’s book reveals that the citizens of Cuba are not racially naïve, per se, but instead that they, like the rest of us, view race and racism through a very specific set of lenses. But why do some people see things differently?

Clealand then elucidates the fact that Cuba’s dominant racial ideology is not the only one that exists. Black Cubans have historically been aware of the role of structural inequalities, and were part of a revolutionary movement that was supposed to eradicate racial inequality; though the government has sought to suppress voices that suggest otherwise, this book provides insight into the conversations that Black Cubans are having about persistent anti-Black racism still pervades the country—both in the intimate surroundings of their home and neighborhoods and increasingly in public, especially among academics, artists, musicians, and a generation that was born after the Special Period. Clealand, building on the work of Mark Sawyer’s seminal text on Cuba’s racial politics, finds that the Special Period served to put into sharp relief the fact that racial inequality was not completely eradicated by the Revolution and, instead, had actually served to exacerbate inequity. An important consequence of recognizing this contradiction is the development of Black consciousness.

The data that form the basis of the ground-up, citizen-centered analysis come from originally collected survey data and a series of interviews. Clealand collected data during 2008 and 2009 with the help of two Cubans. The strength of the survey data stem not only from its fairly large sample size (409) but also from the fact that Clealand shaped questions in such a way that would allow her to coax a generally reluctant population to discuss a taboo and state-censured topic. It becomes quite obvious that the author immersed herself in the norms of the country, thus allowing her to balance the safety of her respondents, the specter of social desirability, and the quality of survey apparatus. The qualitative data provide a rich depiction of Black, white and *mulato* citizens' sentiments about race and racism in their country.

These data reveal that many Black citizens are well aware of the ways in which they are excluded from jobs, ascribed negative stereotypes, disappeared from history, lack descriptive representation in the government, regarded as undesirable romantic partners, and avoided in the media. Interestingly, many see each of these points of exclusion as individual examples of racism but would not go so far as to call this combination of factors institutional or structural racism. There are some that do. Clealand explains that some scholars and artists who have developed a sense of racial group consciousness have devoted more time and energy to understanding how these issues are connected, and are working to educate Cubans, including members of the government, of the ways in which Black people are left behind by the revolution.

No book can provide everything to all of its readers, and the questions that I have perhaps reveal that the book inspires more interest for the racial politics and research in Cuba. As such, I will outline the questions that were sparked by reading the book. Given that anti-black racism is a topic that people are reluctant to discuss, to what degree is data skewed by response bias? What should scholars who are working in places where racial democracy is a central ideology do to account for this potential road block? Relatedly, what effect do foreign researchers have on their respondents and informants, if any? Finally, are the institutional factors that prevent Blacks from attaining things like public education in a socialist society similar or different from those in a capitalist society?

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