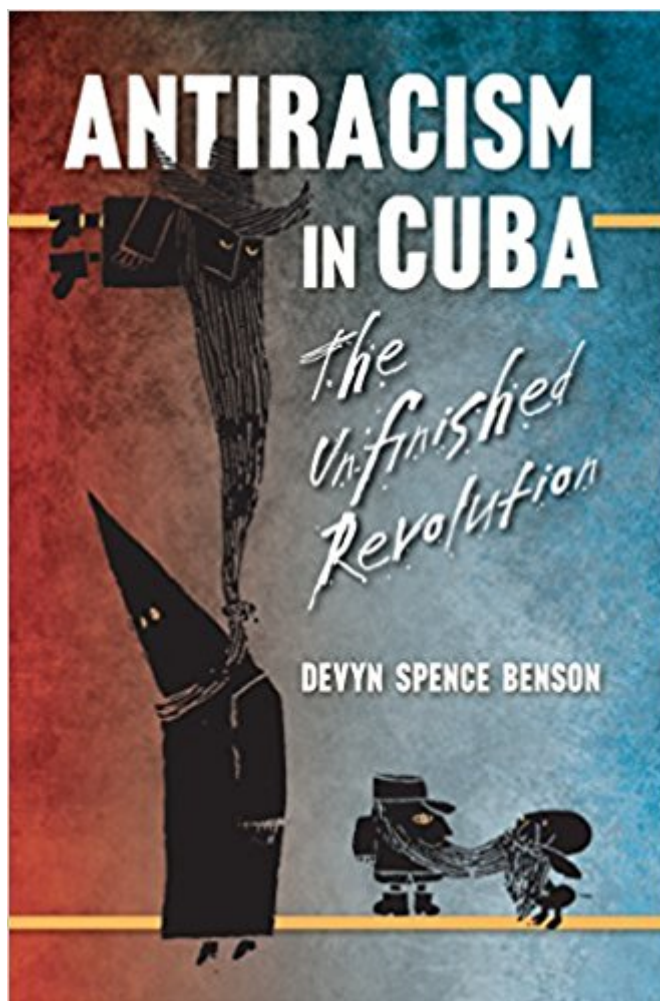


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Antiracism In Cuba: The Unfinished Revolution (Envisioning Cuba)



Synopsis

Analyzing the ideology and rhetoric around race in Cuba and south Florida during the early years of the Cuban revolution, Devyn Spence Benson argues that ideas, stereotypes, and discriminatory practices relating to racial difference persisted despite major efforts by the Cuban state to generate social equality. Drawing on Cuban and U.S. archival materials and face-to-face interviews, Benson examines 1960s government programs and campaigns against discrimination, showing how such programs frequently negated their efforts by reproducing racist images and idioms in revolutionary propaganda, cartoons, and school materials. Building on nineteenth-century discourses that imagined Cuba as a raceless space, revolutionary leaders embraced a narrow definition of blackness, often seeming to suggest that Afro-Cubans had to discard their blackness to join the revolution. This was and remains a false dichotomy for many Cubans of color, Benson demonstrates. While some Afro-Cubans agreed with the revolution's sentiments about racial transcendence--"not blacks, not whites, only Cubans"--others found ways to use state rhetoric to demand additional reforms. Still others, finding a revolution that disavowed blackness unsettling and paternalistic, fought to insert black history and African culture into revolutionary nationalisms. Despite such efforts by Afro-Cubans and radical government-sponsored integration programs, racism has persisted throughout the revolution in subtle but lasting ways.

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Customer Reviews

A rare, impressively researched study of Cuban racial politics in the post 1959 era.--New Orleans Tribune
Unearths the substrate of historical successes, hypocrisies, and strategic elisions underlying contemporary debates about Cuban race relations. . . . Powerfully complicates the oft-repeated idea that racism 'returned' to the island during the trying post-Soviet economic crisis of the 1990s.--Michael J. Bustamante, NACLA Report on the Americas
Benson's thoughtful book challenges many ideas about race in Cuba and in general. . . . Provides a perspective not otherwise found in studies of the Cuban Revolution, and stresses Afro-descendants' ownership of their place in Cuba's history. Highly recommended.--Choice

"Antiracism in Cuba shatters the pedestrian logics of antecedent inquiries and establishes Devyn Spence Benson as a foremost scholar of Cuban Studies and Africana thought. This stunning work does not consider the revolutionary project of racial equality to be one that was lost or finished in 1959. No, for Benson, narrating the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution and plight of Afro-Cuban actors both within the shores of Cuba and South Florida are far from tragic tales. Brilliantly, Benson contends that the hopeful, 'unfinished revolution' of Cuba is replete with ongoing acts of antiracism occurring in the post-revolutionary moment through today. Antiracism, thus, must be interpreted as a perpetual process in late modernity.--Neil Roberts, Williams College & author of Freedom as Marronage
Devyn Spence Benson places cultural artifacts, individuals, and policies in carefully reconstructed contexts full of promise, opportunities, and contradictions--and sensitively locates the continuing limitations of the Cuban revolution's approach to racial equality, nation building, and racial integration. Also one of the first studies to include Afro-Cuban exiles in the history of race in postrevolutionary Cuba.--Alejandro de la Fuente, Harvard University
Insightful and impressively researched, this is a rare, archivally based study of Cuban racial politics in the post-1959 era. It has contemporary resonance because it provides a badly needed historical context for the ongoing struggle for racial equality in revolutionary Cuba. Devyn Spence Benson pushes beyond the 'raceless' rhetoric of the Castro government to find glimpses of the ways Afro-Cubans subtly challenge attempts to silence their aspirations for racial equality.--Frank Andre Guridy, The University of Texas at Austin

I appreciated the clear and thorough way the author explained her position. All of the examples and accounts she used as support were great.

Dr. Spence Benson has given scholars of race politics in Cuba a true gift . Sharp analysis of a

complex history, rigorous in its research and elegant in its writing. A much needed addition to the canon of Cuban history, a much needed referent for studies in the humanities and social sciences about the present moment. A must-read for scholars and activists.

This is the book I have been waiting for since my first trip to Cuba in 1983. It is the best work without question on this issue in English or Spanish.

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