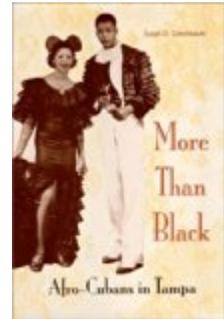


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Susan D. Greenbaum. *More Than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002. xiii + 384. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-2466-0.

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## <cite>More Than Black</cite> Is More Than Good

### *More Than Black* Is More Than Good

Susan D. Greenbaum's text *More Than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa* is a masterful combination of history, anthropology, cultural theory, and contemporary public policy, of interest to a wide spectrum of academic and general reader audiences. Greenbaum is a superior researcher who tells good stories with an overt and effective agenda. Scholars familiar with Florida history, African American Studies, or Hispanic Studies that traditionally focus on Cuban immigrants in Miami, will find this a complicated and refreshing addition to their fields.

*More Than Black* focuses on the development of the Afro-Cuban community in Ybor City, Florida, through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. "This book is about the Afro-Cuban-Americans, the missing faces in the smiling family portrait of Cuban ethnicity in the United States" (p. 2) and "the many strange contradictions of their double-hyphenated lives" (p. 3). Greenbaum relates these experiences through the mutual aid organization, the Marti-Maceo Society. Through Marti-Maceo records, fifteen years of oral interviews with Marti-Maceo members, archival research, and her own contemporary work with the Society on their historic preservation efforts, Greenbaum exposes transnational relations between Cuban exiles and their homeland; Afro-Cuban and White Cuban relations with each other in Ybor City; Afro-Cuban and African American relations; Afro-and White Cuban relations with Anglo Americans; and Afro-Cuban and African American relations with Anglo America. To this complex understanding of

race, ethnicity, and immigration she adds the variables of gender, class, occupation, leisure, religion, and generation, demonstrating the depth of analysis possible when focused on one community and on one beneficent organization.

The text moves chronologically, focusing on major watersheds in Cuban and U.S. history, in addition to the daily operation of Marti-Maceo and life in Ybor City. Such watersheds as emancipation in both countries, the death of Jose Marti, the Spanish-American War, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Great Depression, World War II, urban renewal, the Cuban Revolution, and the Civil Rights Movement provide a global historical context for this detailed case study. Greenbaum concludes that Afro-Cuban solidarity through Marti-Maceo demonstrates the benefit of collectivism and that individual and group sacrifice for the common benefit of a community can ensure its survival. Greenbaum contends her study challenges notions that beneficent societies are doomed to failure because of individualism or the pressure of external forces. The story of Marti-Maceo and the Afro-Cuban-American community in Tampa is arduous but one in which the author finds hope and potential.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of *More Than Black*, and simultaneously the most promising, is Greenbaum's discussion of her methodology as an academic advocate. Greenbaum began work on the book at the behest of a Marti-Maceo member who spoke in her class at the University of Southern Florida. The historic recognition of Ybor City was about to destroy the contemporary

and past Afro-Cuban presence in the area. She writes: "There began a collaborative project in applied ethnohistory, in which the politics of the present and the politics of the past entwined to reveal the evolving intricacies of racism.... [A] gap existed; our task was to fill it" (p. 4). And fill it the book does.

While Greenbaum's open rejection of "objectivity" may disgruntle more traditional academics, the quality

of this book will liberate renegade historians and social scientists who do not subscribe to scholarly notions of "truth," and see themselves as part of, not apart from, the world in which they live. Due to the book's excellence and uniqueness, *More Than Black* was selected for the Theodore Saloutos Prize in 2002, awarded by the Immigration and Ethnic History Society for the best book in the area of immigration studies.

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