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**The Mulatto Republic**

In his classic *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (1940), Fernando Ortiz introduced the concept of transculturation and the metaphor of the *ajiaco* (traditional Cuban stew) as a trope for Cuban culture, one in which indigenous, European, African, Chinese, and other cultural ingredients blended to form a new culture while allowing each formative ingredient to retain its particular flavor. Does the *ajiaco* metaphor apply to the Dominican nation, whose metaphoric dish arguably has far more ingredients and a more complex recipe than the Cuban stew? Is it a *sancocho* (Dominican equivalent of the Cuban stew)? April E. Mayes’s *The Mulatto Republic* is the latest scholarly attempt to sort out the process of cultural identity formation in the Dominican Republic. Mayes’s primary focus is *hispanismo*, which she defines as an ideology that “privileged[s] European ancestry and Hispanic cultural norms such as the Spanish language and Catholicism” (p. 2).

Mayes resorts to a veritable arsenal of historical approaches and methodologies and a broad and comprehensive set of sources. The book seamlessly combines intellectual and social history approaches, which is not an easy task. It also has the virtue of combining microhistorical methodologies and a regional perspective that includes attention to the other Greater Antilles. *The Mulatto Republic* rests on a rich body of secondary and primary sources. Mayes not only uses and lists pertinent secondary sources in the bibliography but also engages them historiographically throughout the text. Equally comprehensive and imaginative is the range of primary materials, among them legislation, criminal records, dozens of newspapers, and popular culture sources.

The book begins with two introductory sections (the introduction and first chapter, “Debating Dominicanidad in the Nineteenth Century”). In these sections, Mayes introduces and discusses the main topics of her work: race, identity, nationalism, and social class. She also lays out several hypotheses. One of them argues that Dominican *hispanismo* does not have its origins in the nation’s foundational centuries but was revived by foreign elites (Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Spanish elites who migrated to the Dominican Republic in the late 1800s). Another thesis is that anti-Haitianism was not always based on anti-black racism but was, rather, an ideological tool for “creating differences within blackness … and central to inventing Dominican whiteness” (p. 10).

These conclusions clash with those of previous authors, including Hugo Tolentino Dipp (*Raza e historia en Santo Domingo: Los orígenes del prejuicio racial en América* [1992]), Ernesto Sagás (*Race and Politics in the Dominican Republic* [2000]), and Lauren Derby (*The Dictator’s Seduction: Politics and the Popular Imagination in...*)
Bryan A. Mayes has written a seminal book on the transition of San Pedro de Macorís, one of the major sugar-producing regions of the Dominican Republic, from a peasant economy to a major economic, urban, and industrial hub. The Mulatto Republic: Antihaitianismo, Racial Differentiation, and the Transformation of San Pedro de Macorís, 1795–1930 (PhD diss., University of Florida, 1993), vi. Mayes musters several examples of tolerance for Haitians and blackness, namely, the words of the intellectual Pedro Francisco Bonó; the pro-miscegenation stance of President Gregorio Luperón; the writings, attitudes, and actions of San Pedro de Macorís’s white elite; and the relative acceptance of cocolos (black West Indian laborers) in that region. In contrast, Sagás, the foremost authority on antihaitianismo, produced a much larger amount of convincing evidence in support of the pervasiveness of race-based antihaitianismo. Moreover, San Pedro de Macorís, as Mayes acknowledges, is not a typical Dominican town. Its location near the eastern tip of Hispaniola (two hundred miles from the Haitian border) and its role as a major sugar-producing region largely sustained by the labor of imported cocolos explain its relatively benign racial environment. These criticisms aside, The Mulatto Republic is one of the best and most thoroughly researched contributions to Dominican history in several years. Its greatest strengths are found in chapters 3-6, in which Mayes addresses the economy, culture, race, and gender in San Pedro de Macorís. Among the book’s salient strengths are the thorough treatment of the transition of San Pedro de Macorís from a peasant region to a major economic, urban, and intellectual hub; the role of education, urban planning, legislation, and cultural productions in the formation of what I would call muted antihaitianismo; and its solidly documented analysis of community formation and cultural preservation among the cocolo population.

So, what about the question I posed at the beginning of this review: does Ortiz’s ajiaco metaphor apply to the Dominican case? If Cuba’s demographic and political histories have been extraordinarily complex and convoluted, those of the island of Hispaniola have been even more so. As I see it, Dominican geography, history, and demography make for an atypical case: one in which two empires and later two nations share an island; one in which Santo Domingo went from being the early epicenter of the Spanish Empire in the Americas to becoming one of Spain’s most neglected colonies; and one in which the sugar boom exploded much later than anywhere else in the Caribbean. The Dominican nation’s metaphorical dish includes the same basic ingredients of the ajiaco but in different proportions: a larger indigenous presence; a generous amount of individuals of African descent, including slaves, free blacks, and maroons; and a sprinkling of European stock. Those foundational racial and cultural ingredients simmered together for centuries in a context of minuscule Spanish colonial presence and a primitive socioeconomic system dominated by a peasant economy and access to communal lands. The context was propitious for racial miscegenation and cultural syncretism, unlike the case on islands with mature sugar-and-slaves plantation systems.

The result was an Indio-Spanish-African mix, with the texture and a homogenized flavor of porridge. While the components of this dish were poured slowly and simultaneously and cooked over a slow fire, in the Cuban case the indigenous cornmeal was violently stirred and swiftly evaporated, only a reduction remained; next came a large inflow of Europeans to affect and complicate the Cuban ajiaco even more, with their onions, beef, and poultry—the largest anywhere in the Caribbean; and soon thereafter, an African majority that overwhelmed the other flavors emerged. The plantain became the staple of the Cuban diet and gave its sweetness to the ajiaco. Over the next centuries, Cuba witnessed a continuous injection of white immigrants, mostly from Spain’s periphery and an avalanche of imported slaves. Relative spatial segregation sustained by slavery and racial and social stratification allowed each ingredient to contribute to the overall flavor and texture and at the same time, maintained the integrity of each ingredient.

Mayes, of course, recognizes the three basic ingredients of the Indio-Euro-African Caribbean nation, but to my taste, she strays too far from the actual recipe: heavy on beef and too many onions, and short on yuca and maize. I enjoyed her dish but it will be interesting to see how Dominican palates will react to it.

Note

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