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[Review of] Cuban Underground Hip Hop: Black Thoughts, Black Revolution, Black Modernity

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Cuban Underground Hip Hop: Black Thoughts, Black Revolution, Black Modernity. By Tanya L. Saunders. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015. Pp. 390. \$90.00 cloth; \$29.95 paper.

In this work, the author ambitiously covers a range of topics: race in the Americas, Cuba's racial history, musical connections to and within Cuba, feminism and sexuality in contemporary Cuban life, and the place of Afro Cubans in the island's aesthetics. Of course, the major focus is on the hip hop movement in Cuba, its genesis, its role as a motor of social activism, and its challenge to conventional assessments of Cuba's racial equality. The years covered in this study of the Cuban Underground Hip Hop movement (CUHHM) are essentially 1998 to 2006, because after 2006 some artists began to leave Cuba, and the leadership underwent transition. As part of the analysis there are connections to sociological constructs, and Saunders explores the movement's ties to global capitalist networks and markets and the tension such ties create with the maintenance of local culture and local identity. A consistent message is that through hip hop Afro-Descendant Cubans became part of a challenge to continuing coloniality.

The book mentions and presents artists, albums, album images, advertisement posters, and photographs of hip hop community members. However, there are far too many names and images to easily categorize or classify them. Most of the photographs are either by the author, courtesy of Cuban photographer Sahily Borrero, or courtesy of acquaintances. One group that does receive extended attention is Las Krudas, a hip hop group determined to help others understand the complexity of their identity as Black lesbians. Chapter seven is dedicated to this group and to the topics of Black feminism and Queer of Color Critique.

In many regards, this is a personal narrative, mainly covering the years 1998 to 2006, in which the author records visits to Cuba, her contacts with the hip hop community, how she as a black American was perceived (*mulata* when she was thinner with straight hair and *negra* when she was heavier and had an afro), and what her contacts had to say about race and racial terminology. Interviews with hip hop artists and other Cubans are given in Spanish and then translated into English. Hip hop voices are also heard directly through selected lyrics that are included in the text and translated into English and through the inclusion of part of "The Final Declaration

of the First Cuban Hip Hop Symposium,” a document read and approved on November 27, 2005 (pp. 100-102).

A few of the transcriptions of interviews in Spanish seem imprecise in places, and some translations into English need fine tuning. In addition to frequent use of terms such as modernity, hegemonic, and coloniality, occasional instances of unusual phrasing appear: “Black women ...interpellated as men” (144); “...people...who are socially interpellated as Black or mulat@...” (161).

Notes and the bibliography are thorough, although dates for interviews and field notes are given only by year, nothing more specific. Broad assumptions about the history of race and race relations in Latin America lack a reliance on key historical sources and would have benefited from a grounding in texts such as those by Herbert Klein, Reid Andrews and Michael L. Conniff and T.J. Davis.

Cuban Underground Hip Hop is structured by chapter topics but there is a fair amount of overlap. A more tightly organized and less repetitive approach would have made this a better introduction to a relatively under-researched topic.

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