

# Book Review

Susan D. Greenbaum. *More than Black. Afro-Cubans in Tampa*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002. 384 pp.

*More than Black. Afro-Cubans in Tampa*, Susan Greenbaum's provocative book about black Cubans in Tampa, is the product of a long-term project involving meticulous historical and community research. The story is told with well-earned aplomb and passion, an effective mix possible only after many years of intimate work with and concern for a community whose presence in and contribution to Latin Tampa and beyond had been hitherto 'invisible.' Greenbaum deftly approaches the subject of this community's double erasure or 'lack of place' in a space where one could be comfortably white (American or Cuban), or black (American), but not Cuban and black. *More than Black* is specific to this paradox. Her analyses across racial and ethnic lines, situate the Afro-Cuban experience in Tampa in the greater context of the de rigueur, Southern, black and white color divide of the Jim Crow South, and the more

complex, multihued perception of race familiar to Cuban immigrants and Latin America, in general. At present, the book's only limitation is that fact that it has not been translated into Spanish, by which it would find an even broader audience: I wholeheartedly encourage the author to pursue this possibility and would find it personally satisfying to work with the author to achieve this.

One of Greenbaum's goals with this book is to problematize the enduring notion of Tampa Latin racial solidarity that has tinged much of the scholarship and even popular perceptions about Latin Tampa since its founding. The other myth Greenbaum strives to debunk, through careful documentation, is the notion that Afro-Cubans and African Americans did not interact because of overwhelming differences. In addressing both the myth of racial solidarity and of black-on-black segregation, Greenbaum has



paved the way for future scholars to approach this history in a variety of ways—e.g., from the perspective of Diaspora, Black Atlantic or New World studies.

The introduction and first five chapters of *More than Black* offer an examination of the facts—the survival tactics, resistance strategies, and social evolution of Tampa's Afro-Cubans—from 1886 till the founding of La Unión Martí-Maceo, a separate mutual aid society black Cubans created when they were excluded from an originally integrated Cuban club by their white compatriots. Explaining that white Cubans did and still continue to rationalize this reality because of Jim Crow pressures to segregate, Greenbaum challenges that such an explanation does not account for all possible considerations. For Greenbaum, it is important to highlight the issue of white Cuban agency in this matter,

and the fact that this 'reason' has done a great deal to assuage white guilt. It has not, however, served the truth.

In chapters six and seven Greenbaum takes on the popular misconception that black Cubans and their African American peers stayed clear of one another in Tampa, a notion that until recently has stymied explorations of the many connections between the two communities, and the outcome of decades of their coexistence and mingling. In chapters eight and nine, Greenbaum presents a succinct view of the obstacles Afro-Cubans faced because of their cultural and social (and even physical) displacement, in part due to historical processes but also because of a 1960s urban renewal project and economic out-migration. She highlights the fact that as blacks in the United States, the most viable route for Afro-Cubans to achieve upward mobility was to integrate into mainstream African American society and join the struggle for civil rights, despite its implications for the survival of the group's Afro-Cuban culture and Spanish language.

In her final chapter, Greenbaum focuses on the current plight of Martí-Maceo's membership to fend off predatory gentrification projects in Ybor City that would deprive them of their one remaining building (after the loss of their original club building in the 1960s). The book's final chapter, "Out of Time," celebrates the advocacy, agency and dignity of this historic population and its descendants, even as they are once again made to 'disappear.'