

of Education, Centro de Estudios Nacionales (the Frondizi archive), the oral history project of the University of Buenos Aires, and the US National Archives. The work is economically and intelligently written, and smoothly translated. In short, Mónica Rein has done a superlative job of examining pivotal events in this painful transition, and for it deserves our warm congratulations.

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LOUIS A. PÉREZ (ed.): *Impressions of Cuba in the Nineteenth Century: The Travel Diary of Joseph J. Dimock*. Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1998.

Using travelers' accounts as a historical source poses an unavoidable epistemological question. How do we know to what degree—and it is a question of degree—a particular observation reflects (a) the idiosyncratic world-view and prejudices of the author, (b) the collective ones of his/her social group, and (c) the objective realities of the place visited. While analyzing the text for internal logic and consistency can help, checking the observation with other sources—even if of the same type—will offer more, and perhaps more reliable, clues. If, for instance, the same observation is made by scores of travelers, we can safely eliminate "a" as an explanation. If the cultural and social background of these travelers is very diverse, we can move further toward "c." In other words, relying on a large number of accounts can turn personal, and even biased, observations into more than anecdotal evidence. For researchers, thus, the publication of a manuscript diary is always a welcome addition to the travel literature, even for a place like colonial Cuba where that corpus is vast.

Written by a Virginian merchant, whose wife's family had business interests in Cuba, during February and March of 1859, this diary displays—like all others—an undetermined combination of the three aspects mentioned above. And this appears even in the most elementary or physical topics. His description of the island's natural geography mixes detached topographical observations with generic tropicalist fantasies and personal musings about the local flora and fauna. His description of Havana's physical appearance betrays a similar mix. As most other visitors, Dimock mentions the city's narrow streets and narrower sidewalks, and its thick-walled houses with tiled roofs and floors and iron-barred windows. But when he adds "as our prisons," and describes the houses as "multi-colored" and their architecture, and that of the baroque cathedral, as "in the old Moorish style," he begins to

reveal more about Anglo-American stereotypes of the Caribbean and "Old Spain" than about the actual appearance of the city.

Naturally, these "cultural lenses" become thicker when the diary deals with people rather than physical structures. Blacks are described as "of the true baboon class, projecting muzzle and retreating chin and forehead." Yet even these "niggers" felt above the Chinese coolies, who "are little better than idiots in point of intellect," and above the freshly-arrived Spanish immigrants, whom they call "dirty whites and are pictures of filth, hunger and nakedness." In an event attended by hundreds of women, Dimock could find only "two or three of delicate figure, the only real handsome girls in the theater were our Yankee girls." Tellingly, white male Cubans are the only group to escape Dimock's carping. These "intelligent" and "brave" Creoles, after all, were the people who could facilitate a recurrent concern in the diary: North American annexation of the island. This desideratum makes it difficult to evaluate whether another *leitmotiv* in the diary, the omnipresence and intensity of native animosity toward *Peninsulares*, is an accurate observation or a self-serving one. For example, Dimock claims that Cubans were not admitted into the army, but a casual observation that the ubiquitous soldiers are "of all colors" inadvertently undermines such claim.

The diary contains many other interesting commentaries of undetermined accuracy: that Havana had little class residential segregation, that Spaniards never engaged in agricultural activities, that *guajiros* [white peasants] showed a particular antipathy to black slaves, that almost everyone bought lottery tickets but few, and mostly the poor, attended Catholic masses. Dimock has also much to say about sugar production, labor, and daily life in an American-owned plantation in Cárdenas, and about topics as diverse as filibusters' expeditions, slaves' conditions, food, cockfights, urban manners, and courtship and funerary customs.

Overall, the diary offers an engaging and illuminative first-hand account of mid-nineteenth-century Cuba. Louis A. Pérez's introduction helps set the broader historical context. But explanatory notes in the body of the diary and a thematic index at the end would have enhanced its pedagogical potential. At any rate, Pérez's own previous compilation of travelers' accounts (*Slaves, Sugar, and Colonial Society: Travel Accounts of Cuba, 1801-1899*, also published by Scholarly Resources in 1992) makes a better choice for undergraduate courses because of its greater selectivity of material, chronological scope, and diversity of voices. And if a more autochthonous voice is desired, the classic autobiography of the runaway slave Esteban Montejo remains the best choice.