

Review / Reseña

Aja, Alan A. *Miami's Forgotten Cubans: Race, Racialization and the Miami Afro-Cuban Experience*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

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Alan A. Aja's *Miami's Forgotten Cubans: Race, Racialization and the Miami Afro-Cuban Experience* examines the Afro-Cuban community of Miami and South Florida from 1958 to the present day in order to understand their experiences and contribution to the region in and definitions of the Cuban immigrant experience in South Florida. This is an important study that brings quantitative analysis of census data together with qualitative research that consists of informant interviews together with the author's personal experience from growing up within the Miami Cuban community in order to understand the nuances of the Miami Afro-Cuban community and, to then use this understanding, to redefine the Cuban immigrant experience in South Florida, more generally. Aja's book challenges what we know about Cuban immigrants in Miami-Dade county by shattering the myth that all members of an "ethnic enclave" benefit equally. Instead, Afro-Cubans's experiences challenge the accepted images of the Miami Cuban experience. Aja's *Miami's Forgotten Cubans: Race, Racialization and the Miami Afro-Cuban Experience* is a vital contribution to Cuban and Latinx Studies and will serve scholars

that endeavor to understand the Cuban American, as well as the Cuban, experience by nuancing the accepted ideas of this community.

Miami's Forgotten Cubans: Race, Racialization and the Miami Afro-Cuban Experience is divided into seven chapters. Chapter one is the introduction to the book and, as most of the book chapters, begins with a personal experience that connects with the subject matter. As opposed to the other chapters and the book's general subject, this chapter begins in Cuba, relating a personal experience that reflects the Cuban perception of Miami as populated and dominated by white Cuban immigrants. While he starts in Cuba, the book considers Miami to be the center of study in order to "uncover the post-1958 racialized realities Miami's forgotten or so-called 'invisible' Cubans negotiate in South Florida" (11). He uses mixed methodology of census data and statistics together with observations and interviews and divides this analysis into three primary stages of Cuban migration: 1959-1979, the first wave of Cuban exiles in the wake of the Cuban Revolution of 1959 (Chapter three); 1980-1989, the Mariel and post-Mariel years (Chapter four); and 1990 to the present, Cuban migration primarily in response to the disappearance of aid from the Soviet Union and the resulting Special Period in Times of Peace that emerged (Chapter five). Chapter two, preceding these more in-depth examination of these time periods, provides an overview of Cuban migration to Miami and the construction of migration and identity narratives within the Cuban community and how the Afro-Cuban narrative began to evolve away from the Cuban specific experience: "over time, it mirrors, and for some, especially their children, it *becomes* the local black American experience" (32), meaning Afro-Cubans are seen by others as African American and need to affirm their Cubanness. In the subsequent three chapters, these ideas are explored through quantitative and qualitative evidence in three different migration periods outlined here. Throughout this examination, Aja presents US policies on Cuban immigration to underscore how this particular group was privileged over other nationalities in similar situations, while also examining local politics in Miami to understand how Cuban-Americans came to dominate there and the implications of this. Chapter six, then, uses the concept of *la Cuba de Ayer*, what Cuban exiles (particularly those in the first wave) refer to as the Cuba before the Castro brothers, invoking the hope and desire that Cuba will return to that state, to then construct *el Miami de Ayer*. This chapter is a poignant interrogation of how white Cubans in Miami contributed to the divisions between white and Afro Cubans in this area. The final chapter of *Miami's Forgotten Cubans* looks forward, by proposing working solutions to the social and cultural issues that are underlined in the preceding chapters.

Aja's *Miami's Forgotten Cubans: Race, Racialization and the Miami Afro-Cuban Experience* is a necessary addition to any scholar of Cuban Studies, Cuban-American Studies, and Florida Studies since it complicates the accepted narratives of Cuban South Florida. This is an important addition to the fields on Cuban Studies, though at times Aja's sentences are overly long and complex, hiding the meaning that should be more easily accessible. Despite this, Aja begins an important discussion on the Cuban experience in the United States and in particular South Florida.