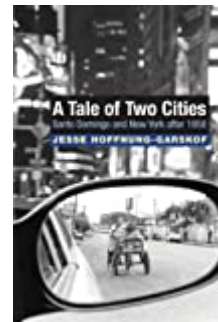




Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof. *A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York After 1950.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008. 319 S. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-691-12338-7.



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J. Hoffnung-Garskof: A Tale of Two Cities

In this meticulously researched historical study of two poor neighborhoods, Cristo Rey in Santo Domingo and Washington Heights in New York City, Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof has made a significant contribution to transnational scholarship on the Americas. By Hoffnung-Garskof's own account (p. xiv), his objective is to offer a historical narrative that speaks to the social history of the United States, but that begin[s] and end[s] outside the United States, in this case, in the Dominican Republic, a nation with a long and fraught experience of American intervention in its political and economic affairs. In writing this history, Hoffnung-Garskof also provides a compelling account of how Dominican migration to the United States acquired its own distinctive social, cultural and political contours.

The book comprises eight chapters whose themes span over fifty years of inter-related Dominican-U.S. history. A unifying thread to the book's multiple and densely detailed narratives, many based on original interviews conducted by the author, is provided by Hoffnung-Garskof's reliance on the explanatory power of the durable notions of *progreso* and *cultura*. Although,

as he carefully documents in the first three chapters of the book, these dominant ideological constructs have their origins in elite discourses of European colonialism, U.S. imperialism and racist Dominican nationalism, over time they have come to form an important means by which ordinary citizens make sense of their social worlds. In particular, they have been incorporated into a broader cultural charter that orients behavior toward a specific (upwardly mobile) vision of a *better future*. Not surprisingly, the meanings and valences of these central idioms have been reconfigured and have shifted in unanticipated ways; yet, as Hoffnung-Garskof also demonstrates, they nonetheless continue to function as potent tools of differentiation, hierarchy and exclusion. *Cultura*, in particular, retains its rhetorical force as a dividing practice with which to devalue the rural, the *uncivilized* African Dominican (often associated with the racialized stigma of Haitianess) and the poor in general.

Chapter Four examines the origins of Dominican immigration to New York City, and in this reviewer's opinion, represents one of the book's most original and significant scholarly contributions. The chapter's title,

“Yankee Go Home” and “Take Me With You” wryly captures the paradoxes and contradictions of early Dominican migration that are critical to understanding the specificities of the Dominican experience in New York City. Hoffnung-Garskof challenges the conventional wisdom in U.S. history that looks almost exclusively to the passage of the Immigration Reform Act in 1965 to explain the boom in new immigration from the developing world. As he points out, this explanation has never adequately addressed why Dominican immigration in particular took off so dramatically and disproportionately during the 1960s. Hoffnung-Garskof documents what other scholars have sometimes alluded to in attempting to understand the singularity of the Dominican boom: the role played by international politics, and in particular, by U.S. imperialist interests in the Dominican Republic at the time in promoting the large-scale exodus of Dominicans. With the death of Trujillo in 1961, and the political crisis that ensued, policy makers in the U.S. quickly came to regard the liberalization of visa policies as an expedient way to help quell the anti-Yankee and nationalist sentiments that were (re)emerging in the Dominican Republic, and that intensified significantly after the U.S. invasion in 1965. As Hoffnung-Garskof puts it (p. 74), “Washington politicians’ unique desire” to manage Dominican public opinion gave Dominican visa seekers considerable leverage in getting admitted to the United States. An unanticipated consequence of this leverage was that the earliest immigrants to New York in the 1960s included an important contingent of political exiles and left wing dissidents fleeing repression from the Balaguer regime. Although not numerically large, these politically engaged migrants nonetheless exerted a disproportionate influence on the subsequent evolution of political organization and the expression of Dominican national identity in New York City over the next decade and beyond. In particular, as Hoffnung-Garskof demonstrates in the chapter that follows, they constituted an important element in the leadership of the first generation of Dominican activism in New York and imbued local political life, especially in the neighborhood of Washington Heights, with their distinctively anti-imperialist, anti-U.S., cultural nationalism. As a consequence, the first decades of Dominican political activity in the U.S. were marked by a strong antipathy to assimilation and the dominant melting pot ideology.

Although initially, immigrants’ political activities were directed almost exclusively toward the Dominican Republic, over time they also began to turn their attention to neighborhood institutions. An early and intense site of such activity was the local high school, an insti-

tution that held a privileged position within the broader immigrant project of *progreso* and *cultura*. Drawing on a previously ignored cache of personal papers written by a Washington Heights community activist, as well as on his own interviews with key Dominican players on the community scene in the 1970s, Hoffnung-Garskof stitches together a complex chronicle of local politics from the perspective of multiply-situated actors. The close description of inter-ethnic competition over scarce, but symbolically critical, educational resources will probably be of greatest interest to the specialist; others may feel bogged down by the level of detail. Be this as it may, Hoffnung-Garskof’s fine-grained approach allows him to avoid over-generalizing and provide a sense of the competing interpretations and ideological positions held by the key actors and ethnic groups (African-American, Puerto Rican, white ethnic, as well as Dominican) who were intimately involved in the political struggles of the period.

The final three chapters move the reader up to the present and address the mutual, transnational constitution of Dominican social life and cultural perspectives as embodied in the experiences of the residents of Cristo Rey and Washington Heights. Over the past couple of decades, the two sites have become even more closely entwined as the result of the increasing globalization of popular culture and mass media and the ever-denser circulation of people and consumer goods between them. Unfortunately for the migrants, a transnational stereotype of the drug-dealing or otherwise delinquent Dominican has also emerged over this period that has complicated the optimistic narratives of *progreso* and *cultura*. Today, residents of Cristo Rey may admire what they regard as the social advancement of migrants but others may denigrate the tokens of this advancement (clothes, gold chains) and, worse, the migrants themselves. Still, as Hoffnung-Garskof convincingly concludes, Dominicans in both sites have persistently managed to take “ideas that had been invented to oppress them, turned them around, and made them part of their claims for respectability and belonging” (p. 247).

A Tale of Two Cities treats the Dominican case, but the questions Hoffnung-Garskof raises about how to approach transnational history, transnational American Studies and the cultural and ideological aspects of transnational migration will be of concern a broad array of scholars. The clarity of the writing, together with the wealth of apposite photographs and other illustrations, will make this text an excellent choice for the classroom as well.

This capacious and well-told tale of two cities will transnationalism, international migration and the Dominican Republic. reward any scholar with an interest in the history of

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