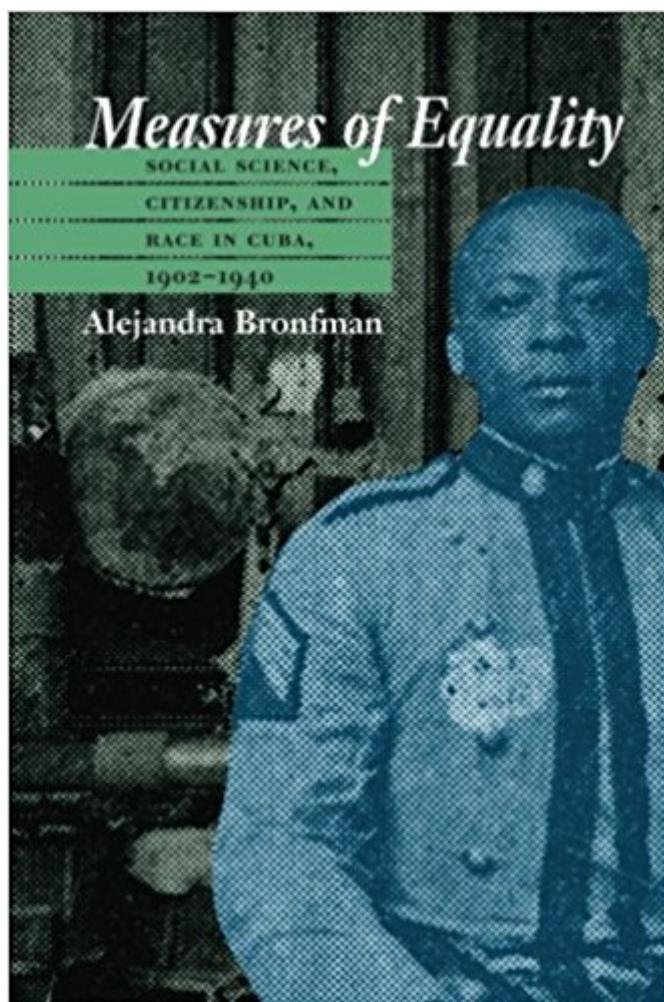


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Measures Of Equality: Social Science, Citizenship, And Race In Cuba, 1902-1940 (Envisioning Cuba)



Synopsis

In the years following Cuba's independence, nationalists aimed to transcend racial categories in order to create a unified polity, yet racial and cultural heterogeneity posed continual challenges to these liberal notions of citizenship. Alejandra Bronfman traces the formation of Cuba's multiracial legal and political order in the early Republic by exploring the responses of social scientists, such as Fernando Ortiz and Israel Castellanos, and black and mulatto activists, including Gustavo Urrutia and Nicolas Guillen, to the paradoxes of modern nationhood. Law, science, and the social sciences--which, during this era, enjoyed growing status in Cuba as well as in many other countries--played central roles in producing knowledge and shaping social categories in postindependence Cuba. Anthropologists, criminologists, and eugenicists embarked on projects intended to employ the tools of science to rid Cuba of the last vestiges of a colonial past. Meanwhile, the legal arena created both new freedoms and new modes of repression. Black and mulatto intellectuals and activists, working to ensure that citizenship offered concrete advantages rather than empty promises, appropriated changing social scientific and legal categories and turned them to their own uses. In the midst of several decades of intermittent racial violence and expanding social and political mobilization by Cubans of African descent, debates among intellectuals and activists, state officials, and legislators transformed not only understandings of race, but also the terms of citizenship for all Cubans.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Brilliant and entertaining . . . Takes us from such fractious beginnings to the construction of black political identities in the 1930s. A virtuoso performance that contributes a great deal to our understanding of Cuban social and intellectual history. . . . Sets out a provocative agenda for further research.--American Historical Review An important contribution to the historiography on the construction of race and political identity in Latin America and the Caribbean. . . . [This] ought to be required reading for scholars and graduate students who specialize in the construction of race and national identities in Latin America and the Caribbean.--The American Journal of Legal History An exciting and innovative study that will surely influence scholarship on twentieth-century Cuba for some time.--Hispanic American Historical Review

Bronfman's subtle and nuanced exploration of the interplay between postcolonial state formation, social scientific knowledge production, and the transformation of racial subject positions significantly deepens our understanding of the emergence and conflicted nature of 'black' political identities in twentieth-century Cuba.--Stephan Palmie, University of Chicago Bronfman posits the relatively inclusive rather than exclusive nature of the early Cuban Republic, legitimizing hereditary views about the inferiority of those of African descent and also animating the critique of those views, especially by Cubans of color. She has marshaled her case with excellent, new, and at times chilling detail, contributing to the growing body of work that is countering the silences of much mainstream study of Cuban history. Her approach is sound and much needed.--Jean Stubbs, University of North London

Alejandra Bronfman research thesis "is about the transformation of a political order and the terms of participation for all involved" (p. 4); the author also examines the process of racial differences and discrimination throughout the course of the early forty years of the Cuban republic. Upon the birth of the Cuban republic, Bronfman takes the task of exposing the social-political difficulties which the Cuban community of color faced as they strived to participate in the political process for which they bravely fought for during the wars of independence. The author explains the gradual persecution which African-derived practices suffered from colonial to early republican years by the established authorities. This persecution derived from late nineteenth century studies of modern scientific theories such as Charles Darwin's theory of human evolution, which in essence was scientific racism, and advocated governments to draft their policies thru the study of Eugenics. Bronfman focuses on racial differences within the press, courts, and social scientific arenas deriving from the November 1904 disappearance of a four-year old white girl which set-off a series of *brujerÃa* - a

scares which persecuted the conscience of all throughout the first years of republican Cuba and the media's commitment to evolve it into a national problem by publishing familiar incidents and rumors on front pages. The author highlights as well the importance of identifying the two models of citizenship performed by Cubans of color engaged in politics. One practiced by Juan Gualberto Gomez which advocated for civil citizenship and the other by the leaders of the PIC (Partido Independiente de Color) which advocated for militant participation, thus for anyone studying this Cuban history incident, the author argues the importance of looking beyond actions of the PIC and the state. The aftermath of the 1912 rebellion forced sociedades de color to adopted new methods of citizenship as avenues for educated citizens of color aspiring for politics. Bronfman work's shortcomings are seen in her zigzagging of various topics discussed within a chapter, in numerous occasions Bronfman jumps from one discussion to the other without a proper transition; thus giving the reader the impression as if she is all over the place in trying to cover as many aspects of Cuban social life as possible. At times, a reader may loose track of the point the author is trying to make across, although for this reason a conclusion paragraph at the end of each chapter may have been strategically located. Bronfman thesis' validity rests upon the previous work accomplished by other scholars; thus her work appears as an extension of or, a summary of her bibliographical sources. Even though her thesis retains validity even today in the representation of Cubans of color within the current Cuban government, the title of her book should be renamed "measures of inequality" since the main focus of her work is to reveal the discriminatory tendencies of Cuban society and its government throughout the first years of the Republic.

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