

Kirwin R. Shaffer. *Black Flag Boricuas: Anarchism, Antiauthoritarianism, and the Left in Puerto Rico, 1897-1921.* Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013. xvii + 220 pp. \$65.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-252-03764-1.

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In his most recent monograph, *Black Flag Boricuas*, historian Kirwin R. Shaffer successfully intervenes in the historiography of anarchist movements by drawing attention to developments in Puerto Rico and the broader Caribbean world at the turn of the twentieth century. As he artfully explains in his introduction, many of the Marxist historians who have written about anarchists tend to dismiss them as “backward, millenarian, and out of touch” (p. 8). Similarly, many scholars often restrict their analyses of anarchists to one country, usually a western European country or the United States. Shaffer avoids all of these pitfalls by taking a transnational, non-Western approach and by taking his subjects seriously.

One of the text’s best features is its introduction. In a very manageable twenty-one pages, Shaffer clearly states his overall argument, meticulously describes his methodology, cites the sources that he consulted, elucidates the uniqueness of anarchism in Puerto Rico, and describes why he decided to name his book *Black Flag Boricuas*. He approaches his subject by tracing the movements of anarchists who “traveled around and beyond Puerto Rico,” and his sources are primarily anarchist newspapers from Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the United States (p. 3). He also explains that *boricua* is more than a term of Puerto

Rican nationalism. Rather, *boricua* refers to a broader “collective identity of resistance” to Spanish and US colonialism (p. 17). Shaffer’s introduction is especially effective because he does not resort to the sort of scholarly jargon that often accompanies academic writing. As such, he welcomes readers to his work with a style that is refreshingly accessible.

Shaffer’s story “explores how cultural politics both reflected the island-specific reality that anarchists encountered, as well as the role that cultural politics played in larger transnational radical movements” (p. 2). To that end, several of his chapters concentrate on the local and simultaneously transnational nature of anarchism in Puerto Rico. Chapters 1 and 2 situate Puerto Rico’s anarchist movement within the context of the Spanish and United States colonial empires in the Caribbean. For example, Shaffer focuses significant attention on Santiago Iglesias Pantín, a Spanish carpenter and cabinet-maker who spent time working with anarchists in Spain and Cuba but who also condemned the anarchism in Puerto Rico. Similarly, Shaffer articulates how and why Puerto Rican anarchists aligned with the American Federation of Labor-backed Federación Libre de Trabajadores despite their differences.

Even though chapters 3 and 4 are enlightening with respect to how and why Puerto Rican anarchists forged alliances with freethinkers and adherents of *espiritismo*, the two chapters seem as if they could have been merged. Structurally, both chapters are relatively short, at sixteen and fourteen pages, respectively. In terms of content, both chapters cover the same period of time, 1909 to 1912. On another organizational note, chapter 5, which includes an interesting section on women and gender in leftist literature, distinctively stands out, but it is doubtful that this is Shaffer's intention, considering that the climax of the narrative takes place in the final two chapters. That is not to say that chapter 5 is extrinsic to the story, but from a structural perspective, it is odd that all of the chapters have a companion, whereas chapter 5 seemingly stands alone.

Chapters 6 and 7 are the best parts of Shaffer's book. By explaining the emergence of the Bayamón Bloc and their creation of *El Comunista*, "the most strident voice advocating revolutionary transformation that Puerto Rico had ever seen" (p. 142), Shaffer wraps up his monograph by masterfully weaving the unique circumstances of Puerto Rican anarchism with the transnational reality of anarchist movements: "What we begin to see is that the paper was both a Puerto Rican and a 'transnational' anarchist newspaper as *El Comunista*'s readership and financial backing spread throughout Spanish-speaking anarchist groups across the United States" (p. 160). It is always impressive when an author manages to conclude the book's narrative with a convincing reinforcement of its overall argument.

With the exception of some questionable structural choices regarding the middle chapters of the monograph, *Black Flag Boricuas* is a brilliant piece of scholarship. Kirwin Shaffer fills a hole in the historiography of anarchism as well as the historiography of Puerto Rican resistance to US colonialism. His text should be required reading for students of both fields.

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