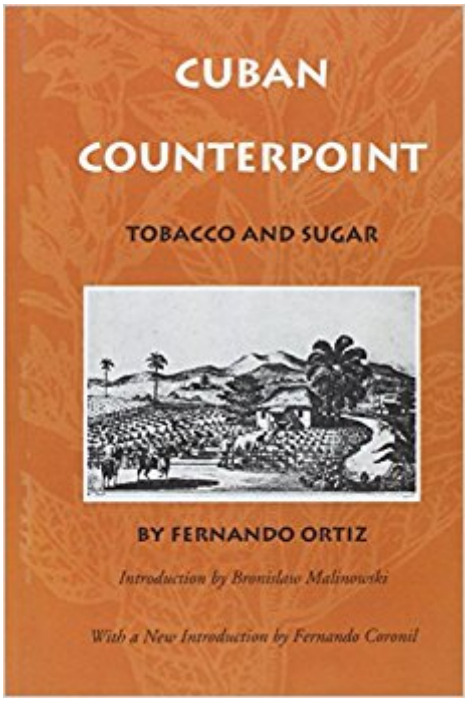
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Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco And Sugar



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Synopsis

First published in 1940 and long out of print, Fernando OrtizÃ¢â ¬â„¢s classic work, Cuban Counterpoint is recognized as one of the most important books of Latin American and Caribbean intellectual history. OrtizÃ¢â ¬â„¢s examination of the impact of sugar and tobacco on Cuban society is unquestionably the cornerstone of Cuban studies and a key source for work on Caribbean culture generally. Though written over fifty years ago, OrtizÃ¢â ¬â„¢s study of the formation of a national culture in this region has significant implications for contemporary postcolonial studies.Ortiz presents his understanding of Cuban history in two complementary sections written in contrasting styles: a playful allegorical tale narrated as a counterpoint between tobacco and sugar and a historical analysis of their development as the central agricultural products of the Cuban economy. Treating tobacco and sugar both as agricultural commodities and as social characters in a historical process, he examines changes in their roles as the result of transculturation. His work shows how transculturation, a critical category Ortiz developed to grasp the complex transformation of cultures brought together in the crucible of colonial and imperial histories, can be used to illuminate not only the history of Cuba, but, more generally, that of America as well.This new edition includes an introductory essay by Fernando Coronil that provides a contrapuntal reading of the relationship between OrtizÃ¢â ¬â„¢s book and its original introduction by the renowned anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski. Arguing for a distinction between theory production and canon formation, Coronil demonstrates the value of OrtizÃ¢â ¬â„¢s book for anthropology as well as Cuban, Caribbean, and Latin American studies, and shows Ortiz to be newly relevant to contemporary debates about modernity, postmodernism, and postcoloniality.

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Customer Reviews

“The first and only comprehensive study of the West Indian people. Ortiz ushered the Caribbean into the thought of the twentieth century and kept it there.” —C. L. R. James

Text: English (translation) Original Language: Spanish

Ortiz is a wonderous writer. He compares and contrasts Cuba's two principal crops in wickedly funny prose (even in its English translation here). I first came across the original 1940 English hard-cover edition a lifetime ago. Over the years, I've tried to find another copy of that long out-of-print edition, but with no luck. Now it is once again available. Worth the price of admission if only you read the outrageous description of what product--sugared bon-bons, or a nice Habana tobaco--certain female fictional protagonists (e.g. Faust's Margurite) would choose. This book should be savored, like a fine Habana tobaco!

Extended early twentieth century analysis of the titular themes, tracking the comparative impact of Tobacco and Sugar on Cuba. Starts with the premise of a very dry subject matter, but quickly makes it fascinating, rolling off fascinating insights, neat connections, stunning juxtapositions and effective systemic analysis. The look into the philosophy and aesthetic behind each plant is entertaining, the argument for how each substance is gendered intriguing, but it's in the overview of how the economics functioned that really make the book take of is the insight into economics. Ortiz argues persuasively that while it's the most pleasant crop, sugar has also directly accompanied a process of standardization, mass production, mechanization and foreign exploitation of Cuba that connects a very destructive long term legacy. In contrast, he explores venues by which Tobacco has had the potential for autonomy and overall financial advantage.The first half is a surprisingly engaging and fast moving chain of analysis that offers much of worth in asssessing colonial and postcolonial conditions generally. After that, the second half is far less satisfying, as it goes into listing and specifics to substantiate the main thesis, slowing the main pace down to a crawl and rendering large setions frankly boring. Still, taken as a whole this is an exciting and virtal work.

If you are thinking about studying Cuban history and society, or if you just want to extend your

knowledge of it, this book is a must on either case. Cuban Counterpoint should be taken as the starting-point for Cuban history and society studies. Ortiz brilliantly reveals the importance that the island's two major economic products have played over the years and the contrast among them throughout society. It is very important for a first time reader to read each respective introduction in order to have better understanding of how this work came about, in which period of time it was completed and its significance to Cuban studies. The first part of the book is the central focus of Ortiz' work and even though the second part might feel a bit boring at times, it does contains some vital content. Again, overall the book is a must in order to fully understand Cuban history and society; enjoy reading it.

This book has become a classic for all of us who study Cuba's history and society. However, I must also recommend the book for any student of social and cultural anthropology interested in cross cultural interactions and acculturation ("transculturaciÃƒÂ n" in Ortiz's own words. It is incredible that his ideas on this subject have been mostly ignored by the United States anthropological community, despite the strong support Ortiz received from Bronislaw Malinowsky. I highly recommend it.

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