

Castaguta's outstanding intersectional study has a minor limitation: it does not tell us how nineteenth-century immigrant socialists approached the issue of class divisions *within* non-white communities. While most African Americans and Chinese immigrants worked and struggled in agricultural, domestic, and industrial settings, a small number ran small businesses and entered the professions. Chinese immigrants opened laundries and restaurants, and a handful of African Americans led higher educational institutions. Non-white business owners and Black anti-socialists like Booker T. Washington, head of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, obviously had different class interests than most of those who shared their racial background. Did Gilded Age socialists write about such divisions? If they did not, perhaps Costaguta could have speculated why.

Of course, the strengths of this study far outweigh any weaknesses. Students interested in the history of the left, labor historians, and scholars of immigration will learn much from Costaguta. He deserves our appreciation for writing it.

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MELÉNDEZ BADILLO, JORELL A. *The Lettered Barriada. Workers, Archival Power, and the Politics of Knowledge in Puerto Rico*. Duke University Press, Durham (NC) [etc.] 2021. xiii, 261 pp. Ill. \$102.95. (Paper: \$27.95.)

The Lettered Barriada. Workers, Archival Power, and the Politics of Knowledge in Puerto Rico is an original and important contribution to Puerto Rican labor historiography. With a solid base in archival research, in Puerto Rico's "New History" of the 1970s–1980s, and in recent scholarship on cultural history, Meléndez-Badillo presents a much-needed disassembling of Puerto Rico's major worker organizations in the early twentieth century, the Federación Libre de Trabajadores (Free Federation of Workers, FFW) and the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (SP) that was its political vehicle. It is a well-written text with an engaging, often visual, narrative style.

The Lettered Barriada offers an impressive bottom-up history of the FFW and the Socialist Party that highlights, among other issues, the workers' print culture, education centers, pre-strike organization, ideological heterodoxy (principally anarchism), and its autonomy vis-à-vis the American Federation of Labor (which organized neither political parties nor agricultural workers). The FFW and the SP that emerge from this book are living, contradictory entities. Meléndez seeks to move away from a binary logic of "resistance or integration" that "obscures other political processes, desires, and sociabilities" (p. 10). His survey attempts a balance between older and newer interpretations in Puerto Rican historiography, and the project is well-framed to promote a critical dialogue.

Meléndez develops five main themes. First, he presents worker print output as not just propaganda but as part of a general cultural process that comprised the formation of a “makeshift intellectual community” and the development of material and ideational archives. The “ragtag intellectuals” (p. 2) who constructed the metaphorical lettered *barriada* had an internationalist perspective but were long excluded from the local public sphere, where they gained entry only in the 1930s. The definition of *barriadas* that anchor the book’s central metaphor were “poor neighborhoods usually interconnected by a system of alleys that allowed people to move from one place to another” (p. 2). (*Barriada* is almost a synonym of *barrio* and is not necessarily tied to poverty, especially in a rural context).

Secondly, in an interesting twist, Meléndez illustrates the exclusionary practices of the lettered *barriada* itself, regarding gender and race through the life histories of several militant workers, including the legendary worker-intellectual Luisa Capetillo; and he argues for the formation of counter-archives by the excluded workers/thinkers.

Third, Meléndez surveys the trajectory of the lettered *barriada* in Puerto Rico’s social and political history, particularly in the 1930s.

Fourth, Meléndez addresses internal rifts in the FFW and the SP over support for strikes, affiliation with the American Federation of Labor (AFL), political status, bureaucratization, and corruption; and in the SP itself over the formation of alliances with the Puerto Rico Republicans (who were pro-statehood and pro-sugar corporations).

The book concludes with the impact of the “lettered *barriada*” in Puerto Rico’s social and political thought, principally by way of Puerto Rico’s 1952 Constitution, the social justice tenets of the Popular Democratic Party, which governed Puerto Rico from the 1940s to the 1960s, and the island’s labor historiography.

The turning point for the FFW and PS were the years 1933–1934, and Meléndez correctly highlights this period. These were the first two years of the SP’s precarious tenure as junior partner in a governing coalition with the Republicans. Major labor conflicts in the sugar industry reached their climax in January 1934, when field and factory sugar workers rejected an island-wide labor agreement between the FFW and the sugar corporations. These strikes were significant for their boldness and scale, as well as for their political character. In major coastal sugar-central towns across the island, the Nationalist leader Pedro Albizu Campos was invited to speak before worker assemblies of several thousands and was even asked to lead the strong but amorphous strike movement. (Remarkably, Albizu is not mentioned.) Massive gasoline and electricity boycotts also shook the island between November 1933 and March 1934, creating a uniquely volatile situation that contemporaries viewed, like historians today, as prerevolutionary.

Yet, in Meléndez’s account the 1933–1934 sugar worker strikes have a muted presence, and the boycott movements have none. The signal event of those years, in his interpretation, was a University of Puerto Rico student strike against the appointment of FFW/PS head Rafael Alonso to the UPR board of trustees. Meléndez quite erroneously interprets this event as being a landmark blow against upswelling worker intellectuals by the lettered class, and overlooks its significance as a historical protest against colonial misgovernment and political cronyism. “[Alonso] was fiercely attacked by students and his political opponents for lacking academic titles and for being culturally and intellectually unfit for the position”.

Meléndez adds, with a touch of irony that, “[s]tudents argued that his appointment would signal the death of Puerto Rican culture” (p. 127). Silenced in Meléndez’s interpretation of the UPR strike is the major controversy that framed the Alonso appointment: the dismissal of the Puerto Rican Commissioner of Education, José Padín, who championed the use of Spanish as the language of instruction in elementary and middle school. For the necessary question may be how the student strike in October 1933 stoked a political environment where a historic sugar worker challenge to the FFW and SP leadership became possible.

Meléndez’s understanding of socialist politics in early twentieth-century Puerto Rico, approached from the standpoint of working-class knowledge production, breaks with long-standing emphases on social class, ideology, party politics, and material conditions, as well as with perspectives that overemphasize Puerto Rico’s unending political-status debates. At the same time, he aims to strike a balance between older and newer approaches.

A comprehensive argument about the ideational archives and counter-archives of the FFW/SP, where older and newer approaches to labor history come into play, remains beyond the book’s focus on the exclusion of Blacks and women. Such an argument remains to be made; perhaps many more pages would be necessary. For instance, Meléndez registers various instances of anarchist influence in the FFW and SP but does not attempt a broad characterization of their anarchist precedents and persistences. Silenced, too, are several SP and FFW leaders who do not fit easily into the mold of the lettered *barriada* (Epifanio Fiz Jiménez, Andres Rodríguez Vera, Tadeo Rodríguez, Francisco Colón Giordany, etc.) and whose trajectory appears in suggestive fragments at best.

On a broader plane, it should be noted that *The Lettered Barriada* also silences the island’s rural milieu, which was massively important in Puerto Rico until the 1950s; or rather, that milieu is tacitly misconstrued as an extension of urban space. This is a recurrent difficulty in Puerto Rican labor histories in the twentieth century. Agricultural workers, especially in sugar cane – the “rural proletariat” who provided the FFW and PS with the bulk of its membership and strike force – are essentially viewed as wage laborers. Such an approach blurs the sugar workers’ still partly peasant existence and culture and seasonal labor patterns – a mode of life further defined by Puerto Rico’s regional diversity. Even the wage relation of the agricultural workers remains to be problematized, since piece- or task-work (*ajuste*) predominated until the 1930s. Sugar-factory workers (about ten per cent of the total) did lead a significantly “urban” existence that needs to be better understood; but even they had many connections to the world of field labor.

The weakest part of *The Lettered Barriada* is the analysis of three works that Meléndez considers as the crowning achievements of the “ragtag intellectuals”, by Santiago Iglesias, Rafael Alonso, and José Ferrer y Ferrer. These are “foundational texts for Puerto Rican labor historiography” (p. 6). Yet, these works of the late 1920s and 1930s have little of the depth and urgency of the earlier writings, including works by these three authors. As Meléndez himself suggests, the critical period was approximately between 1905 and 1920, when the production of newspapers, plays, books, and pamphlets, and strike activity was strongest, rather than the years between the 1920s and 1930s, when the three SP/FFW leaders wrote their main works.

“Although the Socialist Party’s foundation represented the consolidation of a project that emerged in the turn-of-the-century lettered *barriada*, during the 1920s it became just another political institution increasingly detached from its working-class base” (p. 118).

Another issue concerns the “lettered *barriada*” itself as material/social space. Rather disconcertingly, the *barriada* remains a metaphor and the fleeting references to actual worker communities are either blurry (Puerta de Tierra) or unpersuasive (La Perla). Yet, other communities could be instances of the networked worker/intellectual space that Meléndez seeks to evoke: Caguas and then Bayamón in the earlier years, Seboruco/Villa Palmeras and Puerta de Tierra perhaps later.

The “spatial unity” (p. 2) of the lettered *barriada* remains as elusive as its temporal frame. Meléndez’s narrowly ideational *barriada* falls short of the book’s promise and of its overall referent, Angel Rama’s *La ciudad letrada* (Montevideo, 1966). In this classic work of Latin American cultural-historical studies, Rama offers a perspective on the “lettered city” that is both physical and ideational. While Rama overemphasizes old city centers (the *casco*) vis-à-vis more peripheral worker quarters, his optic correctly highlights the significance of “mutual communication” within a specific urban space. Rama considered the intensely urban space of the *casco*, particularly in the later nineteenth–early twentieth century, “as the “intellectual core [*cogollo*, kernel] of the lettered city, as the lettered city in itself” (p. 115).

Hence the lettered *barriada* remains an imaginative construct closer to Italo Calvino than to Angel Rama. The notion of the lettered *barriada* as an evolving social-cultural or intellectual community is, in any case, somewhat at odds with the notion of an “archive”, which leans toward a later, more formal and more stable development. In the end, Meléndez’s broad periodization of the FFW and the Socialist Party does not quite mesh with his account of the genesis of the “lettered *barriada*” and its archival power.

In the 1920s, the FFW/SP leader Iglesias himself turned against the publications of the workers’ intellectual community and “lashed out against those small and independently run newspapers that circulated throughout Puerto Rico and had given life to the lettered *barriada*” (p. 118). Iglesias’s dictum would appear to embody not the consolidation of lettered *barriada* but its epitaph.

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OLIVARIUS, KATHRYN. *Necropolis. Disease, Power, and Capitalism in the Cotton Kingdom*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) and London 2022. ix, 336 pp. Ill. Maps. \$35.00; £30.35; € 31.95.

Necropolis. City of the dead. This is not what most people have in mind when they think of New Orleans, commonly regarded as one of the most boisterous places in