

Leví Marrero

Leví Marrero, a fourth generation Cuban, is a multi-dimensional scholar who defies description. He was trained in geography and taught the subject in Cuban *colegios* prior to being appointed to the Chair of Economic History at the Universidad de la Habana in 1955. His *Geografía de Cuba* (1950, 5th ed. 1982) and his *Historia Económica de Cuba* (1956) were major contributions to the literature on that island. Since 1961 he has made his home first in Venezuela and more recently in Puerto Rico.

We honor him for his *magnum opus*, the incomparable *Cuba: Economía y Sociedad* (Madrid: Editorial Playor), which has now reached 13 volumes with at least one more yet to come. It has been called the most exhaustive, most finely crafted, and most compelling historical geography yet to be written on any country of the Americas. It is a monumental work, the more remarkable in that it is the product of an isolated scholar who for most of the last 25 years has been working alone and without outside support.

Superbly indexed, each volume of *Cuba: Economía y Sociedad* can be used as an encyclopedic manual or sourcebook, but the whole is more properly seen as a scholarly tour de force of the highest literary quality reminiscent of the great works of Fernand Braudel. This prodigious achievement, originally projected for a more modest eight volumes, is organized chronologically. The story is carried down to 1868, the year the Cubans began their thirty years of strife leading to independence. It is based on exhaustive archival research in Havana, New York, London, Madrid, and Puerto Rico, but especially in the incomparable Archivo de las Indias in Sevilla. Firmly based on the land, on its resources, on locational considerations, and the particularism of Cuban culture, it provides an outstanding example of what the geographical perspective can bring to the study of history and how the historical perspective can throw light on geography.

Its presentation is no less admirable than its content. Almost every one of its square, octavo-size pages--and there are close to 4,000 of them to date--contains some sort of map, cartogram, side-bar or insert of a document (*testimonio*) or statistical table (*cifras*). There are innumerable extracts from previously unpublished *mercedes, visitas, cédulas*, royal decrees, notarial registers and price lists as well as biographical vignettes and handsomely reproduced line drawings or etchings. Each of the 13 volumes, bound in olive green, provides a feast for the historical geographer, providing an extraordinary wealth of comparative materials for understanding the evolution of man-land relationships both within the Caribbean area and in the wider framework of Hispanic America.

This remarkable undertaking, still in progress, stands as a landmark contribution to the historical geography of Latin America. The Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers takes pleasure in presenting its 1987 Honors Award for Distinguished Scholarship to its author, Leví Marrero, ex-professor of geography and history at the Universidad de la Habana and in later times, until his retirement in 1975, on the faculties of universities in Venezuela

and in Puerto Rico.

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