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**Liberato, Ana S. Q. Joaquín Balaguer,
Memory, and Diaspora: The Lasting Political
Legacies of an American Protégé. Lanham,
Md.: Lexington Books, 2013.**

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Sociologist Ana Liberato argues in the opening of her study that Joaquín Balaguer was more than a “mere heir to the authoritarianism of Trujillato regime” (p. 1) While regularly labeled as “continuismo,” it is critical, she argues, that scholars and the public alike recognize and understand that the Balaguerato established a clear, distinct, and lasting legacy within Dominican politics and society. Through an intertwined analysis of political pedagogy and memory Liberato offers a critical and interdisciplinary intervention into a serious and multifaceted silence in the historical record.

While Dominican historiography is thick with studies of the Trujillato, the periods that followed, particularly the *doce años*, remain much more sparsely analyzed.¹ Although the

1 This is slightly less pronounced in the area of political science, particularly in the context of the U.S. academy in which this book was published. See, for example, G. Pope Atkins and Larman C. Wilson, *The Dominican Republic and the United States: From Imperialism to Transnationalism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998); Emelio Betances, *State and Society in the Dominican Republic* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995); Rosario Espinal, “Between Authoritarianism and Crisis-Prone Democracy: The Dominican Republic After Trujillo,” in *Society and Politics in the Caribbean*, ed. Colin Clarke (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 145–65; Jonathan Hartlyn, *The Struggle for Democratic Politics in the Dominican Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Christian Krohn-Hansen, *Political Authoritarianism in the Domin-*

work of describing that particular imbalance is the labor of another review, Liberato's research provides ample evidence of how of the building of a pro-Balaguer "narrative of exceptionalism" makes an honest assessment of the period challenging (pp. 15-18). In her study, Liberato aims "to explore the specific ways in which Balaguer seemed to have been able to affect public memory of his regime and of his overall career in Dominican public life" and to "analyze the ways in which many Dominicans still display in their political views the enduring effects of the political pedagogies implemented by Balaguer for many decades" (p. 44). The book takes a wide temporal view, focusing equally on the styling of political pedagogies during Balaguer's multiple years in power and on early 21st memories of his leadership from resident and non-resident Dominicans. In this way it also provides a broad geographic lens on the intersections of memory and political legacy, reminding us of the significance of the Dominican diasporic community when dissecting questions surrounding the afterlives of authoritarianism. Incorporating resident and non-resident groups in her study allows Liberato to also draw valuable connections between memory and migration, including the assertion that political memory serves as "a mediating factor in the development of Diasporas" (p. 34).

In *Joaquín Balaguer, Memory, and Diaspora* Liberato frames her investigation around several sets of questions. In the first section of the book she asks: "How is Balaguer remembered in Dominican society today? Why is he remembered that way? What are the implications of these memories? What is his most enduring legacy?" These questions animate the first six chapters, although they are approached through a diversity of source materials. After an opening chapter providing an historical context for Balaguer's years of political leadership, chapters two through four provide careful analysis of political advertisements, campaign speeches and oratory, and memoir

ican Republic (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Howard J. Wiarda and Michael J. Kryzaneck, "Dominican Dictatorship Revisited: The Caudillo Tradition and the Regimes of Trujillo and Balaguer," *Revista/Review Interamericana* 7 (1982): 417-35.

to capture the ways Balaguer sought to fashion his image of political leadership. In the subsequent two chapters Liberato looks to a range of memory sites and a data set of individual recollections to explain enduring, if conflicted, frameworks of remembrance among the Dominican population. In the seventh chapter, Liberto asks what these memories and legacies look like in a comparative frame and seeks to interrogate how Balaguer has been remembered in relation to two of his contemporaries, Juan Bosch and Peña Gómez, and his political heir, Leonel Fernández. In the final chapter she turns to the question of political trust, asking “Which Balaguer characteristics do Dominicans emphasize in accounts of political trust? How do they justify their perspectives and characterizations of his trustworthiness in these accounts?” (p. 245).

Liberato grounds her analysis in several key concepts of memory, trust, and political pedagogy that often are not placed in the same study but meld together well for the purposes of this work. Her elaboration on public memory, based in scholarship of Kendall Phillips (2004), frames this collective vision of the past as a “discussion” and a continuous “interchange of ideas and thoughts, opinions and beliefs” that is sustained in the public through accessible material objects in particular places and spaces (p. 5). These “facilities of memory,” or spaces in which discussion of the past is “captured,” include memorials, parades, tomb sites, symposiums and conferences, posters, political advertisements, billboards, books, statues, museums, street names, etc., and they all work to build a (somewhat) cohesive narrative. Political pedagogy, she argues, is the “political meanings constructed and disseminated by Balaguer” about himself and his leadership as “part of a larger strategy of power consolidation” (p. 3) Finally, incorporated toward the end of the study but crucial in pulling her analysis together, is the concept of political trust which is “people’s willingness to support and/or legitimize the actions and performance of the political leadership and political institutions” (p. 237).

Liberato's most enduring contribution in this study is her careful dissection of the ways in which a "narrative of exceptionalism," both viewed through memory as well as through his self-fashioning actions at the time, was built around Joaquín Balaguer. Given the complicated nature of memory, let alone collective memory, the diversity of source material Liberato engages is crucial to the success of the study. Using ethnography, traditional political analysis, and discursive and textual analysis, all combined carefully with historical contextualization provides a more cohesive picture of the intensive legacies of authoritarianism in the Dominican Republic. And this, in fact, is the major take away. In order to contend with the legacies of authoritarianism and their contradictions, including counter-memories, counter-narratives, and paradoxes, Liberato contends that the literal processes of recollection must be broken open and examined closely. So must the concept that Balaguer fashioned himself as the Dominican political archetype in such a convincing manner that contemporary understandings of successful politicians continue to rely on the characteristics established by Balaguer himself (p. 24).

In general, Liberato argues, since the *ajusticiamiento* of Rafael Trujillo there has been a trend among the Dominican resident and non-resident population of "(un)memory" / *dismemoria* (including *borrón y cuenta nueva*). This "low intensity memory with eruptions of episodic remembering" is problematic because it presents no systematic effort to contend with the legacies of authoritarianism (p. 12). While a more recent "memory wave" has endeavored to resist the "narrative of exceptionalism" as established by Balaguer, a homogenous narrative focused on heroism of the fallen and other (generally male) resistance actors continues to hold sway. More recently "elite agents of memory" have increase efforts to expand facilities of memory in service to a resistant version of the Dominican political story that is more demanding of a "reckoning with the authoritarian past" (p 13). However, what Liberato demonstrates in her study is that such an effort continues to wage battle with a powerful pro-Balaguer construction of him as the Dominican political par excellence, not to mention re-

cent trends (or at least “eruptions”) of defense of Trujillo the spring from Balaguer’s own complicity and failure to reckon with the dictatorship. In sum, Liberato’s work demands a closer attention to the political and social legacies of the Balaguerato and its lasting imprints on the Dominican consciousness, reminding us of the tenacious links between political “technologies of power,” collective memory, and the symbolic (and real) violence of authoritarianism. As she argues, there continues to be a need for greater and more nuanced memory work in an effort to undo such legacies of conservative paternalism and for finding “collective healing” (270).