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The story of a Cuban-born countess who defined elegance and culture and defied all odds as a 19th century woman

The first English-language biography of María de las Mercedes de Santa Cruz y Montalvo



Known for her beauty, angelic voice and talent as a writer, Mercedes Santa Cruz y Montalvo, *la Belle Créole*, was a Cuban-born star of nineteenth-century Parisian society. A daughter of the creole aristocracy, Mercedes led a tumultuous life, leaving her native Havana as a teenager to join her mother in the heart of Madrid's elite society. As Napoleon swept Spain into the Peninsular War, Mercedes' family remained at the center of the storm and her marriage to French general Christophe-Antoine Merlin tied her fortunes to France.

Arriving in Paris in the aftermath of the French defeat, she recreated her life, ultimately hosting the city's premier musical salon. Acknowledged as one of the greatest amateur sopranos of her day, she nurtured artistic careers and daringly paved the way for well-born singers to publicly perform in lavish philanthropic concerts. Beyond her musical renown, Mercedes achieved fame as a writer. Her memoirs and travel writings introduced European audiences to nineteenth-century Cuban society and contributed to the debate over slavery. Scholars agree that Mercedes' writings deserve a place in the canon of Latin American Literature, and still quote her descriptions of Havana life and recognize her as

Cuba's earliest female author.

In *La Belle Créole* (Chicago Review Press; September 2014), biographer García-Lapuerta beautifully unravels her seven years of research and travels in Mercedes' footsteps to the little known worlds of a magnificent woman in history: colonial Cuba, Napoleonic Spain and Parisian society from 1813-1852. This first English-language biography of *la Belle Créole* strings together stories, memoirs, travel writings and very personal correspondence to reveal a captivating and seductive portrait of a nineteenth-century daughter of the Creole aristocracy who epitomized an unusually modern and sophisticated life.

About the Author:

Alina García-Lapuerta, a native Spanish speaker, was born in Cuba. A graduate of Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service and Tufts University's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, she is member of Biographers International Organization, The Biographers' Club of London. Based in London with her Spanish-American husband and their two children, García-Lapuerta still spends considerable time in South Florida.

Book Details:

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