

# **GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

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**Volume One**

**Winter 1998-Spring 1999**

**Nos. 3-4.**

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## **Editor's Introduction**

### **WHERE IS CUBA HEADED? IMPLICATIONS OF RECENT RESEARCH<sup>1</sup>**

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Every few years a new edited volume on Cuba appears in English.<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, in the last decade more Cubans themselves have their research, analyses and opinions published in these anthologies. In this 1998 selection of scholarship and opinions about Cuba, seven voices (including the Monsignor's interview) are Cubans who live on the island. Voices from the United States include three articles by Cuban Americans, and two more on research about Cubans in the U.S.

When the guest editors issued the call for papers, we did not specify cultural studies, economics, Caribbean studies, Cuba-U.S. relations, gender studies, state-citizen or state-society relations, social science, contemporary history or any of the singular disciplines or inter-disciplinary divides of the academy. The call was wide open and the results are wide-ranging. Reading the articles received has been like opening gifts and finding that the people who gave them have good taste, sensibility and sensitivity. The guest editors are proud to present a fresh wave of new scholarship about Cuba, Cubans, and Cuban-Americans, their changing culture, economy and political views on the island and in the United States. Most of all, we are happy to include a louder chorus of Cuban voices (from both sides of the wa-

ters), although we do not pretend that they represent the official point of view from Havana. It is equally true that the voices from the U.S. do not represent the official views dominating in Washington. It is the profound hope of the guest editors that officials in both capitals might try to listen to all the voices we can squeeze onto these pages.

Many of the authors' vantage points from which to view Cuba and all things Cuban, plus their research methods and writing styles, are together a combination quite different from those in previous anthologies. First, eleven of the twenty-five authors, nearly half, are women. Secondly, many writers are profoundly iconoclastic toward the sacred cows of twentieth century capitalism and socialism. If the writers and scholars by their own personal attributes tell us anything about the next century's Cuba, and the scholars interested in Cuban life, the message would be that Cuba and Cuban scholarship is multifaceted, and that change seems to be the only constant of social and economic relations and life on the island. Furthermore, what happens in Cuba influences Cubans outside, just as prosperity in Miami or Madrid or Union City, New Jersey, has some impact—embargo or not—on the island.

The twenty-two articles in this selection present views of Cuba from several fields of study and from different approaches within those fields. Some writers review a particular type of production such as films, or a changing group within the population. José B. Alvarez IV shows how "Nation, Cinema, and Women" have been changing via the images of "Discourses, Realities and Cuban Utopia" over the past forty years. Elvira Díaz-Vallina and Julio Cesar Gonzalez examine the "Self-Emancipation of Women in Cuba" over a longer span of time. In "Women, the Family and the Cuban Revolution," Marisela Fleites-Lear also sketches changes over several generations. In contrast, less than a decade is represented by Diane Soles' piece, "Cuban Film Industry Between a Rock and a Hard Place."

Most articles present changes of the past nine years, since the collapse of the Soviet Union and COMECON external socialist support for the island. One of the most poignant and troubling pieces, which probes the depths of Cuban immiseration, is entitled "The Devaluation of Women's Work." The study by Elisa Facio jabs us in the gut with the meaning and forms of "*jineterismo* during the Special Period" (the other part of her title). The blow is even harder for those Cubans whose

generation eliminated prostitution from the island, retrained the women involved, and helped them find stable jobs and reintegrate themselves into mainstream Cuban society. They actually saw the achievement of a better life for all the citizenry in terms of education, health, general welfare, and social justice. To now see their own daughters and grand-children cozying up to foreigners, to gain the dollars necessary to make ends meet at home, is a very nasty medicine for those who risked their lives and made continuous sacrifices for the revolution. Life on the island, since 1959, has been neither a paradise nor a hell compared to life in the United States, neither a model for democratic political life nor a model of tyrannical rule. But nobody in the 1970s or 1980s could have imagined an economic distress so severe that it would force (as in war-torn Europe during the 1940s) the return of prostitution by young people from all educational levels, political viewpoints and family backgrounds.

Thankfully, not all the recent changes have been nasty ones. Perhaps the least known yet most important issues are those that deal with the life of the planet. Dr. Jorge Ramon Cuevas, an internationally recognized leader in promoting mass consciousness of ecological threats, directs one of Cuban TV's most popular shows, "*Entorno*." His article presents the rich quantity of Cuban flora and fauna, and shows that there are several opportunities for U.S. and Cuban cooperation to stop the erosion and destruction of natural life of land and sea in the Caribbean (and northwards).

It may come as a surprise to many readers that, at least on the environmental scientific level, there has been some cooperation for years between the two countries. The biotechnology industry and Cuban efforts to forge sustainable and environmentally sound economic development are two of the most important yet undervalued efforts that should be more publicized in the United States. They hold great promise for future cooperation, and the time is approaching when our planet will depend on the restraints of a socialist-inspired mentality (Cuban, not the European opposite) to be applied to a capitalist system of waste and destruction that is simply out of control to the point of threatening all residents of the planet.

### **IS THE DECADE OF THE 1990s MORE "TRANSITIONAL" THAN OTHERS?**

Cuba has seen so many transitions this century—wars, dictatorships, revolutions and foreign interventions—that it may seem artificial to refer to the social, cultural, economic and political changes reported in this volume as "transitions at the millennium." However, due to the coincidence in timing, the disintegration of the Soviet bloc has led to many big "transitions" in several parts of the globe during the last decade of the millennium. The changes presented in the articles, or imagined in the speculative political scenarios, have been in process during the decade leading up to the thousand-year marker. If the calendar years were different, and we were not writing at the end of this century (1901-2001 AD), we might have entitled the collection, "Capitalist Globalization Hits Cuba," "Castro Welfare State Up for Grabs [or open for business]," or, reflecting the contributions on the hardships for Cuban women, perhaps "From Medicine and Law Books to Bikinis and Bars on the Socialist Island."

In a more serious vein, however, all those titles would not be quite right because they imply impending doom, as if those Cubans who support a humanitarian system of economic production and distribution had no internal recourse and no connections to other events and people from Brazzaville to Brasilia to Beijing. Hundreds of millions of people have been finding it continuously harder to survive against the behemoth of growing inequalities. The major stock exchanges, with their promises to small investors of more and more wealth from continuously expanding production into regions with ever lower wages, may not have the last word.

While Cuba has suffered deeply in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the former socialist economies and states, the leadership has mobilized sufficient numbers in the early 1990s to prevent starvation, turn around agricultural stagnation, and slowly get back on its feet through the rapidly developing mixed economy (see Campbell, Carranza, Cotman, et alia). Income flows into the island through the jointly-owned or foreign-owned tourist industry, and has been a partial counterweight to falling sugar prices and bad weather conditions for the growing and harvesting of the cane. The Cuban example of remaining as independent as possible economically, during a global expansion of capital in search of investment opportunities with low,

lower and lowest wages, may find echoes among other poor countries. Trying to develop with external investment, some of the more rapidly-developing economies (Malaysia and Indonesia, for example) already have come crashing down as the flows of capital and goods rushed out of their countries, and into the hands of unscrupulous local elites, at rates that provoked massive civil unrest.

Some of the drama of Cuba's adjustment to the global realities of a post-Soviet world is presented in this volume. Not all the readjustment is economic or political. In the cultural fields of film (Diane Soles and Jose B. Alvarez IV), literature and literary criticism (Victor Fowler Calsada) and philosophy (Emilio Ichikawa Morin), we get a feeling of the lifting from Cubans' necks of a cultural yoke. While Fowler claims it is not being lifted fast enough, and chides the literary critics for being out of touch, at least he can write that criticism and get it published on the island. Ichikawa's article, published in Spanish a few years ago, is interesting because it shows that, despite the economic hardships, some of Cuba's young intellectuals have maintained access to academic trends and social theory in general in Europe, the United States and Latin America.

One of the thought-provoking themes covered is the social construction of race. Christina Proenza, raised in a Cuban household that spoke Spanish within a predominantly Cuban urban area in the U.S., provides observations on the construction of Anglo whiteness, her father's identity before the Cubans in Miami became prosperous and dominated the region's politics.

While our collection is short and one-sided concerning the religious transitions of this decade,<sup>3</sup> we are delighted to have Marisel Caravallo's interview with Monsignor Carlos Manuel de Cespedes, a descendant of the great nineteenth century Cuban patriot. His love of Cuban culture, and his insistence that the Catholic Church is an unerasable part of that culture, offer a view rarely presented to U.S. readers—or TV viewers whose images of Cuba are limited to coverage surrounding the January 1998 visit of Pope John Paul II. It is important to realize that the Cuban Catholic Church began to emerge from its long slumber, not with the arrival of Pope John Paul II but, rather, in the mid-1980s. The number of people attending Church services swelled into a far stronger tide in the 1990s, as they sought solace from the

suffering of Cuba's economic crisis. The papal visit was more a culmination than an initiation of religious practice, and at the same time, the visit undoubtedly strengthened the Church on the island. Monsignor de Cespedes was highly instrumental in organizing the teams of people carrying out the immense arrangements for the visit.

From religion to politics and political speculation, we move to eight articles on political developments. Five of these articles examine the Cuban regime and the island's internal political developments. Benigno Aguirre looks sociologically and historically at the Castro regime and seeks to explain its durability; he employs the political sociological theory of Berger to account for Fidel Castro's popular legitimacy. Edward McCaughan, John Peeler and Peter Sanchez, each from a different point of view, consider aspects of democracy in and for Cuba. While Sanchez and Peeler follow more traditional political science modeling for a democratic transition, McCaughan's research inside Cuba shows that there are several (competing) groupings and tendencies, whose degree of accordance with a type of Marxism and degree or type of democracy preferred, is quite variable. His article strongly suggests that U.S. (or any other) policy, to be successful with Cubans, must understand the subtleties of Cuban political theory and debates, and rise above the crass bi-polar posturing that used to pass as theory in American academies that trained people to work in U.S. foreign policy careers.

The Cold War is over, and somebody should be educating future Latin Americanists about Cuban and other Latin Americans' perceptions of Cuba's century of relations with the United States. Cubans fought hard and long (1868-1898) for the right to run their own affairs. The leaders of its early Republic were forced to agree to U.S. intervention into its affairs, but they did not like it.<sup>4</sup> Over the course of the Machado dictatorship and its overthrow in 1933, Cubans, during the tumultuous decade of the thirties—like many in the U.S. and Europe—turned to radical ideas and experienced a surge of massive labor strikes, political protests, and the proliferation of political tendencies and parties. The revolutionary wave was so strong that it held power for 100 days (1933-1934). That heritage culminated in the democratic and progressive Constitution of 1940, but the democracy was never implemented (Perez-Stable, 1994; Dominguez, 1978).

Out of the frustrations of the radical layers in different social classes arose opposition parties and their youth groups in the 1940s. The leadership of the 1959 revolution came directly out of the student movement of the late 1940s and early 1950s, years when the opposition groupings dominated student politics. Theirs was the generation that would finally overcome the half century of humiliation imposed by the United States and Washington's man of the hour, Fulgencio Batista. Batistiano officials worked with the FBI (five U.S. Embassy officers reported directly to J. Edgar Hoover in Washington), in the jointly-run BRAC, the bureau to repress communist activities, and the notorious SIM (military intelligence), which bloodily upheld its motto to "take no prisoners" to suppress any and all dissension (Paterson, 1994). Thus, it is hard to discuss Cuban political transitions without considering its multifaceted relationships with the United States. Cuba, due to U.S. policy, has far better official state-to-state and economic trade relations with Canada, Europe, South America and the Caribbean, as McKenna & Kirk, Cotman and others document in the pages that follow. Yet, Cubans have maintained networks of ties to the United States, which also has a very strong cultural presence on the island. The transitions of the 1990s, which may seem huge now, may seem a few decades hence far less important than others of the twentieth century.

Ackerman (with interview research methods) and Lulo (who synthesizes survey research with interviewing and news coverage) both look primarily at the Cuban community in Miami and emphasize its importance for what is going and will go on in the politics of U.S.-Cuban relations. McKenna and Kirk criticize the woeful state of U.S. foreign policy through the prism of Canadian political scientists. They seem amazed (yet remain polite) at the backwardness and self-destructive policies of Washington, and recommend Canadian policy as an example for their neighbors to consider. Perea's lively piece criticizes the sectarianism among many U.S. NGOs that seek to normalize relations across the Straits of Florida.

### **SO, WHERE IS CUBA HEADED?**

The fate of the Cuban population over the past decade, and even over the entire twentieth century, has been far kinder than what has befallen many others across the globe. But life has not been easy on the island, not even in relatively prosperous times. The human cost

was excruciatingly high to defeat the forces of Spanish monarchy (1895-98) and the brutal dictatorships in the 1930s and the 1950s. The economic hardships of the 1990s are considered the worst of Cuba's many periods of food and material goods shortages. Somewhat bruised and sore, yet, Cuba has survived.

Cuban transitions away from dependence on the Soviet bloc for foreign trade and technological development have already led to a mixed economy on the island. As capitalism makes greater inroads, material conditions of life (the basics of food, shelter, clothing) worsen for significant sectors of the population, but have improved so much for a few others that an observable social differentiation could be measured. Nevertheless, as the Cold War recedes, there are also some positive openings of cultural and political space for more challenging and controversial themes.

Is Cuba headed for a rapprochement with the United States? All signs would indicate it is, but certainly not fast enough for some contributors to this special issue. Will the United States wait until Fidel Castro is no longer on the scene before opening its diplomatic doors? Not if the U.S. business community has anything to say about it. Cuba offers a wise investment opportunity, but European and Canadian competitors are gaining while their U.S. counterparts are losing out (unless they go illegally and at a cost through other international houses of investment).

Is the Cuban-American community in the U.S. still a hindrance to improving relations between their two countries? The research presented here shows how much the gap has narrowed between the two extreme opinions toward Castro and the Cuban state within the Cuban community in the United States. While the older generation, the most vehement against the Castro regime, now has a weaker input into the Cuban dialogue within the United States, the U.S. Congress has not yet caught up to the younger Cuban-American generation nor to the changes reported in this volume.

We close the introduction with the hope that others will read these articles, gain new knowledge, study further and devote efforts to ending the logjam in U.S.- Cuban official state-to-state relations. Once that is accomplished, life will be easier for divided families and for all those who seek freer travel and mutual exchange in an atmosphere of



peaceful relations. For these reasons, we thank *Global Development Studies* for its decision to devote a special issue to Cuba.

## ENDNOTES

1. Thanks to Dickinson colleagues Mark Ruhl and Sinan Koont for their helpful comments on an early draft of this introductory article.
2. Among them, Miguel Centeno and Mauricio Font, eds., *Toward a New Cuba? Legacies of a Revolution*, 1996; Ruth Behar ed., *Bridges to Cuba/ Puentes a Cuba*, 1995; Mesa-Lago, ed. *Cuba After the Cold War*, 1993; Donna Rich Kaplowitz, ed. *Cuba's Ties to a Changing World*, 1993; Sandor Halebsky and John Kirk, eds., with Rafael Hernandez. *Transformation and Struggle. Cuba Faces the 1990s*, 1990; Dominguez and Hernandez, eds., *U.S.-Cuban Relations in the 1990s*, 1989; Halebsky and Kirk, eds. *Cuba: Twenty-Five Years of Revolution, 1959-1984*, 1985; Horowitz, *Cuban Communism*, 1970, 1972, 1977, 1981, 1984, 1987 1989, 1995; Rolando Bonachea and Nelson Valdes, eds., *Cuba in Revolution*, 1972.
3. In fairness to ourselves, we had solicited and were expecting some other research about the religious revival among various branches of Christian faith, but it did not materialize. We also have no article regarding a Jewish cultural revival, but can report from personal observation that the main synagogue in Vedado has taken on a new coat of paint and a new cultural life, and groups have traveled to the island from the New York area in recent years to celebrate the traditional Passover Seder.
4. The Platt Amendment in 1902, which stated that the U.S. had the right to intervene at any moment it deemed necessary, was a bitter pill that Cubans had to swallow to have a nominally independent republic (Perez-Stable, 1994).

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