C. Sunshine

Cuba now

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REVIEW ARTICLE

CUBA NOW

The Cuba reader: the making of a revolutionary society. PHILIP BRENNER, WILLIAM M. LEOGRANDE, DONNA RICH, and DANIEL SIEGEL (eds.). New York: Grove Press, 1989. xxxv + 564 pp. (Paper US \$14.95). *Cuba: the test of time.* JEAN STUBBS. London: Latin America Bureau, 1989. xvii + 142 pp. (Paper UK £3.95). *Cuba: politics, economics and society.* MAX AZICRI. London: Pinter Publishers Ltd., 1988. xxiii + 276 pp. (Cloth US \$35.00, Paper US \$12.50). *Cuba libre: breaking the chains?* PETER MARSHALL. Boston: Faber & Faber, 1987. viii + 300 pp. (Cloth US \$18.95). *The closest of enemies: a personal and diplomatic account of U.S.-Cuban relations since 1957.* WAYNE S. SMITH. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1987. 308 pp. (Paper US \$8.95). *Imperial state and revolution: the United States and Cuba, 1952-1986.* MORRIS H. MORLEY. New Rochelle, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987. ix + 571 pp. (Paper US \$16.95, Cloth US \$59.50). *From confrontation to negotiation: U.S. relations with Cuba.* PHILIP BRENNER. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1988. x + 118 pp. (Cloth US \$30.00, Paper US \$9.95).

Nineteen eighty-eight marked the completion of the Cuban revolution's third decade. Several events that year suggested that Cubans might finally look forward to a lessening of the island's international isolation, if not its domestic economic woes. The revolution had survived eight years of hostility from the Reagan administration. Washington's attempts to secure international censure of Cuba on human rights grounds had culminated in the visit of a United Nations delegation, at Havana's invitation and with relatively little damage to Cuba's image. Fidel Castro's visits to Ecuador and Mexico to attend the inaugurations of two Latin American presidents underscored Cuba's reinsertion into the hemispheric community.

Finally, Cuban military successes against South African troops in Angola and Cuba's role in the subsequent negotiations over Angola and Namibia were a source of pride.

The revolution's survival was all the more extraordinary given its existence in the shadow of a superpower dedicated to its reversal. Secretary of State Alexander Haig blustered in 1981 that the U.S. would "take it to the source" - allegedly of all conflict in Central America - by confronting Havana militarily. Eight years later, Reagan officials were departing Washington while 30th anniversary parties took place in Havana.

The anniversary's proximity seems to have prompted an outpouring of new books on Cuba in 1987, 1988 and 1989. Those by Azicri, Marshall, and Stubbs, along with the team-edited *Cuba reader* - to pick only a few of those which appeared - attempt comprehensive analyses of Cuban achievements and problems at the three-decade mark. Those by Brenner, Morley and Smith focus on U.S.-Cuban relations, responding in part to the heightened tensions during the Reagan years.

With one possible exception, the books reviewed here represent original and solid contributions to our understanding of Cuba. Their authors include a former U.S. diplomat, two Britons, a Cuban-American and several North American academics. They illuminate virtually every aspect of contemporary Cuban society and explore thoroughly the last 30 years of confrontational relations between Havana and Washington.

What they do less well is anticipate emerging issues beginning to reshape Cuba's domestic reality and international relations. These have introduced new strains and uncertainties, as yet little understood, into the fabric of Cuban society. The tumultuous changes within the socialist bloc have distanced Cuba from its allies ideologically and threaten to disrupt the economic, if not necessarily the political, bonds between Moscow and Havana. This is happening as the economic downturn in Cuba leads to frustration and flagging productivity. In the realm of politics, the trial and execution of four high-ranking Cuban officials on drug trafficking and corruption charges has shaken Cuban society. Internal dissent has become slightly more organized, with small Cuban "human rights" groups gaining notice in the international, if not the domestic, arena.

Given the rapidity with which some of these events have overtaken Cuba, the authors can hardly be faulted for failing to treat them adequately. Yet one cannot help wishing for more penetrating discussion of the issues which could trigger significant changes in Cuba in the next few years.

If the goal is to document the journey Cuba has made, rather than where it may be going, none does better than *The Cuba reader*, an ambitious anthology of 56 essays. Contributors include North American, Cuban-

American and Cuban academics, journalists and officials. A few primary documents are included, such as the Platt Amendment to Cuba's 1901 constitution. A number of articles date from the 1960s and 1970s; most were written since 1980, including several prepared for this book.

The editors' premise is that American perceptions of Cuba are clouded by misinformation, and that accurate information will help improve relations between the two countries. Although the book is aimed at a general audience, specialists will welcome the impressive array of key writings on Cuba as a reference tool.

The section on foreign policy is most substantial, with contributions by former U.S. diplomat Wayne Smith, editors Brenner and LeoGrande, and Cuban vice-president Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, among others. The section on political structures also is strong, with essays by Cuban-American scholars Nelson Valdes and Jorge I. Domínguez on developments within the Cuban Communist party and government. Margaret E. Crahan and Debra Evenson contribute original essays on the Church and the legal system. By contrast, the section on the contemporary economy is thin, given the salience of economic questions in Cuba today.

The reader will want to pick and choose from this voluminous work, and to note carefully the dates of articles, as a number have been included for their historical significance and contain outdated information. But for a comprehensive picture of Cuba over the last 30 years, by leading analysts on both sides of the Florida straits, *The Cuba reader* is unequaled.

In *Cuba: The test of time*, British journalist Jean Stubbs takes a different approach. In keeping with tradition at the London-based Latin America Bureau, this slim volume offers a well-crafted synthesis of key issues. A resident of Cuba for most of the last twenty years, Stubbs manages to combine an insider's sensitivity and depth of understanding with the critical distance of the outsider. She also goes beyond the others reviewed here in anticipating emerging issues for the future.

This book's focus is on economics – Cuba's goals, the obstacles it faces, and the strategies it has pursued. Stubbs discusses the dual dollar/peso economy which has arisen partly as a result of the recent decision to encourage tourism, and shows how this feeds into a subtle malaise born of unfulfilled consumer aspirations. The revolution's very success in guaranteeing basic security to workers – while economic constraints limit the possibility of attractive material rewards – necessitates a constant search for alternative incentives to productivity and efficiency. The Cuban leadership has addressed this problem in varying ways over time, most recently through a renewed emphasis on revolutionary values.

The book gives shorter shrift to social and cultural issues. In a single

chapter, "Ethics of Liberation", the author attempts to cover political structures, human rights, male-female relations, the criminal justice system, arts and culture, and religion. The result is a glossing over of some of the most complex and challenging areas of the revolution.

The treatment of foreign policy emphasizes Cuba's development aid to the Third World and its trade with socialist and western nations. Stubbs blames the U.S. embargo for exacerbating many Cuban economic and political problems, and argues that it is becoming an even greater obstacle as Havana pursues increased economic integration with the West. Yet, she argues, it is likely that pressures from within the socialist bloc and how Cuba chooses to respond to them will be of most immediate significance.

Stubbs concludes that "Cuba 30 years on is a blend of tremendous achievements ... alongside ... growing problems of a social, economic and political kind." Internal debate over how to address these problems within socialist parameters, against the backdrop of socialist reforms elsewhere, will help shape Cuba's course in its fourth decade.

Cuba: Politics, economics and society is a recent addition to Pinter Publishers' series of monographs on "Marxist regimes". The hallmark of the series is detached analysis and exhaustive detail, and this book is no exception. Cuba-born Max Azicri, a professor for the last twenty years at Edinboro University in Pennsylvania, has written a thoughtful and balanced appraisal of contemporary Cuban society.

Azicri begins with a chapter on pre-1959 history which says surprisingly little about the development of Castro's revolutionary movement. Readers interested in the movement's ideological roots will find a rich source in another recent work, University of Akron professor Sheldon Liss's *Roots of Revolution: Radical thought in Cuba* (Liss 1987).

Azicri is strongest when he analyzes the changing structures and functioning of Cuba's government and Communist party. He succeeds better than most observers in balancing institutional dynamics with the factor of Castro's personal leadership. Since the creation of socialist institutions in Cuba in the 1970s, he says, the source of the government's legitimacy has somewhat shifted from Castro's charisma to an institutional base, yet Castro remains central. Although the institutional and personalistic leadership largely reinforce each other, they are also in tension, lending complexity to the Cuban political process.

The treatment of social relations is more uneven. Although Azicri examines changing male-female roles under the revolution, he does not always capture their complexity. His acknowledgement that "remnants of machismo still linger on" may strike some as a polite understatement.

Discussion of race relations, while emphasizing the basic transformation under the revolution, fails to address adequately recent policy shifts targeting the residual structural manifestations of racial stratification.

On such loaded themes as “democracy” and “dissent”, Azicri identifies and contrasts the often conflicting interpretations of Cuban and outside critics. His own background may have contributed to such an approach: after working briefly for the revolutionary government, he was exposed to the anti-Castro movement in the United States in the 1960s, and later joined a group of Cuban-Americans favoring dialogue and normal relations between the two countries.

He does not appear to have an overarching thesis or theme, but simply tries to present a complete picture in scrupulously documented detail. At times the text appears in danger of collapsing under its weight of statistics, and its thoroughness produces a tendency toward repetition. Yet its density also makes this book satisfying reading and a valuable reference for anyone seriously interested in Cuba.

An American resident in Havana for many years once remarked to this reviewer: “A person can come here, spend two weeks, and go home and write a book about Cuba. Plenty of people do. But if you come and spend two months, you’ll write a different book. And if you spend longer than that, you may conclude you can’t write a book at all...” Peter Marshall’s *Cuba Libre: Breaking the chains?* is of the two-month variety. He first visited Cuba in 1984. But he had been fascinated by the Cuban revolution since his radical student days, the British-born author says. One suspects that the extent of his initial illusions may help to explain his disillusionment now.

One is alerted to the intellectual tenor of this book early on, when Marshall inquires rhetorically whether Cuba “has ... really broken the chains of the past? Or has it forged new shackles to replace the old?” His answer is not in itself exceptional: that the revolution has largely freed Cubans from material poverty and inequality, but at a price of ideological rigidity and restrictions on individual liberties. He arrives at this via so many platitudinous observations, however, that the reader is tempted to dismiss any conclusion he attempts.

While giving Cuba credit for its many social and economic achievements, he depicts a highly militarized, repressive society. He is capable of startling reductionism (“The only difference between Cuba’s economic system now and capitalism is ...”). Marshall similarly oversimplifies on the topic of religion, saying that “God is for all intents and purposes dead and buried in Cuba”. He acknowledges the existence of a dialogue between the Cuban churches and the government, but argues that it is “a dialogue in which

[Castro] tends to do all the talking and which takes place on his own terms". This is untrue and sells Cuban church people short.

Marshall appears sincere in his desire to paint a balanced portrait of Cuban society on the basis of his tours of the island. But many such books already have been written, and this one covers little new ground. It well illustrates the peril of trying to judge something as complex as the Cuban revolution from an outsider's vantage point.

Authors Smith, Morley and Brenner do not attempt to render such judgement. Their concern is the relationship between the United States and Cuba, particularly the way in which Washington's Cuba policy has been made and implemented. All three conclude that U.S. policymaking toward Havana over the past 30 years has been a striking failure, and that U.S. interests would be better served by adopting a less confrontational approach.

Wayne Smith was a junior officer in the U.S. embassy in Havana when Castro's triumphant forces marched into the city. Recalled to Washington when the U.S. broke relations with Cuba in 1961, he spent the next eighteen years in other diplomatic posts and at the State Department's Cuba desk. In 1979, under the Carter administration, Smith returned to Havana to become the chief of the newly-formed U.S. Interests Section.

Smith watched with growing dismay as the Carter/Vance opening to Cuba gave way first to the Cold War views of Carter's national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and then to the aggressively confrontational posture of the Reagan administration. After his repeated attempts to urge more constructive policies met with disinterest or hostility at higher levels, he resigned from the foreign service in 1982. *The closest of enemies* is Smith's absorbing account of his experiences during these years.

Its major theme is missed opportunities. Time and again, U.S. officials ignored or rebuffed overtures from the Cuban government which could have led to better relations. Initially, Smith notes, Washington did make overtures to Castro which the Cuban leader rejected. By 1963, however, Castro was signalling his interest in an accommodation and offering a number of concessions. The U.S. State Department responded by demanding the impossible: that Cuba break all its ties with the Soviet Union *before* any talks could begin, effectively giving up its security shield without guarantees that U.S. hostility would cease.

In 1978, after the Carter administration froze the process of normalization begun several years earlier, the Cubans again reached out. Castro offered to sit down at the negotiating table, and the Cubans went on to release a large number of political prisoners as a unilateral concession. The U.S. responded by sending warships to within a few miles of the Cuban coast

for intimidating naval maneuvers. Yet again in 1981, when Cuba suspended its arms shipments to Nicaragua, the Reagan administration dismissed the gesture and refused Havana's offer to discuss Central America – all the while insisting that Cuban interference was at the root of conflicts in the region.

In these cases and others, U.S. officials passed up opportunities to talk because fundamentally they were not interested in reaching an accommodation. Rather, they saw Cuban concessions as signs of weakness, and hoped that further hardening of the U.S. position would lead to Cuban capitulation. Smith's position was that real disagreements indeed separated Washington and Havana, but that U.S. interests could best be advanced through step-by-step negotiation of the matters at issue.

Smith blames the demise of the Carter opening squarely on Brzezinski's National Security Council, which used Cuban involvement in Africa as an excuse to halt normalization. Smith's detailed discussion of Cuba's African role is particularly useful. In contrast to the prevailing U.S. mythology blaming the Soviet Union and Cuba for unprovoked aggression in Angola, Smith adds his voice to those who blame the U.S. for first escalating and internationalizing the Angolan civil war. Although he believed the official version at first, his outrage grew as, in 1977, U.S. officials claimed a Cuban troop buildup in Angola (there was none) and blamed Cuba for instigating the revolt in Zaire's Shaba province (it hadn't).

A fascinating sub-plot in *The closest of enemies* is Smith's personal journey of conscience. One can empathize with his discomfiture when, in meetings with his Cuban counterparts, he had to defend official U.S. statements he knew to be untrue. "As a Foreign Service officer serving at the pleasure of the president, I could not openly take issue with the views of my superiors", he writes. "Neither was I going to lie for them..."

Smith does not challenge the underlying assumption that U.S. security interests required limiting Soviet and Cuban influence in the hemisphere. But he sees that goal as more effectively accomplished by pragmatic and honest diplomacy than by force, intimidation and deception. The failure of such common-sense views to penetrate the U.S. foreign policy community is a good indicator of the hysteria which still dominates U.S. attitudes toward Cuba.

Morris Morley's *Imperial state and revolution* examines U.S. policy toward Cuba over a similar period, from 1952 (the date of Batista's coup) to 1986. In contrast to Smith, who often highlights differences between agencies and individuals involved in making policy, Morley emphasizes a continuity of assumptions and purpose which have undergirded policymaking. He argues that the "imperial state", reflecting the interests of the U.S. capitalist

class, has sought to "open, and keep open, as much of the world economy as possible in the interests of foreign capital accumulation and expansion". Accordingly, successive U.S. administrations have used varying tactics in a continuing campaign to prevent, and later reverse, the establishment of an anti-capitalist government in Cuba.

Morley's particular concern is the interaction between the international system and the imperial state as it pursues these goals. Castro's success in moving Cuba rapidly out of the U.S. political and economic orbit meant that bilateral U.S. pressures had diminishing effectiveness. This led Washington to regionalize and then internationalize the confrontation, pressuring other countries to isolate Cuba diplomatically and economically.

During the 1960s, while carrying out a "secret war" of sabotage against Cuba from U.S. soil, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations applied pressure to each Latin American nation to secure its cooperation in isolating Cuba. European countries also were urged to cut trade and transport links with Havana, and most did. During the 1970s, however, this multilateral economic blockade began to crumble. Capitalist countries from Japan to Spain, responding to their own economic interests, steadily increased trade and credit links with Havana. Eventually, Washington's Cuba embargo became more effective in isolating the U.S. from its own allies than in isolating Cuba.

Morley pays little attention to what was happening on the Cuban side, either in terms of its response to U.S. actions or its diplomacy toward other states. Rather, this is essentially a study of the U.S. foreign policy process and of the limits on economic sanctions as a form of intervention in an interdependent world. But Morley shows how the U.S. preoccupation with Cuba spilled over into U.S. relations with virtually every nation in Latin America and even Europe. It is exhaustively documented with both interviews and primary sources, a careful and well-argued study.

Philip Brenner's *From confrontation to negotiation* departs from a similar perspective, but has more narrowly defined aims. Brenner, who teaches international relations at American University, wrote the book for the Washington-based organization Policy Alternatives for the Caribbean and Central America (PACCA). Arguing that U.S. policy toward Cuba has failed to achieve its objectives, he outlines a concise blueprint for change.

Brenner offers a useful discussion of key issues dividing the two countries, both bilateral (such as Radio Martí and the Guantánamo base) and multilateral (primarily Cuban involvement in Central America and Angola). He argues that none of Cuba's demands threatens fundamental U.S. security, while Washington's demand that Cuba unilaterally renounce its Soviet alliance places Cuba at risk. Without any change in this U.S. posture, he concludes, significant reduction in tensions remains unlikely.

Brenner correctly asserts that U.S. hostility has become counter-productive in regards to the goal of having Cuba reduce its Soviet ties. At the same time, he assigns perhaps too much importance to the U.S. threat in shaping every aspect of Cuban behavior. His focus on the Soviet-Cuban alliance, without mention of its incipient contradictions, may render the book an inadequate guide to the complexities of the coming period.

Brenner emphasizes the need not just for new policies, but for new U.S. attitudes recognizing Cuba's sovereignty and right to self-determination. Sadly, this shift in basic assumptions is likely to be far harder to achieve than the pragmatic negotiations on specific issues that he proposes.

In a period in which the Soviet Union appears increasingly open to diversity within its sphere of influence, one might hope that the United States would move in a similar direction. But the evidence from these books and from recent political events makes it more likely that the U.S. will seize on any emergent Cuban weakness to carry its vendetta into a fourth decade.

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