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CUBA: TRANSITION OR DISINTEGRATION?

Toward a New Cuba? Legacies of a Revolution. MIGUEL ANGEL CENTENO & MAURICIO FONT (eds.). Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner, 1997. ix + 245 pp. (Cloth US\$ 49.95)

Essays on Cuban History: Historiography and Research. LOUIS A. PÉREZ, JR. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994. xiv + 306 pp. (Cloth US\$ 44.95)

Cuba's Second Economy: From Behind the Scenes to Center Stage. JORGE F. PÉREZ-LÓPEZ. New Brunswick NJ: Transaction, 1995. 221 pp. (Cloth US\$ 32.95)

Sport in Cuba: The Diamond in the Rough. PAULA J. PETTAVINO & GERALYN PYE. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994. ix + 301 pp. (Cloth US\$ 49.94, Paper US\$ 19.95)

Cuba is clearly at yet another major turning point, and the four books under review here testify, each in its way, to this. Two are single-authored monographs (one on sport, the other on the informal economy) one is a single-authored collection of essays on history and historiography; and one is a multidisciplinary anthology of essays by various authors. In approach, they cover a broad political spectrum, and all are concerned with an understanding of process in Cuba, whether prior to or since the 1959 revolution, pre- or post-1989, or during the 1990s.

Chronologically, it makes sense to start with the book that deals primarily with history. Louis Pérez is a prolific historian of Cuba, and essays he has written over a period of more than two decades have been reprinted together in this volume. The book sets in sharp relief how the very revo-

lution of 1959 transformed the study of Cuban history. On the island and in the United States, historians set out to determine the sources of radical change. As Pérez demonstrates, historiographical concerns of virtually all scholars have centered around colonialism, slavery, racism, imperialism, nationalism, and revolution, as well as issues of power and powerlessness, dictatorship and democracy, populism and mass mobilization, and social justice. Yet there have been changes over time, in tandem with changes in Cuba, as well as historiographical trends and methodological advances outside Cuba, plus availability of and access to historical sources.

The first section on history deals with two broad thematic areas that loom large in Cuban history: the Cuba-U.S. relation and Cuba's quest for national identity. One group of essays focuses on the imperial, hegemonic drive behind U.S. intervention and collaboration, 1898-99, introducing U.S. education and the English language in occupied Cuba, 1898-1902, and paving the way for North American Protestant missionaries, 1898-1920. Another group explores the history of nineteenth-century radical worker emigrés in Tampa, of whom Pérez himself is a descendant: one charts the process whereby exiles became immigrants and two other short pieces retell the reminiscences of a reader in a Tampa cigar factory and an Ybor City cigar roller. There is one final essay on army politics in socialist Cuba, 1959-69.

The second section of the book delineates the varying historiographical approaches, and the third and last section suggests possibilities for research, providing a useful resource listing of major and lesser-known holdings – the *Archivo Nacional de Cuba*, the U.S. Bureau of Insular Affairs, Protestant Missionary Archival Records, and Manuscript Collections. The second section is the one in which Pérez truly comes into his own. A fascinating opening essay sets the scene, telling the story of how the classic North American *History of the Cuban Republic*, by Charles Chapman, first published in 1927 and reissued in 1969, itself came about in response to U.S. policy needs in Cuba. By 1923, U.S. ambassador Enoch Crowder had failed in his political mission and Chapman was funded to examine especially the organization and working of national government in Cuba. Although Chapman had serious run-ins with Crowder, the end-product, Pérez argues, revealed a striking conformity to the policy imperatives that inspired its writing.

Subsequent essays similarly contextualize the twentieth-century historiography of U.S.-Cuban relations and Cuban historiography at the service of the revolution (1959-79). And there are two retrospective surveys, one of the formidable corpus of study generated over twenty-five years of the revolution and the other of thirty years of Cuban studies. A

major point to emerge is that while history played an important part in Cuba, with themes of struggle and continuity appealing to the past in legitimating the roots of revolution, history has long been marginal to the mainstream of U.S.- and Cuban-American-dominated "Cubanology." And yet, Pérez is quick to remind us, it is necessary to think historically about the revolution, "to develop a perspective on a process that is at once product of and prism for the past" (p. 178).

Of the three books on the post-1959 period, the most straightforward in its narrative is the one on sport by U.S.-based Paula Pettavino and Australian-based GERALYN PYE. Despite the obvious success and political importance of sport in revolutionary Cuba, theirs is the first major study on the subject. The authors, both political scientists, analyze how and why sports should have been accorded such high priority that Cuba had become a world sporting power by the mid-1970s, from then on challenging the United States in the race for Olympic and Pan-American gold medals, and continuing to do so even through the crisis 1990s.

A background chapter on pre-1959 highlights how sport in Cuba was essentially elitist. The major exceptions were boxing and baseball, which provided a route out of poverty (including some striking instances of black Cuban players in the American Negro League). The emergence of baseball as Cuba's national sport is in itself paradoxical, given that it originated from the United States, which was to become the arch-enemy of radical Cuban nationalism.

Key to Cuba's post-1959 achievements in sport was a two-pronged policy of "image-building" and "egalitarianism," a system of physical culture alongside highly selective, intensive, competitive athletics. The motto of "sport for one and all" sat easily with socialist revolution and made for successful international diplomacy. It entailed putting in place a national sports industry, budget, structure, and administration, training personnel, and enlisting the support of the mass organizations for participation in sports. The claim was, first, to promote the development of sports and, second, to seek champions. The two, of course, were interrelated, as "the more people practicing, the more people from which to choose" (p. 127). However, sports schools functioned as veritable grooming grounds, backed by a formidable sports medicine industry, in polishing the "diamonds" from the "rough." The shrinking resource environment caused by 1980s economic strictures and 1990s collapse heightened the tensions between producing champions at the expense of mass participation, especially when the former has international as well as national political kudos. This the authors document well, expressing their hope that what has been achieved will not be lost and that a balance can be struck between the two.

If sport might be seen as the thin end of the wedge in 1990s Cuba, the coping strategies of the Cuban people in an economy that on conservative estimates plummeted by some 50 percent certainly cannot. A recognized weakness in the Cuban government's post-1989 economic crisis strategy has been that of establishing linkages between the export-led and domestic sectors. Thus, the 1994 bottoming out of the crisis centered almost exclusively on export economic indicators, while the domestic economy lagged behind. Unemployment and shortages of even basic foodstuffs and supplies resulted in significantly lowered nutritional and health indicators, especially among such high risk groups as children, the elderly, and the infirm. On a scale unwitnessed since the late 1960s, Cubans were catapulted en masse into a whole range of licit, semi-licit, and illicit activities essential for their everyday survival.

The fact that Cuban American economist Jorge Pérez-López was researching his book prior to 1994 makes his study all the more remarkable. Prior to 1989, neither island Cuban nor Cuban American economists had deemed the plethora of economic activities beyond those of the state worthy of serious attention, and only reluctantly had the crisis forced their hand. This was a first full-fledged study, though based entirely on the "open literature" available abroad, to chart how the crisis had propelled the "second economy" from "behind the scenes to center stage" and to discuss the second economy's potential role in market transition. Defining the second economy as that part of the economy under private control, Pérez-López differentiates between activities that are perfectly legal (and regulated), those that are shadow (that go on willy-nilly), and those that are illegal (against the law). His argument is that what is crucial for gauging the transition is how rapidly the state moves to fully legalize "shadow" activities, which he describes as a "reservoir of entrepreneurial talent" that could be the future backbone of a private, small business sector.

The government has been forced to pass measures that recognize the second economy – for example, dollarization, self-employment, farmers' markets – and has also shown great ambivalence, reining back on steps that have been taken. Pérez-López argues that there are political and economic consequences of non-action: when people must skirt around and even break the law for their own economic survival, respect for socialist norms must erode and discontent with the state must rise. The dangers, of course, as evidenced in several post-socialist Central and Eastern European countries, are that this sector becomes an undesirable mafia-type minefield.

The most recent of the four books is challenging. It sets out asking a futuristic question: What might happen in Cuba? The book attempts to answer that question with contributions from a 1995 Conference at Princeton University by fifteen economists, sociologists, political scientists, and historians, thirteen of them U.S.-based – nine Cuban American, three North American and one British – and two island-based Cuban. Explanations for the Cuban transition, or lack thereof, are sought in both international constraints and domestic political culture. The book rejects deterministic arguments and takes an “eclectic historical approach”: the path followed by Cuba is shaped by structural limitations, which are historical products, and yet constructed by choices made in a variety of scenarios.

The book has two main parts: “Toward a New Politics” and “Toward the Market.” Part 1 opens with Miguel Angel Centeno outlining Cuba’s search for alternatives, beyond “socialism or death.” He distinguishes between scenarios including Fidel Castro – which maintain the political status quo – and those requiring his exit – which might spell chaos, the “Russian nightmare,” and authoritarian capitalism. He concludes that Cuba’s problem is what Gramsci called “disastrous equilibrium”: the regime may not collapse soon but is also not a viable choice. Marifeli Pérez-Stable expounds the exhaustion of politics, with widespread cynicism corroding the regime. She examines four critical elements in the regime’s strategy: ideology, elite dynamics, mass politics, and the management of economic reform. She, too, concludes that the Cuban government is stable as (contrary to comparative experience in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Asia) the conditions for transition – the inability of elites to continue governing in the same way and the unwillingness of the citizenry to accept being governed thus – have not yet coalesced.

Francisco León takes a somewhat different tack in countering assumptions of the strong state and weak society. He revisits the old parody of *sociolismo* and argues that a wide spectrum of organized and unorganized interests are redistributing social power. Alejandro de la Fuente and Laurence Glasco home in on the summer 1994 Havana riot, in which many of the rioters were young blacks and mulattos. Formulating a provocative question – Are blacks “getting out of control”? – they conducted an exploratory poll on the issue of race, not least whether blacks are perceived and perceive themselves as beneficiaries of, and therefore loyal to, the revolution. Their results suggest that what was at stake was a generational rather than a race issue.

Exploring U.S.-Cuba relations, Gillian Gunn asks: Are the two governments inept? Is each confronted with a domestic context in which any

other policy is perceived as threatening to the current power structure? Are the transition processes underway in both countries – in one from communism and in the other from the cold war – contributing to government schizophrenia? Exploring avenues of change, Max Castro deconstructs the ideology of exile: from traditional 1960s Cuban-exile political culture, through continuing hegemony of the right in Cuban-exile politics, to the emergent 1990s transitional center that hasn't quite taken off.

Mauricio Font opens Part 2 by contextualizing the timid 1990s reforms: the foreign investment law, adjustment and diversification, the internal market, and the role of the state and ideology. Susan Eckstein addresses the depth and structural roots of the crisis and state efforts to mitigate it, from early 1990s socialist-style, market-oriented, and "precapitalistic survival" strategies to 1994 reforms. She acknowledges the tensions implicit in policies that may appear economically rational but are not necessarily politically tolerable. In the bifurcation between Cuba's socialist-peso and internationalized-dollar economies, Archibald Ritter argues for a reunification of the two into a single mixed economy if recovery, adjustment, and transition are to occur. Jorge Pérez-López provides a synthesis of the main argument to be found in his book – the link between Cuba's second economy and the market – drawing on the comparative experiences of Hungary, Poland, the former East Germany, Romania, and Bulgaria. The need to move away from a dual economic system to a new vision of a reformed and integrated economy is reiterated by Pedro Monreal, who also outlines the main features of the economic debate in what he describes as a theoretical vacuum. Julio Carranza Valdés in turn charts the policies of financial equilibrium, monetary circulation, enterprise reform, and the new role of the state, and concludes by calling for political audacity in moving from partial and sectoral changes to a systemic model change.

Reflecting as they do views from within, Carranza and Monreal would provide a fitting end to this review essay. However, as a historian, I am inevitably drawn by the poignancy of the postscript by Manuel Moreno Fraginals. He poses the question: Transition to what? His response is that there is no transition but a disintegration – social and physical – of Cuban civil society, that must and can be brought to a halt. History will not stand still, but, as Moreno himself appealed to his audience, it is incumbent on us all to work for dialogue toward that end.

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