

Debating U.S.-Cuban Relations: Shall We Play Ball? Jorge I. Domínguez, Rafael Hernández & Lorena G. Barberia (eds.). New York: Routledge, 2011. xix + 268 pp. (Paper US\$ 39.95)

This timely publication, edited by two of the United States' most distinguished analysts of Cuba and one of Cuba's most distinguished analysts of the United States, is a sequel to an earlier volume written at the end of the cold war (Domínguez & Hernández 1989). At that time, with the Soviet Union gone and U.S.-Cuban scores settled in Central America and southern Africa, the authors thought it a propitious moment for improvement in U.S.-Cuban relations. Fast forward to today, a generation later, and little seems to have changed in the relationship. Old enmities endure; U.S.-Cuban confrontation is "stubborn and endless," as one writer puts it.

In fact, U.S.-Cuban relations are different today, and the changes have been for the better. Many volumes have explored the ongoing conflict between the two countries but there has been little scholarship on the ongoing cooperation between the United States and Cuba. This book more than fills that void. While the collection of essays that Domínguez, Hernández, and Barberia commissioned for this volume do acknowledge the evident tension in U.S.-Cuban relations, they notably highlight elements that have led inexorably to cooperation.

The book explores six topics: political, economic, security-related, and cultural issues, the Cuban-U.S. diaspora, and the U.S.-Cuban-European triangle. Each one is discussed by one scholar who resides in Cuba and one who resides outside. Each chapter address three questions: what has happened, what is happening, and "what if..." The goal is to identify those issues where differences are likely to remain and those interests that overlap and around which bilateral collaboration is ongoing. While there are sometimes substantive differences between the coupled authors, differences also arise naturally because of their varying intellectual and experiential backgrounds as political scientists, economists, historians, sociologists, and former diplomats.

It is unusual to read a book about Cuba that describes positive dimensions to its relationship with the United States. Domínguez cites a number, most of them launched in the late 1980s and early 1990s: professional military relations at Guantánamo, cooperative coast guard-to-coast guard relations, large-scale agriculture trade, effective bilateral migration discussions,

excellent hurricane tracking, cooperation on drug interdiction, expanded academic and cultural exchanges, and large diplomatic missions in each other's capitals. He writes, "Cuba and the U.S. are already, in some respects, exemplary neighbors" (p. 32). Several of the "what if" sections have creative and realistic ideas for building on the two nations' not inconsequential common interests. We finish the book with a degree of optimism about what the bilateral relationship might and can be.

Debating U.S.-Cuban Relations will be good reading for pessimists as well. It analyzes each country's history with the other and provides an avalanche of evidence that describes the mistakes, misinterpretations, misreadings, and misgivings that have characterized that history. Although Cuba specialists will know much of this material, the book is spiced with new research on both sides. It is not well known, for example, that the United States seriously debated a retaliatory attack on Cuba after the 1996 shooting down of two U.S. civilian planes.

The essays touch only lightly on the economic policy changes currently underway in Cuba since they were being launched as the book was going to press. But the chapters on Cuba's economy are exceptionally good, contain excellent data, and present an objective judgment of how both Cuba and the United States would benefit economically if Cuba's reforms continue and are expanded and if U.S. sanctions are lifted. U.S. business will be particularly interested in the authors' projection of Cuba as a significant new market.

For U.S. readers, an appealing though unarticulated subtheme of the book is Cuba as a "normal" country. Cuba has diplomatic relations with 181 countries (are there many more in the world?), including all of Latin America and the Caribbean. Like the United States in the post-Cold War era, it has redefined national security to include nonmilitary threats such as drugs, epidemics, illegal immigration, and natural disasters. Like the United States (and much of Europe), it is struggling to grow its economy and create jobs, manage growing racial diversity, protect the environment, get along with a troubled neighbor (Mexico), pay down unprecedented levels of debt, and reduce drug consumption. Could Cuba be any more "normal?"

No book can cover all the topics a reviewer would like to have included. Still, it is unfortunate that there was not more analysis of some issues that figure hugely in the bilateral relationship, such as the so-called "Track II" programs administered by the U.S. Agency for International Development

and loathed by the Cubans, the Alan Gross and Cuban 5 cases, and the seemingly far-reaching changes occurring in the Cuban-American community, especially its engagement with the economic reforms currently underway in Cuba. Perhaps in a future book the editors might explore the changing domestic politics of U.S. policy toward Cuba and Cuban policy toward the United States. As generational shifts occur in both countries and emerging new coalitions advocate for change, it is important to understand the weight of the new players, their goals, and their strategies.

This is an important book, in part for what it describes, in part for who the writers are, and in part for what it projects: it shows that in spite of a history of non-normal relations, there are practical solutions to issues of common interest.

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Reference

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