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U.S.-Cuban Relations: Past, Present, and Future

Anniversaries are opportune moments to look back and reflect on what was and what might have been. Just this year, the fiftieth anniversary of the Cuban Missile Crisis has prompted people around the globe to draw lessons from a potentially world-ending moment. Two years ago, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, a team of scholars from the University of Toronto and the University of Havana seized a similar opportunity for reflection by organizing a series of workshops, conference panels, and lectures that culminated in an edited volume on U.S.-Cuban relations titled *Fifty Years of Revolution: Perspectives on Cuba, the United States, and the World.* Containing chapters by twenty-two experts from five countries, this volume offers scholars and students of U.S. foreign policy and Latin American international relations an unusually rich resource. With such a breadth of contributors and topics, even the most knowledgeable reader should encounter at least one or two unfamiliar interpretations or arguments.

Fifty Years of Revolution explores the past, present, and future of international relations between Cuba and the United States. The editors, Soraya M. Castro Mariño and Ronald W. Pruessen, divide the volume into three thematically organized sections. The first and third sections–the more innovative parts of the book–place the U.S.-Cuban relationship in its global context and contemplate the future of that relationship. The second section of the volume, consisting of ten chapters divided chronologically by U.S. presidential administrations, provides a more traditional narrative of relations between Cuba and the United States.

The book's first section, "Cuba in the Global Context," approaches the subject of U.S.-Cuban relations with a wide temporal and geographic lens. The first two chapters place the relationship within the larger context of the United States' regional and global policies. In the opening chapter, Lars Schoultz argues that while U.S. policy toward revolutionary Cuba has been exceptional, the interests and ideology that drive that policy are not. According to Schoultz, the underlying interests that U.S. policymakers seek to protect and promote in Cuba and across Latin America are national security, the strength of the U.S. economy, and domestic politics. Ronald W. Pruessen expands Schoultz's scope by placing U.S. policy toward Cuba within the larger context of the United States' rise to power on the global stage, arguing that the island "figured both regularly and significantly in the U.S. ascension" (p. 31). He claims that U.S. perceptions and treatment of Cuba as a "backyard" concern reveal patterns of U.S. behavior in the international arena as a Great Power that are, in turn, fundamental to understanding U.S.-Cuban relations. Like Schoultz, Pruessen identifies security calculations, economic objectives, and missionary attitudes as the driving impulses behind the United States' imperialist policy both globally and in the specific case of Cuba.

The remaining chapters in the first section shift focus, examining Cuba's relations with foreign powers other than the United States. Candace Sobers analyzes the Cuban Revolution in the context of the international history of twentieth-century revolutions, arguing that the Cubans' explicit, long-term commitment to internationalism and attempts to position themselves as models for other revolutionary movements were unparalleled. Her chapter–more theory-laden than most in the volume–also discusses the specific example of Cuba's intervention in African revolutionary movements in order to illustrate the international impact of the Cuban Revolution. Mervyn J. Bain analyzes relations between Havana and Moscow, contending that while many factors have shaped Cuban-Soviet relations over the years, the single most important and constant influence has come from the United States. Peter McKenna and John M. Kirk attribute relatively less influence to the United States

in their chapter on Cuba's relations with another third party–Canada. They characterize the U.S. factor as a contextual or background variable in Canadian-Cuban relations, not a defining one. McKenna and Kirk present a well-balanced discussion of the benefits and drawbacks of Canada's policy of engagement with Cuba, arguing that U.S. leaders could learn a great deal from their northern neighbors. Joaquín Roy's chapter on the European Union's relations with Cuba offers similar lessons about the results of diplomatic and economic engagement. Roy examines Cuba's relations with the European Union as a collective entity and with individual member countries such as Spain and the Czech Republic. Like McKenna and Kirk, he argues that while cautious engagement has so far produced limited results, it is still more effective than U.S. policy.

Highlights of the second section of the volume, "Cuba and the United States, 1959-2009," include chapters by Louis A. Pérez Jr., William O. Walker III, Rosa López-Oceguera, and Jorge I. Domínguez. Pérez begins this section of the book with an overview that argues that U.S. policy toward revolutionary Cuba originated from the psychological trauma of watching Castro shatter long-held beliefs about national security and U.S. omnipotence. This trauma led Washington to adopt a variety of contradictory, "pathological" strategies that have counteracted and negated each other (p. 158). In another provocative chapter, Walker contends that in the mid-1960s to early 1970s, the Soviet Union tacitly joined forces with the United States in a partially successful joint effort to contain Cuban adventurism. Both superpowers, interested in maintaining the status quo, endeavored to prevent Castro from crafting an autonomous foreign policy that could trigger a dramatic change in world affairs. López-Oceguera argues that the temporary thawing in U.S.-Cuban relations that occurred during Jimmy Carter's administration actually began with congressional and State Department initiatives taken during Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford's presidencies. The foreign policy czar for both presidents, Henry Kissinger, sent secret emissaries to Cuba in a failed attempt to use the "carrot" of normalizing relations to tempt Castro into moderating his foreign policy. Domínguez presents a multilayered analysis of international, ideological, and domestic factors to explain the extension of the U.S.-Cuban conflict beyond the official end of the Cold War. He argues that these factors combined to freeze U.S.-Cuban relations even after U.S. policy toward the rest of the former communist bloc thawed.

The final section of the volume, "Visions of the Future," presents three short essays predicting the future of U.S.-Cuban relations. Rafael M. Hernández traces the historiography of Cuba's conflict with the United States, arguing that analysts need to differentiate between the issues of foreign policy and international relations. Claiming that leaders in the United States and Cuba are "caught up in old ways of thinking about their future" (p. 355), Hernández surveys proposals for alternative uses of the Guantánamo Bay Naval Base to illustrate the potential for finding new ways to envision U.S.-Cuban coexistence. William M. LeoGrande and Marguerite Rose Jiménez echo Hernández's argument that both Washington and Havana need a change in attitude if the stalemate in U.S.-Cuban relations is to end. They discuss a number of pressing issues, including the embargo, property compensation, and Guantánamo, contending that mutually beneficial solutions can be found if leaders in both countries build confidence through dialogue and cooperation. Víctor López Villafañe brings the volume to a close with an optimistic chapter about Cuba's potential to become a leading power in Latin America. He lists a number of advantages that Cuba possesses over other countries in the region, including better education, public health, and public safety, arguing that these factors will combine with changes in the international arena to transform Cuba into one of Latin America's political and economic leaders in the twenty-first century.

Though the volume's contributors come from a variety of disciplinary and national backgrounds, they display striking agreement on a number of issues. First and foremost, nearly all argue that U.S. policy toward Cuba has been and continues to be severely flawed. Editors Castro Mariño and Pruessen characterize U.S. policy as "harshly punitive" (p. 3), Pérez labels it "an anomaly and an anachronism" (p. 138), Ramón Sánchez-Parodi Montoto criticizes the Reagan-era New Right's "anti-Cuban obsession" (p. 261), and LeoGrande and Jiménez conclude that Washington's policy of regime change has been an "utter failure" (p. 371). In a similar vein, David A. Welch, López-Oceguera, and Robert A. Pastor lament missed opportunities to improve relations between the two countries.

Cuba's foreign policy receives considerably less attention and less criticism. On the contrary, many of the contributors celebrate what the editors describe as "Cuba's determination to resist unrelenting U.S. pressure" (p. 3). Sobers characterizes Cuba's internationalist foreign policy as an effort to "challenge the balance of power and raise the profile of the third world" (p. 67). Walker argues that "what Cuba did manage to achieve in the face of the powerful forces arrayed against it, an important role in world affairs, was remarkable"

(p. 217). Sánchez-Parodi Montoto describes how "the Cuban Revolution and the revolutionary government–with the overwhelming support of the Cuban citizens–met and succeeded against what have been its harshest challenges" (p. 276).

Ultimately, *Fifty Years of Revolution*'s clear political agenda is both a weakness and a strength. Some of the contributions come across as one-sided or biased, offering more propaganda than scholarship. But the majority of the chapters approach the subject of Cuban-U.S. relations evenhandedly, seeking to explain and understand rather than assign blame. On the whole, the volume achieves the editors' goal of enriching the political discussion about Cuba. One can only hope that it might also help fulfill their desire for better relations in the future.

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