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Despite the fulsome praise lavished on this collection of essays on the book's cover, this is not 'the most important book about Cuba to appear in a generation'. In essence, the fundamental problem comes from the challenge in shoehorning disparate conference papers into a clearly focused unit – never an easy task. Despite a magnificent effort by Marifeli Pérez-Stable to tie loose ends together, her attempt to harmonise the papers fails. This is not surprising. Edited volumes that stem from small conferences are often a disappointment – which is why publishers shy away from them in favour of monographs. This volume is based upon gatherings at Notre Dame, Indiana in September 2003, and Miami, Florida in May 2004. The template followed by all contributors was based upon three focal points: the experiences of 'new democracies', the possible scenarios for Cuban 'transition', and finally plausible/desirable alternatives. This sounds logical enough, and is indeed a laudable goal. Unfortunately, the futurology employed by some of the authors has been overtaken by history, with the appointment of Raúl Castro and a series of reforms implemented since 2007, and the burgeoning relationship of Havana with China and, in particular, Venezuela. Much of the material is simply dated – as one would imagine.

There are other shortcomings. The frequent (and excessive) reference to the experience in Eastern Europe is unfortunate – and in the United States is indeed a common error in analysing changes in revolutionary Cuba. The nature of change in Eastern Europe (where the Soviet Union imposed its will) is very different from Cuba where a genuine social revolution took place. In addition, with the departure of one-tenth of the Cuban population, there is no organised internal opposition – while fear of retaliation by the United States (just 90 miles away) is also a matter of concern to many Cubans. These specific historical circumstances need to be understood more clearly. Sadly, the frequent comparison of experiences in the former Soviet bloc have little relevance for revolutionary Cuba, and the idiosyncracies of one system are not particularly pertinent to the other. (A more pertinent comparison would be a detailed analysis of the Chinese model or, if 'transition' perspective is needed, observations on Vietnam would be somewhat helpful.)

Almost all of the contributors to this volume are Cuban émigrés themselves, and it is an unfortunate sign of the times that there are no Cuban academics from the island who participated in the project. As a result, there is an imbalance in the perspectives presented, which is a disappointing reflection of the times. Sadly, the study of Cuba is extremely polarised. As a result it is not common to see opposing or even alternative viewpoints represented in the same fora – and indeed no Cuban academics have received US visas to participate in Latin American Studies Association (LASA) conferences in recent years. Understandably, the two solitudes that clearly exist do not contribute to a balanced analysis and a book of this nature badly needs input from the Cubans themselves who in the ultimate analysis should be the subjects and not the objects of this

process. Not surprisingly, the presence of Cuban academics at the conferences where these papers were presented was highly unlikely. That said, commissioned papers from Cuban specialists on the island would have gone a long way to ensure a better balance of perspectives.

As a result of the nature of the goals of the conference (and of this volume), the analysis at times reveals a series of unfortunate pre-judgements. This is seen from the very beginning in the introduction by former Brazilian president, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who badly misreads Cuban reality: 'The cornerstone of Cuba's national reconciliation is the internal opposition that arose in the 1990s as the harbinger of good news among so much bad' (p. xii). This sets the tone for much of what follows. In addition, the terms 'democracy' and 'democratic transition' are bandied around as if there was only one acceptable interpretation of the term. The Western, liberal-style interpretation of the term may well be acceptable to the contributors, but it is not the only form of democracy. Sadly, none of the analysts appears to depart from the keystone of this one approach.

The end result is a series of essays that are useful as individual studies of particular aspects of contemporary Cuba. For instance, Jorge Domínguez provides a solid historical overview of the armed forces, and offers four possible scenarios for the future of Cuba ('His Scenario' is clearly the most probable). Likewise Alejandro de la Fuente provides a reprise of his excellent work on racial inequality in Cuba, but offers only a general warning that the racial question will be an important variable in the future development of the island. More successful is the analysis of Lisandro Pérez, who provides a fascinating study of the traditional role of the diaspora in Cuban politics. He concludes that, despite those historical origins, it is highly unlikely that émigrés will play any significant role in Cuba.

In summary, despite the best intentions of the conference organisers and the academic pedigree of several of the participants, this book adds little to an attempt at 'Looking Forward'. Time has overtaken many of the ideas considered here – always a possibility when futurology is invoked. As a result, the material is outdated – in some cases, badly – and the collection as a whole fails to convince.