

Foreword

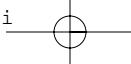
Few countries have been the subject of so much controversy, debate, and probing in the past four decades as much as Cuba. Some forty-six years after the Revolution, Cuba continues to be a symbolic force far beyond its small size and weak economy.

Interest in Cuban affairs is once again rising, yet the reason is no longer the Revolution as a role model for building new societies under the nose of the world's largest capitalist power. The issue now is the question posed by the approaching demise of the principal leader of a regime that will not survive him: Where is Cuba headed after Fidel?

To answer this question, Marifeli Pérez-Stable, the Cuban-born author of *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*—an essential reference on the topic—has organized a collection of essays that attempt to interpret the social, political, and economic transformations noted or foreseen in Cuba as it enters a likely transition.

The traditional free hand of the essay writer is firmly in evidence here. All authors start from a common point—Cuba's domestic and foreign affairs, mainly since the fall of the Soviet Union. And as they search for support for their perception of future trends, they employ comparisons with political or economic transitions observed within the past twenty years in Latin America, the former Soviet bloc, and East Asia.

The result is an all-inclusive, orderly review of all the possible *futures* of Cuba. It ranges from classical transition studies (i.e., the role of the military, the emergence of civil society, relations between émigrés and the internal opposition, the role of outside actors) to issues closer to the microphysics of power, such as race and gender relations and the ideological and cultural dimensions of politics, which is essential to



understanding a regime that made a vast symbolic investment to consolidate its power.

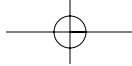
By treating three normally unconnected perspectives—institutions, social relations, and ideology—as complementary, this book makes an especially interesting contribution to the debate on Cuba after Fidel. Will it be a market democracy, or perhaps a hybrid—a mixed economy with a freer society still controlled by the heirs to the regime? If the former, will change be abrupt or gradual? Will a transition necessarily do away with the social gains made by the Cuban people, or will it be an opportunity to augment them after years of economic crisis?

These questions elicit both hope and concern in those who have been fighting for democracy, equality, and peace in Latin America and the Caribbean because in that long march Cuba stands as a special chapter whose fate makes a great difference for the entire region.

By surviving the fall of the Soviet Union, Cuba shifted this transition to an era no longer ruled by the exultant liberal certainties of the late 1980s. We know now that transitioning to any kind of market economy requires not the destruction but the reform of existing institutions, lest the transition end in economic collapse and social breakdown. We also know that building democracy is a gradual, rather uncertain collective undertaking whose success depends on the old regime's institutional legacy and the ability of political actors to build institutions capable of ensuring effective citizenship.

For domestic and foreign actors, the lessons of the last two decades advise a negotiated transition along with measures designed to build economic confidence and political tolerance. Absent gradual confidence-building measures, attempts to build a regime of increased freedoms will make no progress. Instead, they may trigger a repressive backlash or the emergence of criminal groups whose actions can turn a democratic state into an utter impossibility and a market economy into a stage for mafia-style warfare.

Paving the way for a successful transition in Cuba is an immense responsibility. I am frankly skeptical of the chances here of an Asian-style transition such as Vietnam's, with capitalism moving ahead under a one-party system with a tight rein on society. For good or ill, Cuba is part of the Western world. Therefore, I am of the view that demands for



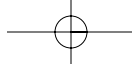
greater economic freedom will rise in tandem with increased demands for greater political and civil liberties.

Both by act or omission, the United States is in a position to make the outside winds blow for or against an orderly transition conducted from within, which is why the increasingly unilateral stance of U.S. foreign policy, particularly on issues regarded as part of the domestic agenda, is of so much concern. Cuba fits the bill, with a twist: in addition to being on the security agenda, the presence of a highly politicized émigré community in the crucial state of Florida also makes it part of the electoral scenario. Thus, the type of smooth cooperation from both sides of the Atlantic that proved so useful to the transition in Eastern Europe would in this case appear to be that much more difficult.

Though difficult, cooperation is not impossible. As is to be expected in a pluralistic society, many in the United States are now actively questioning unilateralism and the notion that freedom and democracy—values to which this great nation does not hold title—could or should be imposed at gunpoint. It remains to be seen whether this new attitude will translate into concrete action by the current and future administrations.

Cooperating with Cuba is also Latin America's responsibility. We share with it our Iberian heritage, the language of the former Spanish colonies, the presence of blacks and natives in our social and cultural makeup, the mixing of many different races. Ever since the return to democratic rule, this common background has provided a basis for dialogue and exchange—not always easy, yet never broken—with Cuba. The political capital earned in these exchanges may prove to be a valuable asset for a Cuban transition, provided it is expended within the principles of democracy and noninterference enshrined in the Inter-American Democratic Charter of 2001.

However important the external players may be, the fate of Cuba will be primarily decided within Cuba. No formula concocted abroad will ever provide a lasting solution. Cuban socialism, it must be understood, is a variant of Cuban nationalism—the reverse of the experience of Eastern Europeans, who had socialism imposed on them from abroad. In Cuba, socialism stood on the shoulders of nationalist sentiment, and it has endured by laying deep roots in it, especially once the Soviet Union fell and took Cuba's umbilical cord with it.

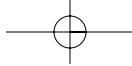


In a Cuba after Fidel, nationalist sentiment will help maintain cohesion. Its challenge, then, is to build on the notion that Cuba belongs to all Cubans—a formidable challenge for a bitterly divided people who question each other's legitimacy. Émigrés blame the regime for taking away their right to live at home, while its supporters charge émigrés with being agents of their biggest foreign foe—a role that the United States took on with disastrous results, bolstering rather than thwarting the regime it purported to fight.

Thus, in a Cuban transition, national reconciliation will be no mere goal—it will be a prime imperative. Without it, no institutional framework will ever stand. Allowing, promoting, and facilitating reconciliation will be a responsibility second to none for all directly or indirectly involved at this crucial stage of Cuban history.

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. This opposition, which resides within Cuba, stands against the regime rather than against the Revolution as a whole. It emerged by using the right of petition entrenched in the Constitution—a device whose legitimacy the regime could not question. Initiatives such as the Varela Project were used to confront the regime, successfully mobilizing thousands of Cubans for human rights and political freedom. Operating under more adverse conditions, they did what we so often did under the Brazilian military dictatorship: use every venue allowed by the regime to challenge it and sow the seeds of democratic ferment to bring about its downfall. This allowed us to steer clear of the deadly dilemma of either joining the regime or rising up in arms against it.

The emergence of an internal opposition, thus, makes it possible to break free of the unyielding in-country Cubans versus overseas Cubans dichotomy. This can pave the way for a transition that is free from civil strife and outside intervention and lay the basis for a broadening of the civil, political, and social rights and freedoms of the people of Cuba. The force of such an option will depend on whether the elites of the regime and émigré communities can build leaderships—such as that of Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas in the Varela Project—that are driven more by their hopes for a better future than by a compulsion to settle old scores.



Leadership such as that will be required, especially because a new institutional framework will have fragile underpinnings. Unlike in Eastern Europe, socialism in Cuba was built less on institutions than on regimentation of the masses around a charismatic leader. True, as an essay points out, Cuba is not entirely inexpert in the functioning of liberal constitutional institutions. Yet its experience is more limited than that of Hungary, Poland, or Czechoslovakia prior to the “velvet revolutions,” during which—truth be told—transitions had begun long before, under socialism. The economic and political reforms introduced in Cuba in the early '90s were tepid, then neutralized, then downright repealed soon after.

This recognition should not be interpreted as gloomy prophecy. To paraphrase a well-known dictum by the older Marx, people make their own history but they do not make it under circumstances they choose. Even so, it is they who make it. Cuban society has long been demonstrating that despite the curtailment of freedoms life under the crusty old regime remains vibrant. This means that there will be life after it. It is to be hoped that Cubans' zest for life translates into a renewal of the Cuban Revolution's selfless dream, turned into a nightmare by the deliberate smothering of freedoms. If freedom can move forward by nourishing rather than razing what is commendable about the Revolution—universal access to public services and goods—Cuba will have finally fulfilled the high hopes first raised in now-distant 1959.

That, I believe, is the aspiration of the authors in this book. It certainly is mine.

Fernando Henrique Cardoso
Translated by Patricio Mason