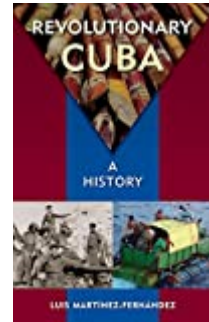




**Luis Martínez-Fernández.** *Revolutionary Cuba: A History.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014. 408 pp. \$44.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-4995-3.



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In *Revolutionary Cuba: A History*, Luis Martínez-Fernández ambitiously sets out to fill a gaping hole in the historiography on Cuba by writing a general history of the Cuban revolution. The fact that this hole has remained unfilled for so long speaks to the difficulty of Martínez-Fernández's chosen task: surveying over fifty years of history armed with a secondary literature that has been severely limited by the impediments to researching the revolution, which include the often extreme polarization around the topic, visa struggles for scholars from outside of the island, political taboos faced by those from the island, and archival access issues for members of both groups. As a result, while Martínez-Fernández draws heavily from the secondary literature, most notably the economic history pioneered by Carmelo Mesa-Lago, he also turns to a creative range of primary sources, from press accounts to political speeches, YouTube videos to novels. In his account of the last twenty years or so, his own voice is present as well, underscoring his personal connection to the story he tells. The result is a lively and compelling history, sprinkled with photos, jokes, and strong imagery, which gives readers a feel for how Cubans have understood their reality, particularly from the 1990s to the present.

This is a broad and sweeping book. It would make an

excellent teaching resource or reference guide to the basic chronology of the revolutionary period because it provides an easy-to-follow narrative while clearly delineating continuities and ruptures through unobtrusive analysis. In keeping with the goal of writing a general history, Martínez-Fernández covers key developments in cultural, social, economic, and political history, with an eye towards race and gender throughout. The book spans from the 1952 Batista coup to 2013, and is divided into three parts based on Martínez-Fernández's characterization of the guiding ideology behind each period. He designates the period from 1952 to the failed Ten Million Ton Harvest in 1970 as "Idealism," the turn toward Soviet-style economic planning in 1971 and Fidel Castro's decision not to pursue *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the late 1980s as "Personalistic Institutionalization," and the halting and pragmatic reformism of the long Special Period, 1991-2013, as "Survival."

Martínez-Fernández also introduces an analytical framework consisting of seven threads—many Cubas, an island on horseback, the longest ninety miles, the pendular revolution, the art of triangulation, the revolutionary third man, and the persistent plantation—which he traces throughout the book. These threads are especially useful in revealing continuities both within the revolution-

ary period and, particularly with many Cubans, an island on horseback, the longest ninety miles, and the persistent plantation, from well before the 1950s. Despite the name, this is not a history of war, or even really of revolution. Aside from the pages dedicated to the civil war against Batista and later Cuban involvement in Angola, this book is a story of society and the institutionalization of a system. As Mart nez-Fern ndez writes, through the process of institutionalization and Sovietization, by the 1970s ‘Cuba ceased to be revolutionary’ (p. 163).

Mart nez-Fern ndez characterizes himself as an ‘exile and a scholar,’ and he has clearly made a concerted effort to embrace both of these identities (p. 11). The result is a history that is powerful and emotional, that captures the stakes faced by the individual heroes of this book—from those risking their lives to combat Batista in the 1950s to the members of the *balseiro* generation struggling to build and maintain transnational ties through the present—while also moving beyond the teleology and polarization that have for so long plagued the historiography of the revolution to show the good and the bad—ultimately, great advances in social justice came at the expense of individual rights. Mart nez-Fern ndez also systematically incorporates the Cuban diaspora into this work, situating the history of Cubans and Cuban Americans in the United States as a crucial part of Cuban history, and thereby revealing how as a group they both shaped and were shaped by developments on and off the island. In doing so, he turns an equally impartial eye toward Miami, to the extent that he reveals crucial similarities between the leadership of the diasporic community and that of the revolutionary state. He writes that ‘while the Cuban regime institutionalized repression and the violation of civil and human rights, the most vociferous and intransigent exile leaders and some rogue operatives replicated similar intolerant, intimidating and repressive practices in Miami’ (p. 223).

No one book can do everything, and as is often the case, broad scope comes at the expense of detailed coverage. *Revolutionary Cuba* leaves the reader curious about a number of topics only cursorily covered: there is much research yet to be done on the revolutionary period. Occasionally, Mart nez-Fern ndez contradicts himself, but this is more a result of the paucity of the secondary literature than anything else. For example, he states that early revolutionary reforms both improved the material conditions of lower- and middle-class Cubans (p. 52) and negatively impacted the standard of living

for middle- and upper-class Cubans (p. 85). While the economic history of the period is well charted, research remains to be done on the lived experiences of middle-class Cubans during the 1960s and beyond, because the economic changes appear to have had complex and contradictory effects. Also, the idea that ‘*jineterismo*’ and the population’s growing resentment toward the government led to the so-called double morality’ gives the impression that the *doble moral* was something new to the 1990s, when in fact this phenomenon is well charted throughout the revolutionary period (p. 208). Even in years of comparative economic abundance, it was not unheard of for the devoutly revolutionary CDR president to buy chicken on the black market.

The sudden thawing of US-Cuban relations took the world by surprise, and as a result, the book’s final chapter already reads as a bit outdated. Though Mart nez-Fern ndez engages in an insightful analysis of the 2012-13 elections in both the United States and Cuba, the results of which, he concludes, ‘assured the continuation of a status quo in terms of relations with Cuba,’ it’s clear that this has not been the case, which just goes to show that even armed with sound knowledge of history one cannot predict the future (p. 277). I read this book and wrote this review from Cuba, having arrived for a six-month research stay in the wake of the momentous announcements of December 17, 2014. The announcements have reverberated throughout Cuban society, awakening hopes of change among much of the population. Mart nez-Fern ndez writes that, as of 2000, ‘in spite of scarcity of food and consumer goods, in spite of the lack of consumer freedoms and the routine infliction of human rights abuses, and in spite of an authoritarian government increasingly disconnected from the masses, Cubans did not want to lose their homes, did not want to give up their rights to free and universal education and health care, did not want to return to conditions similar to those that prevailed under Batista, did not want the Miami-based National Association of Sugar Mill Owners of Cuba to ‘help in the reconstruction of Cuba,’ and certainly did not want to return to U.S. political and economic control’ (p. 227). In my experience, this remains true. While many now look hopefully to their neighbor to the north, particularly as a spur to economic improvement given the increasingly exhausting experience of living through an extended economic crisis, they do so with reservations and the hope that Cuba can find its own path to a stable and prosperous future.

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