

Handbook of Contemporary Cuba

Economy, Politics, Civil Society, and Globalization



HANDBOOK OF CONTEMPORARY CUBA

ECONOMY, POLITICS, CIVIL SOCIETY,
AND GLOBALIZATION

EDITED BY

Mauricio A. Font
and Carlos Riobó

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and Carlos Riobó**

Cuban studies is a highly dynamic field shaped by the country's distinctive political and economic circumstances. The *Handbook of Contemporary Cuba* is an up-to-date and comprehensive survey offering the latest research available from a broad array of disciplines and perspectives. The *Handbook's* general introduction and its section introductions survey the key

literature in the field in relation to rapidly changing events on the island and in global political and economic affairs. For students, scholars, and experts in government, the *Handbook of Contemporary Cuba* is vital to any collection on Latin American studies or global politics.

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***Handbook of Contemporary Cuba* offers contributions by leading scholars from the United States, Cuba, Europe, and other world regions.**

Pavel Vidal Alejandro; Carlos Alzugaray; Carmen Antón-Guardiola; Maria Aristigueta; Larry Catá Backer; Miguel Barnet; Hilary Becker; José Chofre-Sirvent; Amparo Sánchez Cobos; Margaret Crahan; Mauricio A. Font; Alberto Gabriele; Armando Nova González; Mario A. González-Corzo; Yvon Grenier; Camila Piñeiro Harnecker; Zoya Kocur; Emily Morris; Armando Chaguaceda Noriega; J.R. Paron; Robert A. Portada III; Carlos Riobó; Archibald R. M. Ritter; Jorge Luis Romeu; David Strug; Omar Everleny Pérez Villanueva.

Key features of the book

- Intertwines the study several spheres of Cuban society (economy, culture, history, religion, media, race, and others) to develop a clear assessment of its organization and the reform process evolving since the 1990s.
- Exemplifies a fruitful balanced academic collaboration with scholars from the University of Havana, and other institutions in Cuba, making a contribution to rigorous academic exchange.
- Builds a strong foundation for further research on contemporary Cuban society.
- Maintains an emphasis on Raúl Castro's reforms and their impact.

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INTRODUCTION

Carlos Riobó

Contrary to popular thought, Cuban politics and civil society have not been stagnant for the past fifty-three years, caught within a time warp or the polarity of "us" versus "them." While perhaps official rhetoric on and off the island has often hewed closely to anachronistic Cold War posturing, the recent transfer of power to Raúl Castro, foreign tourism, greater visibility of the Catholic Church, and social media signpost a more complex trajectory, especially since the Special Period of the 1990s. What may we glean from the ebb and flow of Cuban policies and practices? How do we move beyond binary commonplaces in Cuban studies? We ask the right questions, gather recent data, and articulate our ideas dispassionately.

In this part, our nine authors, from on and off the island, bring us up to date on Cuban politics and civil society. Some merely need to scratch the surface of Cuban society to uncover competing political discourses and definitions of civil society, while others must delve deeply into matters such as race (often thought resolved in Cuba) to open up the debate to the twenty-first-century reader. Our authors try to understand the degree to which organizations within Cuban civil society can act as agents of persuasion, applying pressure and wielding influence. The relatively dynamic policies of liberalization subtending traditional socialist politics in Cuba are examined carefully in this section.

The chapters in this section, most written in English and one in Spanish, focus either on politics in Cuba or on the island's civil society, with these two areas often bleeding into one another as is to be expected. Contributions by Yvon Grenier and Carlos Alzugaray and Armando Chaguaceda Noriega look at political change and institutions allied with politics. Analyzing cultural

The last section on politics and civil society features an essay by Jorge Luis Romeu, which studies new stages in the formation and promotion of Cuba civil society. Romeu's "Cuban Freemasons in the Development of Civil Society and Political Opening" discusses the future development of participation in Cuban civil society by studying important traits of the Cuban Freemasons (CF) and their Grand Lodge (GLC). The GLC has been largely ignored by researchers of Cuban civil society despite being one of the oldest, largest, most widely spread throughout the island. This essay uses demographic data to show how the GLC constitutes one of the most important organizations of such civil society that is able to play a significant role in fostering a political opening. This discussion fills an important gap in the literature on civil society.

In 1990, exiled Cuban journalist and social analyst Carlos Alberto Montaner wrote that Cuba was in the throes of a "terminal crisis" (Montaner, 1990). Although this sentence came as a harbinger of the Special Period in Cuba, it actually describes a way of life for Cubans today. Today's mantra in Cuba is *resolver*, or the need to get by however one can, by whatever means necessary. More than twenty years have passed since the austere beginnings of the Special Period, yet belt-tightening, incomplete economic reforms, and martial vigilance continue in Cuba without sparking a civic movement that could topple the regime. Why has there not been concerted civic opposition in times of national crisis? Why has there not been a Cuban Spring as there has been in the Middle East? The authors in this section of our handbook propose answers to some of these questions. They examine the discrete instances of civil opposition, analyzing alliances and new spaces opened for social discourse; they trace the evolution of the political strategy of indirect confrontation, in the realms of religion and race in particular. In the end, it would seem that Cuban political reforms and civic and social openness are making incremental gains rather than revolutionary changes on the island.



CUBAN FREEMASONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND POLITICAL OPENING

Jorge Luis Romeu

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

During a 2006 Bildner Center symposium called Cuba Futures, several papers on the embryonic Cuban civil society were presented. They discussed a number of groups inside the island that ranged from Catholics to the Abakuá and from internal dissidents to the remnants of the small Jewish community in Havana. We noticed how such patterns were also present in other forums such as the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy (ASCE). Somehow, researchers failed to recognize one civil society organization that has continuously existed in Cuba for over 150 years, with nearly 30,000 members, distributed among 314 lodges, in every province, town, and city in the country: the Cuban Freemasons of the Grand Lodge of Cuba (CF/GLC).

Several possible reasons exist for the omission of the role of the CF/GLC in the research literature of Cuban civil society: first, a poor knowledge of Cuban history and of its traditional institutions; second, an emphasis on dissident groups that oppose the current Cuban regime and a failure to recognize how civil society is not solely integrated by opponents of the establishment; and third, an existing prejudice against freemasons in general, something well studied and documented in several papers published by the Centro de Estudios Históricos de la Masonería Española (CEHME).¹

This chapter addresses two key research questions that have been ignored by most researchers of Cuban civil society. First, how can CF/GLC



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