

SPECIAL EDITORS' INTRODUCTION: CUBA

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Cuba, as a subject of academic inquiry, has long attracted much interest due to many political, historic, and cultural issues. In the U.S., the most prominent issue since the revolution of 1959 has centered directly on questions related to U.S.-Cuba relations; nevertheless, from an academic perspective, there is much more to consider than this relationship alone.

In 2000, the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) began developing official contacts with the University of Havana, culminating in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between both institutions in February 2012. One planned joint venture of this new collaboration was the publishing of a special issue on Cuba in the peer-reviewed, open access journal *Polymath*, a journal published by CAS; consequently, the three editors of this special issue began working in soliciting, reviewing and editing the articles that we present today in these pages.

The first of these articles is by Alesandro Badella, of the University of Genoa, Italy. It deals with policies toward Cuba during the George W. Bush Administration, particularly surrounding the alleged capability by Cuba to produce “bioweapons.” The premise behind these policies has interesting similarities to the allegations that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, an argument used to justify invasion of that country in 2003. Readers will find this article quite interesting given what we now know about the Iraq War under the G.W. Bush Administration.

The second article, by Colleen Erin Marzilli, of the University of Texas at Tyler, is about a distinctive aspect of the Cuban health system: the maternal-child health programs. That article shows how several programs contribute to excellent maternal-child health outcomes, including outcomes related to maternity home and vaccination programs. Maternity homes provide comprehensive, residential care for at-risk mothers until the initiation of labor. An inclusive vaccination program provides continued support to the mother and child post-delivery. These preventive programs are emphasized and promoted in the Cuban health system.

The third article is by Ana García Chichester, of the University of Mary in Washington. It takes a look at the portrayal of gender and race in the local newspapers during the so-called Ten Years War, one of the liberation wars fought in Cuba against Spanish colonialism. This piece describes how periodicals at that time defended the *status quo* for Cuba and ridiculed efforts on behalf of the insurgency, portraying Cuban women as foolish ideologues, and enlisting enslaved Cubans of African descent into the liberation movement.

In an article by Dennis Molinaro, of the University of Toronto, a little-discussed issue is taken up, the role played by Canada during the Cuban Missile Crises. Molinaro argues that Canada initially presented a unique response to the U.S. claims of Soviet aggression by calling for U.N. inspectors to investigate the claims of the United States. This paper sheds some light by demonstrating that the greatest contribution of the U-2 intelligence was that it established the need for a U.N.-brokered dialogue between East and West.

Armando Chávez-Rivera of the University of Houston–Victoria presents a very interesting, but little-known, event in the cultural history of Cuba: the publication of the poems of Juan Francisco Manzano. This Cuban wrote what is believed to be the only autobiography by a slave in Latin America. The article deals with overlaps between Manzano’s poems and the themes portrayed by the anti-slavery movement of the time, and how the British diplomat responsible

for the publication of those poems in the first place used such texts to advance his own political agenda.

Antonio Carmona Báez, of the University of Puerto Rico at Bayamón, discusses a recurrent theme in modern Cuban scholarship—socialism—but does so in light of current economic reforms. He highlights what these reforms may mean for the immediate future of the political system in the island, and how they may impact the whole process of industrialization for that country.

Aldemaro Romero Jr., from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, takes a look into an old myth in the historiography of the sciences in Spain and Latin America: the idea of the isolated genius. To that end he analyzes the life and works of one of the most famous Cuban naturalists of any period, Felipe Poey. Romero shows that despite Poey's geographic isolation in what was still a Spanish colony in Latin America, Poey developed an extensive network of relations with scientists from both Europe and the United States, a network which helped him not only to keep current with the scientific progress of his time but also allowed for his work to be recognized outside Cuba.

To conclude the special issue, Romero also provides a review of a facsimile reproduction (by Nabu Press) of the 1833 policies and rules related to the founding of what would later become the University of Havana. The policies reveal how diverse personalities of that time looked at both the University of Santo Domingo and universities in Spain in order to model the first institution of higher education in Cuba.

We hope this volume will contribute to the knowledge and discussion of different aspects of scholarship on Cuba by presenting not only a variety of topics, but also present the reader with a rich diversity of authors and points of entrée into some intriguing areas of investigation.

Postscript: As this issue of *Polymath* was about to be published we learned of the simultaneous announcement by President Barak Obama and President Raúl Castro that the U.S. and Cuba were moving towards the normalization of diplomatic relations. Although this will be a long and, probably, tortuous process given that most of the economic sanctions to be lifted need approval by the U.S. Congress, this seems to be the beginning of the end of the last remnants of the Cold War. We hope that the normalization of these relations will mark the beginning of a strong and fructiferous academic exchange between the two countries for which possibilities are unlimited. This special issue represents just a beginning of how far we can go.