

Appendix

The Conference

It took the Cuba Project and the Bildner Center for Western Hemisphere Studies two years to promote and organize the international symposium, “A Changing Cuba in a Changing World,” one of the largest conferences about Cuba held in the United States. The Symposium took place in March, 2008 at the CUNY Graduate Center in Manhattan. It gathered hundreds of participants from the US and abroad on several plenaries and dozens of panels and presentations.

We are currently waiting for the reports and synthesis of the complete conference proceedings, which we hope to post shortly. In the interim, below is a sample of the plenaries and panels presented at the symposium.

Plenaries

The opening plenary featured distinguished professor Jorge Domínguez, former U.S. representative to Cuba Vicki Huddleston, and noted Canadian economist Archibald Ritter—who introduced the theme of current dynamics and changing perspectives in today's Cuba and in its relationship to a changing world.

The special plenary “Cuba and the US Media: Getting In and Getting It Right” brought together several distinguished journalists to discuss recent developments in Cuba. The list included Anthony DePalma (New York Times), Soledad O'Brien (CNN), Emily Morris (The Economist Intelligence Unit), and Francis Robles (Miami Herald). Organized by Professor Ted Henken (Baruch College), this panel illuminated the challenges for US journalists of gaining access to Cuba and accurately

understanding and reporting the complex, changing, and often contradictory Cuban reality.

Panels

The panels represented and often combined perspectives from the social sciences and economics, the arts and the humanities, and the world of policymakers, providing in-depth treatment of a wide range of topics such as U.S.-Cuba relations, Cubans in the U.S., non-U.S. points of view, Cuban healthcare, the history and legacy of the Cuban revolution, Cuban cinema, literature, cultural institutions, the visual and performing arts, religion, the role of intellectuals, Afro-Cuban cultural movements, women, race and ethnicity, and Cuban music.

US-Cuba Relations (Reported by Margaret E. Crahan)

The US-Cuba Relations panel was organized and moderated by Margaret E. Crahan, distinguished professor and director of the Kozmetsky Center of Excellence in Global Finance at St. Edward's University.

This session was organized to provide a highly analytical overview of US-Cuban relations by three experts, all of whom had returned within the previous 10 days from Cuba, together with a discussant who had served as Chief of the US Interest Section in Havana. As a consequence, there were no formal papers, but rather informed analysis based on the panelists repeated visits to Cuba over many years. This provided the panelists with a depth of knowledge that was reflected in a combination of hard data and wideranging analysis. In addition, it encouraged dialogue among the panelists who included:

Philip Brenner, Professor, School of International Service, American University who focused on "US Policy towards Cuba: Waiting for Raul to Die." In his presentation, Professor Brenner analyzed the expectations raised by the new president of Cuba Raul Castro's remarks concerning the need for reform, particularly in the agricultural sector. In addition, he reviewed what might be likely outcomes in terms of reforms more generally.

Dan Erikson, Senior Associate, Caribbean Program, Inter-American Dialogue, in his presentation "US-Cuban Relations: Still on the Brink"

Panels

analyzed current relations between Washington and Havana and the near and medium term likelihood of change. He reviewed the stances of the US presidential candidates and then assessed the likelihood of modifications of the 2004 US restrictions on Cuba.

William LeoGrande, Dean, School of Public Affairs, American University, explored in his presentation "The Future of US-Cuban Relations: Obstacles and Opportunities" the context of US-Cuban negotiations and the prospects for future conversations given internal politics in both countries. Among the conclusions was that there was an increasing inclination in Congress to relax restrictions on trade, as well as academic and cultural exchanges with Cuba.

The Discussant was Ambassador Vicky Huddleston, Foreign Policy Fellow, Brookings Institute and former Chief, US Interest Section in Havana. Ambassador Huddleston agreed with the basics of the panelists presentations and added her own understanding of US-Cuban relations based on her service on the island.

The presentations were limited to 7 minutes each in order to allow ample time for the standing room only audience to pose questions. The panel was inundated with questions which allowed for a deepening of the discussion. It was the most heavily attended session of the conference.

Arts (Reported by Ana Mar í a Hern á ndez)

The conference featured three art panels exploring the changing awareness and recognition of the visual arts in Cuba since the Special Period.

The first panel included a discussion of the changing role of the artist in Cuban society as artists were allowed to participate in the international art market in the years just before the Special Period and increasingly so thereafter. Similarly, a discussion of successful legal challenges to the embargo as it pertained to the sale of Cuban art in the United States helped support a booming interest in Cuban art in this country, as evinced by recent and current shows in Los Angeles, Boston, and New York. Special consideration was given as well to the role of the 10 Havana Biennials over the past twenty years, and how these initially modest events have grown to the stature of international spectacles, drawing a significant amount of "art tourism." The second panel proceeded to trace the increasing interest in Cuban art as reflected in the growing collection of the

Museum of Modern Art, as well as the Bronx Museum of the Arts, and the efforts of institutions such as Art in General, based in New York, to disseminate knowledge and understanding of changing trends in Cuban art over the past 20 years. The second and third panels focused on the historic and unprecedented exhibit at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, “Cuba! Art and History from 1868 to the Present,” which gathered Cuban art from the Museo de Bellas Artes and Fototeca in Havana, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and private collections from the United States and abroad. This exhibit, the first of its kind anywhere, presents a history of Cuban art within the context of the social and historical forces that shaped the concept of “cubanidad.” The discussion of the section covering art from the Special Period was particularly enlightening.

History (Reported by Alfonso Quiroz)

The panel “History and civil society in Cuba” counted with five panelists that presented papers on several subjects of Cuban civil society, associations, and the medical profession in the the nineteenth and early twentieth century. After the presentation a lively period of questions and answers ensued. The development of civil society in Cuba on the basis of associations, black clubs, and professional societies was discussed by considering the legal and political framework of the time, including liberal Spanish legislation and struggles for slave emancipation and full equality. Civil society in Cuba from a historical perspective allows a better understanding about the efforts at rebuilding non-governmental associations in present-day Cuba.

Literature (Reported by Araceli Tinajero)

There were five literature panels which included new readings of *Espejo de paciencia*, an epic poem written by Silvestre de Balboa in 1608, readings by contemporary Cuban writers, Cuban literature from 1990 to the present (two panels), and women and the Cuban literary perspective.

The first panel, “*Espejo de paciencia* (1608-2008): proyecciones literarias e históricas” was organized by Raquel Chang-Rodríguez and focused on new social and historical revisions of Balboa's epic poem. Carmen Lamas offered a close reading of “Soneto criollo de la tierra” taking into account *Espejo de paciencia*'s historical and economic context. Raúl Marrero Fente's talk focused on the poem's context and offered new

historical findings gathered from Cuban and Spanish archives. The participants agreed that the polemics of the authenticity of *Espejo de paciencia* continues even nowadays, four hundred years after its publication, but the issue of its originality has to do with the place this epic poem occupies in the Cuban literary canon.

The second panel, “Cuban Writers Read their Work” was also organized by Raquel Chang-Rodríguez. The first presenter was José Manuel Prieto—accompanied by his translator, Esther Allen—who read from his latest novel *Rex*. There were several questions and answers about the content of the novel and on the intricacies and challenges presented to the translator during the translation process of this rather complex text. Poet Orlando Rossardi read from his recent poetry collection, *Libro de las pérdidas* and Arístides Falcón, another poet, read from his *Tantra Tanka* a collection of poems written in the style of Japanese *tanka*. Falcón announced the recent publication of this book in translation in Japan. All readings were welcomed with great enthusiasm from the audience.

The third panel, “Cuban Literature from 1990 to the Present, Part I” was organized by Araceli Tinajero. In “Un arte del pastiche: literatura cubana de los años noventa” Anke Birkenmaier focused on Cuban writer José Manuel Prieto's latest novel, *Rex* and talked about the complexities and sophistication of its structure and diverse narrators, which make this text a 21st century first rate novel. In “Benjamin no llegó a La Habana: La literatura postsoviética en Cuba,” Rafael Rojas discussed the importance of postsovietic literature in Cuba and emphasized why and how the Cuban intelligentsia received Walter Benjamin's writings. In “Cuba's Special Period and the Diasporic Subject: Self-Invention and Self-Representation in Daína Chaviano's *El hombre, la hembra y el hambre*,” Raúl Rosales-Herrera discussed how this novel is a paradigm of a well written novel which exemplifies Cuba's internal economic problems through a text that shows the complexities of a diasporic, self-invented and self-represented subject.

The fourth panel, “Cuban Literature from 1990 to the Present, Part II,” was also organized by Araceli Tinajero but Uva de Aragón was the moderator. In “El jineterismo en la literatura del período especial” Patricia Catoira focused on how prostitution is portrayed in Cuban fiction since 1990. Catoira underlined that they are two main currents: the exhibitionist, which promotes sexual tourism; and the introspective, which is more

realistic about the social crisis and the emotional disturbance created as a result of the Special Period. In “The Function of Evoking Soviet-Cubans in Global Cuba,” Jacqueline Loss provided several examples of the presence of the ex-Soviet Union in Cuban culture. Loss mentioned that marriages between ex-Soviet Union women and Cubans were a paradigm of transculturation in a global age where sexual, social and racial issues intersect at different levels never seen before. In “Reinaldo Arenas: AIDS and the Sexual Politics of a Queer Activist,” Rafael Ocasio focused on the political and sexual activism of Arenas towards the end of his life. Ocasio emphasized that Arenas' last texts openly dismantled his homosexual erotism as a way to criticize and attack—through his writings—Cuban politics because the author had been the victim of homophobic abuse. In “Distancia no quiere decir olvido, viajes a la semilla,” Uva de Aragón talked about Cuban literature that focuses on the nostalgia and need to return to Cuba. Aragón underlined that writing in exile is not an easy task; however, literature based on the emptiness and the pain left behind by those who left Cuba has not been written yet.

The fifth panel, “Women and the Cuban Literary Perspective” was moderated by Esther Allen. In “La poesía de Juana Rosa Pita,” Ada María Teja talked about this prolific Cuban poet. Teja emphasized that even though Pita began publishing in 1976 (*Pan de sol*), her most current poetry, i.e. *Transfiguración de la armonía* and *Tela de concierto* is evocative and original. In “La hija de Cuba: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda y la novela del siglo XXI,” María Albin focused on María Elena Cruz Varela's recent historical and detective novel, *La hija de Cuba* (2006). Albin suggested that Varela's use of intertexts in her novel helps the contemporary reader to have a deeper understanding of the life of Gómez de Avellaneda—the nineteenth century Cuban writer on who the novel is based. In “Geographies of Memory: Contemporary Cuban Women Rewrite Space and Place,” Myrna García-Calderón discussed the diverse uses of space and place (and displacement) evoked in recent Cuban writers and lastly, in “Animated Photographs: G. Cabrera Infante and Ana Menéndez,” Isabel Alvarez Borland presented the “animated” and symbolic dialogue between these two writers.

Concert

Cubans in the US: Generational Differences among Cubans (Reported by Yolanda Prieto)

While in recent years sociologists have become sensitive to issues of class, race, gender, and sexuality, substantially less attention has been given to generations. In this panel, the researchers focus on generations among Cubans in the island, as well as immigrants and their children, to try to understand their varying experiences and contrasting political attitudes. The panel was organized by Yolanda Prieto and Silvia Pedraza, who also served as panelists along with Lisandro Pérez, María Cristina García, and Catherine Krull.

Concert

In addition, this gathering included the special musical program “The Cuba-New York Latin Jazz Ensemble,” directed by pianist and composer Oriente Lopez. For some this was the highlight of the symposium, many of the attendees could not resist the orchestra’s catchy Cuban rhythm, and jumped on stage to dance as the music went on. With everyone cheering encore! encore! the conference organizers had no choice but to add a second concert at the end of the Symposium.

