

# CUBA IN TRANSITION

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Papers and Proceedings of the  
Twenty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the  
Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy (ASCE)  
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## PREFACE

This year's 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of ASCE was held on July 25-27, 2019, in Miami, Florida at the Hilton Miami Downtown Hotel. Under the theme of "Cuba – Growth or Decline: Is the Revolution Dead?" conference participants analyzed the aging of the revolution and the continued lack of economic growth in the island, as well as the continued economic dependency of Cuba on an external partner or benefactor: from Spain, to the United States, to the Soviet Union, to now Venezuela. The conference consisted of 17 sessions and panels, spanning many topics. Several presentations focused on the changing economic and social trends over the course of 60 years of revolution, among them papers analyzing the state of the Cuban economy after 60 years of revolution; the emergence of *cuentapropismo* (self-employment) in Cuba; U.S. policy towards Cuba—old and new, particularly the changes that went into effect under Presidents Obama and Trump—and Cuba's international economic relations, in trade, aid, and debt. Many presentations also engaged in comparisons between Cuba and Venezuela—e.g., with respect to the success of both revolutions in their origin; inclusionary vs. exclusionary populism in Venezuela; Cuba, Venezuela, and Russia economic relations involving oil, doctors, and weapons; economic relations between Cuban and Venezuelan émigrés and their homeland (via remittances and travel); and *Cubazuela*—Cuba's intervention in Venezuela. Presenters also focused on other development issues and strategies, such as ideology and schooling, changes in agricultural output, particularly the demise of the leading sugar market worldwide (from front-runner to back of the pack), the resulting lack of food security, as well as the recent decline in tourism. Other presentations focused on the political system, such as changes in the pattern of authoritarianism, as well as

Cuba's new 2019 Constitution—particularly issues regarding property and the rights of citizens, including LGBTQ, expressed in that Constitution. Intellectually, it was a very rich academic meeting with many first-time participants from excellent academic institutions presenting their research. We look forward to their continuing participation.

This year ASCE titled the initial session of the conference the "Carmelo Mesa-Lago Opening Plenary," in honor of Mesa-Lago's many years of solid research on Cuba's economic situation. The initial plenary session will continue to bear his name in recognition of his work. In his presentation at the initial session, Mesa-Lago marshaled a wide range of statistics to show the continuities and changes in Cuba's economy, which at present is in a dismal state and betrays a history of dependency on an external benefactor, though the economic partner has changed. Mesa-Lago also pointed out that Cuba seems unable and unwilling to follow the path of market socialism that countries like Vietnam and China took, much to the detriment of its population.

ASCE's program also incorporated the Ernesto Betancourt Keynote address, delivered this year by Prof. Lillian Guerra, of the University of Florida-Gainesville, History Department. In her address on "Heroes, Martyrs, and Political Messiahs in 1950s Cuba: Parables and Legacies for Today," Guerra focused on the beginning stages of the Cuban revolution to show how progressively the possibility to dissent was lost, as civil society—newspapers, TV and radio stations, independent economic and social organizations—were taken over by the new revolutionary government.

This year ASCE experienced many difficulties in bringing to the conference Cuban academics from

the island, as it had done for many past years. A major difficulty resulted from the loss of financial support from the Christopher Reynolds Foundation, which had provided funds to bring scholars from Cuba and other Latin American countries to participate in the ASCE Conference. Another major difficulty was the United States' new and more restrictive policy regarding visas for Cuban scholars, which meant that some Cuban scholars in the island or elsewhere (e.g., Ecuador, Mexico) were not granted the visas to come to the U.S. to attend the conference. Nonetheless, by hook or by crook, we were able to have a number of Cuban scholars attend the conference: Camilo Condis (*cuentapropista*, Proyecto Artecorte, Cuba), Mauricio de Miranda Parrondo (Pontificia Universidad Javeriana de Cali, Colombia), Efraín Velázquez (Consejo de Economía Nacional de Venezuela); Olimpia Gómez and Tomás Depestre (Independent Scholars, Cuba); Roberto Rasúa (Instituto de Estudios Eclesiásticos Padre Félix Varela, Cuba); Miriam Leiva (Periodista Independiente, Cuba); Isbel Díaz Torres (Proyecto el Guardabosques, Cuba) and Jimmy Roque Martínez (Proyecto Arcoiris, Cuba). Rasúa was the winner of the 2018 Student Prize—the first time the winner came from the island—and was able to attend the ASCE Conference. The presence of these scholars enriched the intellectual discussion regarding the changes taking place (or not) in Cuba.

For the first time, ASCE's program included a movie in the evening: a documentary on Carmelo Mesa-Lago's life, titled "Statistics and Chance," directed by Carlos Díaz Montero and produced by Elaine Acosta González. The documentary honored the life of Carmelo and his wife Elena Gross, without who, we know, his prodigious output would not have been possible. The ASCE audience thoroughly enjoyed the evening, indicating that we may want to watch together a movie or a cultural activity focused on Cuba at future meetings.

Despite the real difficulties we faced, stemming from the island as well as the mainland, the conference was a success. This shows that Cubans have the capacity to *inventar* and *resolver*—wherever they may find themselves. On behalf of ASCE, I wish to express our gratitude to all the authors who contributed their papers to this volume and to all who participated in the meeting, enriching it. Special thanks go to the ASCE Board and all other members of the many Committees that enable us to put on the conference and support the many activities of this organization. Very special thanks go to Jorge Pérez-López, without who the conference Program would not be possible, nor this volume.

An electronic version of these Proceedings and the ones for all the previous conferences can be found at [www.ASCECuba.org](http://www.ASCECuba.org).

Silvia Pedraza  
President, 2018–2020