

HANDBOOK OF CONTEMPORARY CUBA

ECONOMY, POLITICS, CIVIL SOCIETY,
AND GLOBALIZATION

Edited by

Mauricio A. Font
and
Carlos Riobó



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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



ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Carlos Alzugaray (Ph.D., University of Havana) is a professor at the University of Havana and a Cuban diplomat.

Carmen Antón-Guardiola (Ph.D.) is a professor of public international law, foreign affairs, and law of the European Union in the University of Alicante. She has published a number of works on public international law and European Community law, including the *Gibraltar: un desafío para la Unión Europea* (2010).

María P. Aristigueta (Ph.D., University of Southern California) is a professor of public administration and senior policy fellow in the University of Delaware's Institute for Public Administration. She is the author of, among other works, *Civil Society in Cuba* (2008).

Miguel Barnet is a Cuban writer, novelist, poet, and ethnographer, whose works have encompassed several sociological and anthropological themes. He is author of *Biography of a Runaway Slave* (1966).

Hilary Becker (Ph.D., University of Havana) is an assistant professor of accounting at Carleton University. He has worked as an analyst with DuPont, Inc., and has consulted with the World Wildlife Fund, the MacArthur Foundation (among other organizations), and the government of Cuba.

Larry Catá Backer (J.D., Columbia University) is a professor of law and international affairs at Pennsylvania State University. He has published an edited collection of essays, *Harmonizing Law in an Era of Globalization: Convergence, Divergence, and Resistance* (2007).

Armando Chaguaceda Noriega (M.A., University of Havana) is a political scientist, historian, and social activist. He is a professor of history and political theory at the University of Havana. He is currently developing his

Armando Nova González (Ph.D., University of Havana) is a professor and researcher at the Center for the Study of the Cuban Economy. He is author of a number of books and articles on Cuban economy and Cuban agriculture.

J. R. Paron (Ph.D., University of Southern California) is a retired US Navy Captain (O-6) fighter pilot and a senior research scientist for Dynamics Research Corporation. He participated in the Cuban missile blockade and made routine visits to Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. He is the author of numerous classified and unclassified publications related to public policy and national security.

Omar Everleny Pérez Villanueva (Ph.D., University of Havana) is a professor at the University of Havana and was director of its Center for the Study of the Cuban Economy. He has published several articles and books, including *Cincuenta años de la economía cubana* (2010).

Camila Piñeiro Harnecker is a researcher and professor at the Center for the Study of the Cuban Economy (University of Havana). She is editor and author of the compilation *Cooperativas y socialismo: una mirada desde Cuba* (2011). She is currently finishing her Ph.D. on the regulatory framework of Cuban state enterprises.

Robert A. Portada III (Ph.D., University of Notre Dame) is an assistant professor of political science at Kutztown University. His current research is focused on constitutional reform in Latin America and the role of private security companies in foreign affairs.

Carlos Riobó (Ph.D., Yale University) is an assistant professor of Latin American literature and cultures at The City College of New York and Cuba Project Fellow of the Bildner Center for Western Hemisphere Studies (CUNY). He is the author of *Sub-versions of the Archive: Manuel Puig's and Severo Sarduy's Alternative Identities* (2011), among other books.

Archibald R. M. Ritter (Ph.D., University of Texas at Austin) is a professor in the Department of Economics and the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University (Ottawa). He has published a variety of works on Cuba including (as editor) *The Cuban Economy* (2004).

⇒ Jorge Luis Romeu (Ph.D., Syracuse University) is a professor at Syracuse University and a SUNY faculty emeritus. He directs the Juárez-Lincoln-Martí International Education Project and has published extensively on Cuban issues, including a demographic study of Cuban Freemasons in the twentieth century.