

Cuban Landscapes: Heritage, Memory, and Place, by Joseph L. Scarpaci and Armando H. Portela, New York: The Guildford Press, 2009. vii + 216 pp. US\$30.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-60623-323-8

Cuban Landscapes: Heritage, Memory, and Place eloquently applies landscape studies, both classical and modern, to the study of a unique insular locale, Cuba, whose landscapes have been reworked repeatedly over the past five centuries. The collaboration between a Human Geographer (Joseph Scarpaci) and a Physical Geographer (Armando

Portela) brings together their vast scholarly and personal experiences on the island of Cuba in a fitting human-environment landscape approach. As such, it is an important addition not only to the literature on landscape, but also presents a fascinating insight into the ever-evolving representations of Cuba. The text consists of seven chapters, with the first two providing an education on the study of landscape for the uninitiated, and an excellent review for those cultural geographers that are so inclined. For example, they present an interesting observation about a particular 19th century Cuban landscape painter, Chartrand, who broke with the European renaissance practice of excluding the 'lowly' peasant in their landscape representations while creating idyllic pastoral scenes of, and for, elite leisure. Instead, Chartrand included and celebrated the Cuban peasant which corresponded, importantly, with the rise of nationalist independence movements in Cuba that challenged Spanish elitist views.

Later chapters apply a distinctly modern cultural geography perspective that expands beyond merely reading the social relationships depicted in the representation of landscapes to analyzing how representation of landscape plays a part in creating, maintaining, and changing social relations. And very few places can entertain this concept as Cuba, where changes in pre- and post-revolutionary Cuban representations of the symbolic landscape are so abrupt. After 'independence' in 1898, Cuba was often portrayed as an idyllic tropical playground and, at times, as a locale for hedonic delights serving the wealthy tourist from the United States. However, post-1959 revolutionary representations made an about-face in the battle of symbolic landscapes, replacing representations based on consumerism with those advancing solidarity and the ideology of communism, forming what the authors call information landscapes.

The text applies landscape studies to the contemporary topics of heritage sites and tourism as well. The analysis of the heritage sites is laudable in its coverage of the nuances involved between reality and its representation in preserved landscapes. Similarly, the chapter on tourism landscapes in the present context raises the important question of how Cuba will manage the desire for capital it promises – both on a governmental and personal level – with the social divisiveness it often creates or exacerbates. And how will this be reflected in the representation of symbolic landscapes?

I did have a few minor qualms with the book. While aptly illustrated with reproductions of landscape paintings, photographs, billboards, tourism advertisements, amongst others, they were all in black-and-white. Since the importance of color in landscape representation is discussed in the text, particularly in depicting tropical locales, the reader is unable to directly engage with these arguments (perhaps the publishers will acquiesce in the next edition!). A more substantive issue relates to the focus on official landscapes such as heritage sites, which while interspersed

across the island, leaves one wondering about more of the everyday landscapes of the Cuban people.

But aside from these concerns, I found this an excellent contribution to the study of landscapes in general, and Cuba specifically. The authors negotiate the political terrain deftly, presenting many viewpoints while avoiding overt bias in their coverage. Considering the rapid changes Cuba has undergone in the past twenty years, from the loss of Soviet support to the resignation of Fidel, this text serves as an important and timely work that sets the stage for observing changes in the landscape – literally and figuratively – that are, and will continue, to occur.

Benjamin F. Timms

California Polytechnic State University-San Luis Obispo

Email: btimms@calpoly.edu

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