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**Lana Wylie. *Perceptions of Cuba: Canadian and American Policies in Comparative Perspective*.** University of Toronto Press, March 2010. ISBN: 9781442640610 (cloth, \$55.00); 9781442610071 (paper, \$22.95).

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## Contents

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Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge .....	2
Review by Asa McKercher, Trinity Hall, Cambridge .....	5
Review by Michael E. Neagle, University of Connecticut.....	9
Review by Heather N. Nicol, Department of Geography, Trent University .....	12
Author's Response by Lana Wylie, McMaster University .....	15

## Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge

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Lana Wylie has enhanced our understanding of Canadian and U.S. policies toward Fidel Castro's Cuba by providing a comparative perspective that extends from 1959 to the present. Wylie applies a constructivist approach which proposes that "culture and identity are integral to a complete understanding of the dynamics of international relations." (6) Wylie proposes to move from a "focus on systemic-level analysis" to examine "national-level identities in order to understand differences in foreign-policy behavior." (8) Furthermore, Wylie examines not only state action at the international level but also domestic factors. "It is not just international culture that constructs a state's identity and corresponding behavior," Wylie suggests, "but also domestic-level culture, identity, and ideas." (9)

At the domestic level, Wylie's focus is on the development of perceptions from self-identity that form norms and influence a state's actions. "Differences in identities cause states to view, understand, and interpret situations differently," (11) suggests Wylie, who applies this model to a comparative study of Canadian and U.S. policies starting with the origins of different identities before 1959. With the U.S., Wylie emphasizes a familiar American sense of exceptionalism which depicts others, in this case Cubans, as inferior, combined with a strong American emotional reaction to Fidel Castro's policies reinforced by the failure of the U.S. to overthrow the Castro regime directly or to undermine it with a variety of policies including the embargo against economic interaction with Cuba, diplomatic non-recognition, and containment through the Alliance for Progress. On the other hand, Canada had a more limited involvement with Cuba before 1945 and, according to Wylie, had developed a different self-identity as a "good international citizen" that "resolves rather than contributes to international conflict." (55-56) As a consequence Canada did not break diplomatic relations with Castro's Cuba, maintained economic relations despite the U.S. embargo, and its citizens enjoyed unrestricted travel to Cuba.

Wylie does not dismiss the more familiar factors that historians and international relations specialists have emphasized with respect to U.S.-Canadian relations with Cuba. However, she believes they are insufficient to account for the differences in Canadian and U.S. policies. The importance of trade is frequently emphasized but Wylie points out that Canada has traded more with the U.S. in one day than in an entire year with Cuba. (50-54) On the U.S. side of the relationship with Cuba, Wylie recognizes the presence and impact of the Cuban-American community as an interest group working to maintain a policy of non-recognition and non-interaction with Cuba. Wylie, however, attributes the influence of the Cuban immigrants and their descendants since 1959 less to politics and more to their sharing general American views that rejected Castro and the Cuban revolution. (35-37)

The reviewers are impressed with Wylie's approach and thesis, although they have some reservations in part because it is impossible to cover all of the major issues and periods in a comparative study of U.S.-Canadian relations since 1959, as well as the historical roots of U.S. perceptions, in 122 pages.

On Canadian policy, Heather Nicol endorses Wylie's interpretation of Canada pursuing continuing engagement with Cuba through different administrations and despite a desire for change in Cuba towards more freedom in many areas. Nicol supports Wylie's conclusion that "Canadians like to think of themselves as good international citizens and at the same time want to be seen as charting their own course through the choppy waters of international relations, especially taking a route that is different from the American one" (47). Michael Neagle suggests that despite "all the posturing about distinction, Canadian policy shares many similarities with that of the United States. Just like the United States, Canada also prefers that Cuba become

more politically open, democratic, and market-oriented. And much like the U.S.-Cuba relationship before the revolution, Canada presently has billions of dollars invested in Cuba and also sees it as an attractive tourist destination.” Neagle also would have welcomed more analysis on how much Canadian policy toward Cuba changed after 1959. Asa McKercher questions Wylie the most on the image of Canada acting as a good neighbor, “a selfless middle power,” versus a pragmatic approach with a “dose of internationalism.” McKercher views Canada’s policies toward Cuba as similar to those of Mexico and Great Britain, “both of which cooperated quietly with the United States while pursuing relations while loudly denouncing U.S. actions that impugned on their sovereign rights.” McKercher lists a number of examples of “behind-the-scenes cooperation” of Canada with the U.S. on Cuba as well as Canadian concerns about Cuban ties with the Soviet Union and activities in Latin America and Africa.<sup>1</sup>

The reviewers are in more agreement with Wylie with respect to the factors shaping U.S. policy. In emphasizing the continuity of U.S. views on Cuba and Cubans reaching back to the nineteenth century as more a product of “internal identity markers” of exceptionalism, Monroe Doctrine hegemony over Latin America, racial beliefs, and American paternalistic assumptions, Wylie makes a persuasive case for Nicol and McKercher. Neagle, however, suggests that Wylie’s emphasis on identities “can obscure important nuances in foreign policy which often is an amalgamation of different inputs and approaches.” Neagle notes differences between Congress and the Executive such as on the 1996 Helms-Burton Act which put the embargo on trade with Cuba under Congressional purview as well as differences among U.S. presidents and their stances on Cuba since 1959. Politics also could receive more analysis in the comparison between Canada and the U.S. From the 1960 election until the present, Republicans and Democrats have made use of the Cuban issue extending beyond winning the votes of Cuban Americans in Florida. Wylie examines relations within the Cold War context which could be considered as important as distant legacies of the Monroe Doctrine, Manifest Destiny and U.S. interventions in Cuba and the Caribbean. The Cold War had a pervasive impact on Americans’ sense of identity, of insecurity, interests, culture, politics, etc., and Cuba was a major adversary after 1959. The most serious Soviet-U.S confrontation in the Cuban missile crisis involved Cuba; U.S. Cold War policies in Latin America focused on preventing another Castro and Castro was frequently viewed as meddling wherever problems erupt from the Dominican Republic to Chile to Central America in the 1980s. The U.S. also encountered Castro and Cubans in Southern Africa in the 1970s-1980s.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, Wylie notes some changes in U.S. policy and attitudes towards Cuba but also offers several examples of continuing differences in U.S. and Canadian policies based on their different identity perceptions. The first involved the Cuban shoot-down of two Brothers to the Rescue planes in 1996 after the planes dropped leaflets over Havana criticizing the Castro regime, which prompted orders to the Cuban Air Force to prevent any further overflights of Cuban airspace. The public uproar prompted politicians of both parties to back the Burton-Helms bill to tighten the embargo and led President Bill Clinton to drop his opposition to the legislation and sign it (72-76). How much does this reflect Wylie’s arguments on ingrained perceptions and how much does it reflect domestic politics? A second example relates to September 11<sup>th</sup> and heightened concerns about terrorism which prompted John Bolton, Under Secretary of

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<sup>1</sup> McKercher supports this perspective on Canadian policy in “‘The Most Serious Problem?’ Canada-U.S. Relations and Cuba, 1962,” *Cold War History* 12:1 (February 2012): 69-88. DOI: 10.1080/14682745.2011.562202. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2011.562202>

State for Arms Control and International Security Affairs,<sup>2</sup> to raise the specter of Cuban support for terrorists and bioterrorism through its biotech industry (81-90). This example certainly reflects the persistence of hostility and suspicions concerning the Castro regime held by some conservatives and Republicans. George Bush and his advisers, however, had more important priorities than Castro after September 11<sup>th</sup> although the differences in the Canadian and U.S. stances on these issues persisted.

**Participants:**

**Lana Wylie**, Ph.D., is an associate professor of political science at McMaster University. In addition to *Perceptions of Cuba* she has recently published *Our Place in the Sun: Canada and Cuba in the Castro Era* (with Robert Wright), *Canadian Foreign Policy in Critical Perspective* (with Marshall Beier) as well as being the guest editor of a 2010 issue of the *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* entitled “The Politics of Canada-Cuba Relations: Emerging Possibilities and Diverse Challenges.” At the time of these reviews she was conducting research for her next book in Havana.

A former archival assistant at Library and Archives Canada, **Asa McKercher** is a Ph.D. Candidate in History at Trinity Hall, Cambridge. His writing on Canada-Cuba-U.S. relations has appeared, or will appear, in *The International History Review*, *Cold War History*, and the *Canadian Historical Review*. His supervisor will be heartened to know that his current project is his dissertation, which explores reactions to the Cuban revolution in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States.

**Michael E. Neagle** recently defended his dissertation, “Isle of Pines, U.S.A.: The Other Side of American Expansion in Cuba, 1898-1960,” written under the direction of Frank Costigliola at the University of Connecticut. He received his M.A. in History from UConn and a Bachelor’s degree from the College of the Holy Cross. His work has appeared in *Latino America: A State-by-State Encyclopedia* (Greenwood Press, 2008), as well as *Red Brick in the Land of Steady Habits: Creating the University of Connecticut, 1881-2006* (University Press of New England, 2006).

**Heather N. Nicol** is a political geographer at Trent University with interests in the Canada-U.S. Border, The circumpolar North, and Canada-Cuba relations. She received her Ph.D. from Queen's University and teaches at Trent University. Her recent work explores the structure and operation of the Canada-US border, with special emphasis on the impacts of the security discourse. She is also interested in the circumpolar North as a geopolitical and geo-economic space, and the relationship between the interests of nation-states, security and northern populations. Nicol has published a number of articles and essays including forthcoming “Canadian Political Geography for the 21st Century” in R. Tremblay ed. *Geographies of Canada* (Brussels, Belgium: Peter Lang Publishing); Victor Konrad and Heather N. Nicol, “Border Culture, the Boundary Between Canada and the United States of America, and the Advancement of Borderlands Theory,” *Geopolitics* Vol. 18, No. 1 (2010): 70-90; and Heather N. Nicol, “Canada-Cuba relations: An ambivalent media and policy,” *Canadian Foreign Policy* Vol. 16, No. 16: 1 (2010): 103-18.

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<sup>2</sup> “John R. Bolton (1948-),” U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian website, <http://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/bolton-john-r>, accessed 28 May 2012.

**Review by Asa McKercher, Trinity Hall, Cambridge**

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I preface my review by affirming that I am an historian who abhors works of political science that are impenetrably written or that spend an inordinate amount of time wading through a methodological morass. I was thus pleased to find that in *Perceptions of Cuba*, Lana Wylie avoided an overwrought discussion of IR theory. Indeed, she has produced a clearly-written and concise book that examines how and why Canada and the United States have such different approaches to Cuba. While contending that scholars have argued that U.S. Cuban policy is the result of the influential Cuban-American lobby, with Canada's policies stemming from the lack of such a lobby as well as economic interests, Wylie posits that more is at play. In her view, "foreign policy is constructed by our perceptions which in turn have their origins in our identities." (ix) Putting Wylie in the constructivist camp, this viewpoint is analogous to the judgment of historians who ascribe to the cultural turn in international history. Her book examines the way in which U.S. and Canadian citizens conceive of the international role of their respective countries and, in turn, how these conceptions inform how policymakers in Ottawa and Washington perceive, and act towards, Cuba. Wylie makes a persuasive case, at least in part.

Since at least March 1960, the United States has sought to topple the Castro governments, primarily by isolating Cuba, although other tactics, many unsavoury to say the least, have been employed. The effort to isolate Cuba has succeeded in weakening that country economically but has accomplished little else. While many governments, especially in Latin America, sided with Washington against Havana during the Cold War, Cuba now has normal relations with scores of former enemies and the economic embargo, once supported by a host of countries, is now roundly criticised in an annual vote in the United Nations General Assembly. This process has pitted the United States and Israel against the rest of the world, although, to be fair, Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau have consistently abstained as a show of support for Washington. And, incredibly, the United States refuses to establish normal diplomatic or economic relations with Cuba but does so with China and Vietnam. With governments little better than Cuba on issues like human rights, Chinese and Vietnamese forces, unlike those of Cuba, were responsible for the deaths of thousands of Americans between 1950 and 1973. In explaining the persistence of Washington's failed approach, Wylie looks to the importance of identity and perception.

From the perspective of an historian, Wylie's point that "parts of the contemporary policies have historical roots" (16) is particularly gratifying. In this regard, Wylie looks to how a U.S. global identity developed, pointing to those old culprits: American exceptionalism, Manifest Destiny, and the Monroe Doctrine and Roosevelt Corollary. These ideas have influenced and continue to influence U.S. policymakers, who reckon that their country has had both the right and the duty to act abroad, especially in the Western hemisphere. For over five decades, Cubans have thumbed their noses at James Monroe, John O'Sullivan, and Teddy Roosevelt. By nationalising U.S. businesses, siding with the Soviet Union, and working with progressive regimes in the Third World, Cuba has challenged both the power and identity of the United States. Further, many in the United States have long seen Cubans to be inferior people, unable to care for themselves. Revolutionary Cuba's very existence, then, is a challenge to Washington. Readers of Louis Pérez and Lars Schoultz will find nothing new in Wylie's argument here.<sup>1</sup> But, nonetheless, Wylie's observations about the

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<sup>1</sup> Louis A. Pérez Jr., "Fear and Loathing of Fidel Castro: Sources of US Policy Toward Cuba", *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34 (2002) [DOI: 10.1017/S0022216X02006387, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X02006387>], 227-54; *Idem.*, *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Lars Schoultz, "Blessings of Liberty: The United States and the Promotion of Democracy in

importance of culture are important. So too is her contention that the power of the Cuban-American lobby, beyond Florida's votes in the Electoral College, comes through these exiles' ability to reinforce views of policymakers with regard to identity. The United States has a very distinct way of viewing Cuba, one explaining the persistence of a policy that remains *de rigueur* in Washington despite having failed, for more than fifty years, in its stated goal of bringing down the Castros' governments.

While accepting her argument about the factors affecting U.S. foreign policy, I disagree with her contention that "Canada's approach towards Cuba is constructed by its self-image as a good international citizen." (55) To be fair, I admit that my view here stems from the relative lack of focus by historians on the link between Canadian culture and foreign policy, but this slim volume does little to fill the lacuna. From an historical perspective, the long-cherished view that Canada has acted abroad as a selfless middle power is under attack by historians. Rather than misty-eyed idealism, it has been pragmatism, with a dose of internationalism, that has driven Canadian policymaking.<sup>2</sup> This approach was especially so in Canadian dealings with the Third World, where considerations of Western interests generally took precedence, as did cultural views that were distinctly unfavourable to non-Westerners.<sup>3</sup>

With Cuba, pragmatism meant helping the United States in cases where this aid did not adversely affect Canada's position that trade and diplomatic ties to Havana should be maintained. Despite public complaints over the embargo's encroachment on Canada's sovereignty, Ottawa took steps to limit exports to Cuba of many goods, banned outright the sale of military hardware, and prevented the re-export of U.S. products to Cuba via Canada. Canadian diplomats gathered intelligence for the United States, sought to dissuade Canadians and Americans from travelling to Cuba, and carefully monitored those who did. In offering behind-the-scenes cooperation, Canadian officials were concerned by both Havana's ties to the Soviet bloc and Cuban activities in Latin America and, later, in Africa. They were mindful, too, of their government's close relationship with Washington. Concurrently, because Cuba did nothing directly to harm Canada, normal diplomatic relations were maintained, as were trade ties albeit with certain restrictions. Canada's

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Cuba", *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34 (2002), 397-425 [DOI: 10.1017/S0022216X02006375, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X02006375>]; *Idem.*, *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. policy Toward Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); and *Idem.*, "Benevolent Domination: The Ideology of U.S. Policy toward Cuba", *Cuban Studies* 41 (2010), 1-19.

<sup>2</sup> See: Hector MacKenzie "Golden Decade(s)? Reappraising Canada's International Relations in the 1940s and 1950s", *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 23 (2010), 179-206 [DOI: 10.3828/bjcs.2010.10; <http://dx.doi.org/10.3828/bjcs.2010.10>]; Adam Chapnick, "The Canadian Middle Power Myth", *International Journal* 55 (2000) [<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40203476>], 188-206; *Idem.*, "Peace, Order and Good Government: The 'conservative' Tradition in Canadian Foreign Policy", *International Journal* 60 (2005), 635-50 [<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40204053>]; and Greg Donaghy, "Coming off the Gold Standard: Re-assessing the 'Golden Age' of Canadian Diplomacy", paper available at [http://www.schoolofpublicpolicy.sk.ca/documents/outreach\\_event\\_announcements/DFAIT\\_symposium/Coming\\_off\\_the\\_Gold\\_Standard.pdf](http://www.schoolofpublicpolicy.sk.ca/documents/outreach_event_announcements/DFAIT_symposium/Coming_off_the_Gold_Standard.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> David Webster, *Fire and the Full Moon: Canada and Indonesia in a Decolonizing World* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009); and Kevin Spooner, *Canada, the Congo Crisis, and UN Peacekeeping, 1960-1964* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009). See the H-Diplo Roundtable on these books: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XI-21.pdf>



approach was similar to those of Mexico and the United Kingdom, both of which cooperated quietly with the United States while pursuing relations with Cuba and loudly denouncing U.S. actions that impugned on their sovereign rights. Canadian government figures in the 1960s, although nationalist – that is, quasi anti-American – were also committed Cold Warriors, a stance reflected throughout the country. Like virtually all of its Western European allies, Canada simply differed with the United States over how to wage the Cold War.

Turning to the contemporary scene, I am less-than-convinced that Canadian actions are driven by a view that Canada must act like a good citizen. Ottawa follows an internationalist course, but one tempered by Western values; and its pursuit of a self-congratulatory middle power-role in the 1990s and early 2000s was contentious. As for Pearsonian peacekeeping, the current Conservative government has followed a course set by its Liberal predecessors by putting greater emphasis on action through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization; and to judge by Tory electoral success since 2006, as well as Tory discourse over Canada's role in Afghanistan and Libya, this approach finds support from wide swathes of Canadian society. Moreover, although many commentators have denounced its approach, Canada's current government has adopted an unabashedly hard-nosed diplomatic posture. If Canada does have a global identity as a good citizen, it is highly malleable.

As for Cuba, Canadians love to travel to, and trade with, the island, but this friendliness is often moderated by unease with the Cuban government, a feeling shared in Ottawa. A point made by Robert Wright, Wylie's collaborator on an excellent collection of essays on Canada-Cuba relations, is that by seeking to affect Cuban actions and pave the way for the post-Castro era, Canadian policy has differed little "not only with Washington but with Miami".<sup>4</sup> Wylie dances around this point. In one instance, she approvingly quotes a Canadian embassy official as arguing that "there are many forms of democracy". (67) Yet, earlier, she quotes Lloyd Axworthy, Canadian foreign minister in the late 1990s and the poster-boy for multilateralism, who said "we share the end objective [with the Americans], which is to see a transition in Cuba into a democratic society. We have chosen different methods". (58) Wylie seems reluctant to admit that Ottawa's approach has been driven by a desire to see regime change in Havana, with Canada having chosen engagement over isolation as the preferred strategy. Still, Canada is not hostile towards Cuba, and disagreements between Canadian and Cuban officials even on fundamental issues like human rights, free trade, and the primacy of liberal democracy have not been seen as reason for cutting ties. Rather, Cuban-Canadian relations are, simply, normal.

What, then, of Wylie's central argument? Why have Canada and the United States adopted such different policies towards Cuba? In my view, the difference is that Canadians lack a view of their country as being exceptional in the manner of U.S. exceptionalism; nor do they have a history of dominating Cuba. After all, Ottawa's stance differs little from that of almost two hundred other governments. Admittedly, Iran and Venezuela have different reasons for maintaining ties to Cuba than do Canada or the members of the European Union; but what all these countries have in common is that their policies are not driven by outmoded notions like the Monroe Doctrine: they view Cuba in a dispassionate manner, free of the unique history of U.S.-Cuban relations. Canadian policy is therefore non-pejoratively un-American, but it is too

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Wright, "Northern Ice: Jean Chrétien and the Failure of Constructive Engagement in Cuba," in *Our Place in the Sun: Canada and Cuba in the Castro Era*, ed. Robert Wright and Lana Wylie (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 216.

much to argue, as Wylie suggests, that proving independence is a *sine qua non* of Canadian foreign policy. She contends that “Canada’s self-image as ‘not-American’ has infiltrated most areas of Canadian foreign policy, and policy towards Cuba stands out as a particularly relevant example of this dynamic.” (63) But surely – hopefully – policymakers in Ottawa put more emphasis on calculations of interest than they do on standing up to Uncle Sam for the simple purpose of proving that Canada is independent of the United States. Since the early 1960s, and in spite of bluster meant for domestic consumption, Canadian officials have supported their U.S. ally’s position when doing so did not challenge Ottawa’s fundamental view that its ties with Havana should not be abrogated.

This point leads to Wylie’s contention that “If trade was the main reason for Canada’s policy towards Cuba, Ottawa would have adopted an isolationist policy decades ago.” (117) Yet, as representatives of a merchant country, Canadian policymakers refused to view trade in a zero-sum manner, a proclivity accentuated by Canada’s desire both to safeguard its economic sovereignty and diversify its trade. Moreover, Canada has sought to trade with all nations, despite ideological differences, with, Canadians hope, engagement through economic links serving as a vehicle for change. For these reasons, embargoing Cuba was rejected and moves by Washington to disrupt Canadian-Cuban trade have successfully been opposed. For more than one-half century, Canada has deftly managed to maintain normal ties with the United States *and* with revolutionary Cuba. Free of the baggage affecting U.S. policy, Canadians have been able to have their rum and drink it too.



**Review by Michael E. Neagle, University of Connecticut**

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During the early-twentieth century on Cuba's Isle of Pines, it was not uncommon for Canadians to be mistaken for Americans. One English-language newspaper there opined that Canadians were considered among the Isle's "American" community because "they speak our language and 'belong'."<sup>1</sup> At a time when settlers from the United States, Canada, and other English-speaking countries were a distinct minority, their classification into one group did have benefits. White foreign nationals could enjoy strength in numbers while U.S. settlers, who once boasted a significant presence, could claim to maintain some influence despite a dwindling population.

As Lana Wylie shows, however, present-day Canadian policymakers would not take kindly to being conflated with Americans and with U.S. policy toward Cuba. In this cogent volume, she illustrates that although U.S. and Canadian policies toward revolutionary-era Cuba largely have the same ends in mind – namely, to see it become more open, democratic, and market-oriented – each country's approach has been radically different. Whereas the United States has isolated and occasionally antagonized Cuba, Canada has engaged and mediated wherever possible. Political and economic factors do not fully explain the divergence in policies, Wylie posits. Rather, there are important cultural elements at play that most scholars of international relations have overlooked. The divergence in approach, she argues, is grounded primarily in each country's distinct national identity and the perceptions embedded therein.

Wylie's constructivist approach challenges readers to assess U.S. and Canadian policies toward Cuba beyond traditional considerations of power politics and commercial incentives. She makes a convincing argument that culture is also critical to evaluating foreign policy. Each chapter reinforces the identity thesis – albeit a bit repetitively – that the United States views itself as exceptional and moralistic while Canada considers itself a good international citizen and distinct from its southern neighbor. She uses two post-Cold War case studies – the 1996 Brothers to the Rescue shoot-down and post-9/11 U.S. anxieties over Cuba's biotechnology program – to demonstrate how cultural considerations shaped each country's approach to the matter. Wylie bases her assessments on "confidential interviews" (x) with U.S., Canadian, and Cuban policymakers and powerbrokers as well as readings of published speeches, interviews, correspondence, and reports.

For the United States, Wylie maintains that notions of exceptionalism have guided policymakers' views about Cuba. She ably articulates the assumptions inherent in such a view. "The discourse of exceptionalism asserts that the United States is not only special but also is politically, socially, economically, and morally superior to other states," she writes. "This self-image portrays a United States that is not only the best country in the world but also the embodiment of democracy, the champion of freedom and human rights, and the leader of the West." (20) Fidel Castro's conspicuous rejection of U.S. influence in favor of a nationalist and socialist agenda challenged such notions of exceptionalism. It also undermined American presumptions of modernity, leadership, and superiority. As a result, U.S. policymakers have since viewed revolutionary Cuba as "the political epitome of the 'other'." (22) Cuba, however, has remained a cause for concern in the United States. Geographic proximity only partly explains it. More significant are familial notions, namely that the United States considers Cuba to be the black sheep of the hemispheric "American family." (27) Wylie's assessment of

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<sup>1</sup> "New Census Gives Isle of Pines a Population of 9,454," *Isle of Pines Post*, 26 November 1931. This makeshift community of peoples referred to as "American" numbered around 700 and included those from Great Britain and Sweden as well.

this family dynamic underscores elements of paternalism still at play, the origins of which she traces from the U.S. intervention in Cuba's War of Independence and continuing throughout Cuba's republican period (1902-1958). Wylie discounts the notion that anti-Castro Cuban-American immigrants have been the primary drivers of an antagonistic U.S. policy. Instead, she maintains that groups such as the Cuban American National Foundation and the Cuban Liberty Council have influence largely because their outlooks are in sync with policymakers' existing predilections.

Canada's approach to Cuba also has been driven by the national self-image of policymakers, Wylie shows. This identity contains two key elements. First, Canada sees itself as a good international citizen and has sought to ameliorate tensions between states. Guided by such professed values as "peace, order, moderation, compromise, and social justice," Canada has preferred to negotiate and discuss its differences with Cuba rather than exacerbate them through ultimatums and bellicosity. (55) Such an approach has set it apart from the United States, the second element of the nation's self-perception. The desire to be distinct has driven Canada's approach to Cuba. In making the case for identity guiding Canadian policy, Wylie rejects the self-interested, economic motive – that Canada has only engaged Cuba for commercial purposes to fill the trading void left by the United States. While Canada was Cuba's largest foreign investor during the 1990s and fourth-largest trading partner from 2001-2006, such activity has had a minuscule impact on Canada's economy compared to its trade with the United States. "Canadians trade more in one day with the United States than they do in a whole year in Cuba," she writes. (117)

Wylie argues that emotion also has played an important role in considerations of Cuba, particularly from the United States' perspective. It is a compelling idea, one that comes through most clearly in her treatment of U.S. opposition to Cuba's biotechnology program after 9/11. Although notions of exceptionalism and morality – two pillars of her central argument about identity – seem absent in this case, the fear and paranoia rampant among U.S. policymakers at this time are plainly evident. Additional close analysis of language to get at emotion and identity – like the kind she provides in the rhetoric surrounding the Brothers to the Rescue shoot-down – would have been welcomed to further tease out policymakers' assumptions.

In addition to its cultural analysis, another of the book's values is its highlighting of Canadian policymakers' perspectives about Cuba. This aspect will be enlightening to U.S. audiences. For all the posturing about distinction, Canadian policy shares many similarities with that of the United States. Just like the United States, Canada also prefers that Cuba become more politically open, democratic, and market-oriented. And much like the U.S.-Cuba relationship before the revolution, Canada presently has billions of dollars invested in Cuba and also sees it as an attractive tourist destination. One lingering question that remains, however, is the extent to which Canadian policy toward Cuba changed after the revolution. Wylie's account provides only scant detail on Canadian-Cuban relations prior to 1959, particularly in terms of diplomatic relations, investment, and tourism. Further examination in this vein would have illustrated change or continuity in Canadian policy in much sharper relief.

Wylie expertly distills U.S. and Canadian identities to show their effect on foreign policy. Such essentializing, though, can obscure important nuances in foreign policy which often is an amalgamation of different inputs and approaches. For example, the U.S. Congress, a body with 535 voting members, has challenged the President's autonomy vis-à-vis Cuba. The 1996 Helms-Burton Act placed the trade embargo under congressional purview, limiting the executive branch's power to normalize relations. Moreover, various presidential administrations have assumed different tones and approaches toward Cuba during its revolutionary era. The Dwight Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy administrations took a hostile, activist

approach toward Castro's government. The administrations of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush did likewise. In contrast, the tone of U.S. policy toward Cuba under Jimmy Carter and Barack Obama was and is generally a bit softer, though stopping far short of normalization. Wylie points out some of these complicating factors affecting foreign policy in her conclusion. Among them: Carter's 2002 visit to Havana; generational divisions among Cuban Americans; congressional leaders who have called the trade embargo into question; and polls that show increasing numbers of Americans who oppose the embargo. While these developments have not forced a reconsideration of the U.S. self-image, Wylie argues, they do suggest a broader rethinking under way about U.S.-Cuban relations. Given the age and health of Fidel and Raúl Castro, such considerations are both timely and necessary. Wylie's study offers a useful contribution by showing why such rethinking has been so slow in coming.

**Review by Heather N. Nicol, Department of Geography, Trent University**

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Lana Wylie's book is an ambitious volume which was written to critically examine the idea that Canadian and American differences in foreign policy openness, with respect to Cuba, are significant and important indicators of larger differences in identity, perception, and world view. The functional and indeed the normative explanation for these foreign policy differences, as Wylie explains, is that American policy in Cuba has been driven by a large and powerful Cuban lobby, which demands the isolation of Cuba, while Canadian policies are premised upon maintaining what policy-makers perceive to be a fruitful trade and economic relationship with the Island. Wylie questions this easy answer, however, suggesting that if we dig deeper, these differences reflect not only Canadian and American postures towards the Cuba relationship, but they also differentiate Canadian and American foreign policies more generally. They are, Wylie suggests, rooted in the interplay between perception and identity: "policies are distinct because the two countries are different in other ways: they have their own identities and perceptions that contribute to the formation of very distinct approaches to Cuba" (5).

Wylie adopts what she calls a "constructivist approach" (5) as a means of revisiting the age-old question about the Canada-U.S.-Cuba relationship with fresh eyes. Already an important tool in other areas of social science, and indeed the backbone of the revival of geopolitics as a 'critical' field, Wylie brings the deconstruction of Canada-U.S.-Cuba relations to the field of international relations. She does so in ways which differ from other more traditional or even functional economic and political explanations of Canadian and American approaches to Cuba, particularly in her rightful insistence that 'identity' is an important marker for understanding the origins of such differences (10-11). This exploration of identity, foreign policy and perception provides the context for the fascinating analysis.

Wylie begins by demonstrating how, "from the earliest periods in Canadian and American history the two countries have had different relationships with Cuba" (11). In outlining the early history of American engagement on the island, she paints a picture of the "extremes of animosity and closeness" (p. 12) which ultimately produced the antagonistic post-Revolutionary relationship between Washington and Havana. Hopes for normalization of relations in the 1970s were dashed by the 1980 Mariel exodus (when the mass emigration of Cubans desiring to leave the island took place from Mariel Harbour), and followed by both the tightening of the U.S. embargo in the 1980s, and the passage of the Helms Burton Act of the 1990s. Moreover, what Wylie calls a relationship of "rhetorical hostility" (14) has prevailed in the Canada-U.S. relationship since the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The Canada-Cuba relationship has followed a different path, however. Wylie suggests that because Canada, unlike the U.S., has maintained diplomatic relations with Cuba since 1945, tension inevitably developed with the U.S., particularly when Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau developed a close personal relationship with Fidel Castro. Successive Canadian leaders have waxed and waned with respect to the degree of 'warmth' and 'constructive engagement' they advocated in the Cuba-Canada relationship, but relations have always remained 'normal'.

Having provided an historical overview, Wylie argues that it is possible to see both Canada and the U.S. as sharing certain values such as a respect for democracy and human rights, and yet fundamentally disagreeing on how Cuba is to be perceived. Her research has led her to the conclusion that Cuba is understood quite differently by each nationality, and that the roots for this difference are not necessarily 'external'. That is to say, in the U.S., for example, Cuban foreign policy is not simply a product of the Cuban-American lobby, but

rather is embedded within value systems, ideologies and beliefs which filter Cuban policy and perception through the lens of national identity. Indeed, in questioning the assumption that U.S. Cuba policy is merely a reflection of Cuban-American attitudes, Wylie notes that: “even though these elements of the community through their lobby groups have a comparatively large influence over policy formulation, many of the government officials I interviewed in Washington and Havana said that the community’s influence is often exaggerated, that the power over US.-Cuba policy remains firmly in the hands of Washington policy-makers.” (41)

Tracing American attitudes and perceptions of Cuba since the nineteenth century, Wylie argues that for Americans, the political tradition of “exceptionalism” (20-21) has created an historical representation of Cubans as ‘the other’, and of Cuba as a place where the U.S. should intervene because Cubans were, and remain, ‘incapable’ of shaping their own destiny (24), and indeed are in need of such assistance. At the same time, Cuba is understood to be “in the sphere” of American influence, and thus “part of the American family.” (27) According to Wylie, it is largely because the ingrained perception of Cuba has been influenced more by U.S. identity markers than political polls that the U.S. retains its Cold War-like approach to contemporary Cuba, even under the current Obama administration.

These historical perceptions and the attitudes they encourage have infiltrated and oriented American foreign policy, and yet they are not broadly shared by Canadians. Indeed, Canada’s different interpretation of diplomacy and international relations, especially with respect to Cuba, is more than the manifestation of small differences among nearly identity foreign-policy agendas. Instead, it cuts to the heart of the Canada-U.S. relationship. For Wylie, the explanation that this foreign policy difference (i.e. Canada’s continuous diplomatic relationship with Cuba since 1945, and its failure to support the U.S. embargo on Cuba) is not predicated upon the Cuban-Canadian trade and investment relationship, although policy-pundits have often claimed this to be the case. Instead, and much the same as American foreign policies, Canadian perceptions of Cuba which shape these policies are rooted in “certain conceptions about their own identity” which include the fact that “Canadians like to think of themselves as good international citizens and at the same time want to be seen as charting their own course through the choppy waters of international relations, especially taking a route that is different from the American one” (47). For Canada, this has meant maintaining a longstanding trade relationship, the formalization of diplomatic relations with Cuba, the maintenance of these connections throughout the past century, and the recognition of the revolutionary government in Cuba even in the face of American disapproval, as was the case in the era of Canada’s open disagreement with the U.S passage of the Helms-Burton Act in the mid-to-late 1990s.

Because of this resistance to U.S. foreign policy pressures, by the early twentieth-first century the Canada-Cuba relationship, although it has weathered some storms, remains relatively intact. However, this is not, Wylie argues, a result of Cuba’s real economic importance to Canada— that is to say the Cuban embargo and the American absence from the island is not the real reason that Canada’s Cuba policy flies in the face of its American neighbour. While the economic narrative continues to inform our thinking about Canadian-Cuban relations, Wylie informs us that closer scrutiny of the trade and economic relationship invites us to reassess this rationale. Economic self-preservation would surely persuade Canadians to align with U.S. foreign policies because of the more substantial economic relationship between the two countries. Wylie argues, however, that national identity—the self image of Canadians as different from Americans, as “good international citizens” (55), engaged in the world and ready to resolve conflicts through co-operation, is a much more plausible and powerful explanatory for the independence of Canada’s Cuban policies. For Wylie, “the good citizen and not-American identities constructs a perception of Cuba that emphasizes the similarities

and even friendship between Canada and Cuba...Consequently the norm that ‘engagement is the best approach towards Cuba’ is a reflection of the Canadian self-image” (70).

There is a saying that the ‘proof is in the pudding’ and Wylie attempts to show just how the identity constructs which have shaped foreign policies in the past and contributed to bilateral Cuba relationships still have agency in transforming new realities. For example, in the early twenty-first century, Cuba was repositioned by the Bush administration in context of the ‘War on Terror’ (81), while Canada’s ‘constructive engagement’ (48) transformed into substantive bilateral co-operations in business and investment, particularly in the field of biotechnology. Tellingly, Wylie asserts that in the U.S. “the image of the Cuban government as a pariah and the location of Cuba within an American sphere of influence have contributed to the American designation of Cuba as a terrorist-sponsoring state and influenced the more recent accusations about the governments involvement in biological-weapons production” (90); while in Canada the “issue of Cuba’s links to terrorism is conspicuous by its absence” (91) and biotechnology collaboration is supported.

In the final analysis, this book is an important commentary on the tangled trilateral foreign-policy dance between Canada, the U.S., and Cuba. It allows us to consider the fact that perceptions are politicized, and policies are also perceptual, and that it is not just cold hard facts and figures that build foreign policies, but also very personal ‘takes’ on the world, which are rooted in our understandings of our place in it. Indeed, Wylie suggests that we are “cognitive misers” (97) in that we recycle and adapt perceptions to meet new circumstances, and this seems a very apt description of the process. What this volume does is contribute yet another piece to the puzzle of how and why Canada and the U.S. often find themselves polemically opposed on issues pertaining to Cuba, when such differences of opinion appear to serve the interests of neither. The facts of history, economics, political science and geography have all been summoned up to explain such differences in the past, but this volume takes us a step closer to understanding how and why ‘the facts’ are understood so differently by Canadians and Americans. Wylie’s book thus makes a very important contribution to explaining and understanding not just Canada-Cuba relations, but Canada-U.S. relations over the ‘Cuba’ issue.



**Author's Response by Lana Wylie, McMaster University**

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I appreciate the opportunity to have my first single-authored book reviewed in an H-Diplo Roundtable. I would like to thank Asa McKercher, Michael E. Neagle, and Heather Nicol for taking the time to read and comment on *Perceptions of Cuba: Canadian and American Policies in Comparative Perspective*. It is clear they each read the book closely. I also appreciate the constructive manner in which they communicated their perceptive critiques of my argument. I will organize my comments around the main issues raised by the roundtable participants, concentrating most specifically on areas where a reviewer's opinion differed from the view expressed in *Perceptions of Cuba*.

It was a particular pleasure to me that the reviewers came from different disciplines. I had hoped that *Perceptions of Cuba* would speak to scholars and students beyond the political science classroom. I am pleased that historians and geographers are taking an interest in the book and are drawing parallels between the approach employed in the volume and the critical or cultural approaches adopted in these disciplines. For example, Nicol notes that the constructivist approach used in *Perceptions of Cuba* is similar to an approach popular in her own field, which she describes as "the backbone of the revival of geopolitics as a 'critical' field."

The reviewers are all persuaded by the case I make about the cultural and identity based dynamics behind American policy. I was particularly pleased they all correctly interpreted my understanding of the role of the Cuban American community and corresponding lobby groups. Although the power of the Cuban American lobby has been stressed by many scholars, previous studies have not explored the ability of the exiles to reinforce perceptions in Washington. I believe this ideational component is a crucial factor in explaining both the apparent power of the community and its rather extraordinary relationship with policy makers.

It is often a struggle to find the correct balance between the articulation of a clear and perhaps even generalisable argument and providing a detailed account of the history of a case study. In writing this monograph I grappled with this complexity versus parsimony dilemma and made an effort to balance the two in my writing. It is clear, however, that more historical detail in some places would have been helpful to the reader. In particular, I now wish I had spent more pages detailing the history of Cuba as I recognize that the book glosses over some important periods in the island's history. I thus appreciate Neagle's comments regarding the lack of detail in my description of the pre-1959 relationship between Canada and Cuba.

For the same reason, I recognize the value of Neagle's comments about the different tones and specific approaches of various U.S. administrations. There are clear differences in rhetoric and some variation in policies depending on the administration in power. However, the important point for me is that in the end no administration has altered the isolationist basis of this foreign policy nor discarded the idea that the United States has a right and a duty to aggressively pursue regime change in Havana. Exploring these differences would have added greater nuance to the volume but it would not have changed my overall argument.

I also welcome Neagle's suggestion to expand on the analysis of language to get at emotion and identity in the case of U.S. opposition to Cuba's biotechnology program after 9/11. I agree that a greater emphasis on the role of identity in this case study would augment my argument.

Both Nicol and Neagle are largely persuaded by my explanation of Canada's policy. However, while McKercher is convinced by my argument about American identity he disagrees with my analysis of the Canadian case. I think part of his discomfort with this analysis comes from perhaps a mistaken view that

*Perceptions of Cuba* accepts that Canada is indeed a good international citizen. In fact, as I wrote in the book, “Whether or not Canadians actually live in a society dominated by these values is arguable; indeed, there is much evidence to the contrary” (55). Many Canadians may think they are “good international citizens” but this doesn’t make it true.

Another point of departure for McKercher concerns the pragmatic nature of Canadian foreign policy. I would agree with him that policy is often based on what would seem to be pragmatic decisions involving calculations of interest. However, *Perceptions of Cuba* points out that there is more than pragmatism involved in both policies. I don’t think McKercher would argue that only U.S. policy is influenced by the identity or cultural dynamics described in the book but in his review he stresses the pragmatic elements in Canadian foreign policy.

McKercher emphasizes Canadian pragmatism in its relationship with Cuba, correctly noting that Canada at times had complied with some American requests such as limiting exports of selected goods to Cuba and even gathering intelligence for Washington. Yet, we also need to acknowledge that Ottawa’s stance on Cuba has at times created considerable friction between Canada and the superpower to its south. President John F. Kennedy and Prime Minister John Diefenbaker clashed over Cuba in the first few years of the revolutionary government. Most famously since the hostility created between Washington and Ottawa over the U.S. handling of the Cuban missile crisis, the two countries sparred over the 1996 implementation of the Helms-Burton Act. At that time, the two countries exchanged harsh words but the most well-known commentary came from the conservative senator Jesse Helms who compared Canada’s relationship with Cuba to Britain’s appeasement of Hitler. Likewise, Canadian officials were similarly the recipients of abrasive criticism following Jean Chretien’s 1998 visit to Havana. Recent Wikileaks releases reveal that visits to Cuba by high-level Canadian representatives continue to irritate American officials.<sup>1</sup>

McKercher also implies that there is little noteworthy about Canada’s position on Cuba, claiming, “Ottawa’s stance differs little from that of almost two hundred other governments.” This is certainly more true now than it was during the height of the Cold War when, for example, Pierre Trudeau was the first NATO leader to pay an official visit to Fidel Castro in Havana. However, the relationship between Ottawa and Havana has always been and even continues to be special. At times, other countries have engaged with the island in ways similar to that of Canada, but no other western country has maintained such a close and long-standing relationship with Cuba.

During the early Cold War, of all the states in the Western Hemisphere, only Canada and Mexico refused the American dictate to isolate Havana, yet in the post-Cold War era Mexico’s relationship with Cuba has faltered. European countries have similarly distanced themselves from revolutionary Havana at various points in their histories. Cuba now enjoys a thriving relationship with all the other states of the hemisphere (excluding the U.S. of course) but only Venezuela and Brazil can rival the importance of Canada to Cuba’s economy.

The long-standing connection between the two countries is noted in Havana and is often raised by Cuban officials as an example of a productive and positive relationship. The special status historically accorded to

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, “Tory silence on Cuban human rights riles U.S.,” CBC News, December 17, 2010 <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2010/12/17/cuba-wikileaks.html>.

Canada is recognized by other expats in Havana. A former British ambassador to Havana once remarked to me that the special character of the Cuba-Canada relationship showed up in subtle ways. For example he noted that in comparison to Fidel Castro's visits to other embassies, the president more frequently made an appearance at events organized by the Canadian embassy.

Connections also occur on a less formal basis between the citizens of the two countries. Canada has been Cuba's largest source of tourists for many years. In 2010 over one million Canadians visited Cuba, making up approximately 40% of all visitors to the island. Interestingly, because of the large number of Canadian visitors, Cubans have begun to inquire about learning "Canadian English."<sup>2</sup> Likewise, there are thriving Canadian studies programs in the nation's universities and Cuba is the only Caribbean country on Foreign Affairs and International Trade's listing of Canadian studies associations.<sup>3</sup> Also noteworthy is the fact that the largest Terry Fox run to occur outside Canada has taken place in Cuba, every year since 1998. In 2007 more than two million Cubans participated in the run, a remarkable achievement in a country of only 11 million. Mark Entwistle, a former Canadian Ambassador to Cuba, in his conclusion to *Our Place in the Sun*, reflected on "the striking and curious affinity of Canadians for Cubans, and vice versa, a familiarity that has held over time, across culture and language..."<sup>4</sup> Although the official Canadian-Cuban relationship has always been maintained, it has encountered its share of ups and downs. Yet, Ambassador Entwistle's observation describes the almost inexplicable and enduring nature of the connection between the two societies, a connection that extends through and beyond diplomatic exchanges.

McKercher also raises the issue of the role of Canadian independence. I would hope the book does not imply that proving independence is "is a *sine qua non* of Canadian foreign policy." As the book points out, distinguishing Canada from the United States resonates very well with the Canadian public and is certainly influential in policy formation. However, there are many drivers of Canadian foreign policy and they can't all be applied equally in every case. *Perceptions of Cuba* argues that a number of factors have made this self-identity particularly relevant in the case of Cuba.

McKercher stresses the consistency in Canadian and American goals in Cuba and claims that *Perceptions of Cuba* is reluctant to admit this. The book does acknowledge the similarities between the two policies and I was pleased to see that another reviewer picked up on this point. Neagle observes that the similarity between Canadian and American goals in Cuba, in short to see Cuba become a "... more open, democratic, and market-oriented..." society, is illustrated in *Perceptions of Cuba*. However, to be fair, *Perceptions of Cuba* does place greater emphasis on the differences in means and makes a greater distinction between the goals professed by officials in Washington and Ottawa.

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<sup>2</sup> Sarah Elaine Eaton, "Canadian English: Not Just a Hybrid of American and British English," December 13, 2011 Literacy, Languages and Leadership <http://drsaraheaton.wordpress.com/2011/12/13/canadian-english-not-just-a-hybrid-of-american-and-british-english/>

<sup>3</sup> Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, "Canadian Studies Associations and Organizations," February 29, 2012 <http://www.international.gc.ca/studies-etudes/worldorg-mondeorg.aspx?lang=en&view=d> March 6, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Entwistle, "Canada-Cuba Relations: A Multiple-Personality Foreign Policy" in Robert Wright and Lana Wylie (eds.), *Our Place in the Sun: Canada and Cuba in the Castro Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 294.

I agree with McKercher that Canada's policy, often times, has endeavoured to spur change on the island, in particular with regards to Cuba's political and economic structures and in this case the book is in agreement with Robert Wright's central point about the similarities between Chretien's policy of constructive engagement and the U.S. approach.<sup>5</sup> Both did not respect Cuban sovereignty. This is an important point but it does not dissolve the ways in which the policies differ.

I would not agree that both policies are centrally concerned with regime change. The Canadian government has always been willing to work with the current government by conducting regular relations and encouraging closer connections between the two countries. In contrast, we all agree that Washington has tried almost every ploy to remove the Castros from power including countless assassination attempts, invasion, and isolation. Regime change is central to the American policy. I agree that Canada has not been a stranger to a feeling of unease with respect to the Cuban government or to some of its policies but the contrast with the American approach is evident. Regime change has never been an expressed goal of Canadian policy in Cuba. The difference is important, especially to the Cubans.

If I may add, it is valuable to consider another similarity between Canadian and American policy. In my opinion, all attempts to foster change in Cuba will ultimately be unsuccessful. The Cubans have shown time and time again that they are first and foremost nationalists who do not respond to pressure from abroad. Change, whether political or economic, will arise only when the Cubans decide to enable it.

Thanks again to these three reviewers for their thoughtful attention to my book. Their insightful comments about its strengths and weaknesses is appreciated. I remain grateful to each of them and to the editors of H-Diplo, Thomas Maddux and Diane Labrosse.

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Wright, "Northern Ice: Jean Chrétien and the Failure of Constructive Engagement in Cuba," in Robert Wright and Lana Wylie (eds.), *Our Place in the Sun: Canada and Cuba in the Castro Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 195-222.