in Cuba, are omitted), and little or none of the all-too-familiar 'background' sketchiness. Here, it seems, the author's historiographical training pays off in a capacity to summarise skilfully but astutely. The overview of the troubled US–Cuban relationship is also treated critically and comprehensively, with the eye of someone who clearly feels the subject perhaps more than a European might. Also, the decision to treat three decades of political evolution as one single theme works surprisingly well, even though it does gloss over some of the inner tensions, ideological arguments and external pressures which forced what Chomsky describes, perhaps a little misleadingly, as 'experiments with socialism'. Indeed, the Cuban–Soviet relationship, which did so much to shape those years, is as a result somewhat downplayed in comparison to the US–Cuban relationship. Both, it is clear, were fundamental in affecting both internal and external patterns of behaviour and thinking, but this comes out less explicitly in this approach.

The final chapters are perhaps less well written. While the Special Period is approached with commendable honesty, detail and balance, the discussion of 'Cuba into the 21st Century' seems unnecessarily reliant on external perspectives, often provided by specialists who lack contact with the complex internal dynamics of the rethinking, tensions and debates which have characterised the post-1999 years. As a result, the 'Battle of Ideas' is largely ignored, in keeping with the judgments of some of those external perspectives, but to the neglect of a close appreciation of the tensions and challenges that made the patterns of a Raúl-led Cuba more necessary and perhaps even inevitable. Instead, the major challenges highlighted are human rights and internal dissent, whose raised profile after 2000 had as much to do with US strategy as with 'organic' structural development, and the elusive and highly contentious notion of 'civil society'. That focus seems a curious one, given everything else going on in Cuba in the last decade or so: economic pressures, internal party debate, changing generations, and so on.

However, those weaknesses should not detract from what is a welcome, worthy and highly perceptive summary of the evolution of a process that is often baffling to outsiders, as well as to many Cubans on the island itself. It not only avoids many familiar pitfalls but shows a perceptive eye alongside the clear sympathy.

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Paulo Drinot (ed.), *Che's Travels: The Making of a Revolutionary in 1950s Latin America* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 306, £66.00, £16.99 pb.

This is a fascinating collection which, arising from a 2006 workshop, attempts to build around the itineraries of Che Guevara's two famous journeys through Latin America (in 1951 and 1953) a series of snapshot pictures of the relevant countries of that time, judging both the extent of their impact on him and his subsequent impact on them.

On the latter, all contributors agree. The 'new Left' which his writings and efforts engendered fundamentally changed each country's politics, albeit, in some contributors' view, not always for the better. On the former, they also mostly agree. What we get here is a variegated picture of a young, white, middle-class Argentine tourist, whose emotional sympathies led him into an assumed identification with a largely romanticised peasantry, but whose failure to understand, or even recognise or

be interested in, the politics or societies which he saw, or the urban poor, left him largely unchanged by the contact. Indeed, only the 1953 journey seems really to have changed his outlook, hinted at fleetingly in an immediately post-revolution Bolivia, but much more so in a Guatemala excited by the 'October Revolution' under Arbenz and then subjected to the counterrevolution under a CIA-backed Castillo Armas in 1954. All, including Che's reactions, are captured well in what is one of the best chapters of the collection, by Cindy Forster. While Che's Bolivian experience seems not to have included any real awareness of the militancy of the urban working class, in what had probably been Latin America's greatest display of proletarian social revolution, Guatemala clearly confirmed in him a number of conclusions of much later significance: notably the power and inevitability of reaction by 'US imperialism' against any real social reform, the need to arm and mobilise active support for any such strategies of deep reform, and the inability of the formal Left to act in a revolutionary way.

Other than that, we are given successive portraits of a persistently romantic Che who visited the 'exotic' countries in his path like any other touring traveller. Indeed, Patience Schell's chapter on Chile interestingly compares his account and approach with those offered by other visitors, earlier and contemporary. Che carried with him, and never really changed, preconceptions about the 'natural' peasantry, the 'soul' of the people and the 'essential' Latin America (glimpsed in its ancient history and long-suffering indigenous peoples), and even behaved like either a patronising European or an irresponsible sex tourist. While that is not necessarily the contributors' aim, although Malcolm Deas's chapter on Colombia carries little evident sympathy with Che, it is nonetheless the overriding image which the chapters collectively present.

Thus Eduardo Elena's chapter on Argentina gives us a Che who, blissfully unaware of the real social transformation enacted daily through mass migration, engaged in the luxury of a hedonistic, Kerouac-like 'journey of the soul', and showed no evident awareness of the complexity of Peronism. Schell's commentary on Che's own account of his visit to Chile shows us a self-deprecating wanderer who seems to have adopted the persona of a picaresque youth, largely unaffected by the evidence of the 'real' politics of an urban working class. Equally, Paulo Drinot, on Peru, gives us a Che curiously unaware of the continentally significant APRA and always essentialist in his interpretation of the Peruvian peasantry.

Between these commentaries on the mutual effect, or lack of effect, between Che and the several countries, we are given a series of often revealing and detailed portraits of the politics and society of each place. Some are excellent. Judith Ewell's exposition of the Venezuela of 1953 is clearly familiar territory and Deas's Colombia rich in detail, with Ann Zulawski's Bolivia and Eric Zolov's Mexico providing us with a welcome summary of the complexity and particularities of each country at that precise historical moment. Hence, we do, as a result, get a revealing and detailed, if not complete, picture of the Latin America of 1951–3.

However, if there is a fault in the collection, it lies in the absence of a clear 'so what?' factor to unify the very different, but strangely repeating, pictures. While each chapter holds together as a snapshot of each case at a particular moment, and while we eventually acquire an accumulated portrait of a Che largely uninterested in, and unchanged by, the politics or society of each country (until the final stages of a second 'tour'), or an increasingly familiar account of 1960s radicalism and guerrilla activity, we are not given a conclusive overview of what this actually means for our interpretation of the time or of Che himself. Drinot's introduction partly achieves

that but, after our reading of the detail in each country, we might well have benefited from some meaningful conclusions being drawn from so many disparate 'cases'. Instead, rather than a book with a clear 'message', we have a richly detailed and always fascinating set of diffuse pictures. One suspects that what works well in a workshop, with discussion and active comparison, works a little less coherently in an edited collection, without such a concluding glue. It is a pity, as the quality of the treatment of each case is often excellent, and the collective contribution offers much to add to our understanding of Che and the post-1959 Latin American Left.

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Brian Loveman, *No Higher Law: American Foreign Policy and the Western Hemisphere since 1776* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), pp. 539, $35.00, hb.

The need to assert 'American exceptionalism' is the keynote of US political culture. It resonates in the boast that the United States is 'the greatest democracy in the world', a claim that was made even when the United States trailed behind most Western democracies by its own definition of what a democracy should be. By the end of the Second World War it was understood in the West that universal suffrage was a prerequisite of political democracy, but in the United States this right was effectively denied to African Americans throughout the South. When John Kennedy strode to the microphone on 20 January 1961 to speak on behalf of liberty, he was the leader of a country in which many citizens were still unable to vote. It was only in 1965, with Lyndon Johnson's Voting Rights Act, that the United States became a fully fledged member of the community of Western democracies.

The same blinkered need to affirm 'American exceptionalism' permeates discussions of US foreign policy. Why should the United States be trusted – in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Pakistan? The answer is so obvious that it does not need to be articulated: because 'America' is just and selfless, and it has proven this for more than two centuries.

There are sceptics, however, among them Woodrow Wilson. 'When issues of our own interest arose, we have been selfish', he wrote in *Atlantic Monthly* in March 1901, 12 years before he became president. He continued:

We have shown ourselves kin to all the world, when it came to pushing an advantage. Our action against Spain in the Floridas, and against Mexico on the coasts of the Pacific; our attitude toward first the Spaniards, and then the French, with regard to the control of the Mississippi; the unpitying force with which we thrust the Indians to the wall wherever they stood in our way, have suited our professions of peacefulness and justice and liberality no better than the aggressions of other nations that were strong and not to be gainsaid.

This sobering statement, voiced by one of the nation's great 'idealists', is very realistic. Indeed, the United States had been 'kin to all the world' even when it had fought a war for the ostensible purpose of freeing another country – in 1898, against Spain. Before entering the war, Washington had solemnly pledged that Cuba would be independent, but after Spain's defeat it transformed the island into a US protectorate, granting itself the right to send troops whenever it deemed it necessary and to establish