

MÓNICA ESTI REIN: *Politics and Education in Argentina, 1946-1962*. Armonk, NY & London: M.E. Sharpe, 1998.

The subject of Mónica Rein's *Politics and Education in Argentina, 1946-1962* is precisely what its title indicates: Peronism and the manifold impacts of Peronism on the education system, top to bottom; and the politics of de-Peronization from 1955 to 1962, and the many consequences of *that* enterprise for the educational system. Her area of concern is the operational and institutional moves of the successive regimes (Perón, the *Revolución Libertadora*, Frondizi); she does not, she says (p. 204), address the question of how, or whether, the Peronist world-view was received and absorbed by the young until 1955, or how or whether Perón was expunged from the hearts of the Argentines afterwards. Those are even more difficult questions, ones which will in the end demand an informed speculation—but Mónica Rein has provided the indispensable information and heuristic framework without which such speculation would simply be empty vapping.

Taking the commonsense view that "politics" is the independent variable in the equation, and "education" the dependent, Rein begins each of the two main parts, the Perón Era and the De-Peronizing Era, with a long essay on "Politics and Ideology." These are narrative and analytical, and so well done they could easily stand as succinct general introductions to those topics. The Peronist section follows with a chapter on "Children and Education in Peronist Thought and Policy," which examines the close personal attention the General gave to reforming education—something of a national disgrace, particularly away from the big cities, in the 1940s. The Peronists proposed to use the state's resources to achieve the democratic objectives of broadened access and opportunity, including access and opportunity for adults and vocational students. More ambitiously still, they sought to create, finally, a new Argentine identity coextensive with (although this was not usually acknowledged) the Peronist "national doctrine."

"The Peronization of the Schools," which follows, analyzes more closely the media (particularly textbooks), organization and procedures through which the "national doctrine" (liberally laced with photos and laudatory passages on Juan and Evita) was inculcated in students. Rein will maintain later that this campaign was at best only partly successful because it began rather late during the regime's lifetime; the earlier period had been taken up with new construction, new organization, new curricula, new textbooks. The first part concludes with a long and careful chapter on the epic struggle between Perón and the universities, a struggle which Perón won. Here, too, the ambiguities of Peronism become clear: thousands more students would flood into the universities during the Perón era, some modernization of the curricula would

take place; but these advances were accompanied by anti-intellectualism, suppression of independent thought and action, and the replacement of talent by mediocrities who hewed to the Peronist line. The student leadership (FUA) traced its lineage proudly to the *Reforma* of 1918; yet it was clear also that the self-proclaimed Vanguard had lost touch with much of its putative mass following. FUA licked its wounds quietly through most of the period, only to reemerge in 1954 as one element of the growing opposition to Perón. Following Perón's downfall, the students would discover that their *reformista* values were scorned not only by Peronism, but also by the *milicos* and the *frondistas* who succeeded the general.

The Liberating Revolution proved, of course, to be every bit as authoritarian and anti-pluralist as Peronism, and rather more sympathetic to the Church's educational pretensions. The latter tendency, moreover, was carried even further by Arturo Frondizi after his election to the presidency in 1958. As is well known, Frondizi reversed his lifelong positions of secularism and defense of Argentine sovereignty; his regime, characterized by developmentalist rhetoric and toadying to the military, was a failure. His removal by the military in 1962 left Argentina in a desperate muddle, the tragic aspects of which would become apparent during the incipient civil war of the mid-1960s and the appalling sequence of events that began with General Onganía's seizure of power in 1966. This section concludes with an excellent chapter on the epic battle between Frondizi and the public universities over the bitterly-divisive question of recognition of non-state (i.e., Catholic) universities. Once again, the universities lost; nevertheless, Rein describes the early 1960s as a "golden age for the Argentine universities". This reviewer was a close observer of the University of Buenos Aires at the time: considering the wretched physical conditions under which students had to work, and the high incidence of "*abandonos*," it seemed to me to fall rather short of Acadia. But if one compares that time with what preceded and followed it, perhaps Rein has a point.

The Peróns presided over the emergence of a New Argentina. They were perhaps the immediate agents of its emergence, but were certainly not responsible for its existence and dynamism. They sought to appropriate *all* the cultural institutions of the new nation, so as to identify the New Argentina with themselves and their movement. But Peronism was only partly successful; their creation was stranded in mid-passage; the old Argentina was only partly defeated. The working-out of this partial success/partial failure would occupy, often violently, the succeeding decades. Until the advent of *menemismo* and ITS version of a New Argentina.

Rein's book is solidly descriptive; it makes no claims it does not satisfy. The author makes good use of research in the archives of the Presidencia, Ministry

of Education, Centro de Estudios Nacionales (the Frondizi archive), the oral history project of the University of Buenos Aires, and the US National Archives. The work is economically and intelligently written, and smoothly translated. In short, Mónica Rein has done a superlative job of examining pivotal events in this painful transition, and for it deserves our warm congratulations.

Ronald Newton

Simon Fraser University (Emeritus)

LOUIS A. PÉREZ (ed.): *Impressions of Cuba in the Nineteenth Century: The Travel Diary of Joseph J. Dimock*. Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1998.

Using travelers' accounts as a historical source poses an unavoidable epistemological question. How do we know to what degree—and it is a question of degree—a particular observation reflects (a) the idiosyncratic world-view and prejudices of the author, (b) the collective ones of his/her social group, and (c) the objective realities of the place visited. While analyzing the text for internal logic and consistency can help, checking the observation with other sources—even if of the same type—will offer more, and perhaps more reliable, clues. If, for instance, the same observation is made by scores of travelers, we can safely eliminate "a" as an explanation. If the cultural and social background of these travelers is very diverse, we can move further toward "c." In other words, relying on a large number of accounts can turn personal, and even biased, observations into more than anecdotal evidence. For researchers, thus, the publication of a manuscript diary is always a welcome addition to the travel literature, even for a place like colonial Cuba where that corpus is vast.

Written by a Virginian merchant, whose wife's family had business interests in Cuba, during February and March of 1859, this diary displays—like all others—an undetermined combination of the three aspects mentioned above. And this appears even in the most elementary or physical topics. His description of the island's natural geography mixes detached topographical observations with generic tropicalist fantasies and personal musings about the local flora and fauna. His description of Havana's physical appearance betrays a similar mix. As most other visitors, Dimock mentions the city's narrow streets and narrower sidewalks, and its thick-walled houses with tiled roofs and floors and iron-barred windows. But when he adds "as our prisons," and describes the houses as "multi-colored" and their architecture, and that of the baroque cathedral, as "in the old Moorish style," he begins to