su camino y continuará en el futuro pese a la pérdida inevitable de su líder histórico. Pese a esos reparos, este libro es una contribución importante y necesaria a los debates que deben producirse durante el año en curso, hacia una valoración objetiva de estos últimos 50 años de historia en la revolución cubana.

Kepa Artaraz *University of Brighton*

RICHARD SCHWEID***: Che's Chevrolet, Fidel's Oldsmobile: On the Road in Cuba.*** Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

When I was growing up in Cuba during the 1960s the status symbol that indicated we were a middle class family was my father's American-built Chrysler, which he had purchased before Fidel Castro's Revolution in 1959. "Don't turn on the interior light," I remember my mother yelling at me once while we took an evening ride, "people will think we are a bunch of *guajiros* (hicks)." The interconnections between social class, American dominance over pre-Castro Cuba, individual and collective transportation, and socialism as symbolized by the automobile are at the heart of Richard Schweid's unique and entertaining book, a history of twentieth-century Cuba seen literally and metaphorically through the car windshield. While he traveled through Cuba at the start of the twenty-first century, usually at the passenger side of old American cars driven by Cuban automobile aficionados, the author was simultaneously doing research in the archives of Havana and Santiago de Cuba on how cars, trucks, and other jalopies shaped Cuban political and economic history and the Cuban sense of national identity. When one's prize possession was imported from the giant neighbor ninety miles to the north, did becoming Cuban, to borrow historian Louis Perez's phrase, become more difficult, or was the car easily incorporated into the collective consciousness as a Cuban adaptation of a Yankee invention, just like baseball?

The automobile is, in Freudian and Marxist terms, overdetermined: invested with symbols of citizenry, social class, race, gender, and a sundry of other categories. But while this is true of almost all modern societies (just look at the rush by the oligarchs to buy BMWs and Mercedes-Benzes in post-Communist Russia), Cuba has always stood out in this regard compared to the rest of Latin America. Cars, before Castro, were associated not only with the middle class but with pro-Americanism in foreign policy—Presidents from Tomás Estrada de Palma in 1902 to Fulgencio Batista in 1958 loved to show off their purchase of the latest product fresh off the American assembly line; gender—the first female driver in Cuba was celebrated in the local press, yet women car owners were

few and far between; and race—Afro-Cubans before the Revolution worked as mechanics and valets but few owned cars, nor were they allowed entrance into the annual auto shows in Havana.

Schweid cleverly weaves two stories into his narrative of the Cuban love affair with the automobile. His own stay on the island from 2000 to 2004 provided him with plenty of fodder for Kerouacesque and Kafkaesque stories of how the locals navigate through Cuba's antiquated roads, colonial-era streets, and dirt paths, while at the same time circumventing the Castro regime's bizarre and equivocal laws on car ownership and rentals. Cubans, he notes with much satisfaction, are masters at maintaining the approximately 60,000 American-built cars still running on the island in prime condition, and also keeping them safely out of government hands when it comes to taxes, fees, and possible confiscation, since many car-owners earn money illegally by transporting Cubans, and their goods, to their destinations. (Under a typical Castroite law, Cubans may use their cars to ferry foreigners from place to place for cash but not their compatriots.) These vignettes are interspersed with the history of the imported automobile in Cuba, from the arrival of the first American auto in 1902, coinciding with the birth of the Cuban republic, to 1960 when American car companies stopped supplying credit to Cuban consumers and the administration of President Dwight Eisenhower embargoed the export of cars and spare parts to Cuba, aiming to paralyze transportation on the island and bring down the Castro regime. Like most American plots against Castro, this one too backfired, since it allowed him to pose as the champion of the poor, who needed imports of rice, not automobiles, and the enemy of the Cuban bourgeoisie, those wealthy few who had wasted the nation's money to buy Fords and Chevrolets rather than spending on education and other necessities. The automobile, Schweid persuasively contends, is a perfect metaphor for the disappearance of the Cuban middle class after 1959 and the transfer of resources, and personal pride, to the poor and working class. Public transportation, by bus, taxi, and even horse and ox, has made all Cubans reliant on each other to arrive at their jobs, schools, and hospitals, creating a culture of *sociolismo* (buddyism).

No one before, to my knowledge, has written an automobile-centric history of Cuba, for which Schweid is to be commended. But his approach runs the risk of turning into an obsession. Reciting the number of American cars sold in Cuba up until the Revolution, along with mini-biographies of some their owners, is one way to gauge the claim made by opponents of Castro that Cuba was already a developing nation with a sizeable middle class before he surfaced to overturn their world. Yet, Schweid should have explored, for comparison, the import of other American products to Cuba, from toothpaste to television game shows, which gave credence to Castro's claim that the Cuban bourgeoisie were

vendepatria (sell-outs) to the Yankees. Likewise, his interviews of current car owners give no clue as to whether their opinions of the Castro regime are any different from that of other Cubans who do not possess this luxury. Women get short-shrift in this book, except in bawdy tales of prostitutes riding in taxis with their foreign clients. I do concur with Schweid, however, in his prediction that when relations between the U.S. and Cuba are someday normalized, automobiles will once again be shipped down from Florida, and driving American cars may play a decisive part in the political outlook of a new generation of Cubans who most likely will have forgotten Fidel Castro.

Julio César Pino *Kent State University*

MATT D. CHILDS***: The 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle against Atlantic Slavery***. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

The rise of African slavery in Cuba is largely a nineteenth-century story. Following the Haitian Revolution, which resulted in the collapse of the world's largest sugar-producing zone, Cuban planters were quick to capture European demand for the sweet crop. Economic opportunities were paralleled by the rising strategic importance of Cuba to Spain after the British occupation of Havana during the Seven Years War and the ensuing reshuffling of European empires in the Atlantic. With large-scale sugar production, Cuba became a major destination for African slaves, precisely at the time when the legitimacy of the slave trade was coming under international assault. It was within this international context that Cuban slavery took shape, at the same time that it experienced patterns of development similar to other New World slave societies.

In this book, Childs looks at the Aponte Rebellion of 1812, an act of slave resistance fuelled by motivations to eradicate slavery from below, a-la Haiti. The Aponte Rebellion shook Cuban authorities to the core and it has captured the national imagination ever since. Childs illustrates the multiple circumstances that engendered Cuban slavery and the slaves' response manifested in the rebellion. The book is organized by circles of historical circumstances going from the broad international and Caribbean background to a more narrow microscopic view of the slaves at the regional and local levels. Built on a holistic argument, the book presents a web of contexts, whereby the experience of slavery was shaped by global forces and local conditions, but equally important, by the actions of the slaves themselves. Structure and agency are interwoven into a narrative of the early phase of African slavery in Cuba culminating in the Aponte Rebellion.