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# To Defend the Revolution Is to Defend Culture: The Cultural Policy of the Cuban Revolution

*By Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt*



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**To Defend the Revolution Is to Defend Culture: The Cultural Policy of the Cuban Revolution** By Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt

Based on a four-year research project, which included five months in Havana, this book documents the approaches to culture that evolved out of the 1959 Cuban Revolution. Deploying micro and macro perspectives, it introduces all the main protagonists to the debate and follows the polemical twists and turns that ensued in the volatile atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s. The picture that emerges is of a struggle for cultural dominance between Soviet-derived approaches and a uniquely Cuban response to culture under socialism, based on the principles of Marxist humanism. Accordingly, this book aims to isolate the main tenets of Cuban cultural policy as they crystallized through an extensive process of trial and error. Primacy is given to emancipatory understandings of culture, and ample space is dedicated to discussions that remain hugely pertinent to those working in the cultural field, such as the relationship between art and ideology, engagement and autonomy, form and content.



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**To Defend the Revolution Is to Defend Culture: The Cultural Policy of the Cuban Revolution By Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #2243196 in Books
- Published on: 2015-09-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x 1.30" w x 6.00" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 448 pages

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"For all the obvious reasons, there is very little useful scholarship on the achievements of socialism past, present and to come; this valuable study of emergent cultural structures in the Cuban Revolution fills a real gap and reminds us of one of that revolution's many (and mostly ignored) successes. Cuba is still in existence; maybe it actually has some lessons for us, in our current social distress." —Fredric Jameson, author, *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*

"Che Guevara believed that art was the highest form of revolution. And Fidel Castro, searching for the appropriate rank to confer upon Guevara at the public wake following his death, called him Artist. *To Defend the Revolution Is to Defend Culture*, by Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, is a brilliant and comprehensive study of the Cuban Revolution's struggle to counteract neoliberalism's commodity-oriented degradation of culture with a strategy that recognizes art as an integral part of life, honors the creative mind, and has promoted an ongoing conversation between artist and public that has moved far beyond the borders of the small Caribbean island. It is a struggle that has had its extraordinary highs and painful lows, and Gordon-Nesbitt documents its complex history. This is a must read for everyone interested in Cuba, art, and culture. And it is long overdue." —Margaret Randall, author, *Che on My Mind*

"Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt has written a tremendous book, one that allows us to imagine what culture might look like in a free society—a society where art and culture are not dictated by a market, and can be developed and expressed freely—limited only by the imagination. This opening of the imagination as to what is possible is achieved through a detailed cultural and political description of the early years of the Cuban Revolution. Gordon-Nesbitt finds a wonderful balance between expressing the unencumbered prioritization of cultural expression in Cuba and the various challenges that this process faced." —Marina Sitrin, author, *They Can't Represent Us! Reinventing Democracy from Greece to Occupy*

"This immensely detailed and extensively documented academic work will be much appreciated by Cuba specialists and scholars of art and culture." —*Publishers Weekly*

"A must read for anyone interested in how the revolution embraced the arts and what can happen to culture when not dictated by the market." —cuba50.org

"Gordon-Nesbitt provides a rich and compelling analysis of the relationship between the political vanguard and artistic praxis that could easily be read alongside today's discussions on socially engaged art, art activism, participatory art, and other variants." —Marc James Léger, marxandphilosophy.org.uk

"With *To Defend the Revolution Is to Defend Culture*, Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt gives us a real gift: a roadmap for understanding the ups and downs of the Cuban Revolution's cultural policy, a subject that has been

approached by many on both sides of the political divide, but never before in English with such research, care, and thoughtfulness." —Margaret Randall, *Policy Futures in Education*

#### About the Author

**Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt** is a writer and researcher dedicated to exploring the politico-economic conditions underwriting artistic practice. Her work has been extensively published in anthologies, monographs, catalogues and journals. She cofounded salon3, a multidisciplinary arts organization in London and was a curator at the Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art in Helsinki. **Jorge Fornet** has been director of the Centre for Literary Research at Casa de las Américas, where he also codirects the eponymous journal. He is the author of *El 71. Anatomía de una crisis* and has written widely on Latin American literature.

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