

the failure of the Black Cubans to assert themselves in the political arena before 1959.

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*The Cuban Insurrection, 1952–1959.* By RAMÓN BONACHEA and MARTA SAN MARTÍN. New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1974. Transaction Books. Maps. Illustrations. Tables. Appendices. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xxi, 451. Cloth. \$12.95. Paper. \$4.95.

Scholarly works on modern Cuban history have greatly increased in the last decade. Yet, the actual war that various groups waged against Fulgencio Batista has received relatively little concentrated, scholarly attention. The gap has now been filled by this excellent volume which provides an in-depth survey of all aspects of the Cuban Insurrection of the 1950s. The authors' primary focus is on the political-military story: the movements, persons, ideas, and tactics that produced eight years of conflict and eliminated the Batista dictatorship.

Some of the data in this book has been presented by other writers, but Ramón L. Bonachea and Marta San Martín have added much new information. They conducted numerous interviews not only with Cubans who participated in both the urban and rural aspects of the insurrection, but also with those who actively supported Batista. As a result, they develop new insights into the organization, tactics, and internal conflicts of both the insurrectionary organizations and the Cuban armed forces.

The opening chapters present a detailed analysis of the background of the Moncada attack, the escalation of student agitation, and the organization of various insurrectionary groups. During the formative stage (1952–1955) three key leaders emerged: Fidel Castro (26th of July Movement, M-26-7), José Antonio Echeverría (Directorio Revolucionario, DR), and Frank País (Acción Revolucionaria Oriental, ARO). Late in 1955, País merged his group with the M-26-7. During 1955–1956, the DR and the M-26-7 pursued different strategies of urban insurrection with little success. Then, in December 1956, Castro, with assistance of the M-26-7 urban underground led by País, moved to a second stage by opening the guerrilla front in the Sierra Maestra mountains. Subsequently, the DR and other groups organized guerrilla fronts in the Sierra Cristal and Escambray mountains.

During 1957, and part of 1958, the urban undergrounds conducted

major offensive operations. The climax came for the DR when its March 13, 1957 attack on the presidential palace was crushed and many of its leaders were killed. Bonachea and San Martín argue that as a result the DR was no longer able effectively to compete with the M-26-7 for the leadership of the insurrection. The urban underground of the M-26-7 suffered a similar fate with the death of Frank País and the suppression which accompanied the frustrated general strike of April 1958. Both groups moved to a support-defensive stage aimed at all-out support of the rural guerrillas. The main theme in these chapters is that Batista was defeated by “means of combined urban and rural guerrilla warfare” (p. 5).

Several chapters provide in fascinating detail the conflict between the rural guerrillas and the Cuban army. The authors give particular attention to the army’s 1958 summer offensive and the reasons for its failure.

One of the most important, underlying themes of this book is that the story of the Cuban insurrection is much more than that of Fidel Castro and the Sierra Maestra guerrillas. The authors give due credit to Castro, especially for his political abilities. But, they also develop the leadership roles of men such as Echeverría and País, and the conflicts which developed as Castro maneuvered for control of the insurrection. The authors argue that until his death in July 1957, País, not Castro, really controlled the M-26-7 movement, and this meant that military affairs were subordinated to civilian leadership. In a footnote the authors drop a strong hint that País might have been betrayed by Vilma Espín, who had close ties to Castro. They are more direct concerning the general strike of April 1958. Bonachea and San Martín argue that Castro was responsible for the conception of the strike and for its failure because he wanted to diminish the role of the urban M-26-7 organization with its civilian-oriented leadership. This is a modified picture of Castro’s role in the insurrection, but on the whole it seems justified by the evidence.

Bonachea and San Martín left Cuba in 1960 and 1962 respectively, and some may feel that their backgrounds have influenced their portrayal of Fidel Castro as something less than a combination of superman and saint. To this reviewer the authors have skillfully utilized their backgrounds to rescue the story of the Cuban insurrection from the myth-makers of both sides. They present it as a complex, human drama; and this is probably as close to the truth as historians can get.

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