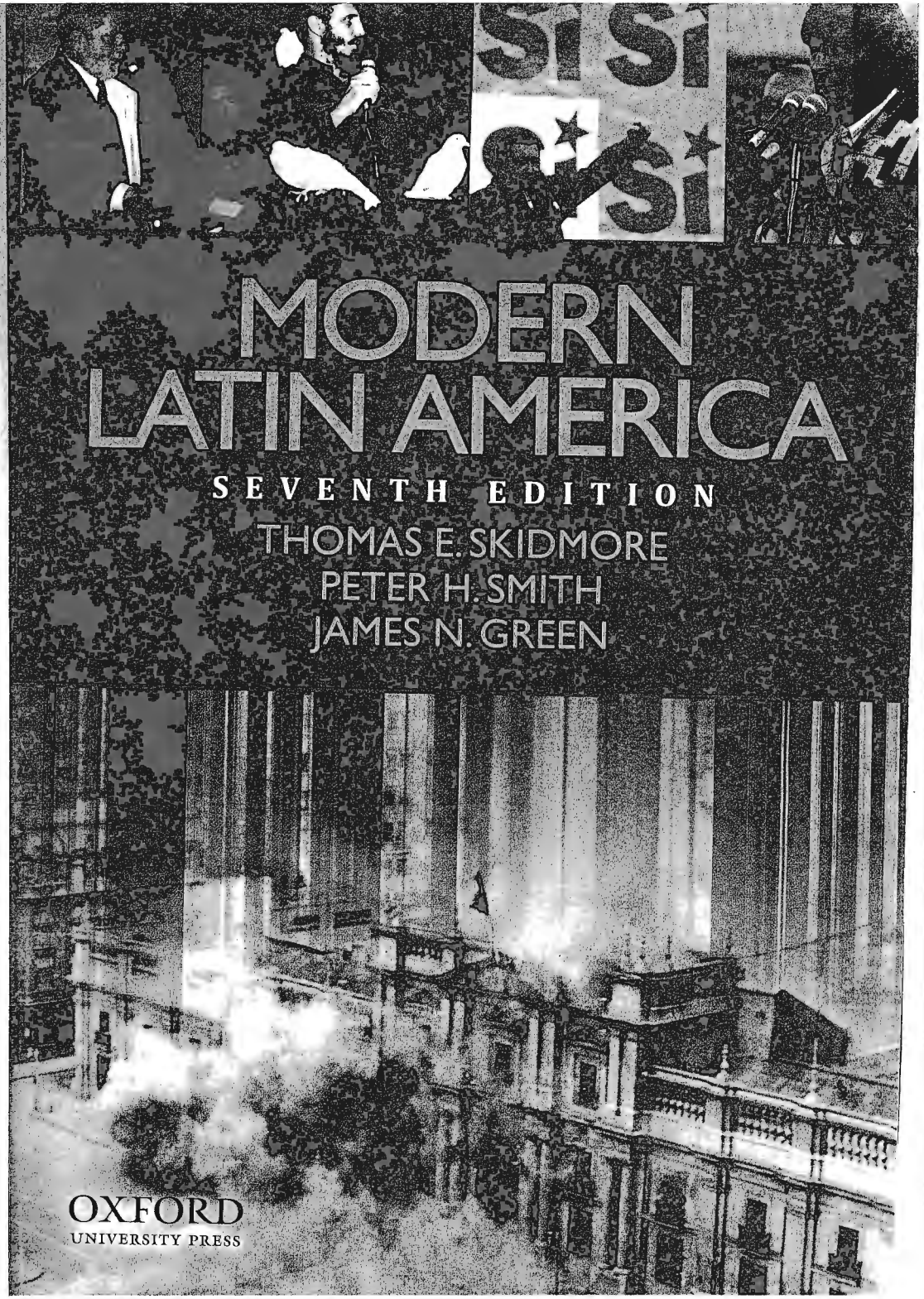

MODERN
LATIN AMERICA
SEVENTH EDITION
THOMAS E. SKIDMORE
PETER H. SMITH
JAMES N. GREEN
OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

percent for "free association" or commonwealth status, and 50.2 percent for "none of the above." The status quo won out again.

Elections of 2000 brought the pro-commonwealth PDP back to power under Sila María Calderón, the first woman ever to serve as governor. As mayor of San Salvador and then as governor, Calderón focused on urban redevelopment, prosecution of government corruption, and an end to U.S. Navy bombing exercises on the offshore island of Vieques. Her successor, Aníbal Salvador Acevedo Vilá, also of the PDP, governed under a cloud of alleged electoral fraud. In 2008 he lost a reelection bid to Luis Fortuño, a pro-statehood candidate of the PNP and card-carrying member of the U.S. Republican Party. His election gave every indication that Puerto Rico would continue its strange and ambiguous relationship with the United States in the foreseeable future.

5

Cuba

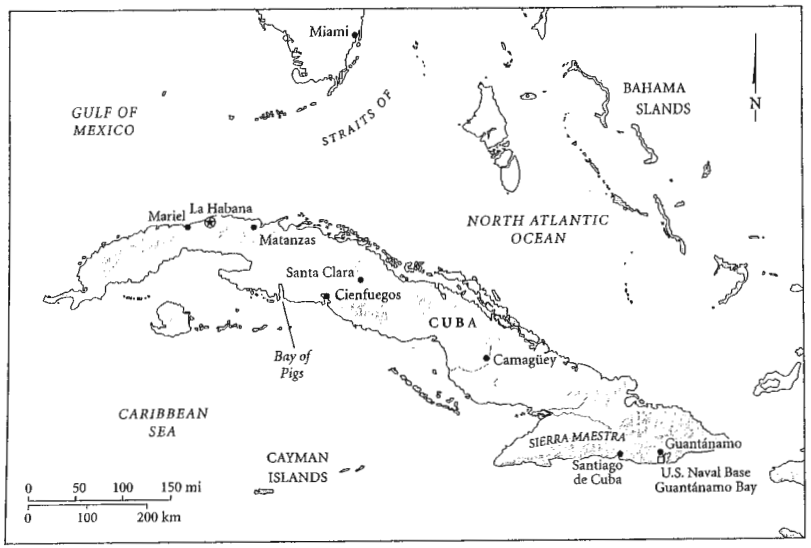
Key Colony, Socialist State

Cuba has a history of beating odds. Coveted for centuries by major powers, the nation found a way to assert its independence and identity. Influenced (and often dominated) by the power and proximity of the United States, it became a bastion of anti-American sentiment. Shaped for generations by the forces of international capitalism, it produced a genuine social revolution—one that spawned admiration, adulation, and fear and loathing in many parts of the world. Contrary to the confident predictions of critical observers, Cuba's socialist experiment managed to outlast the end of the Cold War, the demise of the Soviet Union, the widespread discrediting of Marxist ideology—and the unyielding hostility of the U.S. government. One of the smaller countries in the Western Hemisphere, an isolated island in a dangerous sea, Cuba has come to play a thoroughly outsized role on the stage of global geopolitics. How did these things happen?

Geography offers one basic clue. Cuba's historical development has been deeply affected by its strategic location in the Caribbean basin. Columbus discovered the island on his first voyage (1492), and it soon became a staging ground for Spanish expeditions to the Mexican and Central American mainland. Its commercial and political importance grew with the expansion of royal fleets between Spain and its American colonies.

FROM COLONY TO NATIONHOOD

The indigenous population scarcely survived the first century of the Spanish colonization. Here, as elsewhere in Latin America, the European conquerors turned to black Africa for their labor supply. As a result, Cuba became a multiracial society: by the twentieth century, according to one estimate, the population was 40 percent black, 30 percent white, and 30 percent mixed (including Asian and Indian).



Map 5 Cuba

Cuba's economy languished under the rigid mercantilist policies of the Spanish crown until the Bourbon reforms of Charles III (1759–88) provided the stimuli that led to growth. The nineteenth century saw a brief coffee boom give way to the cultivation of tobacco, which became a major crop by midcentury—a position it still holds, as Cuban cigars *(puros)* continue to be regarded as among the finest in the world.

But the most important source of wealth was another product: cane sugar. Emphasis on sugar began in the eighteenth century, and by 1860 Cuba was producing nearly a third (500,000 tons) of the world's entire sugar supply. The human power to fuel this boom continued to come from the nightmarish slave trade, which delivered more than 600,000 Africans in chains to Cuba between 1800 and 1865. Slavery itself lasted until 1886, longer than anywhere else in the Americas save Brazil.

Cuba's economic development has thus been typical of tropical America: a monocultural, slave-based, export-oriented "plantation"society.

As a crown jewel of the Spanish empire, Cuba remained a colony throughout the nineteenth century. Even so, Spain's effective control of "the pearl of the Antilles" was steadily declining over time. It took ten years of bitter warfare to crush an early independence movement (1868–78). And by the 1880s, Cuba's trade and investment were almost exclusively with the United States. The U.S. economic interest in Cuba led to numerous offers to purchase the island country. The Spaniards invariably refused, although some prominent Cubans strongly favored annexation by the United States. Meanwhile, Cuba was drawn ever closer into the U.S. orbit.

A handful of Cuban nationalist fled into exile and plotted a new rebellion against Spain. The most famous was José Martí, an eloquent revolutionary poet-lawyer. A revolt for independence broke out in 1895. Cuba was soon engulfed in another savage war, which dragged on for three years. The Spaniards resorted to brutal methods, such as the use of concentration camps, to liquidate the guerrilla-style patriots.

Given its huge economic stake in Cuba, the United States was unlikely to stay on the sidelines. The U.S. public was excited by sensationalist press accounts of Spanish brutality, and business and religious leaders demanded U.S. recognition of the rebels. The expansionist urge in the United States was fed both by those who stood to gain economically and by those who preached of a U.S. mission to rescue the Cubans from Spanish misrule.

Although President McKinley resisted pressure to intervene, events overtook him. In April 1898 the USS *Maine* mysteriously exploded in Havana harbor. The blast, which has never been satisfactorily explained, swept away the last vestiges of antiwar sentiment, and Congress promptly declared war on Spain. The ill-equipped Spaniards went down to humiliating defeat. They had little choice but to grant Cuba independence in December 1898.

Dubious Independence

Cuba began her new status under U.S. military occupation, hardly favorable for a healthy sense of national identity. The U.S. authorities immediately disbanded the rebel army, thus removing the only potential source of armed opposition to

The Bronze Titan

The most famous Afro-Cuban of the nineteenth century was Antonio Maceo, the military genius of Cuba's two wars for independence (1868–78 and 1895–98). Born of a Venezuelan mulatto émigré and a free Afro-Cuban, Maceo entered the rebel army as a private in 1868 and reached general only five years later. Having established military leadership among the rebels (despite racist sniping from his white comrades), Maceo led highly successful guerrilla operations in the 1895–98 war. His soldiers were mostly Afro-Cuban, and Maceo himself had been an outspoken advocate of abolition, thereby arousing white fears that he wanted to establish a "black republic." Even Winston Churchill, then a young volunteer with the Spanish forces, repeated that prediction in a magazine article.

Maceo was killed in 1896 by Spanish troops who caught him in an ambush. He has entered Cuban history as an exemplary patriot and soldier. He had faith that Cuba would create a rightful place for Afro-Cubans. He also opposed U.S. entry into the 1895 war, arguing "I should not want our neighbor to shed their blood for our cause. We can do that for ourselves."

American rule. The occupation was a textbook example of what was regarded as "enlightened" intervention. The North Americans built badly needed schools, roads, sewers, and telegraph lines. But it was all in the service of integrating the now "civilized" Cubans within the U.S. sphere of influence.

U.S. government leaders saw these economic, moral, and political responsibilities all going hand in hand. The Cubans were allowed, even encouraged, to choose a constitutional convention, which produced a charter in 1901. But the U.S. government harbored doubts about the new country's ability to govern itself, so Washington forced the Cubans, under protest, to incorporate a provision (the "Platt Amendment") which gave the United States the right to intervene in domestic politics at will. This stipulation made Cuba an American protectorate.

Around this time, the United States also leased rights "in perpetuity" for installation of a naval base at Guantánamo Bay. In other words, the U.S. government acquired a permanent foothold on Cuban national soil. This agreement would have unforeseen consequences more than a century later, as Guantánamo came to be used as a detention center for suspects in the U.S.-directed "war on global terror."

Cuba's first president, Tomás Estrada Palma (1902–6), favored outright annexation by the United States. He was typical of much of the Cuban elite, which saw little future for an independent Cuba. Their willingness to embrace Yankee encroachment aroused the fury of those few Cuban nationalists who kept alive the flame of José Martí's dream of a Cuba free from Yankee dominance.

Estrada Palma won a second term by electoral fraud. The ensuing revolt, led by the defeated Liberals, brought a second U.S. military occupation (1906–9). The United States imposed an interim president, Charles Magoon, who oversaw a new election. Fraud recurred, however, triggering another U.S. military intervention in 1917. All these interventions presented opportunities for U.S. economic interests to deepen their hold over the Cuban economy.

OVERVIEW: ECONOMIC GROWTH AND SOCIAL CHANGE

During Cuba's years as a protectorate, it underwent a great sugar boom. Cuba emerged as one of the world's most efficient sugar producers, helped by the modern vacuum methods of refining. As output increased, sugar came to dominate Cuba's economy and, eventually, to have a lasting effect on the class structure and social relationships.

By the early twentieth century, as shown in Figure 5.1, Cuba was producing several million tons of sugarcane per year—nearly one-quarter of the world supply around World War I, about 10 percent of the total during the Depression years, and close to 20 percent just after World War II. Throughout this entire period, sugar exports earned approximately 80 percent of the island's foreign exchange. Such dependence on a single product obviously placed the Cuban economy in an extremely vulnerable position. If the harvest was poor or demand was low or prices were down, the Cuban economy would suffer. Sharp declines in production during the 1930s and 1950s illustrate some of the dangers of this situation.

Another feature of the sugar boom was concentration of ownership, especially in the hands of American investors. After the 1870s, the new technology, particularly railways, stimulated a rapid reduction in the number of sugar mills (from 1190 in 1877 to only 207 in 1899). The independent growers, whose small- and medium-sized farms had produced most of the cane before the 1870s, now sold out in growing numbers to the big sugar companies. By 1912 large firms controlled more than 10 percent of all land in Cuba. By 1925 the number of sugar mills had dropped to only 184, and they controlled 17.7 percent of Cuban land.

This concentration of mill and land ownership was a natural result of the manner in which the sugar boom had proceeded. Under the shield of the protectorate, U.S. investors poured capital into the building of modern mills *(centrales)* and the consolidation of cane-growing lands. American-owned mills produced only 15 percent of Cuba's sugar in 1906, but by 1928 their share reached about 75 percent; by 1950 it stood at 47 percent.

The technology of sugar production affected labor as well as ownership and management. Cultivation came to require a large-scale workforce. Cane needs to be replanted only periodically, at intervals of five to twenty-five years. Therefore the principal need for labor is for the harvest, or *zafra,* mostly spent on the arduous cutting of cane with machetes. The rest of the year was known in Cuba as the "dead season" of widespread unemployment and underemployment.

But workers had nowhere to go. Because of the enormous plantations, they could not lease or purchase small-scale plots of land for their own use. Managers

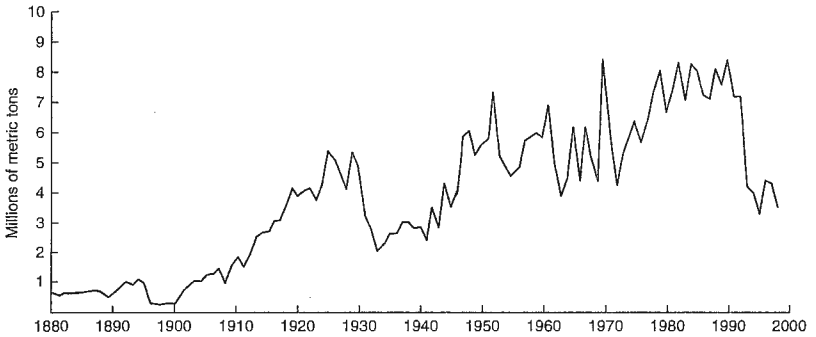


Figure 5.1 Sugar Production in Cuba, 1880–1998

SOURCES: Manuel Monreno Fraginals, *El ingenio: complejo economico social cubano del azúcar* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales,1978), III; Arthur MacEwan. *Revolution and Economic Development in Cuba* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981); Oscar A. Echevarria, "Cuba and the International Sugar Market," Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy, August 10–12, 1995; G. B. Hagelberg and José Álvarez, "Historical Overview of Cuba's Cost of Sugar Production: Implications for the Future," Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida (2005); James W. Wilkie, ed., *Statistical Abstract of Latin America 37* (Los Angeles: UCLA, 2001).

wanted to keep them near the mills, available for work, and for this they devised several tactics. One was to purchase a steady share of cane from independent growers nearby who would share the problems of labor with them. Another was to let workers go into debt, so they would remain under obligation to the ownership. A third was to encourage the formation of modest urban settlements, called *bateyes*, that would create working-class communities.

As a result, Cuba witnessed the appearance of a rural proletariat, a social group that differed greatly from a classic peasantry. Workers in the sugar mills and in the *zafras* were laborers, not farmers. They were concerned more about wages and working conditions than about the acquisition of land.

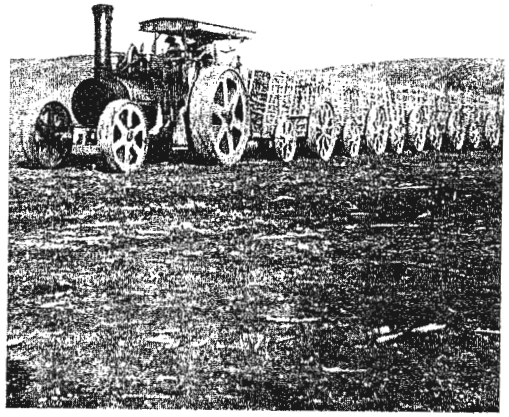
Moreover, the rural laborers had intimate contact with the working class in the cities. They often migrated to urban areas, living in the kind of slums that have come to characterize many of Latin America's largest metropolises: known as *colonias populares* in Mexico and *favelas* in Brazil, they acquired in Cuba the suitable name of *llega y pon* ("come and settle"). And their residents were blighted by poverty and deprivation. Only 40 percent of urban lower-class dwellings had inside toilets, only 40 percent had refrigeration of any kind, and as many as a dozen people lived in a single room.

Contact and communication between urban and rural elements of the Cuban working class would eventually have a decisive effect on the course of the country's history because they permitted the sort of unified, classwide social movement that has been found so rarely in Latin America. It is worth noting, too, that the church played only a minor role in Cuban society, and trade unions had a sporadic and precarious existence. In other words, the outlook and behavior of the Cuban laboring classes were not conditioned or controlled by existing institutions. Workers would, in time, be available for mobilization.

Meanwhile, the United States built up more and more control over the Cuban economy. Not only did American capital take over major ownership of plantations and mills, the United States became by far the largest customer for Cuba's sugar exports—usually purchasing 75 or 80 percent of the total. Through it all, Cuba was dependent upon U.S. decisions for the fate of its major industry. And U.S. sugar import policy was invariably a topic of prolonged debate in Washington.

Newly independent Cuba had originally signed a reciprocal trade treaty in 1903 which gave Cuban sugar a 20 percent reduction from the existing U.S. tariffs. In return, Cuba reduced its tariffs on American goods by 20 to 40 percent. For the next thirty years, U.S.-Cuban trade relations grew ever closer, as the Cuban economy was for all intents and purposes integrated into the U.S. economy.

U.S. investors in Cuba might well have smiled over their good fortune. The end of World War I had brought a widespread food shortage, and all exporters, Cuba included, found themselves cashing in on near-panic buying conditions for commodities. A crash then came in 1920. Prices suddenly plummeted, and the value of the sugar crop declined to little more than one-quarter of the postwar level. The ensuing crisis had a devastating effect on the economy, hitting especially those rural workers whose existence was precarious even in the best of times.



A steam-driven engine hauls wagons of sugar cane to the mill in the early 1900s. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.)

With the collapse of the world economy in 1929–30, Cuba soon suffered for its (somewhat involuntary) dependence on one trading partner. The U.S. Congress, under pressure from the domestic sugarbeet producers, passed the Smoot-Hawley tariff in 1930, burdening Cuban sugar with new duties. This merely increased the pressure on the staggering Cuban sugar economy, which contracted severely. The only bright spot came with Franklin Roosevelt's assumption of power in Washington in 1933. Roosevelt and the Democratic Congress brought lower tariffs. In 1934 Congress mandated fixed quotas among domestic and foreign suppliers of the U.S. sugar market. Cuba's quota was 28 percent, a share that endured, with modifications, until 1960. This provision gave Cuba a privileged access to the U.S. market. It also tied Cuba to the will of the U.S. Congress, which could change the legislation at any time. It symbolized all the vulnerability which independence had brought Cuba in the era of American dominance.

In sum, the reliance on sugar produced mixed blessings for Cuba's economy and society. It brought considerable prosperity to the island, especially in good *zafra* years, but it also created a volatile social structure, one in which rural and urban elements of a long-deprived working class maintained communication with each other. The top of the social pyramid was occupied not by resident landlords, as in classic haciendas, but by foreign entrepreneurs or Cuban owners who often lived in Havana or New York: the upper class was absentee. There was a sizable middle class, at least by Latin American standards, but it was an amorphous stratum that lacked cohesion and self-consciousness. As sociologist Maurice Zeitlin once observed, this combination of factors was bound to have its effect: "Large-scale enterprise in the countryside and the intermingling of industrial and

Cuba: Vital Statistics, 2007

Population (millions)	11.3
Literacy (age 15 and over) (%)	99.8
Unemployment (%)	1.9
GNP/per capita, in purchasing power* ($U.S.)	9500
Life expectancy (years)	78

*This figure is adjusted for estimated "purchasing power" in the local economy. The actual dollar figure would be closer to $3500.

SOURCE: World Bank and Country Profile and Demographics. Data on gross domestic product and poverty levels are not available.

argricultural workers in the sugar centrals permeated the country largely with capitalist, nationalistic, secular, anti-traditional values and norms of conduct. In this sense, the country was *prepared* for development—the only thing lacking being the revolution itself."

POLITICS AND POLICY: PATTERNS OF CHANGE

Cuban governments in the 1920s and 1930s were among the most corrupt and brutal of the republic's history. Gerardo Machado gained the presidency by election in 1925 and soon used his executive powers to make himself forever unbeatable at the ballot box. Machado's repressive measures and the growth of nationalist opposition, especially among students and urban labor, brought out the uglier realities of the U.S. protectorate. When the global Depression hit, Cuba's export-oriented economy suffered badly. The bottom dropped out of world sugar prices yet again, and the Cuban economy contracted even further. Total income plummeted, and unemployment mushroomed.

Economic distress provoked political conflict. Opposition to Machado included a coalition of students, labor leaders, middle-class reformers, and disgruntled politicians, held together by a common hatred for the dictator and a common aspiration for a more honest and more just Cuba. Armed plots abounded. Machado's police and military bore down with more repressive measures. The United States, so attentive to some other kinds of deviations from democracy in Cuba, stood by passively.

Franklin Roosevelt's election victory brought an activist to the White House. While Washington assumed a more critical stance toward Machado, the Cubans took matters into their own hands. A successful general strike in August 1933 helped prod the army toward undercutting the dictator, who fled Havana. Now opinion began to polarize sharply. The young radicals dominant in the provisional government joined with army enlisted men, led by Sergeant Fulgencio Batista. This

alliance took over the government, alarming Roosevelt's high-level envoy, Sumner Welles. The new civilian leader was Ramón Grau San Martín, a doctor-professor and long-time hero to the student left, with whom he had invariably sided. "Soviets" were formed, followed by occupations of factories and farms. The new government proclaimed a socialist revolution.

Washington became deeply worried over the sharp leftward turn by its protectorate. U.S. Navy ships took up stations off the Cuban coast; old-style intervention seemed near. But a new strongman, eager to follow the Cuban formula for finding power and wealth, was already on stage. On signal from the United States, Batista easily ousted Grau and the radicals. A front-man president acceptable to Washington was soon arranged, and the radicals, the nationalists, and the reformers watched with bitterness as Cuban politics returned to business as usual. U.S. hegemony was so certain that Washington had no trouble agreeing to abrogate the Platt Amendment in 1934. The U.S. naval base at Guantánamo was not affected.

For the next twenty-five years, Cuban politics was dominated by Fulgencio Batista. Between 1934 and 1940, Batista ran his country through puppet presidents. He ruled directly from 1940 to 1944, then went back to a behind-the-scenes role as the onetime radical Grau San Martín returned to the presidency (1944–48). There was little left of Grau the idealist, and the spectacle of his descent into the nether world of Cuban political corruption merely deepened the disgust and moral fury burning in the radicals and nationalists. Grau's successor, another Batista front man, was Carlos Prío Socorrás (1948–52). Batista himself retook the presidential reins in a coup and henceforth ruled with dictatorial powers (1952–59).

Death at the Microphone

Cuba of the 1940s and 1950s had no better-known radio personality than the volatile Eddie Chibás. His Sunday evening program was "must" listening for millions of Havana residents, especially the middle classes who resented the cynical machinations of the political establishment. Chibás was a die-hard leader of the opposition "Orthodox" political party, and he poured forth endless invective against the corruption and hypocrisy of Cuban politics.

In July 1951 he launched wild corruption charges against the education minister of President Carlos Prío. When challenged, Chibás failed to produce the promised proof. Instead he went on the air with a passionate self-defense, crying out to his fellow citizens: "Comrades of Ortodoxia, forward! Sweep away the thieves in the government!" A pistol shot then rang out. Eddie had shot himself in the stomach. Evidently he had meant only to wound himself with a dramatic gesture that would galvanize his listeners. Unfortunately, however, he had gone off the air just before pulling the trigger. Chibás died ten days later. His own party could not agree on a successor and went into rapid decline. The stage was set for the final act of Batista's long rule.

In reality, Cuban society and politics saw little change between 1934 and 1959. The futility of the electoral system was repeatedly demonstrated, as the perennial strongman (yesterday Machado, today Batista) worked his will. The honest opposition scrapped and struggled in vain. What had happened to the revolutionary fervor of 1933? Where was the coalition that had so frightened Washington? It had gone the way of all Cuban nationalist movements—rendered impotent by the unbeatable alliance of the Cuban elites, their political and military handmaidens, and Uncle Sam. If one had asked most Cubans in 1959 whether their little island had any chance of true independence, how many would have dared say yes? Very few. Most educated Cubans undoubtedly thought that the best their country could hope for was to win a few advantages at the margin. What else could one hope? A startling answer soon came forth.

In the meantime, America's power and presence exercised a dominating influence. Thousands of North Americans lived in Cuba, chiefly in Havana. They enjoyed pride of place, mingling with members of the Cuban elite, along with wealthy expatriates at the Havana Country Club, the Havana Yacht Club, the Miramar Yacht Club, and other exclusive social establishments. Many more Americans visited the island as tourists. Gambling and gangsterism became synonymous with the U.S. presence as Batista welcomed mobsters like Meyer Lansky and Santos Trafficante Jr. The gangsters in turn shared their earnings with the dictator and his henchmen. Prostitution spread to cater to North American sun-and-sex tourists.

U.S. films and music filled Cuban cinema and radio as young Cubans rushed to learn the latest dances and catch the most recent performances of John Wayne and Marilyn Monroe. English words were incorporated into Cuban Spanish: *jonrón* (home run) and *doble plei* (double play) illustrate not only the popularity of baseball on the island (introduced in the 1860s) but also the growth of a more recent phenomenon, "Spanglish."

By the 1950s, a North American–style consumer culture had taken hold in Havana and the larger provincial cities. Cuban elites bought U.S. automobiles and went on lavish shopping trips to Miami and New York, bringing the latest fashions and consumer durables. While their social betters lived in the style of the North American rich, middle-income Cubans struggled within a dependent economy to obtain the U.S. consumer goods demanded by their precarious social position.

Fidel Castro and the Batista Regime

Born in 1927, Fidel Castro was the son of a successful Spanish immigrant, and he represented an old Cuban tradition—the heir of a *peninsular* who had "made America," as the Spaniards put it in the sixteenth century. But this immigrant's son was not interested in enjoying the comfortable life his background and training might have promised. He wanted to make a different America.

Fidel had followed the classic path—primary and secondary education with the Jesuits, then a law degree. He plunged into the turbulent world of student politics.

He proved to be strong-minded, articulate, and ambitious. Passionately nationalist, he steered clear of the communists, who were the best organized of the student groups.

Soon after graduation, Fidel began traveling in Latin America, meeting other radical nationalists and learning about other political realities. His most dramatic experience came in Bogotá in 1948, when the colossal urban riot of the *bogotazo* turned the city upside down for two days. The triggering event had been the assassination of a young and progressive politician named Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. The populace rose as one and took over a city whose authorities had abdicated in terror. Fidel was swept up into the wave of popular outrage and, in the process, acquired a glimpse of the possibilities of popular mobilization.

Fidel Castro's first assault on Batista's state came straight out of the tradition of romantic Latin American revolutionaries. It was an attack on the 26th of July 1953, against the provincial army barracks at Moncada in the southeastern city of Santiago. Fidel led a band of 165 youths who stormed the garrison. The government reaction was swift and ruthless. The police began slaughtering suspects. Fidel and his brother Raúl were captured, tried, and sentenced to fifteen years in prison. During the trial Fidel gave a long, impassioned, rambling speech ("History Will Absolve Me"), little noticed at the time but later to become a sacred text of the revolution.

The Castro brothers were lucky. They stayed in prison only eleven months before Batista granted amnesty in an attempt to court public opinion and to improve his political image. Given his freedom, Fidel immediately fled to Mexico to begin organizing a new revolutionary force.

In 1956 Fidel set out with a new band of revolutionaries in the *Granma*, an ancient yacht. With him once again was his brother Raúl, more politically radical than Fidel. Also aboard was Ernesto ("Che") Guevara, a twenty-seven-year-old Argentine physician who had personally witnessed the CIA-conducted overthrow of radically anti-American Guatemalan president Jacobo Arbenz in 1954. After a harrowing voyage, Fidel and his fellow survivors fled into the Sierra Maestra in eastern Cuba. From this forsaken outpost, Fidel rebuilt his rebel band and renewed his war against Batista.

Fidel and his top lieutenants knew that a key to toppling Batista would be the erosion of the dictator's foreign support, especially from the United States. Fidel's contacts found the perfect vehicle: Herbert Matthews, a veteran foreign correspondent of the *New York Times*. Matthews was smuggled up to Fidel's mountain hideout and from there wrote a series of stories which exploded on the front page of the most prestigious newspaper in the United States. Matthews' dramatic dispatches portrayed Fidel as an idealistic reformer and gave the rebels international status overnight. Suddenly Batista was on the defensive in world public opinion. He was in that most dangerous of realms—seen to be both brutal and impotent.

As their ranks increased, Fidel's youthful followers encountered the harsh and difficult world of Cuba's peasantry. The rebels took a strong interest in these people's fate. It was the first principle of the guerrilla: retain the sympathy of the local residents, not only for supplies but also so they will not betray you to the authorities.

The rebel band was still, however, primarily middle class. A few peasants joined the rebels, but they never came in large numbers, and they never held positions of leadership. This is hardly surprising. Most revolutions in history have been led by a counterelite. This is not to say that participation and support from peasants was unimportant. But the Fidelista phenomenon was middle class in origin and leadership. Its later directions were another matter.

Guerrilla warfare is a lonely and dangerous business. Month after month through 1957, the rebels managed the essential—to survive. But they failed to score seriously against the enemy.

Early 1958 brought some encouraging signs. In February the Cuban bishops issued a pastoral letter calling for a government of national unity. In March the U.S. government, under pressure for supplying arms to the repressive Batista regime, placed an embargo on arms shipments to both sides. This move amounted to a partial withdrawal of legitimacy for the established government. After a general strike failed in April 1958, Fidel decided to become more aggressive. Batista's army launched a "liquidation campaign" that resulted in disaster. By August the army had withdrawn from the mountains, defeated by their own poor leadership and faulty training and by superior intelligence and dedication on the rebel side.

Through the rest of 1958, a savage guerrilla war raged on. There were never any set battles. It was a war of hit-and-run, with bombings, sabotage, and harassment. Batista's response was counterterror. Since he could seldom catch the guerrillas, he sent his thugs against the students and the middle class suspected of having links to the 26th of July Movement. In so doing, Batista was rapidly enlarging the support for Fidel. Ironically, the repression ended up attracting new recruits to the rebel cause.

Support for Batista began to evaporate. As dictator his greatest card to play had always been his ability to keep order. Now even that was disappearing. Batista and his army were unprepared for the kind of underground that could elude their network of regular informants. Torture and execution only sparked popular outrage.

By late 1958 Batista had no desire to fight a losing cause to the end. He could see that his power was shrinking daily. His army and police had become both hated and derided. He had lost the all-important support from Washington. And the country had become so convinced of his fall that the economy was increasingly disrupted as businessmen and bankers waited for the inevitable. Suddenly, on New Year's Eve, he called his aides together, designated a successor president, and took off with a planeload of relatives for the Dominican Republic. The way was now clear for Fidel's triumphal entry into Havana.

THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

Euphoria is the only word to describe the country's mood in the early days of 1959. Fidel had achieved genuine heroic status. The question now occupying the minds of the middle class, workers, peasants, foreign investors, the U.S. embassy, and other observers was, What kind of revolution would this be?

Fidel entered a political vacuum. The civil war had not only discredited Batista; it had besmirched the entire political class, all of its members, to greater or lesser degree, compromised by the dictator. The momentum now lay with the guerrillas in the green fatigue uniforms. The rebel army was to remain the key political institution thereafter.

Fidel's greatest asset, aside from his own formidable leadership gifts, was the desperate desire for change among his fellow Cubans. The most underprivileged, the rural poor, had never counted for anything in the electoral system. Working classes in the cities and towns had precious little more weight.

The most restless and most important social sector was the middle class, which was ready to receive a new political message. Its members were first of all disgusted by the old political cadre. Second, they were moved by appeals for greater social justice. Third, they longed for a more independent Cuba. That meant a Cuba freer of the United States. Yet any assertion of Cuban national dignity was bound to collide with the Yankee presence.

1959 was a year of drama for the Revolution. The first major political crisis arose over what to do with the captured Batista officials who had been responsible for the worst of the repression. The revolutionaries resorted to arbitrary procedures in trying their victims, appealing to sentiments of "ordinary justice" to legitimize their executions. Within six months, about 550 were put to death, following trial by various revolutionary courts. These executions, punctuated by cries of *paredón!* (to the wall!), worried moderates in Cuba and their sympathizers abroad, especially in the United States.

In April 1959 Fidel set out for New York, where he was to visit the UN headquarters. He managed to project the image of a nationalist reformer, strongly opposed to foreign intervention, but also not a communist. He was careful to maintain only distant contact with the U.S. government while skillfully cultivating elite centers of opinion with, for example, a triumphant appearance in Harvard Stadium.

Fidel returned to Cuba to carry out his most radical measure to date: the Agrarian Reform Law of May 17, 1959. The law eliminated the giant estates, expropriating farmlands over 1000 acres, with compensation to be paid in Cuban currency bonds. No foreigners would henceforth be allowed to own agricultural land. The expropriated lands would be turned over to small private holders and cooperatives. A National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA) was created to implement these far-reaching measures. Critics in Cuba and abroad, especially in the United States, began to raise the alarm. Was this not the first step to communism? Hadn't Fidel appointed a communist as the operating head of INRA?

Political polarization heightened throughout the year. Fidel announced the discovery of a plot against the Revolution. Noncommunists among the supporters of Batista's overthrow became increasingly alarmed. A former president of the Senate attacked the agrarian reform and called for the elections which Fidel had promised. The commander of the air force resigned in protest over alleged communist influence in the military. In July Fidel staged what was to become a recurrent

drama: he resigned the premiership in the midst of what he described as conspiracies against the Revolution. There followed massive rallies, where the carefully primed multitudes called for Fidel to return to the premiership. He bowed to their will and, in so doing, announced a lengthy moratorium on elections.

There was now brewing a case that would for many become a hallmark of the Revolution's radicalization. Major Hubert Matos, one of Fidel's oldest political allies and a longtime revolutionary, chose to break with the Fidelista line. He resigned from the armed forces and issued a letter attacking the growth of communist influence. Fidel's response was swift. He jailed Matos and mobilized a huge propaganda campaign against him as a traitor to the Revolution. For the next decade and a half, Matos, locked away in prison, remained for the Fidelista regime the supreme symbol of revolutionary deviationism. For many foreign observers, Matos remained the quintessential victim of Stalinist-style repression.

The year 1960 proved to be even more decisive for the course of the Cuban Revolution. Four basic trends took hold: (1) the nationalization of the economy, (2) a sharp swing to the Soviet bloc, (3) the establishment of an authoritarian regime, and (4) the launching of an egalitarian socioeconomic policy.

It was inevitable that any Cuban government attempting to reassert Cuban control over its economy would collide with the United States. The first major clash came over oil. When Fidel had discovered that he could buy crude oil cheaper from the Russians than from Venezuela, he ordered the U.S.-owned oil refineries located in Cuba to process the Russian crude. Although an old law obligated them to comply, they refused. Fidel promptly confiscated the U.S. oil companies. Partially in retaliation, President Eisenhower suspended the Cuban sugar quota in the United States.

The Cuban government now followed by seizing virtually all the rest of U.S. property. That included electricity and telephone companies (another prime irritant to the nationalists), sugar mills, and nickel mines. Washington reacted by embargoing all trade to Cuba, except medicines and foodstuffs. This embargo would later be tightened in 1962—and remain in place for decades to come.

The swing to the Soviet bloc was neither a cause nor an effect of the clash with the United States; it was part and parcel of the same process. Initially it was a question of how far the Soviets might be willing to commit themselves in Cuba. The Russians proved bolder than almost anyone expected. In February 1960, well before the full economic break with the United States, the Soviets signed a trade agreement with Cuba, granting $100 million credit to buy equipment and promising to purchase 4 million tons of sugar in each of the coming four years. Fidel was now developing an alternative source of technology and equipment, and the Soviets were getting ready to integrate Cuba as a "socialist" ally in the Third World.

Revolutionary Cuba's state was emerging in a piecemeal, ad hoc fashion. Fidel began by proclaiming his commitment to the 1940 constitution, which

Batista had repudiated by his coup of 1952. The problem was a classic one: how to carry out fundamental economic and social change when existing government institutions were set up to maintain the status quo. Fidel resolved this dilemma with authoritarian efficiency, asserting revolutionary control over key institutions of the "bourgeois" social order—the media, courts, unions, universities, and schools.

Though the old legal system remained in place, there was never any attempt to elect a new legislature. The 26th of July Movement could hardly provide an institutional base. It had never developed into a tightly knit organization, and it was far from a political party. From the start, Fidel relied on the most responsive and popular institution at hand: the revolutionary army.

Late in 1960 the government created an important new institution: Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs). Locally based citizens' groups, they were organized primarily for civil defense. The constant threat of invasion necessitated such a measure. Since the Revolution also had enemies at home, the CDRs also had the task of monitoring the population for counterrevolutionary opinions or behavior.

The Revolution set out to create new institutions in place of the old. Fidel seemed to be everywhere. Mobilization was the inexorable theme: mobilization against invaders, mobilization against social and economic problems at home. To achieve this goal, a huge militia was created: by the end of 1960 it totaled 500,000 out of a total population of 6.7 million. And none could doubt the identity of the commander-in-chief.

The only political party to survive the revolutionary transition was the Cuban Communist Party. Never a member, Fidel had carefully avoided any personal identification with the party. But he made it clear that anticommunism would be considered counterrevolutionary. He also entrusted party members with such programs as agrarian reform.

What most Cubans cared about was not political structure but how the Revolution would change their lives. On this score, Fidel and his guerrilla companions kept their eyes fixed on the poor, especially in the countryside. The revolutionaries were determined to attack the legacy of the corrupt, capitalist Cuba: illiteracy, disease, malnutrition, and dilapidated housing. A yearlong crusade cut illiteracy rates in half (Cuba's illiteracy rate was already low by Latin American standards), and illiteracy has virtually disappeared since then. Sensing the direction of the Revolution, the rich (and many from the middle class) began to flee, and the government acquired a windfall: the refugees' abandoned assets—homes, offices, farms—that the state could now distribute.

The number of defectors steadily grew. Most attacked the guerrillas for betraying the hope of rapid elections. Instead, they charged, Fidel and his clique were leading Cuba toward communist totalitarianism. Most probably were sincere. Others also thought it the best tactic to arouse the United States.

FRAMING U.S. POLICIES

The Cuban Revolution was utterly unacceptable to the United States. After all, U.S. policymakers had long claimed to have a "special relationship" with Cuba—which, in effect, meant control of the island's destiny. As John Quincy Adams put it so famously in 1823, "There are laws of political as well as physical gravitation; and if an apple severed by the tempest from its native tree cannot choose but fall to the ground, Cuba, forcibly disjoined from its own unnatural connection with Spain, and incapable of self-support, can gravitate only towards the North American Union, which by the same law of nature cannot cast her off from her bosom." (In the end, racial prejudice prevented outright annexation of the island—how could the United States absorb such a substantial black population?) But the basic consensus was clear: one way or the other, as either a state or a protectorate, Cuba rightfully belonged to the United States.

In this spirit, Republicans and Democrats vociferously denounced Fidel Castro's upstart regime. The notion that this small-sized plantation society could challenge Wall Street's investments and Washington's authority was deemed to be absolutely galling. It challenged conventional wisdom about the benevolence of U.S. power, about the solidarity of the Western Hemisphere, and about the forces of historical change. Given the dynamics of the Cold War, something had to be done.

The U.S. government developed antirevolutionary policies in stages over time. As Fidel and his followers were still fighting in the mountains, the Eisenhower administration began searching for an alternative—preservation of the status quo under another pro-American autocrat, under the formula of "*Batistianismo* without Batista." The dictator's sudden departure at the end of 1958 brought that option to an end.

After the triumph of the Revolution, Castro's nationalization of American-owned enterprises offered grounds for governmental overthrow (as in Guatemala in 1954). While diplomatic hostilities intensified, U.S. political leaders decried what they saw as the leftward drift of this onetime protectorate, only ninety miles off the Florida coast, into the orbit of the Soviet Union. Washington could simply not abide a "communist beachhead" within the Western Hemisphere. This was the thinking that prompted the Eisenhower administration to sever diplomatic relations with Cuba in January 1961, and to accelerate planning for an effort to overthrow the Castro government.

The most obvious strategy for Washington was to support an exile invasion of Cuba. That was how José Martí had returned to the island back in 1895, and it was the standard strategy in Caribbean-exile politics. In July 1960, the CIA convinced President Eisenhower to approve the training of an invasion force.

The "toughness" of U.S. policy toward revolutionary Cuba became an issue in the 1960 presidential campaign, which featured Eisenhower's vice president, Richard Nixon, and the relatively unknown senator from Massachusetts, John Fitzgerald Kennedy. In their first televised debate, Kennedy took a more aggressive

stance toward Cuba than Nixon—who knew of the invasion plan, but was unable to acknowledge it in public.

It was Kennedy, the ostensibly tougher candidate, who won the presidency and inherited the "Cuban problem." Eisenhower broke diplomatic relations in January 1961, in response to Fidel's demand that the United States drastically reduce its embassy in Havana. In April, Kennedy found himself pressured to approve an exile invasion of Cuba. Wanting to do his anticommunist duty, but fearful of the possible effect on world opinion, the new president demanded that there be no identifiable U.S. involvement. It proved to be an ironic and fateful concern.

The Bay of Pigs

As rumors mounted, an invasion force headed for Cuba in April 1961. The operation proved a misadventure from the beginning. After strenuous debate, President Kennedy reduced the exile-piloted air cover and vetoed the use of any U.S. planes. The invaders foundered in an ill-chosen bit of southern coast, on the Bay of Pigs. The hoped-for uprisings, which would supposedly paralyze the Cuban defenders, never materialized. The Cuban defenses proved more than adequate. The invasion brigades were quickly captured. They never had a chance to adopt their fallback procedure—head for the mountains and mount a guerrilla operation.

The Bay of Pigs could not have been a greater triumph for Fidel and the revolutionaries. The United States had finally shown its intentions to be what Fidel had always said they were: a desire to turn the clock back in Cuba. Although the CIA had tried to screen out the more unsavory ex-Batista types, the invaders included more than a few who had served the dictator. Fidel and his supporters seized on those names to prove that the United States wanted to restore the discredited tyrant.

The Missile Crisis

The failed invasion marked a watershed in U.S.-Cuban relations. Washington's most obvious strategy had failed. What options were left for the United States?

The issue now shifted to the level of the superpowers. In 1960 Nikita Khrushchev had rattled Soviet missiles in defense of Cuban socialism. The Soviets thereafter decided they must back up their threat by putting missiles in Cuba itself, and by October 1962 they were installing intermediate-range rocket bases in Cuba. This was an unprecedented challenge to the balance of military power. The United States demanded that the Soviets withdraw their missiles from Cuba, under sanction of a naval quarantine on all Soviet military shipments to Cuba. The world seemed to balance on the edge of nuclear war. After a fateful interval, Khrushchev complied. The missiles were withdrawn.

The superpower confrontation in the Caribbean had fateful implications for Cuba. First, Fidel himself was not consulted at any stage. The result was to make Cuba, in Latin American eyes, into a Soviet satellite in essential security matters. Second, the Soviets withdrew their missiles only because Washington (secretly)

promised it would not invade Cuba. The Soviets had forced the United States to allow the socialist experiment in Cuba to proceed.

The Hardening of U.S. Policy

The survival of Cuba's revolutionary government not only intensified U.S. hostility. It also affected Washington's policy toward Latin America as a whole. The central premise became: no more Cubas. No more socialist experiments, no Soviet puppets, no anti-American ideologies. In the context of the Cold War, the United States could not and would not permit any such forms of political deviation. This conviction provided the underpinning for subsequent overt or covert U.S. interventions in Brazil (1964), the Dominican Republic (1965), Chile (1973), Grenada (1983), and Central America (the 1980s). In the eyes of Washington, Cuba became an object lesson for the hemisphere.

As for Cuba, the U.S. goal was simple—bringing down the regime. Toward this end, American policymakers pursued a variety of tactics—removal of Fidel Castro, support for refugees and dissidents, and strangulation of the Cuban economy. These policies remained in place for decades to come.

The first strategy was rather primitive: assassinate Castro. At the behest of the White House, the CIA orchestrated multiple schemes and attempts. Such plots included an exploding cigar, a fungal-infected diving suit, and a gangland-style shooting. (American Mafia bosses had lost control of profitable businesses in Havana as a result of the Revolution, so they were as eager as the politicians to remove Castro from the scene.) According to one of Fidel's former security guards, in fact, the CIA took direct or indirect part in 638 assassination efforts against him over the years! As Castro is reported to have said, "If surviving assassination attempts were an Olympic event, I would win the gold medal."

The reasoning behind these attempts was as flawed as the execution. The predominant assumption was that Cuba's revolutionary movement was Fidel's personal creation: through the force of his character—untrustworthy, ruthless, and megalomaniacal—he had taken his country away from its proper historical path. Eliminate him and everything would change. What this logic failed to acknowledge, however, were the factors behind the revolution: inequality, frustration, long-simmering resentment of U.S. domination, and popular support for programs of radical change. This approach also got the U.S. government into the distasteful business of attempting to assassinate foreign heads of state, a tactic that was later declared unlawful by an act of Congress.

The second broad strategy was to embrace Fidel's opponents. From the time of Batista's departure in late 1958, the United States welcomed Cuban exiles and refugees with open arms. And they came by the thousands, settling for the most part in the Miami area—where they formed a vibrant and successful community, eventually transforming what had been a sleepy beachside resort into a multilingual "capital of Latin America." The U.S. government hailed all dissidents as freedom fighters (remember, the Bay of Pigs operation was carried out by anti-Castro Cubans) and proclaimed that their exodus provided unmistakable proof

of the superiority of capitalism over communism. For practical intents and purposes, Washington regarded the anti-Fidelista community in Miami as a government in exile.

This long-term reliance on Cuban dissidents would have fateful implications. One was to give the Cuban American community in Miami inordinate influence over U.S. policy toward the Castro regime. As their numbers grew and prosperity swelled, the exiles formed a powerful political force within the state of Florida. And through a right-wing organization known as the Cuban American National Foundation, their leaders bitterly—and effectively—opposed any relaxation of hostilities toward the revolutionary government. To a considerable extent, Cuban Americans in Miami managed to tie the hands of elected politicians in Washington.

An additional consequence was entirely unintentional: the U.S. policy enabled Castro to export his opposition. Over time, Fidel's most vociferous critics were obliged (or encouraged) to leave the country. As a result, the most resourceful center of dissidence was nowhere to be found within Cuba; it was in Miami. Ironically, this process provided Castro with a political safety valve. It also allowed him to taint his opponents as unprincipled traitors of the fatherland, as opportunistic *gusanos* (worms) rather than loyal *cubanos*. Words were important weapons in the struggles over Cuban destiny.

U.S.-Cuban relations took an unexpected turn in 1980. After anti-Castro dissidents stormed the Peruvian embassy in hopes of gaining political asylum, the Cuban government retaliated (against Peru) by withdrawing its security guard around the diplomatic compound. Word suddenly spread that the embassy was unguarded, and within twenty-four hours 10,800 Cubans rushed onto the embassy grounds. The Castro government announced that they would all be allowed to emigrate, along with anyone else who cared to inform authorities. The total exodus eventually climbed to 125,000 people (including criminals and deadbeats). Departing from the port of Mariel, most went via small craft provided by the Cuban American community in what became known as the "Mariel boatlift." After that, the Castro government prohibited unauthorized emigration from Cuba to the United States.

The third and final pillar of U.S. policy toward Cuba was an economic embargo. In late 1960 President Eisenhower imposed a partial trade embargo on Cuba, excluding food and medicine. The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 prohibited aid to Cuba and authorized the president to impose "a total embargo upon all trade" with Cuba, which John Kennedy did in response to Castro's expropriations of U.S.-owned properties (notably, those belonging to the United Fruit Company and International Telephone and Telegraph). This took place in February 1962—months before the missile crisis of that year.

The embargo has remained in place ever since. In 1992 it was codified into law for the stated purpose of "bringing democracy to the Cuban people." In 1996 Congress passed the Helms-Burton Act, further restricting U.S. citizens from doing business in or with Cuba, and in 1999 President Bill Clinton amplified the

embargo by prohibiting foreign subsidiaries of U.S.-owned corporations from conducting trade with Cuba. In large part, continuation and extension of the embargo reflected the electoral power of the Cuban American community in the all-important state of Florida. The result was perpetuation of the most enduring trade embargo in modern history.

The idea behind this policy appears to be that strangulation of the Cuban economy would generate widespread discontent that would result in a popular uprising against the Castro regime, which would lead to its eventual downfall. As of early 2009, after nearly half a century, nothing of the kind had taken place. One reason, mentioned earlier, was that the most resourceful opposition to Castro was not in Cuba but in Florida: the exile leadership was absentee. Moreover, the embargo (or *bloqueo,* as it is known in Spanish, i.e., the "blockade") had enabled Castro and his colleagues to blame any and all economic setbacks and downturns on the U.S. government and its embargo. American policy thus became a useful scapegoat for the Cuban leadership.

POLICY EXPERIMENTATION AND REGIME CONSOLIDATION

After defeating the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, the revolutionaries could concentrate on the economic tasks facing the new Cuba. The central fact was that the Cuban economy revolved around exporting sugar, especially to the United States. The revolutionaries were determined to change that humiliating dependence. The chief architect was Ernesto "Che" Guevara, the Argentine physician-guerrilla who was the most creative theoretician among the revolutionaries. Guevara drew up a Four-Year Plan which called for agricultural diversification (a de-emphasis on sugar) and industrialization (the manufacture of light consumer goods). Cuba launched this ambitious plan amid great fanfare.

By 1962 the results had already proved disappointing. In part, Guevara and his youthful planners were reaping the whirlwind of the shortsighted policies of 1959–60. Sugar production had taken a plunge. In 1961 the Cubans had produced 6.8 million tons of sugar, the second highest harvest in Cuban history. This output merely disguised the deliberate neglect the government was showing to sugar. In 1962 the harvest dropped to 4.8 million tons and in 1963 it was only 3.8 million tons, the smallest since 1945. The fall was disastrous for export earnings.

The industrialization drive was also going badly. Cuba lacked the raw materials and expertise to rush into industrialization. Since 1960 the United States had enforced an economic embargo against Cuba, pressuring all U.S. firms (and their Latin American and European subsidiaries) to cease trade with Cuba. This embargo forced Cuba to depend largely on the Soviets and the Eastern bloc for equipment. Direction was to come from highly centralized planning bureaucracies, modeled after Soviet and Czech patterns. The effort was ineffective and expensive. Even the Russians seemed uneasy about underwriting a socialist utopia in the Caribbean.

In mid-1963 the Soviets put their foot down. The Cubans must slow down the industrialization drive and improve their planning. They must recognize Cuba's comparative advantage: sugar. Che Guevara resigned, confessing his errors. Fidel, ever on the initiative, now embraced sugar, which he had so recently spurned. In 1963 he announced that in 1970 (later labeled the "Year of the Decisive Endeavor") Cuba would break all records for sugar production: it would harvest 10 million tons. Like other plantation societies, Cuba thus fell into the trap of reliance on a single export crop.

Debate continued over strategies for economic development and political consolidation. Still active in the regime, Che Guevara argued for an "idealistic" strategy, a Maoist approach that would totally eliminate the market and material incentives. The economy would be fully collectivized and directed by a centralized planning authority. A radical break with the capitalist past would require a "new man," a Cuban who would work for moral rewards (decorations, public praise) and thus reflect a new, higher level of political consciousness. Here the Cuban leaders were going through the familiar dilemma of communist regimes: how to reconcile Marxist idealism with a pragmatic economic policy.

Guevara's idealists further argued that the construction of socialism at home required the aggressive promotion of revolution abroad. They wanted to prove that a guerrilla strategy could work throughout Latin America and perhaps the entire Third World.

Guevara's main opponent in this debate was Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, an economist and longtime Communist Party member. Rodríguez took a practical approach. He favored a more measured use of central planning, partial reliance on market mechanisms, and autonomy left to the individual enterprises. He thought state firms should have to account for their expenses and earnings. In short, Rodríguez and his allies proposed a more conventional path, relying on material incentives instead of only moral ones. They favored also a strong party and a "flexible" policy toward Latin America. This meant a willingness to deal with regimes that Guevara saw only as targets for revolutionary opposition.

While the arguments went on, Cuba was returning to sugar. Economic production was nonetheless disappointing. The year 1964 yielded a 9 percent growth rate for most of the economy, but that was primarily a catch-up from the declines of 1961–63. In 1965 the figure slipped to 1.5 percent, less than the rate of population growth, and in 1966 became negative again (–3.7 percent). Indecision in basic policymaking was not building a dynamic socialism.

At this point Fidel brought the debate to an end by endorsing Che Guevara's idealism. Cuba would make a gigantic collective effort accompanied by moral incentives. This immediately increased Fidel's own power, since he himself took charge of the now strengthened central planning apparatus. He and his trusted lieutenants plunged into the minutiae of economic management. The atmosphere recalled the early romantic days of the Revolution—endless rhetoric, euphoric dreams, celebration of the selfless "new man."

Fidel Castro addresses a rally in the early 1960s; the doves, frequently used as a political symbol, represent the idea of a society at peace. (Center for Cuban Studies, New York.)

Along with this idealistic mobilization at home went a stepped-up commitment to revolution abroad. Cuba sought out guerrilla movements across Latin America, offering arms, training, and expertise. Che Guevara spearheaded the drive. Always a heroic figure, Che became the nemesis of the CIA and the Latin American military. Unfortunately for Che, however, he chose the *altiplano* (highlands) of Bolivia to start the spread of his "many Vietnams" in South America and there met death in 1967 at the hands of U.S.-trained Bolivian Ranger troops.

By 1968 Fidel was pulling back from the Guevarist line. There had already been signs that Che did not get full support from Havana during his ill-fated campaign in Bolivia. By supporting the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Fidel signaled a return to Soviet orthodoxy. He then began to downplay the export of revolution.

On the domestic front, however, Guevarist policies continued intact. The spring of 1968 saw a "revolutionary offensive." The remainder of the private sector was nationalized, consumption was subordinated to investment, and Cubans were exhorted to give their all to reach the omnipresent target of 10 million tons of sugar in 1970.

The magic year came, and all of Cuba was mobilized to cut cane. Everything was sacrificed to release labor for the cane fields. Sensing that the target was

distant, the authorities left some of the 1969 harvest in the fields, hoping to improve the 1970 figure. It was no use—the *zafra* reached only 8.5 million tons. It was a prodigious total, the largest in Cuban history, but it still fell short of its much-touted goal. So much propaganda, so many promises. It was a mortal blow for the "voluntaristic" philosophy of Che. The psychological toll was enormous. But Fidel, ever resourceful, was about to change policies again.

Consolidating the Regime

The failure of the 10-million-ton effort made Fidel's about-face easier. Everyone could see that the "idealistic" model had failed. On July 26, 1970 Fidel confessed all. In a marathon speech ("Let the Shame Be Welcome"), Castro took on his own shoulders the responsibility for the quixotic crusade for the super-harvest. He offered to resign, but the crowds cried no. The economic failure was obliterated by revolutionary theater.

Cuban policy now turned more pragmatic. First, there were to be new management and planning systems and more use of "profits" as a basis for decision making. Second, the private sector was to be given a greater role in both agriculture and services. Third, wages and salaries would now be linked to output, with premiums for needed skills. Finally, there was to be greater economic interaction with the West.

This more conventional economic policy was accompanied by a similar shift in institutional policy. The Communist Party was now strengthened; the unions and other mass organizations were reorganized and given a greater role. This move toward greater "orthodoxy" (i.e., closer resemblance to Soviet practice) affected culture as well. Central controls over education and the mass media were tightened.

In early 1971 Fidel launched furious attacks on "former friends" of the Revolution who had charged that Fidel's personalistic regime was leading Cuba toward economic defeat. In addition, Fidel cracked down on the Cuban artistic scene by arresting the internationally known writer Heberto Padilla. Apparently under coercion, Padilla was forced to confess crimes against the Revolution. He later repeated his mea culpa before a writers' conference, which set the tone for a tougher standard of political loyalty now expected of all artists in revolutionary Cuba. Use of the police to enforce political conformity brought back unpleasant memories of recent dictators.

Part and parcel of this policy shift was an increasing approximation of Soviet models of economic and political decision making. It had been under way for several years, but the shift in domestic policy now made Cuba's overall stance more consistent. Radical experimentation was over. The inevitable logic of Cuba's enormous economic and military dependence on the Soviets was being played out. Fidel was now a reliable ally of the USSR in the Third World. The Cuban Revolution was approaching the Soviet model more closely than ever before.

Cuba thus settled into an extreme economic dependence on the USSR, one that bore much resemblance to her onetime dependence on the United States.

Although the exact total was difficult to calculate, it probably equaled about one-quarter of the Cuban gross national product (GNP). The integration of trade with the Eastern bloc was close to what it had once been with the United States. Had Cuba merely traded one brand of dependency for another? Yet the ties to the Soviet Union did not produce the direct ownership which had created such a nationalist backlash against U.S. economic penetration before 1959.

What were the consequences of this new dependency? We know that Fidel had echoed the Soviet-line denunciation of the Solidarity movement in Poland and praised the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Cuba sent more than 30,000 troops and social service personnel to support a Marxist regime in Angola. Some observers suggested that Cuba had produced a new hybrid regime of "state capitalism." In one key respect, Fidel's regime had shown little change. He constantly promised more meaningful public participation, but actual rule remained top down and the final voice was always his. Ironically, applying Marxist dogma in the Caribbean had produced Latin America's most durable *caudillo*. The profound social revolution in Cuba had been possible only because of Soviet military protection and economic aid. It remains unclear whether Cubans had more bargaining power with Moscow than they once had with Washington, since Soviet-Cuban relations occurred in far greater secrecy than had relations with the United States. The Cubans, who often acted against Soviet wishes, achieved brilliant military victories over the South African army in Africa and, as a result, won much praise in the Third World.

The Revolution brought many changes to Cuba. Socialist Cuba's greatest triumphs have been in serving basic human needs. Illiteracy has been wiped out, and a comprehensive school system has been created. Its teaching content is, not surprisingly, highly ideological, designed to inculcate the new socialist values. Basic health care, especially preventive care, has been extended to the lower sectors. Medical training has been geared to public health. Food distribution, always one of the most shocking reflections of social inequality, has been guaranteed by rationing. The result is that life expectancy rose from sixty-three years in 1960 to seventy-eight in 2007, and the infant mortality rate fell by more than two-thirds in the same period.

Race relations underwent major improvements as well. In Cuba, as elsewhere, the legacy of slavery had been extensive racial prejudice. Whites occupied the topmost social rungs, mulattoes were in the middle, and blacks were at the bottom. Given the determination to rectify social injustice, Fidelista policies enabled Cuba's blacks to acquire education and advance in careers on the basis of merit. Afro-Cubans climbed to notably high ranks within the armed forces. Because of these improvements, the black community in Cuba remained as one of Fidel's most loyal bastions of political support.

The role of women has been another area of significant change. The tradition of *machismo* has proved a major obstacle to the feminist movement. To take a striking example, by mid-1980 only 19 percent of the Communist Party members and applicants for membership were women. Nonetheless, the Federation of

Cuban Women (Federación de Mujeres Cubanas, or FMC) has gone a long way toward changing opinion and behavior. The number of women in higher education and professional schools (especially medicine, where female students now outnumber males) has increased sharply. The FMC was instrumental in getting adopted in 1975 an egalitarian family code which obligated husbands to do half of all family chores. Any viewer of the Cuban film *Portrait of Teresa* knows that this and other feminist goals will not be easily reached in Cuba. Despite the perceptible change in Cuban attitudes, married women, especially those with children, have found it difficult to enter the full-time labor force. One reason is the cost and inconvenience of child care.

Housing was the other basic need that had been so unequally distributed before 1959. Here the revolutionaries had trouble making rapid progress. It was easy enough to expropriate the residences of the wealthy and give them to special groups (like students). But new construction was slower and more expensive. In the short run, investment in new housing was not seen as a top priority.

Ironically enough, one of Cuba's greatest economic failures was in agriculture. In the early years of the Revolution, that was understandable. The guerrillas were eager to repudiate Cuba's longtime bondage to a single export crop. Even after the turn toward economic realism in 1963, food production lagged. According to a United Nations study, Cuba's agricultural performance for 1961–76 was tied with that of Chile for the worst in Latin America. After 1976 farm output grew at a healthy rate, but by the end of the 1990s, there were desperate food shortages.

Although Cuba reached the 1990s without the signs of mass discontent that doomed communism in East Europe, the strain had started to show. In May 1987 the deputy chief of the Cuban air force and a hero of the Bay of Pigs climbed into a plane and defected to Florida. In June 1989 a heavier blow fell. The army's most respected leader, General Arnaldo Ochoa Sánchez, architect of brilliant battlefield victories over South African forces when Cuba fought to consolidate the communist regime in Angola, was tried and executed, along with three other high officers. The charges were drug running and embezzlement. Many asked how officers who had enjoyed Fidel's closest confidence could have organized such a vast conspiracy without the knowledge of a leader who possessed a legendary appetite for administrative detail. Or was this a way of eliminating a potential rival for ultimate power?

A key to the Revolution's survival would be the ability to institutionalize the revolutionary process. The basic challenge was to transform leadership from a tiny elite of guerrilla veterans and party faithful to a growing base of loyal supporters. The most obvious means was to broaden the base of the Communist Party. In 1975 this process began. Under the banner of "popular participation," grassroots elections for regional assemblies were held. Yet by the mid-1990s Cubans were still complaining about a highly centralized, bureaucratized, inefficient state apparatus.

THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE (1990–PRESENT)

After 1990 Cuba underwent a painful reality check as the foreign underpinning of its economy vanished. The collapse of the USSR and of Comecon (the foreign trade authority for the USSR and Eastern Europe) brutally exposed Cuba's economic vulnerability. By 1992 all Russian economic and military aid was gone. Oil shipments fell 86 percent from 1989 to 1992, while food imports dropped 42 percent in almost the same period. Vital equipment, such as buses, once supplied by Eastern Europe, now languished for lack of replacement parts. General economic activity fell by at least 29 percent between 1989 and 1993. Cuba suffered an economic blow greater than any (including the Great Depression) experienced in Latin America in the twentieth century.

Dissolution of the Soviet bloc imposed enormous strains upon the island. It brought a sudden end to Moscow's economic subsidies and, more important, to commercial links with Comecon. Cuba thus faced what analysts called a "double embargo"—one reflecting the longtime policy of the United States, the other resulting from the implosion of the USSR. The demise of the USSR also brought an end to thirty years of Soviet support for Cuba's political sovereignty. Ominous warnings from the Cuban American community in Miami about plans to "retake" the island by force acquired a new sense of plausibility. Isolated by Washington and abandoned by Moscow, Cuba found itself in an extremely vulnerable position.

Fidelista leadership forged a double-edged response. One part was to hunker down: to assert the integrity of the Cuban Revolution, to stress the importance of national unity, and to maintain a commitment to socialist ideals. As a matter of fact, Cuba was virtually the only former member of the Soviet bloc that retained a one-party communist system. The other part involved modest political reforms. Direct elections for the national legislature (Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular) were introduced in 1992. Procedures for selecting local and provincial representatives were thereafter opened up as well. Restrictions on religious organizations were relaxed, and, in the aftermath of a visit by Pope John Paul II in 1998, the Roman Catholic Church assumed a significant role in national life. In these and other ways, Cuba's leadership made significant efforts to strengthen the legitimacy of the regime.

Tolerance of dissent remained a delicate issue. The regime carefully permitted the existence of a "legal" opposition and allowed writers, artists, and athletes to cultivate international links and travel abroad. Yet it also imposed harsh penalties on the "illegal" opposition that echoed U.S. government demands for "regime change," which, in effect, meant overthrow of the political system. It has been estimated that Cuba holds between 100 and 1000 political prisoners.

A major crisis emerged in 2006, when Fidel Castro underwent an emergency operation for gastrointestinal complications. Could the Revolution survive without its "maximum leader," the only president that it had ever had? Fidel responded by "temporarily" stepping down and handing over power to his deputy and younger brother Raúl. Fidel also assigned key responsibilities to

The Saga of Elián González

Cuba's economic crisis of the early 1990s prompted a large number of Cubans to sail to the Florida coast on improvised vessels or homemade rafts (*balsas*). The crossings led to many deaths and created an immediate humanitarian crisis. In response, the two governments reached an agreement under which Cubans intercepted at sea are sent back to Cuba, while those who make it to American soil are permitted to remain in the United States. This came to be known as the "wet-foot, dry-foot" policy.

This imperfect but workable arrangement came under severe pressure in a highly publicized case involving child custody, political maneuvering, and national pride. In November 1999 a little boy named Elián González, his mother, her boyfriend, and others left Cuba in an aluminum boat. The engine failed amid rough seas, the vessel sank, and most passengers died. The boy and two survivors floated in an inner tube until they were rescued by fishermen and turned over to the U.S. Coast Guard. This was a clear case of "wet-foot" apprehension.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) temporarily released Elián to his paternal great-uncle, Lázaro González. The boy's father, Juan Miguel González, had in the meantime notified Lázaro by telephone from Cuba that the mother and his son were missing. Backed by Cuban American leaders, however, Lázaro claimed that the boy should stay in the United States—rather than go back to Cuba.

Wrangling followed under the glare of intensive media coverage. Elián's father and both grandmothers came from Cuba to plead for his return. The U.S.-based relatives countered by seeking legal asylum for the boy. A federal judge denied the petition. Miami-Dade County authorities vowed to resist official efforts at repatriation. Elián went to Disney World one day, and met with political figures the next.

Seeking to enforce the court ruling, Attorney General Janet Reno ordered the return of Elián to his father by no later than April 13, 2000. Defiant Miami relatives kept the boy in a house surrounded by protesters and police. A week after the deadline, Reno authorized a raid by SWAT-equipped officers of the U.S. Border Patrol. Onlookers protested and a chaotic melee ensued. Crowds jammed a ten-block area of Miami's Little Havana district, police were deployed in riot gear, and tear gas filled the air.

An obviously happy Elián was reunited with his father but had to remain in the United States while the Miami relatives exhausted their legal options. A circuit court eventually ruled that the relatives lacked the legal standing to seek asylum on his behalf. In June 2000, nearly a half year after the saga began, the U.S. Supreme Court let the circuit court decision stand. Later that same day, Elián González and his father finally returned to Cuba.

Throughout the case, elected U.S. officials from both political parties were attacked for getting involved in what some people regarded as a private family matter. Wrote a columnist in the *Washington Post*: "Elián and Juan Miguel González, son and father. The former is an innocent child, the latter a man whose boy was taken from him. Elián has behaved like a typical 6-year-old, Juan Miguel like a typical father. And most of the politicians like typical fools."

other aspiring leaders, including such young figures as Carlos Lage and Felipe Pérez Roque. And then in February 2008—days before the National Assembly was due to elect the president—Fidel announced that he would not accept another term, and Raúl was duly elected. Although Raúl lacks Fidel's charisma and popular appeal, he expresses a realistic and pragmatic sense of national needs. More to the point, Cuba's political institutions managed to survive a major challenge.

On the positive side, the Soviet departure facilitated the reopening of Cuba's diplomatic relations with nations of the Americas, most of which were either democratic or embarked on paths of democratization. Three nations of the hemisphere—Canada, Mexico, and Venezuela—became especially prominent partners in trade and investment. (It did not escape international notice that Canada and Mexico were founding NAFTA members.) As Hugo Chávez intensified efforts to forge "twenty-first-century socialism," Venezuela began providing Cuba with low-cost oil and abundant foreign exchange in return for the service of thousands of teachers and doctors. Largely as a result of the Chavista subsidies, in fact, Cuba began to register very high rates of growth.

Figure 5.2 offers a broad summation of Cuba's overall economic performance since 1990. The gross domestic product (GDP) dropped sharply at first, plunging to −15 percent in 1993. Thereafter came a decade-long modest recovery, with consistent and positive rates of growth (sometimes over 5 percent). And with strong support from Venezuela, Cuba enjoyed a brief "boom" in 2005–7, as the growth rate exceeded 12 percent in 2006. One way or another, Cuba was managing to navigate its way through this era of uncertainty.

Notwithstanding the end of the Cold War, the United States continued its strident opposition to the Cuban regime. After the Soviet threat disappeared, Washington focused its wrath on the persistence of one-party rule. In October 2003 the George W. Bush administration went so far as to create a shadow

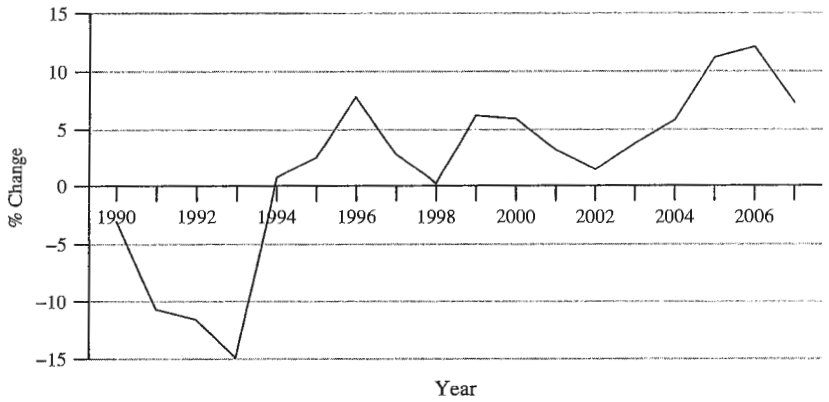


Figure 5.2 Cuba: Annual Percentage Change in GDP, 1990–2007

SOURCE: CEPALSTAT: Latin America and the Caribbean Statistics (http://www.eclac.org/estadisticas/bases/).

government, a so-called Commission for the Assistance of a Free Cuba (CAFC) that was intended to "help prepare the U.S. government to provide effective assistance to a free Cuba" and to step up the enforcement of sanctions. The following year led to a tightening of restrictions on travel and remittances. And in 2007, the CAFC reiterated persistent U.S. official demands for "regime change" in Cuba as a precondition for relaxation of sanctions.

The U.S. embargo remained firmly in place under Bush, but not without increasing controversy. For the seventeenth straight year, the UN General Assembly adopted in October 2008 a nonbinding measure urging termination of the embargo—by a vote of 185-3-2 (Israel and the Pacific island state of Palau sided with the United States in opposition, while Micronesia and the Marshall Islands abstained). American business interests also expressed mounting frustration with the embargo, since it prevented U.S. companies from seizing potentially lucrative opportunities for trade and investment in Cuba—and left the field clear for European and other competitors. Time was running out for Cold War leftover policies.

It was in this atmosphere of uncertainty that Cubans marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Revolution on January 1, 2009. Apart from obligatory displays of posters and flags, the event gave rise to little fanfare. An ailing Fidel did not take part. Plans for an ambitious celebration were toned down in light of major damage from three hurricanes. Raúl Castro led the main gathering in the eastern city of Santiago, praising the regime's survival "despite the unhealthy and vindictive hatred of the powerful neighbor." Effervescent Cuban citizens hugged and kissed and drank on New Year's Day, while children ran and played in the streets. One observer, a reflective middle-aged man, expressed faith in change of leadership—not only in Cuba but also in the United States, with the inauguration of Barack Obama as the U.S. president. "We are hoping and counting on things getting better," he said. Only time would tell if he was right.