

S E C O N D E D I T I O N

*Louis A.
Pérez, Jr.*

Cuba

*Between Reform
& Revolution*

1
CUBA

Between Reform and Revolution

SECOND EDITION

Louis A. Pérez, Jr.

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To the friends who gather at Café Don José:
For all the years of Friday afternoons

Preface and Acknowledgments

I

It happened quite suddenly, and so quickly, all quite improbably: a revolution overthrew a repressive regime, to the general approval and acclaim of all. Within the space of twenty-four months, Cuba had been transformed into the first Marxist-Leninist state in the Western Hemisphere and the first New World nation to align itself totally and unabashedly with the Soviet Union—all this occurring ninety miles from the United States, in a region traditionally secure as a North American sphere of influence, in a country historically secure as a North American client state.

And the question arose immediately, and persisted subsequently: why? "It is yet too early to say with finality," wrote Russell H. Fitzgibbon in 1961, "just why a revolution of the nature and extent of that in Cuba should have come to that country rather than to any of half a dozen others in Latin America." Stanislaw Andreski formulated the question in two parts: "Why did Castro's rebellion break out and why did it succeed?" Ramón E. Ruiz concluded that "no one can say precisely why a radical upheaval engulfed the island in 1959." John Fagg asked rhetorically: "How had such a dismaying situation come about?" Robert Freeman Smith asked: "What happened in Cuba?" In similar terms, Frank Tannenbaum mused in 1969: "Just why this profound tragedy has come to afflict the Cuban people . . . will always remain a matter of dispute."

The developments that transformed Cuba into a singular New World phenomenon were without precedent, without parallel. But they were not without an internal logic, the most salient elements of which served to confirm the essential historicity of the Cuban revolutionary experience. The proposition of revolution was not new. Its antecedents reached deep and ran wide through the Cuban past, back to the very sources of Cuban nationality. Whether in the name of liberty, or equality, or justice, Cu-

bans of diverse origins—men and women, people of color, poor whites, rich whites—on one occasion or another, often in concert but just as often in conflict, mobilized to challenge the premise and practice of iniquitous authority. These themes dominate Cuban history, and recur with remarkable regularity, slightly modified from time to time, to be sure, with different emphases here and there. In the main, however, the basic issues shaping the course of Cuban history have remained fundamentally fixed and firm.

Constant too has been the ideological duality that has characterized competing versions of *cubanidad*—between, on one hand, liberal constructs of *patria* and, on the other, radical formulations of nationality. This dualism has been one of the principal sources of tension in Cuban history, for it has served to give content and context to rival versions of liberty, and equality, and justice. In its principal derivative embodiments, the dichotomy determined the form and function of Cuban mobilization—between politics and arms, class and mass, reform and revolution.

This dualism, in turn, was itself acted upon and acted out within a larger context of successive dependent relations with more powerful patron states—where indeed the very terms of those relationships were often at the source of the conflict. The ideal of self-determination, in all its historic manifestations—autonomy, self-government, independence, and sovereignty—has loomed large over the national experience. Indeed, much of Cuban history was shaped by the circumstances under which the island was integrated into hegemonial relationships, the means by which it adjusted to dependent relations, and its efforts to revise the terms of dependency.

These circumstances, further, served to impede the development of autonomous political structures, and in turn reduced considerably the range of responses available to Cubans to resolve internal differences. Rarely were political disputes settled wholly among Cubans, entirely on their own terms, completely according to their own needs. Political elites were typically linked to and dependent upon the support of outside powers, in whose behalf they often functioned and upon whose patronage they frequently depended. A political challenge to local powerholders represented at one and the same time a challenge to the foreign powers that backed them. The affirmation of self-government was potentially no less an act of self-determination. The issue of nationalism, hence, became inseparable from the question of political change. Under certain circumstances, nationalism in Cuba could serve as a social value of irresistible

appeal, unifying disparate and otherwise incompatible class interests and into which was subsumed the expectation of increased opportunity for social mobility, improved economic status, and greater political participation. Nationalism could serve as an agent of political change, as well as be its effect. In either case, Cuban nationalism emerged out of the dissident sectors of the body politic, who in the pursuit of political change were often also obliged to confront the question of nationality in a larger context of shifting international relations. This reality defined the character of the political exchange and the context of social change. It influenced the way Cubans looked at themselves and at the world, who was seen as a possible adversary or as perceived as a potential ally.

Cuba passed successively from colonial status under Spain to a client role with the United States to dependency under the Soviet Union. These relationships, each at its own turn, each in its own way, penetrated Cuban society deeply. Each relied on and underwrote the ascendancy of quite different dominant classes; each produced a profound realignment in the internal balance of social forces. All exercised a decisive influence on Cuban economic policy, political institutions, state structures, and international relations.

But these influences, however pervasive, were not total. Cubans learned to exploit the limits of hegemony to their advantage and with considerable skill and success. They revealed consistently a particular genius and vast resourcefulness in creating spheres of autonomy within the constraints of hegemonial relationships and through which they pursued interests that were singularly and substantively Cuban.

The influence of sugar, on the other hand, was pervasive and total. It summoned into existence a plantation economy and the attending banes of monoculture, chattel slavery, and large-scale production for export. The social composition of the Cuban population was permanently changed. Sugar shaped property relations, class structures, land tenure forms, labor systems, the process of capital accumulation, the pattern of investment, the priorities of domestic policies, the course and content of Cuban trade and commerce, and the conduct of Cuban foreign relations. In the end, sugar shaped the national character.

But if the history of Cuba is, as Fernando Ortiz was fond of saying, the history of sugar, it is also a chronicle of a people locked in relentless struggle against the by-products of their history: against slavery and racism, against inequality and injustice, against uncertainty and insecurity. Against, above all, the conditions that made Cuba peculiarly vulnerable

to the dictates of the market and the metropolis and out of which was forged Cuban nationality. These elements have served as fixed correlates of the Cuban national experience, past and present.

II

In the course of completing this study, I have drawn heavily on the knowledge, talents, and wisdom of others. Over nearly two decades of research on Cuban history, I have benefited from the courtesy and attention of the professional staffs of a number of libraries and archives, including the Library of Congress, the Biblioteca Nacional "José Martí," the New York Public Library, the University of Florida Library, the Center for Cuban Studies, the National Archives in Washington, and the Archivo Nacional in Havana. Most of all, I am grateful to the staff and personnel of the University of South Florida Library for years of support and assistance. If it be not invidious to limit this acknowledgement, the staff of one department in particular should be mentioned. The personnel in the inter-library loan office, including Jana S. Futch, Marykay Hartung, Cheryl D. Ruppert, Monica Metz-Wiseman, and Gale V. Vaccaro, provided indispensable assistance through the course of the research and writing of this book.

It is necessary also to acknowledge the enormity of my debt to Cecile L. Pulin. From the first draft of the first chapter, and for weeks and months thereafter, without stop, she presided over the preparation of the manuscript. I do not dare to think at what stage this study would be were it not for the constancy of her support.

I owe a great deal also to Sylvia E. Wood, who assisted with proof-reading, reviewed the tables, and otherwise tied up all loose ends associated with the final preparation of the completed draft. In this regard, I am also grateful to Nita C. Desai for her assistance with the completion of early drafts of the manuscript. Whatever else was required during the preparation and completion of manuscript was done by Peggy Cornett. She has been an indefatigable collaborator over the years, resolving crises as they occurred and, more important, preventing many more from occurring at all.

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to colleagues who gave of their time to read the manuscript in the course of its writing. They are mainly friends, too, for upon whom else would one inflict the unremunerated

task of reading an unfinished manuscript, at various stages of writing, and sometimes more than once? Nancy M. White read an early version of the first chapter and guided me in my efforts to understand something of pre-Columbian Cuba. She made many helpful suggestions, about both the text and my assumptions, and as a result the former was modified immediately and the latter changed permanently. Jules R. Benjamin provided thoughtful comments on the material dealing with post-revolutionary Cuba. I have benefited greatly from his own research and very much appreciate his critical perspectives on mine. Jorge I. Domínguez read the final draft of the later chapters and responded with helpful and constructive comments, for which I am most appreciative. I am grateful also to Thomas P. Dilkes, whose observations were helpful in the completion of the last several chapters. To Rebecca J. Scott my appreciation for her efforts in my behalf is heartfelt. Her willingness to respond so openly, so fully, and in such detail, with enthusiasm, to the formulations that follow has left me deeply in her debt. This has been an exhilarating collaboration, demonstrating, among other things, that divergent styles and interests are indeed more than compatible. I am only too conscious of the inadequacy of an acknowledgement of a friend who gave unstintingly to this project, and in the process influenced much of what follows. The manuscript also benefited from a critical and sympathetic reading by Nancy A. Hewitt. She made detailed comments on the text and raised thoughtful questions about the interpretations. As a non-specialist in Cuban history she was in a unique position to concentrate almost entirely on the internal logic of the narrative and the assumptions upon which it rested. In this instance, as so often in the past, I am grateful for the constancy of her collaboration and companionship. Marifeli Pérez-Stable read the chapters dealing with the twentieth century, and suggested improvements throughout the text. But the value of her contribution to the completion of this book goes beyond the comments and criticisms written along the margins of the typescript. Through hours of conversation, over weeks and months, on matters substantive and anecdotal, personal and professional, she has given me new understanding of the meaning of the Cuban revolution. What has made her insights so compelling is that her commitment is not uncritical and her understanding of what is desirable is tempered by an appreciation of what is possible. Going up and down in elevators and over more than one *café con leche*, my appreciation of the value of her friendship has deepened. Finally, a special acknowledgment of appreciation to Stephanie Sakson-Ford at Oxford University.

Press, who made innumerable suggestions, and as many queries, all of which helped to improve the narrative and sharpen the analysis.

It becomes necessary at this point to acknowledge that as hard as friends and colleagues tried to eliminate propositions with which they did not agree, and for reasons that I understood, I did not heed their counsel every time. I want to assure them, however, that their suggestions were indeed considered each time. We simply disagreed, but that disagreement has helped to give this book the form it has taken. I can only hope that they will find the final product worthy of the assistance they so generously provided. It is understood that their sustained efforts in my behalf free them of any responsibility for particular statements and arguments that I have stubbornly refused to modify. And, of course, their generosity does not make them in any way responsible for whatever errors persist on the following pages.

This book is dedicated to a special group of friends who, over many years, and through many ups and downs, has been at the center of what has made the Department of History at the University of South Florida so special to me. I am especially mindful of the largest debt of all, that which accrues from receiving the unconditional affection and constant support of friends. And for this, I am enormously grateful to Thomas P. Dilkes, Nancy A. Hewitt, Robert and Joële Ingalls, Georg and Esther Kleine, Steven F. Lawson, Brenda and G. Kelly Tipps.

And a final word to my daughters, Amara and Maya, as they move through these years of their adolescence: they should know that they have become everything that I could have hoped for—and more.

Tampa, Florida
January 1988

L.A.P.

Preface to the Second Edition

The years since this book was first published have been a time of momentous change in Cuba, with far-reaching consequences, the effects of which will continue to reverberate through the 1990s and well beyond. The changes of the 1990s were no less dramatic than developments of the 1960s, and no less unpredictable. The world became a very different place during these years, and the effects of these changes inside Cuba called into question almost every assumption upon which socialism had evolved. Cuba had to adapt, often grudgingly, to new global realities, largely because it had few alternatives. The crisis of the early 1990s forced the government of Fidel Castro into the world market, and once there Cubans were obliged to modify internal economic organizations to international capitalist structures, changes that were themselves only the prelude to more change.

While international circumstances changed dramatically, regional conditions changed hardly at all. Cuba and the United States remained estranged. Indeed, the divide deepened. North American policy hardened against Cuba even as hardship in Cuba increased. These were complex issues, and not always rational ones. Clearly the improvement of the Cuban condition was directly related to improved relations with the United States, but it was not at all clear how or when or if relations would improve.

The completion of the second edition was aided by many of the same persons who gave unstintingly of their time and wisdom for the original edition. They know who they are, and they know too of my gratitude. Carole L. Rennick at the University of South Florida was enormously helpful in the preparation of the additional bibliographical material. I am also grateful to Rosalie Radcliffe in the Department of History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for her preparation of successive drafts of added text.

*Chapel Hill, North Carolina
March 1995*

L.A.P.

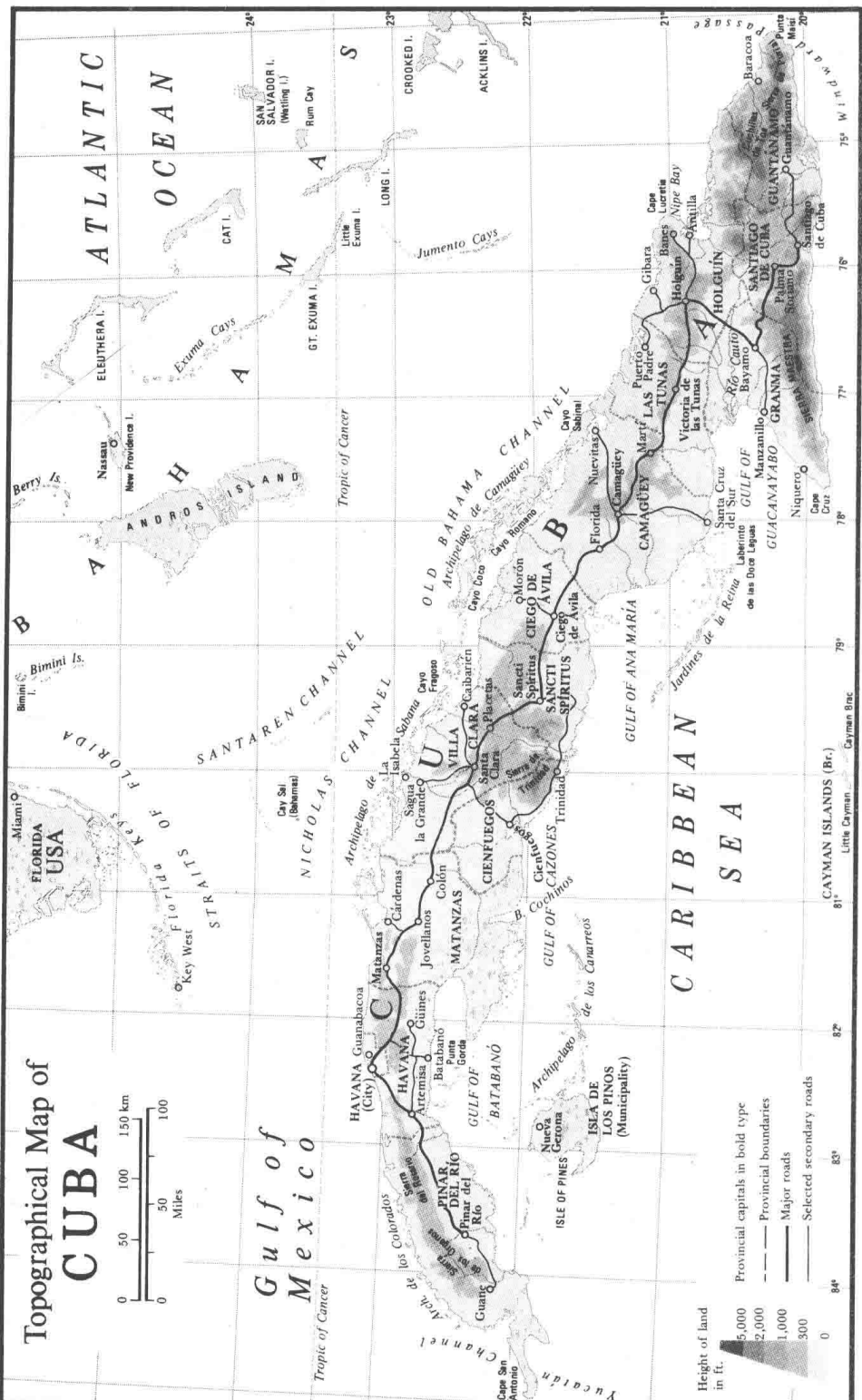
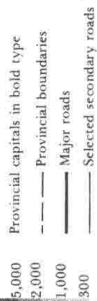
Topographical Map of CUBA



Gulf of Mexico

Tropic of Cancer

Height of land in ft.



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Cuba

Que tenga sabor a Cuba,
Que tenga sabor a son.

—Orquesta Aragón