

VIEWPOINTS / PUNTOS DE VISTA

A HISTORY OF THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

AVIVA CHOMSKY



 WILEY-BLACKWELL

A History of the Cuban Revolution

Aviva Chomsky



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A History of the Cuban Revolution

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The books in this series will introduce students to the most significant themes and topics in Latin American history. They represent a novel approach to designing supplementary texts for this growing market. Intended as supplementary textbooks, the books will also discuss the ways in which historians have interpreted these themes and topics, thus demonstrating to students that our understanding of our past is constantly changing, through the emergence of new sources, methodologies, and historical theories. Unlike monographs, the books in this series will be broad in scope and written in a style accessible to undergraduates.

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Series Editor's Preface

Each book in the “Viewpoints/Puntos de Vista” series introduces students to a significant theme or topic in Latin American history. In an age in which student and faculty interest in the Global South increasingly challenges the old focus on the history of Europe and North America, Latin American history has assumed an increasingly prominent position in undergraduate curricula.

Some of these books discuss the ways in which historians have interpreted these themes and topics, thus demonstrating that our understanding of our past is constantly changing, through the emergence of new sources, methodologies, and historical theories. Others offer an introduction to a particular theme by means of a case study or biography in a manner easily understood by the contemporary, non-specialist reader. Yet others give an overview of a major theme that might serve as the foundation of an upper-level course.

What is common to all of these books is their goal of historical synthesis. They draw on the insights of generations of scholarship on the most enduring and fascinating issues in Latin American history, while also making use of primary sources as appropriate. Each book is written by a specialist in Latin American history who is concerned with undergraduate teaching, yet who has also made his or her mark as a first-rate scholar.

The books in this series can be used in a variety of ways, recognizing the differences in teaching conditions at small liberal arts colleges, large public universities, and research-oriented institutions with doctoral programs. Faculty have particular needs depending on whether

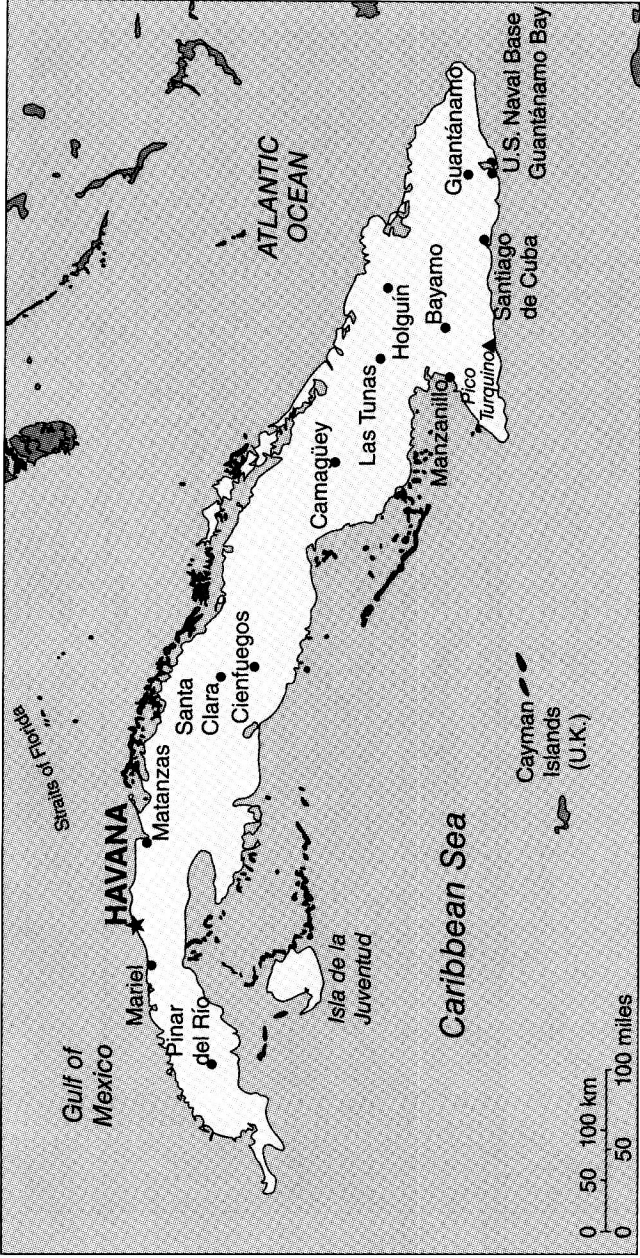
they teach large lectures with discussion sections, small lecture or discussion-oriented classes, or large lectures with no discussion sections, and whether they teach on a semester or trimester system. The format adopted for this series fits all of these different parameters.

This volume is one of the two inaugural books in the “Viewpoints/Puntos de Vista series. In *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, Avi Chomsky provides a compelling and fascinating synthesis of the Cuban Revolution – the first socialist revolution in the Americas, and significant in world history for its role in the Cold War. Drawing on historical literature and primary sources from both Cuba and the United States, the author takes the reader on a historical tour, from the beginning of the Revolution in the Sierra Maestra mountains up to the present day. Along the way she includes not only the preeminent actors in the drama – Fulgencio Batista, Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, Dwight Eisenhower, J.F.K., Robert Kennedy, and many others – but she also covers the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Cuban Missile Crisis, issues of immigration and emigration, political culture, and the social and cultural legacies of the Revolution in race, gender, and sexuality as well as in literature, film, music, dance, religion, sport, and food.

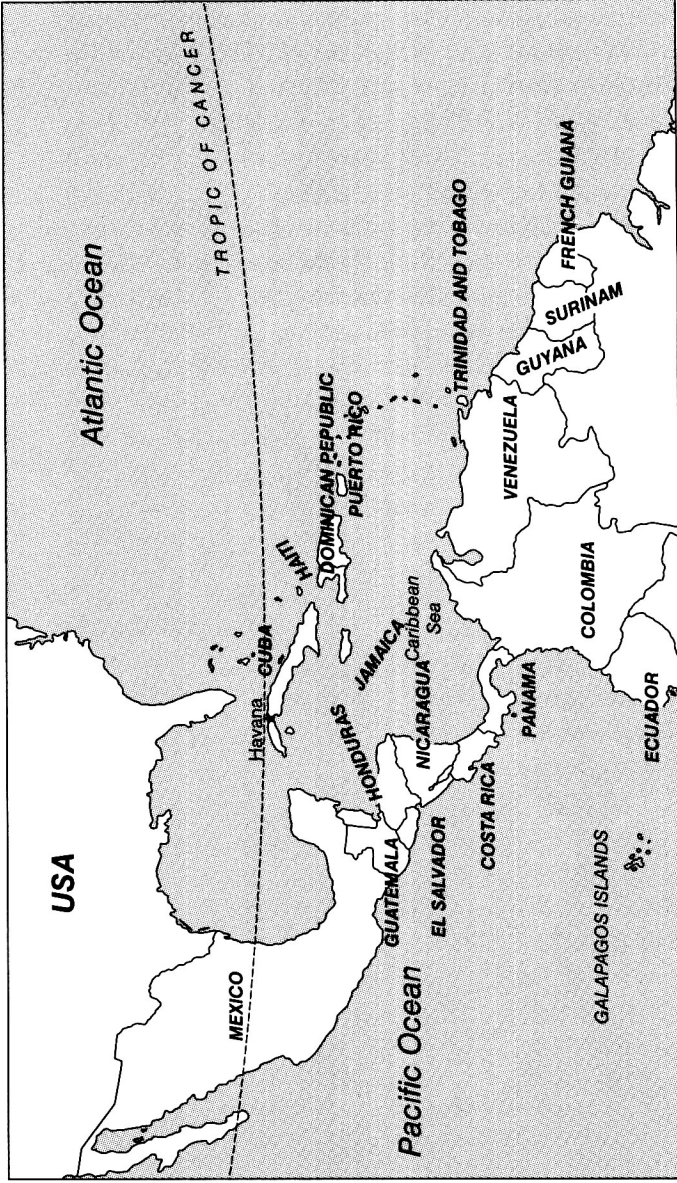
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Cuba with major cities



Cuba with respect to the Caribbean and the Americas

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Introduction

Rarely does popular opinion in the United States diverge so strikingly from scholarly analysis as in the case of the Cuban Revolution.

It's one of the few events in Latin American history that U.S. students have heard of. When I ask my students to come up with names of important figures in Latin American history, the only one that reliably emerges is that of Fidel Castro. And students are fairly unanimous in their opinions of Castro: "Dangerous," "evil," "bad," and "dictator" are the words they most commonly come up with to describe him. Survey results show that my students' positions are widely shared among the U.S. population: 98 percent of those surveyed in the United States had heard of Fidel Castro, and 82 percent had a negative opinion of him.¹

Fidel Castro has certainly inspired his share of scholarly attention, including numerous biographies. Some are by historians. Some are by journalists. One is by a doctor. There is even a graphic novel recounting Fidel's life. In a "spoken autobiography" the Cuban revolutionary recounted his own story of his life.²

Most serious studies of the Cuban Revolution, though, focus less on the figure of Fidel Castro and more on the process, the politics, and the people of the Cuban Revolution. Here we find a giant gap between what scholars, including historians, have to say, and what U.S. political leaders and the general public seem to believe. Most

historians frame the story of the Cuban Revolution with the long history of U.S. involvement in the island and in the rest of the Caribbean. But politicians and the general public have tended to see the USSR, rather than the United States, as the main factor explaining the nature of the Cuban Revolution. In this respect, U.S. scholars today have more in common with their Cuban counterparts than they do with the U.S. public.

Talking about Freedom

Both in Cuba and in the United States, the word “freedom” comes up frequently in describing Cuba’s history and current realities. It’s a word that incorporates many different meanings. U.S. policymakers tend to use it to refer to freedom for private enterprise, while for Cuban policymakers it generally means freedom from U.S. interference. This dichotomy is nothing new. “The Cuban people want to be free as much from the foreigners who abuse the flag as from the citizens who violate it and will end up burying it,” wrote a Cuban nationalist organization in the 1920s, referring to the U.S. political and economic domination of the island, and to the Cubans who collaborated with the foreigners.³ Around the same time, Cuban Communist Party founder Julio Antonio Mella published his pamphlet entitled *Cuba, A Nation That Has Never Been Free*.

And today, a billboard in Santa Clara proclaims “O libres para siempre o batallando siempre para ser libres,” over a painting of two giant hands, one black and one white, breaking free of a shackle (Figure I.1). “Either free forever, or forever fighting to be free.” The contemporary use of the image, and the quote by Cuban independence leader José Martí, clearly draws a parallel between Cuba’s struggle for independence from Spain, its struggle for the abolition of slavery and for racial equality, and its struggle for national independence in the current era in the face of U.S. threats. “Freedom,” a Cuban high school student at the “Martyrs of Kent” high school told U.S. educator Jonathan Kozol in 1976, “means when you are free of *international capitalistic exploitation!*”⁴