




THE WAR AND AFTER

 The death of Martí dealt a terrible blow to the revolutionary cause and was a tragedy for the Cuban people. The war went on, however; and Gómez and Maceo continued their guerrilla tactics until they had reached the western part of Cuba. They scored some decisive victories over the Spanish army and, within little more than a year, were in control of almost the whole of the Cuban countryside. The Spanish were still in control of the large cities and key strongholds, but they were in a virtual state of siege. Antonio Maceo was about to attack Havana itself when he



was killed in action on December 7, 1896. The Spanish army still outnumbered the rebels by about five to one, but the morale of the Spanish soldiers was low; after all, they were fighting far from home and under terrible conditions. Many of them died of disease, and all of them felt the hostility of the local populations, most of whom were on the side of the rebels.

Meanwhile, the political leadership of the revolution had passed into the hands of Tomás Estrada Palma, a distinguished Cuban exile in New York who had helped Martí organize the Cuban Revolutionary Party. Estrada Palma had always favored closer ties with the United States, and he had even moved the headquarters of the party to Washington, D.C., to be closer to the people he hoped to win over to the side of Cuba. In fact, he spent more time lobbying in the United States Congress than he did raising funds and supplies to support the revolution.

Estrada Palma's actions did not go over well with the rebel army. The army was composed primarily of poor farmers and former slaves—who wanted to be part of the postwar government—but their officers were in favor of a military junta. The people in favor of the republic that Martí had worked so hard to see established favored a democratically elected civilian government. So the



revolutionaries were hopelessly divided, and there was no one with Martí's skills and reputation to bring them together. Although the Liberation Army was now in reach of its goals, it was still desperately in need of arms and supplies to deliver the final blow that would defeat the Spanish army. At this point, the United States came forward to deliver the means of striking that final blow.

From the beginning of the Second War of Cuban Independence, as it was then called, the United States had refrained from recognizing Cuba's right to independence. Presidents Grover Cleveland and William McKinley favored Spain in the struggle because they thought that Spanish rule was best for American commercial interests. Most of the Cuban sugar industry was now in the hands of United States citizens, and Spain treated them most favorably.

However, now that it appeared that Spain was losing the war, President McKinley decided to step in to protect United States interests and to assure their preservation in an independent Cuba. The United States could have simply annexed Cuba, putting it directly under its control. This would have suited Estrada Palma and his Cuban Revolutionary Party. The trouble with this tactic was that the United States would have had to face the Liberation Army, which could mean a brand-new



war. The United States, therefore, decided to withdraw its support of Spain and not to annex Cuba. Its new policy was to help the revolutionaries by giving them aid and encouragement.

Then, on February 15, 1898, the United States battleship *Maine* blew up in Havana harbor, killing 260 people on board. The cause of the explosion remains a mystery, but the United States blamed it on Spain. American public opinion, which had already been largely pro-Cuban, turned violently anti-Spain. McKinley promptly recognized the independence of Cuba, demanding that Spain withdraw completely from the island. Spain of course refused, and McKinley asked Congress for a declaration of war, which was granted on April 25, 1898.

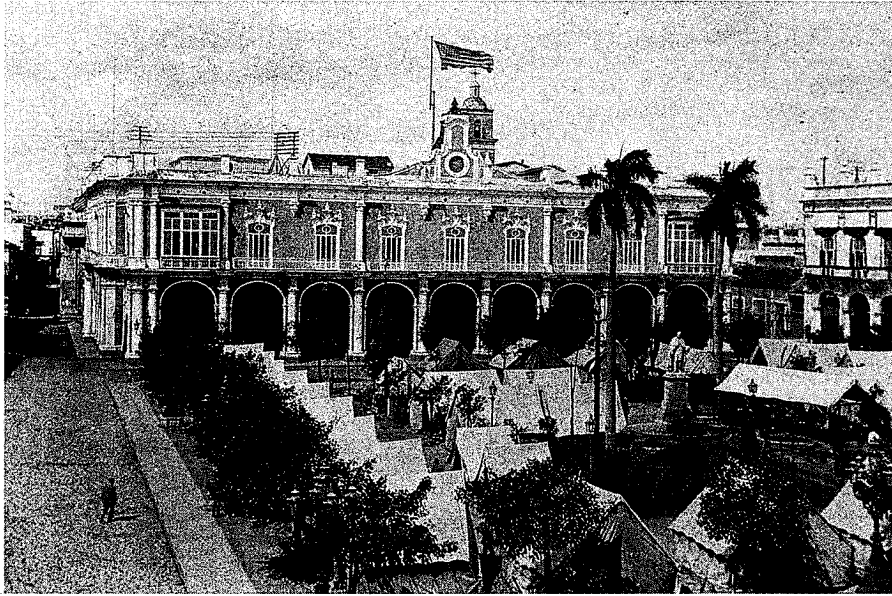
The Spanish-American War, as it is now called, lasted only three months. Spain was forced to surrender in the face of overwhelming American forces, particularly on the sea. Practically the entire Spanish fleet was destroyed in the harbor of Manila, Philippine Islands, and in the harbor of Santiago de Cuba. There was some heavy fighting on land, most notably at San Juan Hill, where Theodore Roosevelt gained fame by leading his Rough Riders in a charge up the hill. The United States government dealt directly with the Spanish government during the peace negotiations, as

though the Cuban Liberation Army had not existed. The United States has always taken credit for the defeat of the Spanish forces and the liberation of Cuba, which Cuban patriots stoutly deny. They feel strongly that Cuba was freed from Spanish domination by Cubans themselves, and not by the Yankees from the north.

The United States occupied Cuba for four years, from 1898 to 1902. The Cuban Revolutionary Party was no longer needed, and the Liberation Army ceased to exist. The new government that Martí had envisioned was never formed, and the United States took over all government and commercial functions. The wealthy landowners were restored to their old positions in the social and economic order of Cuba, and United States corporations were given generous trading rights. In short, everything that Martí had feared came to pass.

Before ending the occupation and leaving the island, the United States forced the new Cuban assembly to adopt the Platt Amendment to its new constitution. This amendment was named after United States Senator Orville Platt, who proposed that the United States had the right to supervise the Cuban government and to intervene in its affairs if it felt justified in doing so. It also gave the United States the right to maintain a naval base on





In 1908, American occupation troops camped in front of the Presidential Palace in Havana, Cuba.

Guantanamo Bay. All of this made Cuba virtually a United States protectorate. The United States also endorsed Estrada Palma as Cuba's first president, which virtually assured his election.

In 1906, President Estrada Palma was forced to resign after a revolt occurred over the fixing of his reelection, and the United States again stepped in to prevent civil disturbances. American forces remained in Cuba for three years. In 1912, an insurrection by African Cubans, who demanded the same civil rights as other Cubans, again gave the United States a reason to intervene in Cuban

affairs. Other minor interventions occurred in 1917 and 1920, both of them as the result of fraudulent elections. After the resignation of Estrada Palma as president, Cuba was governed by a series of weak and corrupt governments until General Gerardo Machado, who had fought in the War of Independence, was elected president in 1924.

At first, President Machado looked like the answer to Cuba's problems. His program included the rebuilding of a Cuba shattered by wars and corruption in government and the broadening of Cuba's economy. Unfortunately, a fall in the price of sugar and other economic problems led to strikes and demonstrations by workers and by students at Havana University. The government, of course, had to move to end the strikes and restore peace. This infuriated the strikers and students, and Machado took harsher steps to put them down. His government, and especially his police force, became more and more repressive.

In 1928, a Machado-controlled legislature voted to give him six more years in office, and he became, in reality, a dictator. The university students formed a secret organization in opposition to Machado and began resorting to assassinations and gun battles in the streets of Havana with Machado's brutal police. The United States could



have intervened once again under the terms of the Platt Amendment. However, the situation was so heated that the government in Washington, D.C., hesitated to enter into it for fear of being drawn into a full-scale war with Cuba. The American ambassador to Cuba, Sumner Welles, tried to convince Machado to step down. This angered the students and workers even more because they wanted to deal with Machado themselves. Machado finally gave in and went into exile in 1933.

The Platt Amendment had long been criticized by Latin Americans as no more than a tool of "Yankee imperialism," and there was much opposition to it in the United States as well. With the downfall of Machado, Cubans experienced a wave of national pride and demanded that the Platt Amendment be done away with. The United States was in the midst of its worst depression ever, and it had enough troubles without opposing popular feelings at home and abroad. The Platt Amendment was withdrawn from the Cuban constitution in May 1934, under the terms of a treaty between the United States and Cuba and as part of the United States' wish to promote its new good-neighbor policy toward Latin America. The United States, however, was allowed to keep its naval base on Guantánamo Bay.



The government that followed Machado's could not control the situation. Revolutionary activity increased, with mobs attacking wealthy city dwellers and roving bands taking over sugar factories and looting the homes of landowners. In September 1933, a group of Cuban army noncommissioned officers revolted and forced the government to resign. Among the leaders of the coup was Sergeant Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar. The army turned over the control of the government to a commission chosen by the university students. It was, in fact, the students who had taken the largest part in the revolution, and now they were firmly in control. Unfortunately, the new government was no more successful than the previous one; strikes, rioting, and gun battles became common throughout Cuba. Once again the army stepped in, this time led by Sergeant Batista, and took over the government. Batista was to rule the country, first from behind the scenes and then as an outright dictator, for the next eleven years, until 1944.

In 1933, the Cuban student organizations had become a real force in Cuban politics when they created a party which they claimed was based on the principles of José Martí. It had the grand title of the *Partido Revolucionario Cubano-Auténtico* (Authentic Cuban Revolutionary Party), but its



followers were known as the *Auténticos*. This party remained the main opponent to Batista throughout his stay in power. Batista's main support came from the army, but he actually brought many reforms to Cuban government and genuine improvement to the economy and the conditions of laborers. He won a fair election in 1940, and during World War II he benefited Cuba by receiving aid from the United States, which was doing everything it could to strengthen the Western Hemisphere. However, Batista could not rid himself of the accusations of corruption and gangsterism, and the *Auténticos* never let up in their opposition to him. In 1944, he lost a fair election which he could have easily fixed in his favor. He retired to the United States, a multimillionaire.

The student movement, which reached its high point with the defeat of Batista, did not do much better in the national spotlight than had the corrupt parties it overthrew. It did, however, produce two remarkable men—Eduardo (“Eddie”) R. Chibás and Fidel Castro.

Chibás was sickened by the wave of corruption and violence that erupted in Cuba after World War II. The price of sugar rose to spectacular heights, and the profits to be made from the booming economy created an atmosphere of greed and

excess. Chibás broke away from the *Auténticos* and formed the *Ortodoxo* party, claiming that he was José Martí's true political heir. He ran for president in 1948 but lost to Carlos Prío Socarrás, who soon became involved in graft and corruption greater than that of any president before him. Socarrás also used Martí's words to discredit his opponent. He quoted Martí's poems in his speeches and claimed that Chibás could never understand the ideals of forgiveness and honesty that Martí represented. Both sides found something in Martí to use for their own purposes: Chibás continued to attack the government on weekly radio broadcasts, but without much success. He fell into despair and, after a final broadcast on August 5, 1951, shot himself.

Eddie Chibás's suicide plunged the nation into gloom. There seemed to be no way out of Cuba's problems, which all seemed to stem from her one-crop economy. Corruption, greed, and excess grew and the government made no attempt to halt any of it. Into this hopeless situation stepped, once again, Fulgencio Batista. Before the farce of the 1952 elections was about to take place, he returned from the United States and took over the government in a coup supported by army officers.

Batista again tried to better the life of the average Cuban. He restored law and order, even if

it did consist of his brutal police force, and he tried to establish a program of public works. He could not overcome the weaknesses of Cuba's sugar economy, however, and as a result the standard of living of all Cubans was lowered. The condition of the small farmers and laborers who lived outside of the great cities was especially bad, and it was from them that Chibás's Ortodoxo Party got its chief support. The student movement was not dead; in fact, it was growing stronger because of the widening gulf between the rich and the poor of Cuba. The students had also never forgiven Batista for his overthrow of the constitution in 1940. They felt that tyranny was tyranny, no matter what it replaced, and tyranny must be removed.

Fidel Castro was a follower of Chibás and became a member of the more radical wing of the Ortodoxo Party while he was a student at Havana University. He had always been an admirer of José Martí, and throughout his career he insisted that he was following Martí's principles and ideals. On July 26, 1953, he attempted to overthrow Batista by attacking the army barracks at Santiago de Cuba. The attack was doomed from the start, and most of the young people who took part in it were either killed or captured. Castro escaped but was later captured and sentenced to prison. What saved him from execution was the fact that he



Cuban Premier Fidel Castro always claimed that he was a follower of Martí's principles. Like Martí, he experienced early imprisonment, exile, and guerrilla warfare in Oriente province.

had, overnight, become a national hero. Batista could not afford to go against such strong public opinion, so he spared the young revolutionary. At his trial, Castro gave his famous "History will absolve me" speech, in which he outlined his program for a Cuba that would be both free from the tyranny of a corrupt dictatorship and economically independent. Almost everything he proposed could be found in the writings and speeches of Martí. The majority of the Cuban people embraced Castro's ideas wholeheartedly, either outwardly or in secret.

When Castro was released from prison, in May 1955, he went to Mexico, where he founded the 26 July Movement, whose purpose was to invade Cuba and free it from the Batista dictatorship. He was joined in Mexico by other Cuban exiles. On December 2, 1956, Castro, together with eighty-two men, sailed for Cuba on the yacht *Granma* and landed in Oriente province. The revolution started there and ended a little over two years later, on January 1, 1959, when Batista fled Havana, and Fidel Castro and his forces entered the city in triumph.

It is interesting to note that during the early days of Castro's revolution, he was hiding in the Sierra Maestra mountains of Oriente province. His army was small and barely surviving, and the success of the rebels was in doubt. Castro was then visited by an American journalist, Herbert

Matthews of *The New York Times*, to whom Castro granted an exclusive interview. In 1957, Matthews began publishing in the *Times* a series of articles on Castro. It is said that these articles, more than anything else, turned world opinion in favor of Castro.

He became a hero to many in the United States, and public opinion moved Congress to cut off any aid to Batista. Does this sound familiar? Did Castro take a page from Martí's history, the one in which Martí granted an interview to George E. Bryson of *The New York Herald* while in the middle of his march from Las Playitas to Dos Ríos? In both cases, the intention was to sway public opinion in the United States.

Fidel Castro has always said that he is following in the footsteps of Martí, but many critics maintain that he has broken away from Martí's principles on several crucial points. The military organization that Castro formed has remained in power, and a dictatorship exists today that is at least as strong as Batista's. Castro made Cuba completely independent of the United States, but in so doing lost its number-one trading partner. He was forced to depend almost exclusively on the Soviet Union for support and aid. In other words, he traded the United States for the U.S.S.R. Freedom of expression was also



stifled, and censorship and punishment for dissenting voices became commonplace. Many of Cuba's prominent writers, artists, and scientists left the country. This is certainly something that Martí would have considered a disaster.

