

Cuba

Fifth Estate Collective
Liberation News Service

Jerry Lindquist

Barbara Strong

Noel Conrad

1970

This section of the *Fifth Estate* has been prepared in recognition of Cuba, the first liberated territory in the Americas. July 26th is Cuba's national day—and because Cuba is what she is, the 26th of July has become an international day to mark the struggle of all people against their oppressors.

The following articles were written by Detroiters, Jerry Lindquist, Barbara Strong, and Noel Conrad. They were members of the Venceremos Brigade and spent the months of March and April cutting sugar cane in Cuba.

One article, from Liberation News Service, was prepared by another member of the Venceremos Brigade.

26th of July

July 26th is Cuba's National Day. It is also the name of the guerrilla movement that Fidel Castro led into armed struggle against the Batista dictatorship in 1953. Armed only with .22 caliber rifles and shotguns, they attacked the second largest army garrison in the country, the Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba. Over half of the revolutionaries were killed in the fighting, and many of those who were captured were "shot while trying to escape."

Although the attack failed militarily, it was a success politically. The people's opposition to the Batista regime started to get together as a result, and organized resistance began to develop. When Fidel and some of his comrades were later captured, Batista was forced to give them a "trial."

Fidel used the courtroom to outline the goals of the Revolution in his famous four-hour "History Will Absolve Me" speech.

The Cuban people have been struggling for their freedom for over a hundred years. The attack on the Moncada barracks signifies the beginning of the final stage of struggle that carried them on to victory.

Centuries of Struggle

In October 1492 Columbus "discovered" America. Among other things during that month, he found an island in the Caribbean, 700 miles long and 100 miles wide—the Spanish called it Cuba.

In 1510, the Spanish government began the task of conquering and exploring its new possession. The army they sent was effective—within 25 years they had so “pacified” the Indians that major armed resistance ended. The “pacification” went on until the native Indians were exterminated.

For the next 350 years Cuba was a Spanish colony—the official language was Spanish, her young rich men were sent to Spanish universities for a proper Spanish education.

We in the U.S. think that Cuba was “given” her independence as a result of the “Spanish-American War”—Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders, Remember the Maine, the Battle of San Juan Hill.

To Cubans the term “Spanish American War” is an insult, one which comes from our blindness—our ignorance of the history of Cuba’s struggle for independence from Spain. Cuba had been fighting for her independence for 30 years, and had virtually won the war when the U.S. entered in 1898.

Cubans are very conscious of the length and depth of their struggle for independence. Their national heroes are of longstanding important to them, though we know little about them. What do we know of Antonio Maceo—the black leader in the War of Independence; of Mariana Grajales—who fought against the Spanish and is regarded as “the mother of the Cuban Revolution” and who was also the mother of Maceo; or of Jose Marti—the political leader and poet? We know Marti best as the author of the words to “Guantanamera;” he died in battle against the Spanish in 1895—three years before the U.S. became involved militarily.

It was Marti who warned of the danger of Cuba escaping the dominance of Spain only to fall under the dominance of the United States.

The Cubans regard the struggle led by Fidel in the 1950s as the continuation of their century-long struggle for independence—first against Spain, then (and now) against the United States.

In 1898, at the end of the war, the U.S. took control of Cuba from Spain. In 1902 Cuba became a “Republic”—an officially independent nation.

During the next fifty years, U.S. business moved in. With U.S. business came the U.S. Military: they came from 1906 to 1909, to help get the new Republic started “correctly;” they returned in 1912, to keep a black candidate from becoming President; and we had troops there. again from 1917 to 1933.

During this period Cuba had a variety of governments. One man appeared repeatedly—as a military man behind the scenes in the ‘30s, as President in the early 1940s, and as dictator in the 1950s—he is Fulgencio Batista. He has the backing of very powerful forces: The Cuban Army, the Catholic Church, the large land-owners and, most important of all, the United States.

But Batista does not rule unopposed: on July 26, 1953, armed opposition begins. On December 2, 1956, Fidel (who had been in exile) leads a group of 96 men back to Cuba. Among the 96 is a doctor who joined up with the Cubans in Mexico. He is Argentinean he has never been to Cuba before; his name is Ernesto “Che” Guevara. After a disastrous initial battle with Batista’s troops, Twelve of the 96 men managed to regroup and establish a guerrilla front in the Sierra Maestra—a rugged mountain range at the southeastern end of the island.

Their group grows and gains support; they have support in the cities as well as in the mountains. The “guerrillas” begin to gain military advantage over Batista’s troops.

At midnight on December 31, 1958, Batista flees Cuba. The Rebel Army marches the length of the island—from the Sierras to Havana—to establish a new revolutionary government.

Since 1959

We tend to think of things as ending on January 1 1959—the Revolution is successful, Batista has fled.

Cubans talk of “the Revolution” as being 11 years old—that it began January 1, 1959, and has continued.

They talk of “the Revolution” abolishing illiteracy in Cuba, of “the Revolution” building child care centers for all children, and of “the Revolution” providing jobs for everyone in the country.

The Revolution launched a major campaign in 1961 to abolish illiteracy, which was about 40%. Thousands of young people responded to the call for teachers. They went into every spot in the island—to places where there were no roads, no schools, no electricity.

The campaign was a success—illiteracy was wiped out. Now the drive is for everyone to reach the sixth grade level. The whole island is one big school.

On April 17, 1961, 1,500 mercenaries financed and equipped by the CIA landed at the Bay of Pigs. Call this the “first defeat of US Imperialism in Latin America.”

US Imperialism may have had a defeat, but it still is the enemy—the main enemy. In October, 1962, defense missiles acquired from Russia were removed from Cuba by the USSR, because of US pressure. This was done in spite of Cuban opinion that the missiles should stay.

Traditionally, Cuba has been a one-crop country—she exported sugar and imported just about everything else, from machines and cars to meat and rice.

The Revolution is trying to make Cuba self-sufficient. Sugar is still the major crop, the main source of income, but the cattle and dairy industry is growing and is second in importance. By 1971, Cuba plans to be self-sufficient in rice—a staple in every meal they eat. Citrus fruit, coffee and tobacco are also being developed. By 1975, Cuba plans to be the major source of citrus in the world market; before the Revolution, no fruit was exported and virtually none was grown in the country.

Cuba’s struggle for self-sufficiency is seen as the most recent stage of its 100-year fight for independence from the U.S. and against the effects of the U.S. economic blockade of the country.

Trade with the most logical countries, those nearest at hand, has been cut off. Not only does this make everything more expensive for the country—since now things have to be imported from further away—but when parts or replacements are needed for machines or supplies they have to be manufactured specially. All the old trucks, busses, railroad cars, are from the United States—and they are needed to keep the economy going. But every new gear needed to replace them and keep them going has to be manufactured in a special workshop—which takes a lot of time and uses scarce resources.

Thus Cuba is shut off from the U.S. But if the United States is someday liberated from US Imperialism, then the ties between the U.S. and Cuba can be rebuilt—on a new basis of cooperation, not the old basis of exploitation.

The Cubans are eager for that time to come—they feel the people of the United States are their friends, and that the US government is the enemy—of both the Cuban people and of the American people. Their watchword, as it should be for all people struggling for freedom, is international solidarity.

Related, articles on Cuba in this issue

- Dig this!
- Gloria Made the Revolution
- Sugar, Sugar

fifth Estate

Fifth Estate Collective
Liberation News Service
Jerry Lindquist
Barbara Strong
Noel Conrad
Cuba
1970

<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/110-july-23-august-5-1970/cuba>
Fifth Estate #110, July 23-August 5, 1970

[fiftheestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fiftheestate.org)