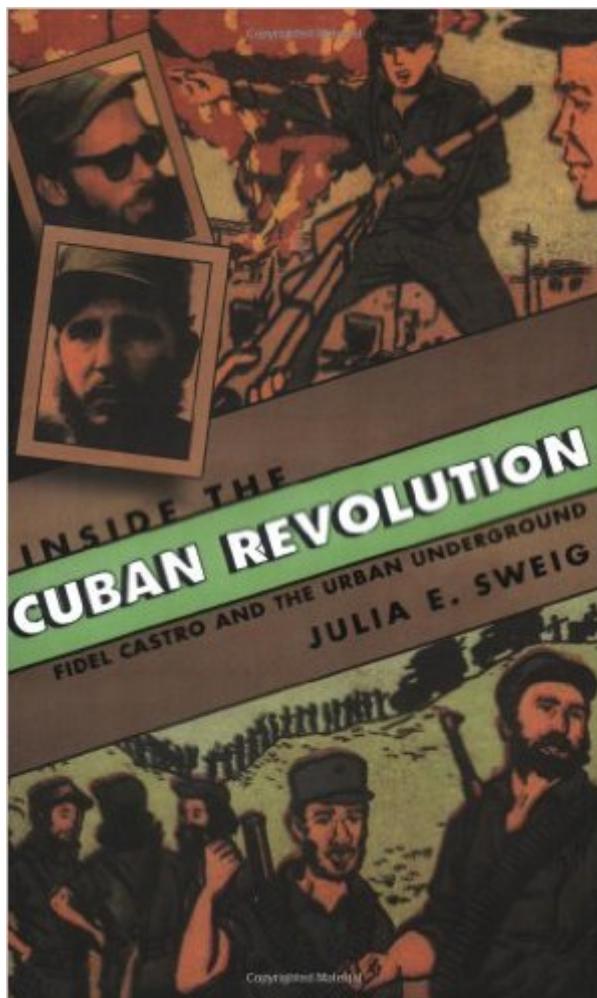


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Inside The Cuban Revolution: Fidel Castro And The Urban Underground



Synopsis

Julia Sweig shatters the mythology surrounding the Cuban Revolution in a compelling revisionist history that reconsiders the revolutionary roles of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara and restores to a central position the leadership of the Cuban urban underground, the Llano. Granted unprecedented access to the classified records of Castro's 26th of July Movement's underground operatives--the only scholar inside or outside of Cuba allowed access to the complete collection in the Cuban Council of State's Office of Historic Affairs--she details the ideological, political, and strategic debates between Castro's mountain-based guerrilla movement and the urban revolutionaries in Havana, Santiago, and other cities. In a close study of the fifteen months from November 1956 to July 1958, when the urban underground leadership was dominant, Sweig examines the debate between the two groups over whether to wage guerrilla warfare in the countryside or armed insurrection in the cities, and is the first to document the extent of Castro's cooperation with the Llano. She unveils the essential role of the urban underground, led by such figures as Frank País, Armando Hart, Haydée Santamaría, Enrique Oltuski, and Faustino Pérez, in controlling critical decisions on tactics, strategy, allocation of resources, and relations with opposition forces, political parties, Cuban exiles, even the United States--contradicting the standard view of Castro as the primary decision maker during the revolution. In revealing the true relationship between Castro and the urban underground, Sweig redefines the history of the Cuban Revolution, offering guideposts for understanding Cuban politics in the 1960s and raising intriguing questions for the future transition of power in Cuba.

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Customer Reviews

As a former representative of Castro's Movement in Washington during the insurrection against Batista, I was interested in how Ms Sweig covered a period I was very familiar with. I was surprised and disappointed. The book's many mistakes reflect sloppy research. Grau San Martín was not the Auténtico party candidate in the 1952 elections. It was Carlos Hevia. Those elections were scheduled for June 1952, not November. It was Huber Matos, not Pedro Miret, who brought the shipment of weapons contributed by President Figueres of Costa Rica. Perhaps her most careless mistake is writing that Felipe Pazos was working in the Inter-American Development Bank in the 1940s, when, in fact, the IADB was not established until 1959! The author, tries to convey an image of thorough scholarship, but, probably due to ideological bias, failed to interview anybody mentioned in the book living outside Cuba. Plus, the sources consulted overseas are heavily biased in favor of the Castro regime. In my case, she quotes me at large and attributes to me a political membership in the Ortodoxo Party that never existed. She also writes about my alleged appointment by the Castro sisters as Washington Representative, yet I never met them. If she had bothered to contact me, and she knew where to find me, she would have avoided these inaccuracies. As to her main thrust that Castro was not involved in the great failure of the April 9, 1958 general strike, nobody who worked with Fidel can believe that. Those of us who were in the Movement at the time and are now free to talk know he was deeply involved. He is too much of a micromanager to have allowed such a central event in his effort against Batista to take place without his participation. The entire book is tainted by the biased sources used by the author. -Ernesto Betancourt

This is not an easy book to read. It is as if the author had taken her thesis and expanded it into a book, which is exactly what she did. The book does seem to affirm the importance of the true martyrs of the Cuban Revolution, those fighting Batista in the cities - the "llano" revolutionaries, which have been somewhat pushed aside in Cuban mythology by the exaggerated myth of the Sierra fighters developed by Che Guevara after the Revolution. While the book does affirm and establishes the immense contributions of all the other groups and people fighting the Batista dictatorship, it seems to me that it fails to answer the same question that it raises: WHY did Castro and his band diminish their contributions?, why did they splinter their unions? It was of course the threat of potential "other than Castro and his group" heroes sharing in the victory and challenging Castro's caudillismo and eventual brutal dictatorship. And I wondered what would have happened had Frank País not been murdered by Batistianos? And the answer, of course, is that he would have suffered the same fate later on in Castro's hands as countless other Cuban martyrs, who were not

Communist, did. The book is well researched, and Sweig has obviously had a lot of access to the Cuban regime's doctored archives. It is because of this access that perhaps she is somewhat soft on her evaluation of Castro and his motives. Nonetheless, regardless of this bias and some apparent historical errors here and there, it remains an interesting, if somewhat hard to read, window on a part of the Cuban Revolution that has been diminished by the regime.

If you are looking for a book on the Cuban Revolution that goes beyond the myths of Fidel Castro, this is a good place to start. Sweig looks at the key roles that men and women from Cuba's urban areas played as a link between Castro's rebel forces and the rest of Cuba. She explores how urban underground leaders sought to supply both weapons and recruits to the rebels in the mountains in order to ensure that the revolution would continue. While there is still a good deal of discussion about the Castro brothers and about Guevara, especially in the later parts of the revolution, Sweig makes sure to go well beyond that in exploring why Castro was ultimately successful.

Sweig draws on many previously confidential sources that historians have long been unable to access to put together a fine piece of work on the power struggles among those active in opposing the Batista dictatorship. Sweig focuses on the rivalries between revolutionary groups, as well as the tension between the 26th of July Movement's rural guerrilla forces (led by Fidel Castro) and the underground urban network that worked to support them. Particularly interesting are the prominent roles played by Frank Pais and Armando Hart in securing monetary and moral support for the small guerrilla band traversing the Sierra Maestra. Sweig's work demystifies the guerrilla movement and examines the complex dynamics that led to the victory of the 26th of July Movement and the course it would take. This book is probably not for the casual reader of Latin American history. Much of what is detailed can be rightly called esoteric, but, as a whole, the book is useful in understanding the Cuban revolutionary struggle as far more complex than the musings of Che Guevara would suggest. If Guevara's accounts of the episodes of the struggle became the romantic myth of the revolution, let this book be understood as the (sometimes unflattering) reality.

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