

## Highlights of the Cuban Transition:

1952: 8 years after his previous term's end, Batista returns on Cuban ballots; he's supported by a Cuban people who are exhausted with their government changing hands, seemingly incapable of finding stability (Alpert 41:43). Despite this, Batista worries that Cuba will vote for his opposition, whose platform hinges on cleaning up corruption, which Batista has been benefiting from. He takes power in a military coup using his contacts in the army three months before the election. The coup is bloodless; Cuba welcomes, for the most part, what they expect to be a stable administration.

1952/1953: During Batista's first months in power, rallies and events are organized to legitimize his rule and get the people excited to have him in office; meanwhile, the police force is increased dramatically (Alpert 42:36). By 1953, any opposition to Batista's regime is punished harshly. Police violence becomes common, and claims 2,000 lives (44:27).

1953: Fidel Castro, a lawyer whose case against the Batista regime is thrown out by corrupt courts and former legislative candidate in the cancelled election, alongside his brother Raul, gather a group of revolutionaries to storm the Moncada barracks in Santiago on July 26, the night of Carnival (Encyclopedia Britannica, Alpert 46:07). Their goal is to seize the barracks and the weapons within—with only 150 men, the rebels believe the military men will be too drunk on behalf of the parade to gather into any kind of organized defense (Alpert 47:50). Before the rebels can even get in, however, an unexpected patrol sets the alarm to keep them from entering at any cost. 19 rebels are killed before Castro and the others surrender; 55 others are executed after being arrested. Though no one expects a fair trial, the Castro brothers and other surviving members are put on trial and imprisoned (49:36).

1955: Batista releases his political prisoners on Mother's Day in a bid for public favor, announcing amnesty for the remaining Moncada rebels. Upon their new freedom, the Castro brothers leave for Mexico to organize a more effective revolution, naming their cause "the 26th of July Movement." In Mexico, they meet Ernesto "Che" Guevara, an Argentinian doctor and Marxist who resists Soviet-style communism. Though the group is reluctant to outsiders, they accept Guevara among them on Raul Castro's word.

1956: Mexico imprisons the Castro brothers and Guevara, hoping to force armed activism out of the country. Fidel Castro is released soon after, but Guevara and Raul are kept in jail (17:39). Castro uses his freedom to fly to the United States and rustle up support among exiled Cubans in the name of anti-colonialism, using their funds to buy a 60-foot cruising boat that the rebels name Granma (Alpert 18:51).

1956: The entire rebel group—eighty-two men at this point—manage to board the overloaded Granma and sail for Cuba on November 25 (Alpert 20:37). They land at Las Coloradas on

December 2, and are met with immediate attack by Batista's army (23:58). They suffer heavy losses, and the survivors escape to the nearby Sierra Maestra mountains.

1956: News organizations around the world, most notably *The New York Times*, believe the uprising to be officially quashed and tell its story with a sense of martyrdom. Castro is believed to be dead. Meanwhile, the 26th of July Movement sets up camp in the Sierra Maestras to regroup, recover their losses in numbers, and further train.

#### More about Cuba: (Prehistory)

October 28, 1492: Three caravels appear off the coast of Cuba. Onboard the ships are Spanish men armed with swords and helmets. Their leader was Christopher Columbus, who was sent by Queen Isabella. The sailors called them "Indians" and said they would make good slaves (Alpert 4:37). When the Spanish took over the island, many native men were killed, and the children were raised as Spaniards. The native Cubans did not fight back because of all the weapons the Spanish brought. As the conquerors explored the island, Spanish diseases, like measles and smallpox, killed 90 percent of the native population.

1526: This is the first-time enslaved peoples were imported to Havana from Africa. Cuba's principal export was tobacco, but since the Spanish killed many natives with diseases, they brought enslaved peoples to work the land. It is estimated that 800,000 enslaved peoples were imported to Cuba, which is double that of the United States (Utset).

1886: This is the year slavery was abolished in Cuba. The slave trade from Africa ended in 1865, but slavery was not abolished until over twenty years later (Alpert 16:56). Carlos Manuel de Cespedes is one of the main figures in this revolution to free enslaved peoples in Cuba. He owned a sugarcane plantation but did not significantly benefit from the profits because of Spain's excessive taxes. He declared the island an independent country and freed all the enslaved workers to create his own army against Spain. This led to guerrilla warfare where most fighters only had machetes.

1895: Jose Marti leads a second war of independence against Spain for Cuba's independence. He was known as "the teacher" because he taught many Afro-Cuban exiles how to read and write (24:03). Marti was also a poet and writer who lived in exile in the United States. Cubans wanted to be freed from Spain, so Marti and other exiles joined forces with other military men to wage a war. In May, during the first battle, a Spanish bullet killed Marti. Newly recruited soldiers were brought to solidify independence in the revolution.

Early 1898: The United States becomes involved in the war to send supplies to the rebels. The USS Maine was a primary ship in this battle. Maine's mission was to protect American property in Cuba. The Spanish government planned to meet the US demands, but then the ship was blown up. While it is unknown who was involved with the attack, it is certain that 261 Americans

were killed in the explosion (32:06). The US says it must have been Spain, but some scholars think the US blew it up to have a reason to get involved in the war.

Late 1898: The United States declared war on Spain to free Cuba from Spanish rule. The US troops landed in southeast Cuba without any resistance because Spain knew their army base in Cuba could not compare. The rough riders, commanded by Teddy Roosevelt, came in as a volunteer unit. The Americans won in December of that year, and propaganda about the war spread across North America (38:19). Cuba officially becomes classified as an American protectorate.

1903: Guantanamo Bay is established as the biggest US naval base outside of the states (46:59). Therefore, the recently freed island of Cuba did not receive as much independence as expected with an American naval base controlling the surrounding seas.

1905: Angel Castro emigrated to Cuba to work on farmland after he fought for the Spanish in the war. Cuba was a new opportunity for him because the United Fruit company liked to work with Spanish migrants. United Fruit, which primarily sold sugarcane and bananas, had substantial political power in Cuba because they controlled the local government and funding of the country (19:47).

1924: The Machado dictatorship developed after becoming a war hero who fought for Cuba's independence (31:00). He was modern and flaunted his relationship with the army. He promised to free Cuba from ties to sugar and the United States if he won the election. In 1924, he was officially elected and immediately started working on releasing control of sugar products. His first project was to build a highway across the country, so citizens did not have to use US owned rail companies. Then, he built a new parliament building and famous constructions that were financed by US banks. Cuba's economy developed, but in 1929 the US fell into the Great Depression, which hit Cuba and Machado's rule. Cuba was then struck by a terrible hurricane and many buildings were destroyed. Machado tried marketing himself as Cuba's savior again, but the people lost confidence in their president.