workers or peasants, or simply by rival political factions. American soldiers often arrived to solve problems in Cuba that a genuinely independent government would have been obliged to sort out on its own. The resentment created was to explode in 1933 and again in 1959.

Richard Gott,

Cuba: A new history

(Yale UP, 2004)

4

The Cuban Republic, 1902–1952

A Republic for Americans: Estrada Palma and Charles Magoon, 1902–1909

Only his shoes remain. Below, the likeness of a gigantic Greek goddess sits eternally poised on the steps in front of the plinth, laurel-wreathed and sandalled, ever at the ready to write with her sculpted stone pen. Only the barest trace of ceremonial lettering can be deciphered. This memorial to Tomás Estrada Palma, the first elected president of the independent Republic of Cuba, was erected in the Havana suburb of Vedado on one of the great avenues that leads down to the sea. Little now survives. The statue of the man perceived to have betrayed the nation was torn down by a revolutionary mob in 1959. His unforgiveable crime was to have accepted something less than independence from the hands of the US occupying force, and to have presided over the inauguration of a Republic that often seemed to privilege Americans over Cubans.

Cuba's 'pseudo-republic', as *fidelista* historians have described it, was formally proclaimed on 20 May 1902. Leonard Wood, the US military governor, formally handed the country over to President Estrada, a Cuban-born American citizen who had been a veteran of exile politics for nearly three decades. Characterised by endless violence, dramatic corruption, military revolts, gangsterism and sporadic military intervention by the United States, the new Republic also experienced spectacular economic growth and prosperity for a small section of society. With a span of nearly 60 years, it was eventually swept away by Fidel Castro's Revolution in 1959. While 20 May continued to be celebrated in the United States as Cuba's independence day, Castro's Revolution dropped the anniversary altogether.

Estrada, representing the Republican Party, had been elected unopposed at a presidential election in December 1901. Máximo Gómez had refused to put himself forward, while Bartolomé Masó, who was hostile to the Platt

Amendment and would have been more popular than Estrada, withdrew after General Wood had rigged the election against him by appointing five of Estrada's supporters to the electoral commission.[1] Most of Cuba's embryonic political elite threw their weight behind the new President.

Estrada was a man of his time. He belonged to the educated and ruling class that had no prejudice against its US occupiers, and looked forward to a close and continuing relationship with the Americans after independence. Much of the Cuban population might be imbued with an embryonic sense of nationalism, but thousands of them had crossed over to the United States in the previous half century, to work and to study and to establish small businesses. The wars and economic uncertainty of the final decades of colonial rule had led to an immense migration, and the creation of a large Cuban-American population on the mainland was not without repercussions back home. Martí might have had reservations about 'the colossus of the North', but many of his fellow migrants came to admire its dynamism, generosity and modernity.

The migration had been made up over several generations of a vast cross-section of the Cuban people – young and old, men and women, black and white – and many of them moved easily between the mainland and the island. Constant communication was maintained between the two communities. In the early years of the Republic, almost everyone of importance and influence possessed direct experience of living in the United States.[2] American intervention in Cuban affairs was not an insult for such people; they welcomed it, and often requested it.

The people running the Republic's new government might have learnt about the American system that the occupiers had sought to impose, and even admired it, but they had no immediate model to hand for their own use other than the old Spanish colonial practices that allowed the rulers to organise the country for their personal benefit. Estrada, an austere schoolmaster, was himself an honest man, but many officers in the rebel army who translated themselves into candidates for office had no such self-restraint. Even if personally honest, many still received loyalty from their former troops, now impoverished and without work, and were expected to distribute largesse among their supporters.

Corruption was not a simple matter of individual enrichment. Since jobs in the state sector provided an income for many thousands of people, and since their job was dependent on the electoral victory of their chosen party, electoral fraud became entrenched at the very start of the Republic. The armed supporters of the Conservative and the Liberal parties would guard the polling stations to try to ensure the victory of their candidate. If serious disputes arose, as they did at each election, the United States could be called upon to intervene under the obligations it had accepted with the Platt Amendment.

American intervention was welcomed by the Cuban elite in the early years, and supported by the American settlers and businessmen who arrived in considerable numbers. More than 13,000 North Americans had acquired title to land in Cuba by 1905, bringing in millions of dollars of investment. Soon, some 60 per cent of rural properties were owned by American individuals or corporations.[3] Many Cubans who had fought in the independence war – for independence not economic annexation – were disillusioned by this development, but others believed it to be inevitable and desirable, and hastened to associate themselves with the new economic power in the land.

Irene Wright noted sympathetically in 1910 that a population 'suddenly released from colonial conditions' had not 'found itself as a Cuban people, or constituted a nation with an identity of its own'.[4] Her contemporary comment reveals the intrinsic problem. With a bleak colonial inheritance, battered by war and divided by race and class, the Cuban people were hardly prepared to march onto the stage of history. Nor were they ready for what was to come next, for the vacuum created by the absence of a properly constituted Cuban nation was happily filled by American settlers and entrepreneurs, and their allies on the island. Irene Wright had the measure of the tragedy:

> This republic is not a creature of Cubans – it was neither fashioned by them nor by them influenced – but on the contrary it is of all-American manufacture. Americans built it. Americans set it up again when it fell flat. American influence is all that sustains it to this moment. If they discover anything to criticise in it, or its failure, let Americans remember in so criticising that they are dealing with the work of their own hands.[5]

The US Marines returned to Cuba just four years after they had left. Some 2,000 soldiers landed at Havana in September 1906 and established themselves at their old base at Camp Columbia on the outskirts of the city. Soon there were 5,000 of them distributed around the country. They stayed for just over two years, much of the time spent mapping the island, and withdrew in February 1909. The intervention was not a unilateral military action by the United States, but the result of a request by Estrada Palma under the terms of the Platt Amendment. No one could have been more irritated by Estrada's petition than Theodore Roosevelt, now the American President. 'I am so angry with that infernal little Cuban republic,' he declared. 'All that we wanted from them was that they should behave themselves and be prosperous and happy so that we should not have to interfere. And now, lo and behold . . . we have no alternative save to intervene.'

With Cuba, as elsewhere in the early years of the century, except for Panama and the Philippines, the Americans liked to give the impression of being reluctant imperialists. Annexation, or occupation on the European model, was rarely their preferred style, although it was not unknown. The Marines occupied Nicaragua from 1912 to 1925, Haiti from 1915 to 1934, and the Dominican Republic from 1916 to 1930. They returned to Cuba in 1912, 1917 and 1921.[6] Typical of the American attitude towards Cubans was that of Henry Cabot Lodge. 'Nobody wants to annex them,' he wrote in September 1906, 'but the general feeling is that they ought to be taken by the scruff of the neck and shaken until they behave themselves.'[7]

The Americans intervened in 1906 to prevent the Cubans from fighting among themselves, and they were obliged to do so partly because of the inadequate legacy of occupation. When elections were held for Cuba's national congress in February 1904, it was immediately obvious that the state had no capacity to organise a fraud-free contest. With the country divided – between the Republican Party, of conservative and centralist leanings, and the National Liberal Party, which supported local autonomy – the election result was inevitably contested. To the American eye, little of principle distinguished the parties. Both were led by former rebels seeking the spoils of peace.[8]

Estrada's Republicans were in power and proved more successful at fraud than the Liberals, and secured the victory of more congressmen. The Liberals refused to accept the result, and absented themselves from the congress, an unhappy augury for the presidential election in December 1905. Believing that his services were indispensable, and backed by the US minister in Havana, Estrada Palma sought re-election. The Liberals united behind the candidature of José Miguel Gómez, the governor of Santa Clara whose running mate was Alfredo Zayas, a colourless lawyer. Máximo Gómez would have been the more popular candidate, but he had died in 1905. Gómez and Zayas disliked each other intensely, but both were to be dominant figures in Cuban politics for the next 20 years, and both eventually became President.

A violent atmosphere before the December poll, and the certainty that government officials would secure the re-election of Estrada, led Gómez to withdraw, and Estrada was again elected without opposition. The Liberals now turned to the only weapon with which they were familiar, trained in its use since 1868. With machetes in hand, and other simple weapons, they organised an armed insurrection to overthrow the government. Some 24,000 armed rebels, many of them black, assembled in Pinar del Rio in August 1906 and began to march on Havana. They were joined by provincial leaders throughout the country in what became known as the Guerrita de Agosto, the August War. The usual panic broke out among whites in Havana, with calls for American intervention. One excited writer, calling for immediate US annexation, described the Liberal rebellion as the 'first spark' of a race war in which 'the butchers of Africa' would revenge themselves on the whites.[9]

Estrada was faced with a rebellion that he could not easily crush. The Americans had left the Cuban state without a standing army. The Rural Guard had only 3,000 men, distributed in tiny groups around the country. An artillery force was manned by a mere handful of soldiers. Fearing his imminent overthrow, Estrada appealed to Washington for military assistance in September. Everything in his own personal trajectory, as well as in that of other leading Cubans, made his decision inevitable. He had worked closely with the United States throughout the independence war, and had happily entwined the Americans in Cuba's affairs.[10]

Roosevelt agreed to intervene only 'if Cuba herself shows that she had fallen into the revolutionary habit, that she lacks the self-restraint necessary to ensure peaceful self-government and that her contending factions have plunged the country into anarchy'.[11] He sent two emissaries to Havana to seek 'a peaceful solution', and William Taft, the under-secretary for war, and Robert Bacon, the under-secretary of state, arrived in Havana to negotiate between Estrada and the Liberals.

Estrada did not seek negotiation; he wanted US military intervention to keep him in power. He outmanoeuvred Roosevelt by resigning as president and obliging his cabinet to do likewise. The country was left without a government. Roosevelt could not abandon Cuba and its American investors to another round of civil war, and was obliged to fill the vacuum. The Marines were sent to Havana, 'to establish peace and order'.

Some thought Roosevelt should send General Wood back to Cuba, but he chose Charles Magoon instead, a lawyer from Minnesota who became the first civilian captain-general. Magoon was the closest approximation to a typical European colonial governor that the United States possessed; he had just finished a stint in control of the Panama Canal Zone, America's most recent acquisition.[12] His principal task in Cuba was to remedy what had been left unfinished in 1902. Magoon's advisers devised a more reliable electoral system, drew up rules for the state bureaucracy and established a small professional army.[13] They also created a new legal system to replace the codes of the Spanish era.

Magoon ruled Cuba for three years. The new army was trained and ready in 1908, as were the new electoral rules. The task of drafting the necessary reforms was handed to Colonel Enoch Crowder, an American officer who would play an influential role in Cuba at intervals over the following 20 years. Like Magoon, he had acquired some relevant colonial expertise, working in the Philippines as the military governor's legal adviser. Often described as 'a farm boy' from Missouri, 'Bert' Crowder was educated at West Point, and his military experience went back to the campaigns against the Indians: he had fought against the Apache leader Geronimo in New Mexico in 1886 and against the Sioux chief Sitting Bull in 1890.

Crowder organised drafting committees in which Cubans were represented, although they often missed meetings. Sometimes it proves easier to leave detailed work to the occupying power. Municipal and provincial elections were held in August 1908, under the rules devised by Crowder, and won by the Republicans, renamed as the Conservative Party. This, another Magoon creation, was formed from the coalition that had supported Estrada. The Liberals remained divided as usual, but when presidential elections were held in November, they won with Gómez and Zayas, the team deprived of victory in 1906. President Gómez ruled until 1913. 'Once again the Cubans have the destiny of their nation in their hands,' he declared optimistically when Magoon, Crowder and the Marines left at the beginning of 1909.

The renewed American occupation had been a humiliating experience for many Cubans. They had been made to appear to outsiders, and to themselves, as inexperienced, incompetent and divided. It seemed that any dissident group that lost an election, or felt worsted in an argument, could cry 'Foul' and take to the hills, while their opponents would speed off to the US embassy, to request the return of the Marines.

Although the influence of the United States became all-pervasive in the early years of the Republic, much survived of the empire of old Spain. The Spanish collapse had not meant an end to the Spanish grip over many aspects of Cuban society. The new Republic had not started with a clean slate, for many Spanish bureacrats remained at their desks. Those who wanted to stay signed a new oath of allegiance, first to the United States and then, after 1902, to the Republic of Cuba. The country was ruled much as it had been in colonial times. Apart from a few modifications introduced during the American occupation, little really changed. Cuba's Spanish-born population – the *peninsulares* – was still large at the turn of the century, and soon there were to be more. White migration from Spain would continue at a steady rate throughout the first decades of the Republic.

A Republic for white settlers from Spain

High above the tiny streets of the village of Casablanca, on the eastern side of Havana's harbour and close to the looming fortress of La Cabaña, stands a great marble statue of Christ, one hand raised in blessing. Completed in 1958, it is one of the last of the grandiose public works of the Batista era, together with the road tunnel that passes under the harbour entrance. American visitors might be reminded for a moment of the Statue of Liberty in New York's harbour, welcoming Europe's poor and huddled masses.

The reference is not altogether misplaced, for General Wood ordered the construction of an immigrant reception centre in Havana harbour in 1900, modelled on New York's Ellis Island (opened in 1892). The new Cuban centre, called Triscornia, was built on the slopes above Casablanca and remained there until 1959. General Wood's aim, like that of his Spanish predecessors, was to encourage the immigration of white settlers from Spain.

Most of Spain's settlers remained in Cuba after 1898, a reversal of earlier Spanish experience. When their empire had collapsed in Latin America at the start of the nineteenth century, Spanish citizens abandoned the colonies in droves, returning to their Spanish motherland or re-settling in Cuba or the United States. The pattern was similar in the imperial retreat from Europe's African colonies in the 1960s. White settlers in Algeria and Kenya, and later those from Angola and Mozambique, streamed back to Europe. Cuba was an exception to this imperial rule. Not only did Spanish settlers stay behind, they were reinforced over the next 30 years by nearly a million fresh migrants from Spain.[14] The old Spanish ambition to 'whiten' Cuba, to push the white population over the 50 per cent mark, had been achieved by the time the Spaniards withdrew. It was made permanent by the fresh immigration of the twentieth century, during the first three decades of which more Spaniards came to Cuba than in the four centuries of Spanish rule.[15]

Cuba remained a typical settler society with the white colonists still in charge, similar to many of the European colonies in Africa. Politics was left to the Cuban-born, but Spaniards controlled commerce and industry and the retail trade and were well represented in the professions as well as in schools and newspapers. The US-organised census of 1899 revealed the presence of 113,000 white male foreigners on the island, representing 20 per cent of the male adult population of 523,000. Most of that 20 per cent were Spanish born. A further 252,000 white males were defined as Cuban (*nativos*) while 158,000 were described as 'men of colour'.[16]

Spaniards arriving in Cuba after 1898 were driven by tradition and by the deteriorating economic situation, and came primarily, as in the past, from Galicia, Asturias and the Canary Islands.[17] Although some returned to Spain, and others went on to the United States or to Latin America, at least 40 per cent of the half million Spaniards who came to Cuba in the first 20 years of the Republic remained there. Among them was Angel Castro, the father of Fidel.

General Wood made special efforts to respect the rights of the Spanish settlers, hoping that they would stay to run the country. Their individual and property rights were sustained by the military government, guaranteed by the peace treaty of December 1898, and ratified by the Republic in the constitution. Having ensured a steady influx of white settlers, Wood drafted legislation to keep black and Chinese immigration to a minimum. In May 1902, five days before leaving, he signed a law forbidding the import of contract labour, specifically mentioning the Chinese, but preventing a possible surge in black immigration from Puerto Rico. Estrada's new Republic made no break with the old colonial order, and retained the racist legislation imposed by the Americans.[18]

The 'whites-only' policy was not without problems for the landowners, for not all new Spanish immigrants were uneducated farmhands. Some were anarchists or anarcho-syndicalists, typical products of rural Spain. Some were trained agitators soon to be active in Cuba's embryonic union movement.

After the first great sugar strike, in October 1917, with a demand for higher wages and an 8-hour day, the President decreed that all foreign workers connected with the strike were to be expelled from the country. White immigration had become a two-edged sword.

Most Spanish immigrants, moving rapidly upwards in status, made themselves more than at home within Cuban society, happily establishing themseves in the late nineteenth-century *casinos*, or social centres, in Havana, some of the most sumptuous buildings in the city. Just as the blacks once had their *cabildos* to maintain the cultural memory of their original African location, so the Spaniards kept their regional origins alive. The Centro Asturiano, the club of the immigrants from Spain's north coast province, still stands on the south-east side of Havana's Parque Central, a magnificent palace now housing the non-Cuban collection of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes. This opulent and competitive building, originally constructed in 1885 to outstrip any possible rival, was a symbol not just of justifiable immigrant emotion but also of white pride, similar to that exemplified by the constructions in Pretoria of Sir Herbert Baker. Across the Parque Central, next to the Hotel Inglaterra, stands the Teatro Tacón, originally built as the Centro Galiciano, by poor immigrants from Galicia made rich in Cuba.

These *centros* were designed as social meeting places, where daughters could be married off to someone from the right region. They had their own theatres and libraries; they created credit and savings banks; they wrote their own newspapers, notably the *Diario de la Marina*. They provided hospitals and schools for their members, everything from the cradle to the grave. The budget of a single Spanish regional *centro* was far larger than that of any provincial government on the island.

The immigrant reception at Triscornia survived until 1959, but Spanish migrants had tailed off long before. Wars and slump made migration to Cuba less attractive, and the mood in Cuba changed after the Revolution of 1933. Spanish migrants were no longer made welcome. The great tide of refugees at the end of the Spanish civil war in 1939 headed for Mexico City rather than Havana.

A Republic denied to blacks: Evaristo Estenoz and the massacre of 1912

White supremacy was the official mood in the early years of the Republic, but the jovial optimism of the settlers could not disguise the fact that the country contained a large population of unhappy blacks. Black Cubans provided the bulk of the soldiery in the independence war, and reaped no reward. As the racist character of colonial society reasserted itself in the Republican era, the *mambises* were soon forgotten. Their great generals had been killed in the war. The new leaders who sprang up to defend the black community came mostly from the middle-class 'men of colour', aspiring politicians who had returned from exile to work within the Liberal Party.

The two most prominent black leaders in the new era, Juan Gualberto Gómez and Martín Morúa Delgado, devoted themselves to the black cause through the promotion of education and integration. Gómez campaigned in the newspapers, and Morúa in the senate. Both sought legislation that would prohibit racial segregation in public places and ban discrimination in employment. In this they were largely unsuccessful, although Morúa secured an end to segregation in the new artillery force.

Yet nothing the two men did in congress or the newspapers could quell the growing sense of disillusion that permeated black communities throughout the country. What had the independence war been about? Rafael Serra, a black journalist returning from exile in New York, gave voice to this feeling in a book of essays published in 1907:

> Unfortunate are Cuban blacks if all they will get as a just reward for their sacrifices for the independence and freedom of Cuba is to listen to the anthem of Bayamo and to the false adoration devoted to the memory of our illustrious martyrs. No, my brothers, we deserve justice, and we should no longer continue to encourage a humiliating and ridiculous patriotism.[19]

Arthur Schomburg, the black American historian who visited Cuba in 1905, also wrote about black Cuba's discontents:

> During the colonial days of Spain, the Negroes were better treated, enjoyed a greater measure of freedom and happiness than they do today. Many Cuban Negroes were welcomed in the time of oppression, but in the days of peace . . . they are deprived of positions, ostracised and made political outcasts. The Negro has done much for Cuba. Cuba has done nothing for the Negro.[20]

Many of the white liberals who had fought for independence were as patronisingly racist as those who had fought for Spain. Bartolomé Masó, hero of the struggle against the Platt Amendment, was a supporter of white immigration and had firm views about the role of blacks in an independent Cuba. 'Our negroes . . . are mostly uneducated labourers, quite unfitted for holding positions,' he told an interviewer in 1898. 'With sufficient employment [they] will give no trouble . . . Our negroes will work as before in the cane-fields, and I see no reason to anticipate trouble from them. We have no coloured officials in this government, and very few of our officers are black . . .'[21]

Some black war veterans were active within the various associations of veterans created after the war, and many were bought off with discreet payments. Yet the general black discontent continued, and large numbers swelled the ranks of the Liberal army in August 1906, in support of the war of

José Miguel Gómez against Estrada Palma. During the subsequent rule of Charles Magoon, as discussions began about the reform of the electoral system, many black veterans began to consider the possibility of mobilising as blacks and perhaps forming a political party.

Prominent among them was Evaristo Estenoz, a war veteran who had been born a slave, and worked as a private contractor in Havana. Blacks had been the architects of the independence struggle, he argued, and had been robbed of 'all the fruits of victory'. He and his friends had previously supported the Liberal Party; now they expressed their disappointment and hostility. The party had done nothing to improve conditions for the blacks. In 1907, he set up a black political party with a broadly progressive platform, the Independent Party of Colour. It campaigned for more jobs in the public sector to be given to blacks.

Estenoz was the son of a black mother and a white father and came originally from Oriente. He was widely travelled and had visited Europe and the United States. He had gone with Rafael Serra to examine the experiences of American black organisations. If whites could learn from the United States, so too could the blacks. Caught up in the logic of the Platt Amendment, he even called on Magoon, and exchanged letters with Crowder. He hoped the Americans could be persuaded to take up the Afro-Cuban cause.

The new party, and its newspaper, *Previsión*, began to develop what would later be called black consciousness. The paper attacked the obsession of white Cubans with their European origins and took up the issue of Cuba's African heritage, pointing out that Spain had been colonised by Africans in the Muslim era. It called for the whites-only immigration policy to be abandoned, and for the ban on black immigration to be dropped. Unlike the Liberals, who had adopted the cock as their emblem and supported the legalisation of cock-fighting (banned during the American occupation), the new party chose a horse as their symbol. The horse represented both the preferred vehicle of the independence war, but also the god Changó, the Yoruba deity of thunder and lightning.[22]

The new party was the first real political challenge to the rules of the political order established in 1902. As it began to erode the traditional Liberal vote within the black community, it was subjected to campaigns of abuse. The old fears of a Haiti-style revolution were revived in the Havana newspapers, and Estenoz was accused of promoting black racism. He was arrested in 1910, his newspaper was seized and the party threatened with closure. Hundreds of blacks were arrested across the country. Such arbitrary actions increased the sense of white panic and the Havana newspapers began printing alarmist accounts of a coming black rebellion. The blacks had been rightly detained, announced the *Diario de la Marina*, 'because they were threatening the whites, and more precisely the white women'.[23] The imminent arrival of Halley's Comet, scheduled to pass over the island on 19 May 1910, gave rise to stories across a still superstitious community that it foreshadowed a racial catastrophe for the whites.

After the peaceful passing of the comet, the white panic subsided. No trace of an imminent uprising was detected, no arms were found, no black conspiracy was uncovered. Estenoz was released from prison at the end of the year, and the prisoners put on trial were found not guilty and released. But the damage had been done. A mood had been created in which it was easy for congress to agree on a law forbidding any political movement to be formed on the basis of colour. The so-called 'Morúa Law' was put forward by the reformist black senator, who claimed that since Estenoz's party represented only the interests of black Cubans, it would inevitably discriminate against whites – which would violate the constitution. The Independent Party of Colour was banned.

Estenoz had two possible courses of action. He could make common cause with José Miguel Gómez and try to persuade him, given the size of the potential vote his black supporters would normally supply to the Liberals, to lift the ban and provide them with secure jobs. Alternatively, he could play the Platt Amendment card and make fresh overtures to the United States, the self-appointed guarantor of Cuban liberties. He had had a friendly reception from Magoon and Crowder, why should he not expect the same from President William Taft? Estenoz would test whether the American guarantee extended to the blacks.

Negotiations with Gómez produced nothing, and Estenoz now issued an ultimatum. If Morúa's law was not withdrawn, the blacks would fight to save their honour. At the same time, and with the hope of securing the threat of US intervention, he forwarded a petition to President Taft requesting an appointment. The petition was lost in the entrails of the State Department bureaucracy, but the US minister in Havana gave his personal view in a comment to Washington in February 1912. He explained that although the blacks had 'always been the backbone of political uprisings' in Cuba, they had always acted 'under white leadership'. Blacks acting alone would be an insignificant force:

> As practically all the talented negroes and mestizos of political inclinations are well cared for by the Liberal and Conservative parties, the negroes themselves lack the necessary leadership and talent to bring about unaided a widespread revolt. Therefore I do not think that the present agitation will be productive of anything more than the passing excitement which it affords. At the most a few sporadic outbreaks might occur, which could readily be put down by the Army which is not in sympathy with the negro movement.[24]

The US minister underestimated the determination of the black leader. Still hoping to provoke an American intervention, Estenoz launched an armed protest movement on independence day, 20 May 1912. Action took place chiefly in Oriente, with a smaller group in Las Villas. There may have been as many as 4,000 rebels, and some have suggested a figure of 7,000.

US warships did sail for Cuba that month, and four companies of US Marines landed at Guantánamo Bay. This was the first military intervention since Magoon had left in 1909, and General Wood, now the chief of the general staff in Washington, was quick to reinforce the US base at Guantánamo. But the Marines had not come to support Estenoz and the blacks; they were sent to protect the US sugar estates in the region.[25]

President Gómez was not pleased with the US mobilisation. His forces were quite able to conduct a massacre on their own. The repression was fierce, and some 3,000 blacks were killed. This was a race war, crushed by white Cubans. It was over within three weeks. Estenoz was killed on 12 June, surprised by an army patrol. His body was taken to Santiago and laid out in the Moncada barracks.[26]

Much controversy has surrounded these events, a debate similar to that over the 'Conspiracy of La Escalada'. Was this a rebellion by frustrated blacks, or was it a racist massacre organised by the government? For the authorities at the time, it was a black rebellion fortunately crushed by loyal troops. Later historians have been divided. Aline Helg describes it as 'a government-initiated racist massacre' aimed at the annihilation of Estenoz's black party, and has evidence to show that government repression *preceded* the action of the black protesters.[27] Others, notably Louis Pérez, argue that the black protest developed into a violent and uncontrollable black and peasant rebellion. In this version, the discontent and disappointment with the republican settlement of 1902, bubbling away within the black community in Oriente, finally exploded into a peasant *jacquerie* in the hills that took on the colouring, at moments, of a race war. Estenoz lit the tinder that caused the explosion. The violence had a political purpose, but it went beyond the usual breakdown of law and order at election time, and became a more generalised outbreak of anarchy.[28]

The versions are not mutually exclusive. Cuban politics, certainly since 1868, involved groups and individuals taking up arms to make their point, and Estenoz's armed protest of 1912 was no different in principle from that of José Miguel Gómez in 1906. Unfortunately for Estenoz, three things were different. The protest was led by a black for the first time since Aponte's rebellion a hundred years earlier; it took place against the background of widespread racist propaganda in the press; and it exploded chiefly in Oriente, an endemically conflictive part of the island since the first days of the Spanish conquest, very different from the western provinces where Gómez had raised his standard in 1906.

Estenoz might have expected his armed protest to lead to a period of negotiation; instead it sparked off a race war, with a revival of the poisonous atmosphere engendered by Lersundi's *voluntarios* in 1869 and by Weyler's concentration camps in 1896. 'This is the free and beautiful America,' commented the Conservative newspaper *El Día*, 'defending herself against a clawing scratch from Africa.' *El Día* commented favourably on American lynchings as a model for Cuba to keep the black population under control.[29] White militias were organised, martial law was imposed and the general commanding the forces in Oriente organised a special show for journalists of the army's new machine guns. They were directed towards a peaceful peasant village, killing 150 peasant families in their huts.[30]

'The "*reconcentración*" ordered by the Cuban general', wrote the French consul in Santiago, 'will empty the countryside of all indigenous and foreign families. It will hand over all these unfortunate and inoffensive black day labourers, rural workers, coffee pickers, cane cutters, herdsmen, and servants to the pitiless executioners of the military administration's dirty work. I tremble for this black flesh.'[31]

The massacre of 1912 remained etched in the memory of Cuban blacks for decades. They almost never took part in politics again, devoting themselves to music and retreating into their own African religions, and participating in white Cuban society in the only institutions to which they had easy access – the lower ranks of the army and the police force. Maybe they got their own back on the whites during the dictatorship of Machado in the 1920s. A later dictator, Fulgencio Batista, was one of their own.

A Republic for gamblers: Mario Menocal and Bert Crowder

The first decade of the Republic may have been characterised by white racism, violence, corruption and American military intervention, but at another level the country underwent an extraordinary economic recovery. As Cuba moved from the Spanish into the American sphere, new settlers and fresh investment poured in, transforming not just the sugar industry and its associated railway network, but also the mining and tobacco industries and the manufacture of textiles and other consumer goods. Given the prostrate country that existed in 1898, the recovery was a notable achievement.

Its first political beneficiary was Mario Menocal y Deop, Conservative president from 1913 to 1921. His period in office coincided almost exactly with that of Woodrow Wilson in the United States, as well as with the First World War, which created an insatiable demand for Cuban sugar. Income from sugar nearly doubled between 1914 and 1916.

A man who still dreamed in the 1930s of returning to power, Menocal was perceived by his contemporaries as 'more American than Cuban'.[32] Born in 1866 and educated at Cornell, Menocal returned to Cuba to fight in the independence war under Calixto García, later serving in the US military government as the Havana police chief. When the Americans left, he set out to make his fortune, joining the newly created Cuban American Sugar Corporation of New York and becoming the manager of its vast Chaparra estate in Oriente, soon to become one of the most successful sugar enterprises on the island.

A millionaire businessman, Menocal believed that what was good for the Cuban-American Sugar Corporation would be good for Cuba. He was so rich himself that he hardly needed to be personally corrupt, yet he acquired more from the Cuban treasury than from Chaparra's sugar mills. He ruled in an arbitrary manner, as though he were still a Spanish captain-general untrammelled by the demands of democracy, and he presided over a system that worked most effectively by buying people off with the money of the state. He introduced many reforms that bolstered the power of the presidency, including the modernisation of the armed services, with the amalgamation of the army and the Rural Guard, and the creation of a national bank in 1915 that issued a national currency – the Cuban peso – on a par with the US dollar.

While distant battles in Europe had usually had an adverse effect on developments in the Caribbean throughout much of Cuba's colonial history, leading to increased piracy and the collapse of trade, the First World War gave Cuba a gigantic bonanza, as the sugar price went sky high. Cut off from its German suppliers of beet sugar, Britain among others turned to the United States for its sugar supply – and by extension to Cuba.[33] Land was bought up, peasants evicted, forests cut down, plantations laid out, sugar mills constructed, new technologies introduced. Teresa Casuso, scion of the sugar oligarchy, recalled the drama of the environmental destruction in Oriente:

> I remember . . . the great impenetrable forests that were set aflame, whole jungles that were fired and razed to the ground to make way for the sugar cane. My parents were in despair for that lost wealth of beautiful, fragrant tropical wood – cedar and mahogany and mastic, and magnificent-grained pomegranate – blazing in sacrifice to the frenzy to cover the countryside with sugar cane. In the nights the sight of that flaming horizon affected me with a strange, fearful anxiety, and the aroma of burning wood floating down from so far away was like the incense one smells inside churches.[34]

Others were as concerned with uprooted peasants as with cut-down trees, and wrote of rural communities driven from their lands to join the surviving groups of bandits in the hills.[35]

With new lands to plant and harvest, plantation owners grew desperate for labour. Dispossessed peasants would not be turned overnight into a willing workforce. Former black slaves had preferred fighting for independence to working in the plantations, and were still angry over the massacre of 1912. White migration from Spain was at a low ebb in the war years because of shipping difficulties. Recruiting blacks from the Caribbean had been forbidden since the turn of the century, but the inexorable demand for workers led successive governments to override existing legislation. Landowners had to search for labour in neighbouring islands. Ironically, the demand of Evaristo Estenoz for the ban on black immigration to be lifted was granted in the year of his death. The Nipe Bay Company, owned by United Fruit, persuaded the government to allow it to import 1,400 workers from Haiti for its Preston plantation, next door to Chaparra. The wall had been breached, and over the next decade nearly 200,000 workers from Haiti and 80,000 from Jamaica came over to Cuba to work, from islands experiencing no comparable boom.[36]

Many were employed only during the harvest. Landowners preferred Haitians who could be shipped home after the harvest and did not have to be paid during the off-season. Many from Jamaica remained, leaving a permanent trace within the population of eastern Cuba. Americans preferred Jamaicans, since, as one journalist noted, 'they are the only servants in Cuba who can cook American style with any success'.[37] The labour recruiters also resurrected Chinese migration, banned during the American occupation and condemned by the Chinese emperor in 1873. Since the Manchu dynasty was swept away in 1911, the old rules no longer applied, although many new additions to Cuba's Chinese community came from California.

Happy with office, Menocal contemplated his re-election in 1916 and organised the customary fraud to ensure his victory. Magoon and Crowder had devised an elaborate and seemingly foolproof electoral system in 1909, but Cuban presidents would continue to rig the results – to no one's surprise. Much of the population continued to believe in the old nineteenth-century traditions of war and revolution. Another fraudulent election would mean another rebellion, and the violent campaign of 1916 was no exception.

Defrauded of victory, the Liberals organised an armed revolt to protest against the result, which had revealed more votes cast than there were eligible voters, and appealed to Woodrow Wilson to intervene. José Miguel Gómez landed on the south coast in February 1917, while Alfredo Zayas raised a rebel banner with other Liberals who would take their turn as President over the next 20 years – Gerardo Machado and Carlos Mendieta. The rebellion was called La Chambelona, the lollipop, after a Liberal song popular during the campaign.

Gómez was convinced that his American friends, who had come to his rescue in 1906, would do so again. Yet they were now more experienced in Cuban affairs and did not always jump the way that was expected of them. They had intervened reluctantly in 1906 to prop up a regime they had put in power just four years earlier. Fifteen years after independence, and on the verge of entering the great European war, they were yet more reluctant. The Americans condemned the Liberal rebellion, and although they eventually sent 2,000 Marines in 1917, these arrived, as they had done in 1912, to protect the US sugar plantations not at the request of aggrieved parties to an internal conflict. They stayed on the island for six years, 1,600 of them stationed in Oriente and 1,000 in Camagüey.

The Marines did not take action in the battle between Menocal and the Liberals, and Menocal defeated the rebellion through the tough methods of repression that Cuba had inherited from Spain. Along with many of his supporters, Gómez was captured and imprisoned, although he was released in September and the others amnestied in March 1918.

When fresh elections loomed again Menocal invited Bert Crowder to return to Havana to suggest 'amendments to the electoral law'. Crowder was familiar to Cubans and was now famous in America too, as the man put in charge of the draft. Arriving in March 1919, he immersed himself in census returns and electoral rolls, in the search for an ever more perfect electoral system, to be ready for the polls in November 1920.

Alfredo Zayas was declared the winner, and once again the Liberals shouted fraud. Once again they called for US intervention to verify the results of a fresh election. Washington was faced with its usual difficult choice. Treaty-bound to protect lives and property, it knew the situation was unstable, hearing from the US minister in Havana that 'if disturbances or revolution were to come, US interests would be the first to be destroyed'.[38]

The Marines had been on the island since 1917, but President Wilson preferred a political to a military intervention. Crowder was sent back to Havana in January 1921, as his personal representative. He arrived on an American battleship, the *Minnesota*, and remained on board in Havana harbour, engaged in negotiations to prevent further violence and to solve the election dispute.

The campaign for fresh elections in March 1921 took place in such an atmosphere of violence that the Liberals abstained, believing that they would again be the victims of fraud. The ever-hopeful Gómez went to Washington to appeal to the new American president, Warren Harding, for intervention. Harding was not interested, and Gómez died in New York in June. The Cuban leader who had sought US intervention on so many occasions, with such persistence and panache, was finally out of the race. Alfredo Zayas became President in May.

The election shenanigans were now overshadowed by a far more serious crisis. The end of the world war in 1918 affected sugar production and the sugar price. The world price, fixed by an Anglo-American committee, had been kept low during the final year of the war, at 4.6 US cents per pound of raw sugar. Controls were lifted in 1919, and the price soared inexorably in the early months of 1920 – to 10 cents a pound in March and to over 20 cents in May. This miraculous, if ephemeral, moment, was dubbed the 'dance of the millions', as immense fortunes were made by the US sugar companies in Cuba, and just as rapidly lost. The peak was reached in the middle of 1920, and then the price suddenly plunged – back to below 4 cents a pound by the time of the election in November.

What the US sugar companies had briefly won was now lost by the Cuban banks. They demanded, and eventually secured, a moratorium on the repayment of debt in October 1920. The political and the financial crisis intertwined and soon overwhelmed the country. The National Bank was forced to close its doors in April 1921. Its controlling shareholder was found hanged on the balcony of his apartment. The entire Cuban banking system collapsed in June, and many bankers fled into exile. Only a handful of foreign, mostly US, banks remained in operation, further enriching themselves by the purchase of sugar mills whose owners had been bankrupted.

Once wealthy, but now impoverished, Cuba was in desperate need of American assistance, not the Marines this time but a large loan. Zayas's new government approached several US banks and they demanded severe conditions – to be guaranteed by the continuing presence of Bert Crowder on board the *Minnesota*. He now took on the role of financial expert and adviser. Crowder wrote the script, while Zayas spoke the words. The government's budget would be cut, existing contracts would be reviewed and future projects would be subject to congressional approval – the American pattern. Crowder and Zayas worked separately and together in yet another attempt to reform the government bureaucracy and to root out corruption. An uphill task. The promised American loan was finally forthcoming in 1922. Crowder remained in Havana as the new US ambassador and as the guarantor for the US bankers.

American military interventions in Cuba in 1906, 1912 and 1917 had propped up unstable and insecure governments to maintain peace and security. Crowder's intervention in 1921 was of a new and different order, more directly concerned with the protection of US investments and loans during a difficult period. Cuba had become a significant producer of immense wealth, in whose activities American companies and individuals were deeply involved. Bankers and traders, mill and plantation owners, railroad operators and simple investors, all looked to the United States to protect their interests. Cuba had become a colony in all but name.

A Republic under dictatorship: Gerardo Machado, the tropical Mussolini, 1925–1933

Elections in 1924, still violent and fraudulent, produced a victory for the Liberals, their first since 1909. Their candidate, Gerardo Machado y Morales was a typical Liberal *caudillo*, little different from the Republic's first generation of corrupted politicians. He saw himself as the political heir of President Gómez. He enjoyed considerable popular appeal with the traditional liberal electorate, but was also at home in the army, the police force, the Liberal Party, the business community and the United States embassy.

Machado would have been well equipped to run any Latin American republic in the nineteenth century, but taking his turn as Cuba's president in the 1920s – with the sugar price collapsing, the stock exchange crashing and the country's finances in permanent disarray – he found the going more difficult than in earlier years, and his government's actions were correspondingly harsh. He coped with the situation by turning his government into an authoritarian dictatorship, the flavour of the era in other areas of the world from whose influence Cuba was by no means immune. Julio Antonio Mella, the Communist student leader, described him in a memorable phrase as a 'tropical Mussolini'.

Machado had humbler origins than earlier presidents. Once a butcher in Santa Clara, the town where he was born in 1871, he came from a family of cattle robbers, cutting up by day what they had obtained by night. A natural recruit to the rebel forces in the independence war, he rose to be a commanding officer, and turned to Liberal politics in peacetime. Elected mayor of his home town in 1900, and a collaborator of José Miguel Gómez, he reaped his reward when the Liberals became the chief beneficiaries of the creation of a Cuban army. He was appointed to be deputy chief of the armed forces in 1909, and was later the minister of the interior. He took an active part in La Chambelona, the Liberal war of 1917.

Machado established himself as a successful businessman while climbing up the political ladder, controlling the electric company in Santa Clara and then the sugar *central* at Carmita. In the 1920s he became a director of the powerful Compañía Cubana de Electricidad, the subsidiary of a US firm and a target of Cuban nationalism for many years because of its high prices. The American boss helped to finance his political campaigns.

Machado's business experience was an asset he put to good use. Bert Crowder noted with approval that he behaved like 'an intelligent executive in a position of semi-dictatorial authority'.[39] Machado soon took a leaf from the American book. If American pro-consuls could summon advisers to Cuba every few years to rewrite the election laws, why should a Cuban President not ask the Cuban congress to do the same? He arranged for a complicit congress to decree the tight control of all political parties. No new ones could be established, and the old ones were forbidden to reorganise. The road to a one-party state was mapped out. Machado's power was based on the army, soon the most powerful party in the land.

The old liberal fear in the nineteenth century was that Cuban independence would follow the pattern of Latin America or the Caribbean, with the emergence of military *caudillos* or the establishment of black rule. In the 1920s and 1930s these fears were realised with what was, in effect, a military dictatorship under Machado. He extended his presidential period in 1928 for a further six years, without troubling to call a fresh election.

Bert Crowder remained as US ambassador in Havana until 1927, watching his protégé's operations with considerable pride. 'Most Cubans' favoured a second term, he wrote in February 1927, and since Machado supported the 'closest possible co-operation' with the United States, the State Department would be well advised to give him an 'informal' assurance that it would not oppose his re-election.[40] In Crowder's eyes, Machado had done well in difficult circumstances, and his economic policies were not unintelligent. Indeed they prefigured some of the programmes of the Roosevelt New Deal. To mop up the unemployed, he embarked on huge public spending projects, among them the central highway the length of the island and the vast *Capitolio* building in central Havana, a copy of the US Congress building in Washington. Construction work on these prestige projects was concentrated in the off season, when no sugar cane was cut. To the thousands of US citizens who flocked to Cuba during the era of Prohibition, the island was an agreeable and fashionable place for a holiday. Enchanted by its rhythmic music, its beaches, its sunshine, and its rum, few visitors knew much about its politics.

Cubans were more critical of Machado than American tourists. The prolonged financial crisis, the economic uncertainty and Machado's manipulation of the political system, created opposition on a scale that any president would have found hard to deal with. Much of it was spearheaded by survivors of the older generation of Liberals and Conservatives, many of them members of the newly created Veterans' and Patriots' Association. Machado's control of congress meant they had little chance of returning to power by legitimate means. General Carlos García Vélez, the son of Calixto García, had organised an armed revolt near Cienfuegos in April 1924 even before Machado took over. He denounced graft and corruption in similar tones to those of Crowder, but his American friends proved of little assistance. President Coolidge sent USS *Cleveland* to Havana to support the government, and the revolt collapsed.[41]

Another rebellion was organised by a similar group a few years later, almost the last of its kind. The former president Menocal joined forces with Miguel Mariano Gómez, the son of the former president Gómez, and with Colonel Carlos Mendieta, a popular mayor of Havana, to revive the spirit of La Chambelona. They formed a right-wing group, the Unión Nacionalista, that sought support against Machado from within the armed forces. They also hoped to secure US support for a coup, and when this was not forthcoming, they turned to armed rebellion. Menocal and Mendieta sailed from the Havana Yacht Club to land at Rio Verde, in Pinar del Rio. Too old for such rash activities, they were promptly detained and imprisoned.

Others fared just as badly. A group of 40 led by Emilio Laurent and Sergio Carbó landed at Gibara on the north coast of Oriente. Advancing by train towards Holguín, they soon came under attack. Although Laurent and Carbó escaped, most of the others were tortured and shot, as were several innocent inhabitants of Gibara, which was bombed from the air.[42] Another group in

Oriente, led by Antonio Guiteras, sought to capture the Moncada barracks at Santiago, but they failed in the attempt and were captured and imprisoned.

The Gibara episode was the swansong of the generation formed by the experience of the independence war and the subsequent small wars that accompanied most Cuban election campaigns. The old figures from the independence war were dead or in their dotage and were widely discredited.

Other forces in society began to emerge during the Machado dictatorship. Cuban workers, for the first time since the slave revolts of the nineteenth century, were not only restless but on the road to creating their own organisations. The early traditions of the workers' movement, as in Spain and much of Latin America, were rooted in anarchism. A small workers' organisation, the Confederación Nacional Obrera Cubana (CNOC), was created by anarchists in 1925, and brought together small groups of anarchists, socialists and communists, all pledged to work on behalf of the working class. The anarchist strain began to fade in the 1920s, partly because of the appeal of the successful Russian revolution, which indicated that a modicum of discipline might be useful to a political movement, and partly because Machado shot or deported prominent anarchist leaders, or fed them to the sharks.[43]

An embryonic Communist Party, formed in August 1925 by socialists attracted by the Russian revolution, was eventually strong enough to take over the CNOC in 1931. Several of the more prominent Cuban Communists were Jews from eastern Europe – a fresh input into Cuba's ethnic mix – some of whom still found it easier to speak Yiddish rather than Spanish.[44] One of them, Yunger Semjovich, was to survive into the early years of the Revolution in 1959, under the name of Fabio Grobart. Distrust of the Communists as 'foreign', 'Jewish' and beholden to Moscow was one of the obstacles facing the Party, distrust as prevalent on the nationalist left as on the right. Mella was one of the Party's early leaders, a brilliant student orator shot in 1929 when in exile in Mexico City, assassinated on Machado's orders. Out walking with Tina Modotti, the Italian photographer, he died in the house of Diego Rivera.

Mella came from the middle class, like most Cuban politicians, but the Communists were more 'workerist' than the other movements that sprang up to oppose the Machado dictatorship. They also took more interest in the blacks than the middle-class parties felt called upon to do. Their principal aim was to organise the working class, in the factories, the sugar and tobacco plantations, and the railways, and this inevitably brought them into contact with the black population. Communists had no prejudice against blacks taking a leadership role in the Party, and at one brief stage in the 1930s they supported the idea of setting up a black republic in Oriente, where the blacks were in the majority.

Machado had little choice, from his perspective, except to clamp down on the various forms of opposition that began to emerge, and he did so with uncommon ferocity. The assassination of Mella was only unusual in that it took place in a foreign country. Cuba had always been a violent society. The tradition of the slave-owner with the dog and the whip had not been obliterated, and the machete had given way to the machine-gun as an instrument of social control. Those who participated in strikes and other oppositional activities in the Machado era put themselves in the firing line. Nor was Cuba an exception to the Latin American rule. The crushing of worker demonstrations with bullets was a common phenomenon elsewhere.

The repression soon affected sectors of society unused to such treatment, notably the middle-class students at the university whose parents did not expect them to be shot. A radical organisation at the University of Havana, the Directorio Estudiantil, was created to protest against the dictatorial behaviour of the Machado government. It grew out of the student euphoria of the 1920s that spread to every country in Latin America, similar to the mood that sprang up decades later in 1968. University students came solely from the middle class, and were more influenced by the Argentine student revolt in Córdoba in 1918 that brought students into the forefront of political change than by the (more distant) Russian revolution. They embraced anti-imperialism with open arms, but were often more circumspect about socialism. The Directorio was disbanded by Machado in 1927, obliging the students to turn to more violent forms of opposition.

A generational change in the 1930s brought new ideas and new leaders to the fore. A wide variety of secret organisations began to proliferate, with widely differing agendas. All were united in their desire to see an end to the Machado era, and individuals moved promiscuously from one to another, seeking effective action rather than ideological purity.[45] This freshly minted opposition to Machado became increasingly violent, matching the repression. After 30 years of nominal independence, Cuba remained corrupt and violent, and in the dark atmosphere of the Machado years, it was often difficult to distinguish between politically motivated gangsters and plain criminals.

The Directorio Estudiantil was re-established as a secret organisation in September 1930 and soon embarked on a campaign of violence, terrorism and assassination. More radical students, with a more overtly socialist orientation, split away six months later to form the Ala Izquierda Estudiantil, supported among others by Raúl Roa. A second opposition group, Unión Revolucionaria, was the brainchild of Antonio Guiteras Holmes, the most radical left-wing figure in the opposition. Formerly a leader of the Directorio Estudiantil, he had abandoned chemistry to become a full-time political activist, and split away from the movement in 1931, working briefly with the Unión Nacionalista.

A third conspiratorial movement, which labelled itself ABC for security reasons, was formed in September 1931, with an emphasis on 'youth' and the need for a clean break with the past. Although Machado himself had followed in the footsteps of Mussolini, the principal right-wing force that opposed him had been drinking from the same well. The ABC had some of the characteristics of the Spanish Falange, but their political lineage seemed closer to the Italian Futurists and to Mussolini. They were led by Joaquín Martínez Sáenz and Carlos Saladrigas, both middle-class lawyers, and Jorge Manach, a French-educated writer.

The ABC's Manifesto-Programme, issued early in 1932, was consciously based on the Italian fascist programme of 1919. A national-socialist programme of the radical right, it was hostile to US business interests, supportive of producer cooperatives and state control of public services and an advocate of 'Cubans First'. Its fascist flavour was indicated by its plan to withdraw the vote from illiterates, inevitably aimed in Cuba against blacks. No one ever revealed what ABC stood for, but the Communists with some justice suggested that it meant Asociación Blanca de Cuba, the Association of Cuban Whites.[46]

The ABC's practice was more significant than its ideology, for all student groups in the early 1930s were subject to foreign influences of one kind or another, and few were able to adjust them to Cuban reality. Many individuals moved seamlessly from one group to the other and the ABC would sometimes work with the Directorio Estudiantil. Ideologically at odds, the anti-Machado movements, on the left or the right, were all enamoured of violence, believing that the tactic of terror against the government – against its buildings and its servants – was their only effective weapon. In their use of terror they were at one with contemporary movements in Europe; they were also consonant with the revolutionary struggles of Cuba's past. The ABC may have hoped that this would provoke American intervention; Guiteras's Unión Revolucionaria and the Directorio Estudiantil would have fiercely rejected such an outcome.

The revolutionary violence of the early 1930s grew out of the increasingly desperate economic situation, which had deteriorated after the Wall Street crash of October 1929. Almost no regime, however repressive, could have easily survived the crisis affecting the island. The Depression struck Cuba with the force of a Caribbean hurricane. Just one economic indicator provides a measure of the disaster as it affected Cuba. The value of the island's sugar production slumped from nearly $200 million in 1929 to just over $40 million in 1932.[47] Not until 1991–4 was the island to experience a comparable catastrophe. Machado's government was bereft of ideas or mechanisms that might have provided a way through the crisis. As more than a quarter of the workforce lost their jobs, with a million family members facing hunger, political unrest exploded beyond the capacity of the state to contain.

The economic gales brought political upheaval and revolution to many countries all over the world, and Latin America was in the eye of the storm. A peasant insurrection in El Salvador in January 1932 was famously repressed; an air force rebellion in Chile in June that year briefly established a 'socialist republic', led by Marmaduque Grove, the uncle of Salvador Allende. These were new times, too, in Washington. A fresh government led by a Democratic president, Franklin Roosevelt, was inaugurated in January 1933. Americans were offered a 'New Deal', Latin Americans were promised a 'Good Neighbour' policy. Roosevelt told Cuba's ambassador in Washington that he had 'no desire to intervene' in Cuba's affairs. America's sole duty was to do what it could 'so that there should be no starvation and chaos among the Cuban people'. Nothing else was on offer.[48]

The new ambassador in 1933 was Sumner Welles, who had been part of Crowder's entourage in the 1920s and was no stranger to the sugar industry. He and Roosevelt had been at school together, at Groton, and they had a close relationship not unlike the one Theodore Roosevelt had once had with Leonard Wood. Roosevelt asked Machado if he would receive his old friend as a special envoy, as Crowder had once been, but the Cuban President requested that he should come as the ambassador. Machado cannot have been ignorant of the fact that Welles had instructions to investigate the situation, and permission, if necessary, to ease him from power.

Trouble had been brewing throughout the summer. A strike of bus drivers in Havana in July, protesting against a tax increase on urban transport, led to a bloody confrontation between the drivers and the police. Other workers soon joined the strike: tram drivers, lorry drivers, printers and stevedores at the docks. By August, what had been an ordinary workers' protest had developed into a general strike with insurrectionary overtones.

Welles stood back and took no action. Many wealthy Cubans believed that revolution was in the air and hoped for a US military intervention under the terms of the Platt Amendment. American troops stood ready at their base at Guantánamo Bay, poised to intervene to support the government once again. Other US forces were alerted in neighbouring Haiti, under US military occupation since 1915.[49] But they received no orders to move.

Without US support Machado was doomed. Destabilised by the economic collapse, unable to quell the strikers in the streets and under pressure from senior officers – and finally from Welles himself – Machado was forced to resign. He left the country for Nassau on 12 August.[50] His downfall took place rather sooner than Welles had expected and led to the first Cuban revolution of the twentieth century.

A Republic for revolutionaries: Antonio Guiteras and the Revolution of 1933

The Revolution of 1933 unfolded in three distinct phases, as each of the secretive anti-Machado movements emerged from the shadows to take their turn at government. The first had a semi-fascist tinge, and lasted barely a month, its political support coming from the ABC. The second was a radical, ultra-leftist experience, that survived for four months and came out of the Directorio Estudiantil, with Antonio Guiteras as its leading player. The third phase was a counter-revolution lasting five years, from 1934 to 1939, that took its political colouring from Fulgencio Batista, a worthy successor to Machado.

At the start, an orderly transfer of power led to the appointment as interim president, effectively selected by Sumner Welles, of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, the pedestrian grandson of the independence leader of 1868. He had once served as a minister under Machado and was supported by the fascist-leaning ideologues of the ABC. His right-wing government, with its notably pro-American cabinet, did little more than preside over the dissolution of the Machado congress and watch helplessly as the mob took over the streets.

They could do nothing to control or canalise this anarchic explosion of popular feeling, made more dramatic in Havana by the total absence of policing. Machado's policemen had sensibly disappeared from the streets before they were met with popular justice. Many were lynched, and, in the ensuing chaos, hundreds of people were killed and many houses sacked.

Grant Watson, the British ambassador, described scenes of vengeance that would 'remain for ever a painful recollection for those who beheld them', perhaps because it was unusual to observe the Havana middle class taking part in the looting. Looking out of the embassy window after dinner, he noted a frenzied crowd sacking the house of his neighbour, a Machado senator. He found it 'a revolting sight, for while Negroes fought for gramophones and nursemaids for shawls, well-dressed families drove up in Packards and Cadillacs, [and] seized Louis XV cabinets and gilded chairs'.[51]

With the pressure of dictatorship lifted, the country beyond Havana experienced a mounting tide of revolutionary fervour, beyond the capacity of any political group to ride or control. A wave of agitation and unrest swept across the sugar zones, extending to the most distant mills. Young and old, black and white, old inhabitants and new immigrants – everyone was caught up in the revolutionary excitement. A vivid account of that summer's great upheaval was provided a year later by a group of Cuba experts at the US Foreign Policy Association, who visited the country to report on the events of the revolutionary year. They described the first seizure of a sugar mill at Punta Alegre in Camagüey, on 21 August:

> Within less than a month the number of mills under labour control was estimated at thirty-six. Soviets were reported to have been organised at Mabay, Jaronú, Senado, Santa Lucía, and other *centrales.* At various points mill managers were held prisoners by the workers. Labour guards were formed, armed with clubs, sticks and a few revolvers, a red armband serving as uniform. Workers fraternised with the soldiers and police.
>
> During the first stage of the movement, demonstrations in Camagüey and Oriente were often headed by a worker, a peasant and a soldier. At some of the *centrales* in Santa Clara, Camagüey, and Oriente provinces, the workers occupied not only the mills, but also the company railroad systems, and extended their control to the sub-ports and neighbouring small towns and agricultural areas.
>
> Relief committees supplied food to the strikers and their families, and in some cases became subsistence commissions for the whole population of the strike area. At various points these committees allocated parcels of land to be cultivated by the field workers.[52]

In this continuing atmosphere of revolution in the countryside, with violence on the streets of Havana and political plotting behind closed doors, Céspedes and the ABC could not survive. They were swept away on 4 September by an unplanned and unexpected coup. A rebellion broke out at military headquarters at Camp Columbia, the huge base on the outskirts of Havana. Discontent among a group of army sergeants resulted in a barracks mutiny. The sergeants feared a counter-coup by the surviving Machado officers and moved first. A small group of sergeants, corporals and enlisted men formed themselves into a revolutionary junta.

Pre-eminent among their leaders was Fulgencio Batista Zaldívar, a mulatto typist from Oriente, aged 31. The sergeants' mutiny was a bizarre and unlooked-for development, one of the few occasions in Latin American history when a *coup d'état* has been staged by the lower ranks. It was soon capitalised on by a handful of professors and student leaders from the Directorio Estudiantil who had read their revolutionary manuals and had been busily plotting on their own account. They drove out to Camp Columbia to make common cause with the soldiers and to assist in the formation of a provisional revolutionary government. Céspedes was replaced by a coalition of soldiers and students. Their alliance was explained in a contemporary account of the sergeants' actions by Ruby Hart Phillips, the well-informed wife of the *New York Times* correspondent. Hers is probably a close enough guide to what happened:

> They realised the people of the island wouldn't support a military government headed by sergeants no one had ever heard of, so they sent out cars and called members of the university faculty on the phone, members of the Directorio Estudiantil and some other well-known radicals to hurry up and come to Camp Columbia. All the radicals and students rushed out to Camp, thinking it was their conspiracy; when they arrived they found it was the sergeants', but they decided that was as good as any conspiracy, so long as they were in it, and everyone shouted 'Viva la República'.[53]

The soldier-student gathering in Camp Columbia produced a 'Proclamation to the People of Cuba' that was published the next day. Drafted by Sergio Carbó, the newspaper editor who had taken part in the abortive landing at Gibara in 1931, it was signed by 16 civilians, two former soldiers and Batista, who described himself alongside his signature as the 'Revolutionary Chief Sergeant of All the Armed Forces of Cuba'.[54]

The moderate programme outlined in the Proclamation looked forward to a constituent assembly to write a new constitution, and a tribunal to judge the crimes of the Machado era. It sought the protection of property, of both nationals and foreigners; the recognition of debts incurred by previous regimes; and the re-establishment of peace and justice. It was a triumph for the middle-class students of the Directorio Estudiantil, whose programme it was.

Throughout August, the more radical student leaders had been alarmed both by the alliance between Céspedes and Sumner Welles, and by the fact that Machado's army had remained intact after the departure of Machado himself. The rebellion of the sergeants was a godsend to the radicals. Ordinary working-class soldiers were taking up arms against their corrupt and privileged officers. It was an unexpected but most welcome development. Just in case anyone missed against whom the revolution was directed, Sergio Carbó told the *New York Times* that the Republic had come of age and 'with cries of joy' had 'escaped from the American embassy'.[55]

In their own statement, signed, among others, by Carlos Prío Socarrás and Eduardo Chibás, the Directorio Estudiantil claimed their own part in the revolution, emphasising their hostility to the 'inanimate government named by the US Ambassador', and the need to purge the armed forces:

> With this chaotic state in the country, without principle of authority and with many Machado-stained men still in the armed forces, the Directorio decided to launch its revolutionary action, with the relatively untarnished section of the armed forces who, with great patriotic organisation and responsibility, acted energetically but without needing to fire a single gun, cleansing in this way the glorious uniform of the Army, which was on the edge of dishonour, because of the collaboration of its leaders with the *Machadato*.[56]

The cries of pleasure at the latest twist came from the rebellious black crowds in the streets, and soon caused alarm among the Americans in Havana and among Cuba's own white settler elite. 'Fears of a Negro uprising again took hold of certain sections of the Cuban population,' noted the American researchers from the Foreign Policy Association, who described how 'negroes were among the leaders in seizing sugar properties and making exorbitant demands on mill managers'.[57] Ruby Hart Phillips exemplified the mood among American observers, describing in her diary the scenes on the palace balcony on the day after the September revolution:

> Every negro in town is there, apparently they didn't even go home for lunch, or perhaps they thought the new government would serve lunch. Sergeant Batista has proved to be a powerful and inflaming speaker. He really is good, but he'd better be careful those negroes don't get the idea that the island is completely theirs, and go out to help themselves to anything in sight.[58]

She need not have worried. The whites soon reasserted themselves, and were soon turning up their noses at the dark-skinned Batista. Batista, too, had made clear where he stood. Abandoning the student revolutionaries on the palace balcony, he took himself off for an appointment with Sumner Welles, apparently at his own request. Welles had panicked the previous day, fearing the worst and summoning more US warships into Havana harbour, but Batista, with his immense personal charm and broad grin, made an excellent impression on the nervous ambassador. They were to meet again, frequently.

Batista's junta chose Dr Ramón Grau San Martín, a wealthy doctor and a university professor who had supported the Directorio, to be the new president. He was sworn in on 10 September, and presided for just four months over a revolution that he was wholly unable to control. Batista and the sergeants remained in the background, while the students fought out their differences among themselves.

Grau's revolutionary government was divided from the start between a radical group from the Unión Revolucionaria of Antonio Guiteras, and more moderate elements from the Directorio Estudiantil. Guiteras was in the most powerful position, appointed as minister of the interior, of war and of the navy, giving him nominal control over the army, the navy and the police. His ally, Gustavo Moreno, took over communications, and Eduardo Chibás was put in charge of public works. Guiteras now took the leading role in the revolution, a link between José Martí and Fidel Castro. His political ideology and practice prefigured that of Castro 20 years later, while his incorruptibility in a venal age and his austere style – he was known to have only one suit – harked back to Martí. All three men were imbued by a sense of patriotism common to few.

Born in 1906 to a Cuban father and an English mother, Guiteras had been partly brought up in the United States. He was a radical Liberal soon attracted to socialism, but never to communism, although the US embassy in Havana routinely described him as such. Like the other student leaders, he had long been organising in secret, breaking away from the Directorio to found Unión Revolucionaria in 1931. Later, in 1934, he was to organise a new movement, Joven Cuba, that called for socialism; advocated land reform, industrialisation and the creation of a national shipping company; and hoped to achieve its aims through armed struggle and the infiltration of the armed forces.

Guiteras's views reflected an eclectic mix of revolutionary influences, from Auguste Blanqui to Jean Jacques Jaurès. He drew inspiration from the Mexican and the Russian revolutions, the struggle in Ireland and Sandino's guerrilla movement in Nicaragua. He shared the anti-imperialist politics of the age and, drawing on anarchist roots, advocated rural and urban armed struggle, assaults on army barracks and the assassination of policemen and members of the government. He was a firm believer in direct action, the propaganda of the deed, derived from Blanqui and the Spanish anarchists, and was much criticised by the Communists for his voluntarism and his predilection for violence.

Grau's government had innumerable enemies. First there were the ousted cadres of the fascistic ABC. Then there were the old Conservatives around Menocal and the Liberals of Colonel Mendieta, grouped together in the Unión Nacionalista. Finally there were the senior officers in the armed forces, the survivors of the Machado era. Many had been humiliated during the August rioting and now they had to choose between staging a coup or escaping into exile. The action of Batista and the sergeants made a coup more difficult and the majority decided to leave the country.

Sumner Welles paved the way to what looked like a solution of their problems. During the panic immediately after the sergeants' coup in September, he told US citizens to congregate at the Hotel Nacional, the great hotel palace on the Malecón looking over the sea. Welles had appealed for US intervention, if only to guard the hotel and the embassy, yet immediate intervention proved impossible. Several US warships hovered off Havana, but none had a complement of Marines sufficiently large to land against possible resistance.

Ignorant of these important details several hundred of Machado's officer corps took refuge in the hotel with the Americans, praying for a speedy intervention and their evacuation. Their prayers were not answered. Soldiers loyal to Batista attacked the hotel with heavy artillery and some 80 people were killed and 200 wounded. The surviving officers surrendered and were escorted across the harbour to the Cabaña, several being killed on the way. A second officers' revolt in November, supported by sections of the ABC and sparked off within the airforce, was also brutally crushed, with more than 200 dead.

The defeat and slaughter of the Machado officers immeasurably strengthened the hand of Batista, who was now the unquestioned boss of the army. Hundreds of sergeants and corporals were promoted to fill the depleted ranks of the officer corps. Backed by this newly constituted army, Batista was now in a far stronger position than Guiteras and the students with whom he was allied.

Yet the radicalisation of Grau's government went ahead. It refused to service the debt on the American loans made to Machado. It nationalised Chaparra and Delicias, the two mills of the Cuban American Sugar Corporation, and it nationalised Cuban Electric.

More controversially, in a decree reflecting the frustrated nationalism of many decades, it ordered all businesses to ensure that 50 per cent of their workers had been Cuban born. The decree was aimed at both Spaniards and blacks from the Caribbean. The inherent racism within Cuban society, never far fom the surface, had been released by the September revolution. So too had the resentment against what was seen as the arrogance of the Spanish immigrants. Spanish immigration had in fact been in decline since the Depression, but the decree was a psychological as much as a physical blow to the powerful Spanish community. The notion that a Cuban government could take such an action against the citizens of the mother country was a grave humiliation. Yet the decree against the Spanish was hugely popular, and Spanish businesses and shops came under attack. English, German and North American companies were also affected.

Harsher still was the impact of the decree on the black migrants from Jamaica and Haiti. Fidel Castro's godfather was the consul of Haiti in Santiago, and Castro recalled in 1985 how the consul had been affected by the decree:

> The so-called revolution of 1933 was a movement of struggle and rebelliousness against injustice and abuse. It called for the nationalisation of the electric company and other foreign enterprises, and for the nationalisation of employment . . . Tens of thousands of Haitians were mercilessly deported to Haiti. According to *our* revolutionary ideas, that was an inhuman thing to do.[59]

Inhuman or not, the decree against the immigrant blacks was as popular as the attack on the Spanish community.

These populist measures were not sufficient to protect Grau's government. The final showdown between Batista and Guiteras came in January 1934. Batista had defeated his enemies within the armed forces, and the only enemy in sight was the United States ambassador, who had steadfastly refused to recognise the Grau government. Batista well understood that the United States would only recognise and support a more moderate President. The favoured candidate was Colonel Mendieta, leader of what was left of the old Liberal Party. As the crisis deepened, Guiteras called for a general strike to protect the existing government, but the public mood was changing and the workers were no longer listening. Batista pushed Mendieta into accepting the presidency, and he took over on 18 January, to be greeted at the palace by rapturous crowds.

Batista had judged well. The continuing uncertainty had lost the Grau government the support that it had once had. With a new, more conservative president in place, the United States was content to recognise his government, which it did formally a few days later, while Grau sailed off to exile in Mexico.

A Republic designed for Fulgencio Batista, 1934–1952

Batista had made himself the arbiter of Cuban politics, and he was to dominate the country for the next 25 years. Born on a sugar plantation in 1902, he was more representative of the Cuban people than any of the rulers in their history, before or since, claiming African, Spanish, Indian and Chinese blood in his veins. He had joined the army as a private at the age of 19 and, learning how to use the typewriter, he became a stenographer with the rank of sergeant who participated in the work of military tribunals. He was later to become the single most important political figure in the twentieth century in Cuba aside from Castro. As revolutionary leader, elected president, military dictator and millionaire defender of the Mafia, he left an indelible mark on the history of his country that was only effaced by the Revolution of 1959.

Batista manipulated events behind the scenes during the civilian governments of the 1930s – seven followed in quick succession from 1934 to 1940 – before finally submitting himself for election, successfully, in October 1940. Although he was eventually to join the ranks of the most reviled Latin American dictators of his era, in his years as the country's elected president, from 1940 to 1944, he enjoyed considerable popularity.

His counter-revolutionary blow of January 1934 was effected with ease. He simply transferred the allegiance of the armed forces from Grau to Mendieta, through the offices of the US embassy. The United States reinforced the position of President Mendieta by abolishing the Platt Amendment, the chief grievance of Cuban nationalists. It was formally removed from the Cuban constitution on 29 May 1934 and a new treaty was signed. The United States retained a safeguard, refusing to abandon its great military base at Guantánamo Bay.

Yet in spite of Batista's coup, much of the country was still in a revolutionary mood that Mendieta could do little to counter. Guiteras, released from the cares of government, revived the clandestine movement, now renamed Joven Cuba, with which he had once fought Machado, and welded it into an urban guerrilla movement to overthrow Mendieta. Anti-government protests, work stoppages and strikes continued throughout 1934 and into the early months of 1935. He tried yet again to destroy the government with a general strike in March 1935 and brought the country to a halt. Yet Mendieta and Batista still had a populist wind in their sails, and, imposing martial law in the old Spanish fashion, they crushed the strike. Once again a wave of repression swept across the island, with unions made illegal, the university closed and detention and torture made the norm for political activists.

The island came under increasing military control. The process begun under Machado was consolidated under Batista. The army became the most significant force in politics, a power that seeped rapidly into the culture and remained deeply entrenched in Cuban society. The American researchers of the Foreign Policy Association recorded how, when 'speaking of the need of playgrounds and playground directors in Havana, a Cuban woman told of the children who congregated in a small park near her house. All day . . . the children played at revolution. They lined up and paraded, and shot each other with imaginary guns, and dragged off the victims.'[60]

Writing of the influence of North American films, Louis Pérez has described how the gangster movies of the 1930s became especially popular, influencing the Cuban form of political violence. 'The drive-by machine-gun shooting, so much a part of the film genre, became a prominent motif of political warfare in Havana. The method was familiar to movie-goers: the speeding car, the burst of machine-gun fire, the getaway.'[61] The word *gangsterismo* was coined to describe a new development in the country's politics.

In despair after the failed general strike, Guiteras planned a retreat to Mexico. A farm had been bought there, guerrilla fighters were to be trained to return to Cuba to fight a revolutionary war, on the nineteenth-century model.[62] Guiteras was to sail out from Matanzas in May 1935. The operation was an interesting one, but was not to be up and running for another two decades, and it would not be led by Guiteras. He was killed at the Fortín Morillo in Matanzas as he prepared to sail into exile.

Mendieta did not survive as president for long, and was followed by a succession of minor political figures over the next few years, all relying on the whim of Batista. Elections were finally held in January 1936, but the protagonists were ghosts from the past; former President Menocal losing to Miguel Mariano Gómez. President Gómez barely lasted the year, defeated on the issue of rural schools. Batista had sent soldiers to build and teach in rural schools, considered a dangerously populist measure by the old Liberal elite. When put to the vote in congress, Gómez was successfully impeached for trying to prevent it, and replaced by his vice-president.

As the violence receded, the old order reasserted itself under Batista's watchful eye. Grau San Martín reassembled his old supporters and created a new middle-class movement, the Partido Revolucionario Cubano Auténtico, reviving the name of Martí's old party. The Communists, too, began to emerge from the shadows and to feel their way towards legality, creating the Partido Unión Revolucionaria, led by Juan Marinello, a poet and professor at the university. Since Grau's party had no intention of making common cause with them, the Communists turned towards Batista. If Batista would allow the Communists to organise, they would offer him the party political support that he lacked. A deal was done. The Communist Party was allowed to operate legally, and a party newspaper, *Hoy*, edited by Joaquín Ordoqui, was set up. 'The people who are working for the overthrow of Batista,' the Comintern journal noted piously, 'are no longer acting in the interests of the Cuban people.'[63] The Communists were allowed to form a new union movement, the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba (CTC), led by Lázaro Peña, a black tobacco worker, and the CTC became the beneficiary of a close relationship with the Ministry of Labour.

The alliance between the Communists and Batista was understandable in the context of the time, but was jeered at by middle-class radicals, the heirs to the upheavals of 1933, and the legend of Communist Party perfidy remained widespread until long after 1959.

One of the belated achievements of the Revolution of 1933 was the creation of a new constitution. Machado had written one to suit his own convenience, but the constitution of 1940 was the first produced by an elected constituent assembly since the first Republican constitution of 1902, flawed by the inclusion of the Platt Amendment. Elections for the assembly were held in November 1939, and Grau's Partido Auténtico and its allies won 41 seats out of 76. Batista's party and the Communists secured 35 between them. The assembly met in February 1940 and completed its work within six months.

The new constitution had an important progressive formulation for its time and became a significant reference point in later years. It had a strong social-democratic content: workers were given a constitutional right to an 8-hour day, a 44-hour week and one month's paid holiday, plus a pension, compulsory social insurance and accident compensation; freedom of association, and freedom to vote in elections and referendums, was granted to adults over the age of 20; and women received the vote for the first time.

The old nervousness about the black population reasserted itself, and, although segregation was outlawed, political movements based on race were specifically banned – as they had been since 1910. Still influenced by US models, though now those of the Roosevelt's New Deal, the constitution favoured a powerful role for the state in economic and social development, the regulation of property rights and eight years of compulsory education for all children.[64]

When Batista became president himself, during the boom conditions of the Second World War, he ruled as a social democrat. Trade union rights were confirmed and extended, government money was spent on social programmes and local Communists were welcomed into his government (with Stalin perceived as a vital ally against Hitler and diplomatic relations established with the Soviet Union).

The war led to the collapse of sugar production in Asia and Europe and Cuba again received an unexpected bonanza. The sugar crop increased from 2.7 million tons to 4.2 million in the period from 1940 to 1944, and the value of raw sugar production went up from $110 million to $251 million. Although European markets were lost, and even some in the United States owing to the scarcity of shipping, these were balmy years for Batista's government.[65] The high sugar price and a prolonged era of social peace, the product of support for the government from the Communist Party and its allied labour movement, gave the country a positive folk memory of the Batista government.[66] People forgot wartime scarcities, unemployment, inflation and the lack of foreign tourists.

When his four-year period came to an end, Batista hoped that Carlos Saladrigas, his prime minister and a former leader of the ABC, would win the presidency, but the voters chose Grau San Martín and the Auténticos. Invoking memories of 1933, he swept the country. Once in government, he continued along Batista's reformist path, soon disappointing his more radical backers. As the storm clouds of the Cold War began to gather, and with the support of Carlos Prío Socarrás, his minister of Labour, he moved against the Communist Party and against the Communist-dominated workers' union, the CTC.

Grau's move to the right sparked opposition within the ranks of the Auténticos, and in 1947, Eduardo Chibás, another memory from the 1930s, formed a more radical party, the Partido Revolucionario Cubano Ortodoxo. With the Ortodoxos, he hoped to win the presidential election of 1948. He was pitted against Prío Socarrás for the Auténticos, another relic of 1933. Prío was the winner, and his four-year government, from 1948 to 1952, has been described as 'the most polarised, corrupt, violent, and undemocratic' in Cuba's republican history.[67]

At mid-century, Cuba was suffering from a systemic crisis, both political and economic. The generation that had participated in the overthrow of Machado and taken part in the revolutionary events of 1933 had had a fresh chance to run the country and had thrown their opportunity away. All the old politicians were discredited, while the one figure from that era that retained a sense of honesty – Eduardo Chibás – had made a dramatic exit from the scene. He shot himself live on radio, in August 1951, during one of his weekly broadcasts usually devoted to attacking the corruption of the Prío government. Possibly an accident or more probably suicide, Chibás's death marked the end of the era that had begun in 1933.

New players were now hovering in the wings. One of these was Fidel Castro, who, together with half a hundred would-be revolutionaries emerging from the University of Havana, was soon to sponsor a fresh revolutionary movement that would inevitably evoke echoes of that earlier event.

Another contender, first on stage, was the military. Remade under Batista, Cuba's armed forces were closely involved in politics but did not fall into the continent's typical pattern. They were not part of the traditional ruling elite. Junior officers were as aware as anyone in the wider society of the failings of successive civilian regimes. Political corruption and *gangsterismo*, coupled with the luxurious life-style of senior officers that rarely trickled down the pecking order, aroused as much anger in the nationalistic breasts of young officers as it did in students at the university.

In the final years of President Prío, junior officers sounded out General Batista to discover if he would support a coup they had under consideration. The old coup-maker was initially reluctant; elections were scheduled for 1952 and he would again be a candidate. Chibás, the charismatic candidate of the Ortodoxos in 1948, was dead. The candidate of the Auténticos was the uncharismatic Grau San Martín. Batista calculated that he might not win, and the unrest within the military suggested that the elections might not even take place. Discovering that the officers were bent on a coup, with or without him, he put himself at their service.

Batista drove to Camp Columbia in the early hours of Sunday 10 March 1952, and arrested the senior officers who lay sleeping there. Before dawn, he controlled the city, and Prío Socarrás was on his way to the Mexican embassy to seek asylum. Prío's rule was in its final months and his downfall left no regrets among the population. No one took up his call for resistance, and his government collapsed without a shot being fired.

Batista's new regime was widely welcomed. After a perfunctory attempt to preserve the constitutional niceties, and to repeat his experience of the 1930s by finding a figleaf president, Batista appointed himself as chief of state. He invoked the name of Martí in his first public speech and associated himself with the popular aspiration for progress and democracy, and for peace and justice; it was an impeccable performance. Police and army pay was increased, congressmen and senators continued to receive their salaries. Much of the constitution of 1940 was suspended, but most people, with the exception of the Ortodoxos, like Castro and his friends, gave the new government the benefit of the doubt. European and Latin American countries granted swift diplomatic recognition, followed at a decent interval by the United States.

Batista's coup forestalled the presidential election and obliged politicians of all stripes to revise their plans. Some accommodated themselves to the new order, but to a new generation of young political activists the coup came as a fresh political opportunity. Like their politically confused predecessors in the 1930s they had doubts about the value of the electoral process in the Cuba context. Like them, they had already organised themselves into action groups and were involved in the internecine political feuding and *gangsterismo* that characterised the post-war period. Now they were presented with an unexpected opportunity to put their theoretical support of violence into practice. The time seemed right. While Batista's coup received some initial support from those disgusted by the corruption of the parliamentary regime, his subsequent actions showed that there would be no real break with the past. Batista had no fresh recipe for the country other than himself and his record. It was not sufficient.

5

Castro's Revolution takes shape, 1953–1961

Castro's attack on Moncada, 26 July 1953

The Moncada fortress lies just a short drive from Santiago's central square. In the 1950s it stood on the outskirts of the city. A once grey, two-storey battlemented barracks, now painted bright yellow picked out with white, its aboveground entrance is approached via a row of concrete steps. The second largest barracks in the country in the 1950s, second only to Havana's Camp Columbia, it was originally designed to house the Rural Guard during the American occupation after 1898, and often regarded subsequently as a symbol of government repression. A hundred years later, its large courtyards are shared between a number of classrooms and a dusty museum, for the revolutionaries of the 1950s had promised that such barrack buildings would be turned into schools. The cells and the interrogation rooms remain as they once were, bleak testimony to past atrocities.

On 26 July 1953 an armed attack took place at Moncada, led by Fidel Castro, the flamboyant figure then aged 26 who was to dominate Cuban politics and history for more than half a century. The assault on Moncada, and a simultaneous move against the barracks at Bayamo, was designed to secure weapons from the arsenal, but its underlying purpose was to overthrow the Batista government established after a *coup d'état* the previous year. The action itself proved to be a disastrous failure, little more than an ill-prepared putsch, as the Communists described it, showing no more interest in the country's insurrectionary traditions than they had done in the 1930s. Yet Moncada was a challenge to the regime, and would lay the groundwork for a revolutionary organisation, the July 26 Movement, that would sweep to power less than six years later. It also made the name of its leader known across the island.

Castro was regarded at the time as the outstanding figure of his generation, a brilliant student orator and a successful athlete, a man marked for politics