

Lillian Guerra, *Heroes, Martyrs, and Political Messiahs in Revolutionary Cuba, 1946–1958*

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Lillian Guerra's impressive study of the wide-ranging radicalism in Cuba before 1959 and beyond the Fidel Castro-led 26 July Movement is in one very clear sense a 'Part 2' of her major opus to date. In 2012, her prize-winning *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption and Resistance, 1959–1971* attempted to deconstruct what she saw as the current of redemptive morality which helped shape the post-1959 radicalisation and evolving ideology of 'the Revolution'; it included those who were driven by the same current but who dissented from that project. That study added significantly to our growing awareness of the Revolution's nationalist roots and the ideology's multilayered nature and has since been widely seen as a path-breaking exposition of post-1959 Cuba.

This time her focus is the pre-1959 radicalism out of which that Revolution emerged. However, unlike most narratives within the established canon of historiography inside Cuba, her aim is to rescue the elements, and especially the 'heroes' and 'martyrs', who she argues were subsequently overlooked (or, more often, distorted) by that canon but who, in her well-argued view, contributed as much to the shaping of post-1959 Cuba (or, in some cases, of an alternative 'new Cuba' that in the event never emerged after 1959) as the 'mythified' and canonically established 'heroes' of the Cuban narrative.

In doing so, she brings to her analysis her now characteristic delight in detail, her sharp eye, and her eloquent turn of phrase, but also this time introduces her own interviews with contemporaries of the 'heroes', to give us a more human and potentially revealing dimension and detail. Indeed, although overall she offers relatively little in the way of solid data that is either new or not already surmised by the literature on the period, what these sources provide is a richness of detail that does indeed help us to understand the atmosphere of the time (making a clear claim to that period's undeniably 'revolutionary' character and potential) and also to understand, and get inside, the often complex mix of motives and ideological underpinnings which drove the protagonists. In fact, curiously, one might add that we get a clearer sense of that complexity from her interview-based picture than from her rather sweeping description of many of the heroes' politics as (undefinedly) 'socialist', a reference that, while not entirely convincing or elaborated, feeds unexpectedly into the canonical narrative: that the post-1959 socialism was firmly based on existing traditions. However, while that narrative

(at least as it was written in the 1975–89 years of orthodox ‘institutionalisation’ in Cuba) saw those traditions as represented by the pre-1959 (communist) Partido Socialista Popular (PSP), Guerra’s ‘villains’ (rather than ‘heroes’) of the piece clearly include the PSP, whose somewhat patchy and often decidedly un-heroic history after 1930 is well examined and exposed by her. That said, however, the determination to critique the post-1959 narrative of the PSP does perhaps lapse into a degree of neglect of the success of their labour activism and, as a result, their relatively high levels of support among sectors of the Cuban population.

Her approach to detail also gives us some welcome and fascinating insights into key (but often superficially treated) episodes of the period. The outstanding examples are two from 1947: the abortive Cayo Confites expedition to liberate the Dominican Republic, at the time in the thrall of dictator Rafael Trujillo, and Castro’s deliberately dramatic seizure of the Demajagua ‘liberty’ bell from Manzanillo, an action symbolically designed to stimulate opposition to the contemporary corruption and disillusion. Equally detailed and fascinating is the account of the plotting of the 1952 coup by Fulgencio Batista and his co-conspirators.

If there is a criticism of the study it lies perhaps in the rather narrow focus in terms of characters: the two ‘martyrs’ – Eddy Chibás (founder of the Partido del Pueblo Cubano – Ortodoxos) and the student leader José Antonio Echeverría – are well portrayed, with all of their contradictions and broad popularity, while other potentially revealing biographies are somewhat overlooked. Disappointingly, Rafael García Bárcena (from whose Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario many 26 July recruits came and whose plan to attack the Havana garrison may well have stimulated the idea of Fidel Castro and the other Ortodoxo plotters to attack Santiago’s Moncada garrison in July 1953) is covered but not in the detail given to the main two protagonists. The other neglected ‘hero’ is perhaps Frank País, the 26 July leader in Santiago, who was driven by his Baptist beliefs and whose omission here misses a trick, given that Guerra’s focus is partly driven by the idea that the deaths of Chibás and Echeverría helped create the environment for Fidel Castro but may also have left a space for him alone to fill. Given that some observers have seen País’ death as leaving a similar void, greater detail might have been welcome.

Moreover, one underlying assumption of Guerra’s counter-narrative is that her heroes were long neglected in Cuba: however, while that was certainly true for the first three decades of the Revolution (when ‘class’ predominated in historiography and when the immediate past attracted no clear consensus to allow it to be addressed objectively), the reality is that the post-1994 reassessment of historiography has increasingly focused on the Patria rather than class and on the neglected episodes, people and parties of the once long-condemned ‘Pseudorepública’ of 1902–58, especially through the Instituto de Historia de Cuba, the Bayamo-based Casa de la Nacionalidad and the many local histories emerging from the provincial Ediciones Territoriales. That reassessment has included Guerra’s ‘heroes’, albeit not with the human detail and the perspective that she offers, not least the implicit and explicit critique of the ‘mythical’ post-1959 ‘heroes’. Although she does well in convincing us of the revolutionary

nature of those times, her account of the 1933 ‘real’ revolution rather skims over that confusing episode’s complex history, of a wave of widespread and often violent unrest which may well have consisted of up to six separate currents of rebellion, few of which were either intentionally or actually revolutionary.

Nonetheless, those criticisms aside, this is a masterful and always riveting account and analysis of a period which few outside or inside Cuba have addressed in this depth and detail and, in the process, of some of the key protagonists of that ferment. ‘Part 2’ is indeed every bit as good as ‘Part 1’.

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Flavia Fiorucci and José Bustamante Vismara (eds.),
Palabras claves en la historia de la educación argentina
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 download, PDF.

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This book is an excellent reference work for broad audiences and Latin Americanist scholars alike. Sixty-eight entries illustrate the impressive development of the history of education in Argentina and provide a conceptual toolbox and roadmap for specialists across Latin America. Contributing authors examine various aspects of the history of elementary and secondary education, in entries ranging from the mainly descriptive to the predominantly theoretical, all of them accompanied by brief bibliographies. As the editors acknowledge, this book represents an original initiative inspired by equivalent works in the social sciences. Taking an indispensably interdisciplinary approach, contributing authors share a concern over historicising educational ideas, events, artifacts and processes. In doing so, they challenge the tendency to naturalise educational phenomena still common in Latin American societies.

A book like this is possible because of the notable expansion of the history of education as a field of scholarly inquiry in Argentina. In his entry on the subject, Nicolás Arata summarises the genealogy of the field, identifying four consecutive approaches that have come to overlap in the present. Early works on educational institutions appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century, often with a celebratory or combative tone. Over time, this institutional approach has evolved toward presenting pluralistic memories of Argentine education. The first syntheses appeared in the first half of the twentieth century, generally focusing on the evolution of school systems, prominent educators and educational ‘milestones’. In the second half of the twentieth century, new interpretive paradigms and a growing autonomy from narratives produced by government agents contributed to the