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The Cuban Revolution: Years of Promise (review)

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Unfortunately, the book's illustrations form an insufficient graphic support for this excellent text. Although the author has retrieved historic images from various archival sources, their reproduction and integration appear to be insufficient. For a book in which visual documentation could be an extraordinary support, the images diminish its overall effectiveness, especially for students of Spanish cultural history.

Of the 123 illustrations included to support the text, some two dozen images are snapshots taken by the author. Poorly composed and insufficiently edited, these images are improvisations that undermine the rigorous study itself. When Escobar introduces his own photographic reproduction of plans and elevations from the Archivo de la Villa de Madrid, the reduced contrast and crumpled papers render them virtually unintelligible. The results are satisfactory in the reproduction of documents held in the Library of Congress, The New York Public Library, the Biblioteca Nacional, and other institutions with credible photographic services.

Nevertheless, the study itself is an important contribution to the study of Spanish architectural, social and cultural history. Thoroughly grounded in disciplines that range beyond architectural history, Escobar has written a book that shall be essential reading for any study of the development of cities in Habsburg Spain and the Americas.

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The Cuban Revolution: Years of Promise
University Press of Florida, 2005
Edited by Teo A. Babun and Víctor Andrés Triay

The Cuban Revolution: Years of Promise, by Teo A. Babun and Víctor Andrés Triay, is an exceptionally significant contribution to Cuban history through the power of photography. This book which is also subtitled, *A Photographic*

History of the Cuban Revolution, consists of 110 pages of photographs and 20 pages of textual information and narratives of the illustrated events. Most of the images are always accompanied by short descriptions of the events that led to the Cuban revolution and its immediate aftermath. Unlike many other historical texts in which the participants have no faces, this book captures not only the faces of its most important revolutionaries but the photographs are also a powerful testimony of the direct participation of many Cubans in the political developments in the island before and after the 1959 revolution.

In this book, the authors employ a chronological approach highlighting four principal stages of the Cuban revolution beginning in 1953 with the attack on the Moncada military barracks and ending in 1961 with the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. However, it is the preface that serves as in introduction, where Teo A. Babun Jr. one of the authors, sets the frame for the pictures that describe the first incidents of the revolution. According to Babun on May 28, 1957, almost six months after his arrival to Cuba, Fidel Castro led a small group of guerrillas in an attack against a Cuban army garrison near his father's sawmill of El Uvero, near a town of the same name. Later, Babun goes on to mention that this small battle was the first important victory for Castro's army against the forces of dictator Fulgencio Batista. The author describes how his father, an influential industrialist, from Santiago, Cuba, had the intuition that these small developments were the beginning of an important time in the history of his country. In time, according to Babun himself, his father went on to develop a relationship and became a sympathiser to the rebel's cause and used his businesses as a cover to help smuggle arms and ammunition to them. Ironically, says Babun Jr., little would his father ever know that a few short years later Babun's family members would participate in the Bay of Pigs invasion. After his father's death in 1987, Babun goes on to say how he found two shoe boxes filled with photographs of this important part of Cuban history that his father had collected, including many of the pictures that Mr. Jose "Chillin" Trutie had taken. After many years

of organizing these photographs Mr. Babun says that he decided to tell the story of the Cuban Revolution and its aftermath with his father's pictures. In 2003, Babun decided to join forces with Víctor Andrés Triay to make this book in pictures a reality.

In the first part of the book, Babun and Triay attempt to give the reader a clear and concise location of where many of the most important events of the Cuban revolution and its aftermath took place. The authors salvage photographs from history, which depict the uprising against dictator Fulgencio Batista going back to 1952, when Fidel Castro was a candidate to the House of Representatives. However, it is with the photographs of the 1953 attack on the Moncada barracks and another picture of a young Fidel Castro awaiting trial for this attack when the authors introduce the reader to this time in Cuba's history.

In the second section of the text, the authors portray photographs that bring to light Castro's rebels first acts of sabotage in 1957, shortly after his arrival from Mexico. Some these attacks highlight destroying the sugarcane mills that were at the heart of the Cuban economy. This section contains a short narrative of the events that gave rise to Fidel Castro's small army in the Sierra Maestra Mountains and underlines the importance of his July 26 movement as the base of his political support. A historical picture of great significance in this section is that of Josue País, the brother of Frank País and the co-leader of the local July 26 movement who was assassinated while driving in the Streets of Santiago de Cuba. Nonetheless, one of the most important and symbolic pictures are those of the American movie actor Errol Flynn. Flynn, as confirmed by Babun and Triay, like many Americans who visited Castro in the mountains was responsible for creating the mythical image that has always surrounded him. The mythical image of Castro has always been sort of a Latin American Robin Hood. This image still exists today and has made Castro a symbol of anti-Americanism all over the world. However, the narrative places most of the blame on Herbert Matthews, a reporter for the New York Times.

According to Babun and Triay, it was well known that Matthews was manipulated into believing and reporting that the number and strength of Fidel Castro's forces was much higher. In other pictures, the authors draw attention to the events and people from 1957 to 1959 and characterized Castro's civil war against Batista's government. Many of the pictures relate to the acts of sabotage that during the last three months of 1958 severely disrupted the islands transportation between Havana and the eastern provinces and severely affecting Batista's troops from continuing to fight Castro's rebels.

The third section of the book is the most extensive and varied with many photographs that range in theme. In this section, the authors illustrate some of the most important developments shortly before Castro's arrival to power and during the first months of his presidency. The first set of pictures illustrate Castro's guerrilla fighters or *Barbudos* (bearded ones) during their final push from the Sierra Maestra Mountains into Santiago de Cuba, Cuba's second most important city. In an attempt to illustrate the cruelty of the revolution, several pictures depict many of the victims of the civil war left on the side roads of the Cuban countryside. Other photographs in this section illustrate the popular figures that played a critical role in Castro's government such as Ernesto "Che" Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos, Juan Almeida and Haydee Santamaria.

However, some of the most important pictures in this book are those that the authors use to remind the reader of the intense political repression and persecutions that have always characterized Fidel Castro's government. Some of these pictures include such important political figures as José Miró Cardona, who became the first minister of the new Cuban government and shortly after had to go into exile. Huber Matos, the military governor of the Camaguey province and one of Fidel's closest allies, ended up in a Cuban jail for more than 20 years. William Morgan, an American, became disenchanted with Castro's government and helped create an anti-Castro guerrilla army in the central Cuban mountain range of Sierra Escambray. Morgan was shot by

a firing squad shortly after being captured. The end of this section is characterized by one very popular picture of a triumphant Fidel and his rebel soldiers entering Havana on a tank being followed by the Cuban people that are celebrating his victory. Nonetheless, in contrast to those pictures, as if to illustrate the more horrific side of Castro's victory, in the following two pages the authors show the shooting of Batista's chief of maritime police in Santiago de Cuba on January 2, 1959. In this photograph René Rodríguez Cruz, chief of militias in Las Villas, delivers the coup de grace. The photographs at the end of this section are of great political significance and allude to the public and sometimes televised shootings of Castro's enemies. These shootings not only helped Castro's government to get rid of any internal opposition but also helped to create a generalized political terror never before experienced by the Cuban people.

In the fourth section of Babun and Triay's book, the authors begin with a short introduction to the events that brought about the first massive exodus of Cubans from the island to the United States between the years of 1959 and 1962. In the narrative, the authors provide a detailed summary of some of the events that triggered the end of relations between the United States and Cuba. Some of these critical events in history were Operation Peter Pan, as well as the Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961. The photographs show many Cuban families arriving in the United States by plane or ship. One of the most important photographs relates to the ship African Pilot. This ship played an important role in facilitating the arrival of many Cuban exiles to the U.S. and later was chartered by the U. S. Department of Commerce to deliver humanitarian cargo in exchange for many of the prisoners of the Bay of Pigs invasion. Another photograph captures the images of some of the more than 14,000 children that were sent unaccompanied to the United States in Operation Peter Pan. However, the most symbolic picture is that of a Cuban exile kissing American soil. For many Cubans, this act was an expression of gratitude to the new land for helping them escape certain death on the island. The last set of pictures in

this section pertains to the Bay of Pigs invasion and shows many of the participants that played an important role. Some of the most dramatic pictures relate to the return of the members of Brigade 2506 and their families. As the authors explain, most of the survivors of the Bay of Pigs invasion had not seen their families in twenty months or more, and in many other cases, families were unaware if their loved ones were still alive. Teofilo "Tofi" Babun himself is pictured during the celebrations of the return of the Bay of Pigs veterans. However, probably the most important set of pictures in this section relate to President John F. Kennedy officially welcoming Brigade 2506 before twenty thousand exiles at the Orange Bowl. Ironically, sitting to President Kennedy's right, is Jose Miro Cardona, who as previously mentioned became the first prime minister of Castro's government and shortly after was forced to go into exile. The picture of President Kennedy is of great importance because to many Cuban Americans, President Kennedy was personally responsible for the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion.

The Cuban Revolution: Years of Promise is a well planned, historical depiction of contemporary Cuban history and a great testimony to the didactic power of the visual image as a means of transmitting history. It is to the credit of Teo A. Babun and Víctor Andrés Triay, who possess a very keen understanding of Cuban history, to produce such an interesting and fascinating book.

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VITA: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment
University of California Press, 2005
By João Biehl

João Biehl's *VITA: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment* (2005) is a study of the increasing prevalence of urban places in appallingly inhumane conditions that house the social outcasts of contemporary Brazil. Biehl refers to such