

Epilogue

Historians contribute to the identity of a culture by teaching young people “truth” about the past, and presenting a portrait of the nation to its people. Most “historians” would claim to tell a “balanced and objective” history but that only leads the careful inquirer to respond “objective in relation to what?” The classically liberal historian will talk about “Truth” in a transcendent sense and may imply a historical progression toward human rights, freedom and democracy. The Marxist historian will speak of objectivity in terms of science and materialism and perhaps the central story of class struggle and economics. Yet both equally depend upon “truths” that are beyond the scope of technicians simply revealing “what was.” As a result, story tellers (as historians are) create the identity of their subject, and Cuba, like every nation, has strengths and faults, heroes, villains, enemies, patrons, fame and infamy. Arguing that Cubans have been so overwhelmed by the treachery of foreigners that it cannot take the blame for its own problems undermines Cuba’s national identity. The blame game ultimately reduces a nation to a helpless pawn -- insignificant, powerless, and worthless.

Self-governance means looking within for the source of a nation’s character and destiny. Maturity requires self-responsibility, not scapegoating. Strength and power flow from maturity -- not in looking for demagogue to flatter the national ego while laying the blame for problems elsewhere. Such leaders have not helped Cuba in the past, nor will they in the future.

Despite Machado's faults, it is ill-advised to build a Cuban identity based upon the rejection of a man who significantly contributed to the development of Cuba's economic reformation, political independence, and social development. His failures were in part due to the collapsed sugar economy, the Great Depression, and a political and moral culture which reinforces armed insurrection. His enemies were envious politicians, American diplomats, malignant economic conditions, and middle-class Cuban terrorists. In the final judgment, he was a better leader for Cuba than those who replaced him.

Grudging acknowledgement of Machado's contributions to Cuban development can be found even among his detractors. Jorge I. Dominguez calls Machado's efforts "the first comprehensive reordering of Cuban affairs" since independence.¹ Luis Aguilar renders that "in all fairness," "Machado's stand for nationalism and his promises of honest government were a firm step in the right direction, and an evident sign for many that times were changing for the better."² The New York Times noted Cuba's progress under Machado calling his programs the "most ambitious program ever undertaken by any Cuban government since 1902."³ Even after the constitutional manipulations and election of 1928, Machado received

¹Jorge I. Dominguez, "Seeking Permission to Build a Nation: Cuban Nationalism and United States Response Under the First Machado Presidency," Cuban Studies No. 16, Carmelo Mesa-Lago, ed., (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986), 35.

² Luis Aguilar, Cuba 1933: Prologue to Revolution, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972), 54.

³ Anonymous, "To Give Credit to Cuba," New York Times, January 1, 1927, p. 44. As quoted in Hernandez, "The Second Administration of President Machado, p 46.

the political approbation of his people⁴ because he proved in his first four years the sincerity of his program and the genuineness of his national improvements.

Fidel Castro will pass when his time is up. Cuba's political culture may well continue forms of armed rebellion, authoritarianism, graft and patronage. This is normal for countries most of the time and is not meant to be demeaning. Only generations of storytelling -- and not just of the historical kind -- can change cultural assumptions and lay a foundation for liberty and greatness and national identity that minimizes the vices of governments. If nothing else, perhaps this paper will in a small way cause a few young people to re-think the "truths" passed down to them about Cuba.

⁴ Hernandez, "The Second Administration of President Machado, p 83.