

The Cuban Revolution – A short overview

This first chapter gives a short overview of the Cuban Revolution by presenting some of the most well-known Cuban billboards and the revolutionary slogans shown on them. The other chapters of the book provide more details about the revolution and its backgrounds.



Señores imperialistas ¡No les tenemos absolutamente ningún miedo! :: Dear imperialists, we are absolutely not afraid of you!

A billboard characterising the ongoing conflict between the US and Cuba, a conflict that has been going on for almost half a century now. It stands close to the US Interests Section, the official representation of the US in Havana.



La revolución vive en su obra :: The revolution lives in his work

Key persons and key events of the Cuban Revolution are shown on this billboard:

- José Martí & Fidel Castro: José Martí is Cuba's national hero, the Cuban Revolution was heavily influenced by his ideas. Martí was a journalist, writer and poet who played an important role in the fight for independence against the Spanish. In his days he was as famous for his moustache as Castro is for his beard nowadays. Martí died in 1895 on the battlefield shortly after the start of the Second War of Independence. He was very aware of the intentions of the US regarding Cuba. After the Spanish ordered him to leave Cuba, Martí lived for a long time in the US and wrote: *'I lived inside the monster and I know its entrails'*. It turned out that he was right. The US intervened in the Cuban fight for independence, which led to the Spanish-American War of 1898. The Spanish lost the war and were forced to leave Cuba. US companies took over the land, the mines and the industry and controlled the island for more than half a century. The presidents of Cuba in those years were nothing more than US marionettes, the most famous of them being Fulgencio Batista. Despite the Declaration of Independence of 1902, Cuba had not become independent at all. The Spanish had in fact just been replaced by the Americans.

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- The Moncada Barracks: the attack on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba on July 26, 1953 is generally seen as the start of the Cuban Revolution. During the carnival of Santiago the barracks that housed troops of the dictator Batista were attacked by Fidel Castro and his comrades. After so many years of corrupt and US-backed governments, Castro came to the conclusion that the only way to give the country back to the Cubans was by armed struggle. The attack did not succeed however, Castro was arrested and sent to jail. He was sentenced to 15 years, but was released after 2 years by Batista in an attempt to gain popularity with the Cuban people.
- The Granma: the boat that Castro used to return to Cuba. After Castro left jail in 1955, he went to Mexico where he met the Argentinean doctor Che Guevara. There he made a second plan to overthrow Batista's regime. Together with 80 compañeros Castro and Guevara left for Cuba. After a week on a stormy sea they landed at Playa Las Coloradas on December 2, 1956. Castro's hero José Martí landed near Baracoa, also in the Oriente. Both fights for freedom started in eastern Cuba. In a battle with Batista's troops the revolutionaries suffered great losses. Only 12 men survived, including Castro himself, Che Guevara, Castro's brother Raúl and Camilo Cienfuegos. They escaped into the hills of the Sierra Maestra. From there Castro was able to gain more popularity and to build up an army. Eventually this led to the fall of Batista. The dictator fled to the Dominican Republic on New Year's Eve 1958. Exactly 5 years, 5 months and 5 days after the attack on the Moncada Barracks the victory of the revolution was a fact.
- Two pioneros: a new generation ready for Martí's ideas, dressed in the uniform of Cuban primary school: red shorts or skirt, white shirt and red scarf. After the revolution the Moncada Barracks were turned into a primary school.

Asalto de coraje y justicia :: Attack of courage and justice

The attack on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba. Again there is a central role for José Martí on the billboard.

Note the white doves: they are generally known as a peace symbol, but they also play a very remarkable role in the Cuban Revolution.

During Castro's first speech in Havana on January 8, 1959 white doves were released. One of them landed on Castro's shoulder and remained sitting there for almost the whole speech.

The white dove plays a significant role in Santería, the most important Cuban religion. It symbolises Obatalá, the Son of God. Obatalá is the Orisha (Santería God) that rules the mind, thoughts and dreams of human beings. After seeing the white dove on Castro's shoulder, many Santería followers believed that he was the chosen one to lead and protect their country.

Their belief was strengthened some months later when Castro visited Washington DC. At the Lincoln Memorial doves flew in from a park and one of them sat down on Castro's shoulder.

In 1989 the performance was repeated again. During a speech to celebrate 30 years of revolution another white dove landed on Castro's shoulder.

Coincidence? Magic? Dove training? Who will tell. Great show though, that's for sure.

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Patria o muerte. ¡Venceremos! :: Fatherland or death. We will win!

Certainly one of the most famous Cuban slogans. The two revolutionaries on the billboard are Che Guevara (right) and Camilo Cienfuegos (left).

Escenario de heroicas batallas de Camilo y Che :: Scene of the heroic battles of Camilo and Che

The battle of Santa Clara was a decisive moment in the Cuban Revolution. From the Sierra Maestra in eastern Cuba, Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos headed westward. On December 29, 1958 Che Guevara and his men derailed the Tren Blindado, a train filled with weapons sent by Batista from Havana as provisions for his troops in the east. By capturing the train Guevara prevented this, while at the same time it gave him the opportunity to provide his men with new arms.

A few days later – on January 2, 1959 – Guevara and Cienfuegos entered Havana. Castro arrived there on January 8, after a triumphant journey across the island.

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Resistir vale tanto como acometer :: To resist is worth the same as to attack

A quote from the work of José Martí.

Revolución es modestia, desinterés, altruismo, solidaridad y heroísmo :: Revolution is modesty, unselfishness, altruism, solidarity and heroism

Both slogans refer to the identity of Cuba: non-aggressive, non-imperialistic, non-egoistic, but ready to defend itself whenever necessary.



