
The Machete and the Liberation of Cuba



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THE battle of Maltiempo on 15 December 1895 was one of the bloodiest combats of the Cuban War of Liberation (1895–98) and probably the greatest Cuban victory over Spanish forces during three years of fighting. In fifteen minutes, cavalry of the Liberation Army destroyed six companies of Spanish infantry. Eyewitnesses described the Cubans on horseback charging into Spanish infantry formations and cutting them to ribbons using their machetes. Cuban general Manuel Piedra remembered that Spanish soldiers were terrified by the machete at Maltiempo and that they lost all discipline.¹ Veteran Esteban Montejo recalled how the Cubans hacked to death hundreds of cowering Spanish conscripts and left piles of Spanish heads in the woods of Maltiempo as a testament to the deadliness of the machete in close combat.²

Historians have lavished attention on Maltiempo, and rightly so.³ The Cuban revolution, which had begun in February 1895, was still confined in the fall to the eastern half of the island, the Oriente. This region had long been a center of unrest, but it was not of vital economic or strategic importance. Spain's military leaders reasoned that if they could contain the insurrection in the Oriente, they could put a stop to the revolution. Maltiempo changed all of that. It opened the way for the Cuban

1. Manuel Piedra Martel, *Las campañas de Maceo en la última guerra de independencia* (Havana, 1946), 68–72.

2. Miguel Barnet, *Biografía de un cimarrón* (Barcelona, 1968), 154.

3. For accounts of Maltiempo, see José Miró y Argenter, *Cuba: crónicas de la guerra, las campañas de invasión y de occidente, 1895–1896* (Havana, 1945), 169–72; and Benigno Souza y Rodríguez, *Ensayo histórico sobre la invasión* (Havana, 1948), 144–46.

"invasion" of the rich sugar and tobacco provinces of the West in the winter of 1895–96. What followed was the destruction of Cuba's export economy, as the Cuban Liberation Army destroyed farms, sugar mills, and cane fields and prevented the production of sugar.⁴ This suddenly made the war interesting to American and European investors and crippling to Spanish revenues. It also forced thousands of workers in the sugar industry into unemployment, creating conditions of starvation for those who remained in Spanish-held territory and inducing previously neutral or disinterested Cubans to join the Revolution.⁵ Thus, Maltiempo was probably the most important battle of the war, at least until July 1898, when the American victory at Santiago forced Spain to evacuate the island.

Unfortunately, interest in Maltiempo has also helped to perpetuate one of the most enduring myths of the Cuban war: that the Cubans used machetes to defeat Spanish troops. In fact, however, Maltiempo was an anomaly. The image of whooping, machete-wielding men on horseback rolling up Spanish infantry is certainly a dramatic martial image, but it is not an accurate depiction of the way the Cuban Liberation Army fought the war. The Cubans used the machete for many purposes, but rarely as their main weapon in battles with Spanish troops. When Cubans did employ the machete in combat with the Spanish, it was usually out of desperation, and the effect was not especially deadly, except to the Cubans themselves. Cuban forces were fortunate, though, to have better weapons close at hand: rifles, dynamite, and eventually artillery. Not the machete but the intelligent use of this available firepower by Cuba's outstanding military leaders, Máximo Gómez, Antonio Maceo, and Calixto García, helped to create the conditions for military victory against Spain.

In this essay I will examine how battles were fought in Cuba and argue that the machete was of little use in most combat situations. Although the machete was an invaluable tool and could be a weapon of

4. On 1 July 1895, Máximo Gómez, the commander in chief of the Cuban Liberation Army, issued a proclamation promising that "all sugar plantations will be destroyed, the standing cane set afire, and the factory buildings and railroads destroyed," and that anyone caught working in the sugar harvest would be "executed." In the winter invasion of 1895–96, Maceo and Gómez attempted to fulfill this promise. Cited in Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy* (Athens, Ga., 1990), 82–83.

5. In November 1895, Gómez declared work "antirevolutionary," and in July 1897 he remarked that "work means peace, and in Cuba we must not permit working." See Philip Foner, *Antonio Maceo: The "Bronze Titan" of Cuba's Struggle for Independence* (New York, 1977), 175. In Miró's estimation (*Cuba*, 175), the thousands of men and women put out of work became the greatest problem for Spain, which had to figure out how to feed them and how to prevent them from joining the ranks of the Liberation Army.

great terror, especially when used against Spanish sympathizers and civilian neutrals, it did not win battles against the Spanish. This conclusion has broad ramifications for our understanding of the Cuban War of Liberation. First, the military history of the war must be rewritten leaving machetes aside and paying closer attention to the weapons and tactics actually employed by the Cuban Liberation Army. This essay argues that the Cubans won battles primarily because they used their rifles more effectively than did Spanish troops. Second, if the machete was not a terribly devastating weapon, then it is puzzling that it became such a ubiquitous image of the war. I suggest that the machete was elevated to a central place in Cuban iconography not because it won battles, but because it was unmatched as a symbol of national unity, first against Spain and later against the United States.

The Machete in Historiography

Cubans recalling their War of Liberation from Spain rhetorically transformed the machete into a weapon of mythical power. Bernabé Boza, who served as an aide to Gómez, wrote in 1924 that Spanish commanders had feared the machete so much that they avoided combat with the Cubans. The “historical Cuban machete” struck terror into Spaniards, who fled blindly when they heard Cuban troops cry “al machete.” According to Boza, Spanish soldiers who once experienced a machete charge could never get out of their minds the horrible “chis! chas!” sound made by the machete when it severed a neck.⁶ Cuban historians continued to work in this vein. Erasmo Dumpierre, for example, wrote in 1969 that the machete was the Cubans’ “fundamental arm,” against which even Spain’s most advanced weapons had no effect.⁷ At times the machete has been intoned as a kind of mantra, even when completely inappropriate. For example, in his 1984 work Pedro Roig used the word “*macheteando*” as a synonym for “attacked” in an account of Gómez’s assault on the garrison of el Mulato, where the machete played a minor role.⁸ The author of a folio produced in 1989 by the Instituto de Historia de Cuba examined one of the defensive lines constructed by the Spanish. The story had nothing to do with machete charges, yet it was illustrated with images of Cuban horsemen charging

6. Bernabé Boza, *Mi diario de la guerra desde Baire hasta la intervención americana* (Havana, 1924), 23, 41, 91. Boza’s use of the phrase “historical Cuban machete” is interesting, for it shows the iconic status of the weapon.

7. Erasmo Dumpierre, introduction to Máximo Gómez, *Diario de campaña* (Havana, 1969), 10–13.

8. Pedro Roig, *La guerra de Martí* (Miami, 1984), 63.

into ranks of Spanish infantry stupidly pointing their guns into the air.⁹ In such cases, the machete has served as a shibboleth for Cuban bravery and Spanish incompetence and a symbol of Cuban victory. As a result, Cubans have been reluctant to examine its actual role on the battlefield.

Spaniards, too, have emphasized the horror of the machete charge. One Francoist military historian, a descendant, ironically, of Arsenio Martínez Campos, the military governor of Cuba in 1895, attributed Spain's defeat to the skill with which Cubans wielded the machete.¹⁰ In 1975, Ramón Barquín, in a description of Cuban tactics, wrote that the Cubans "charged on horseback waving their machetes to the chilling cry '*al degüello*,' falling like demons upon the enemy squares, principally upon their flanks and rearguard."¹¹ It has, in fact, become dogma in both Cuba and Spain that the revolution's most fearsome weapon was the machete. Thus, the Army Museum in Madrid features machetes in its display of Cuban artifacts from the war, not the Remingtons and Hotchkiss guns that tore apart Spain's colonial armies.

The machete has also proved an attractive image in the United States. A glance at the dispatches and accompanying illustrations of American war correspondents in Cuba confirms this early romance with the machete. In 1896 one such observer, James Hyde Clark, wrote one of the first histories of the Cuban insurrection for the American public. Clark provided titillating descriptions of machete charges, in which Cubans, "screaming with the voice of Indians," or alternatively with "the voices of a thousand hyenas," ploughed into cowering masses of Spanish infantry.¹² Later American historians presented much the same picture. In 1977 Philip Foner described Cubans falling "suddenly upon the enemy: their gleaming machete blades brandished on high and fierce war whoops piercing the air," a sight that paralyzed even the best Spanish troops.¹³ As recently as 1994, Joseph Smith revived this iconic machete,

9. Enrique Buznego Rodríguez, *La línea militar de Mariel a Majana: apuntes históricos militares* (Havana, 1989).

10. Carlos Martínez Campos y Serrano, Duque de la Torre, *España bélica, el siglo XIX* (Aguilar, 1961), 273.

11. The same author also wrote: "In Pinos de Baire . . . the peaceful instrument known as the *mocha* or *machete* emerged as a powerful instrument of war at the service of Cuban independence." Ramón M. Barquín, *Las luchas guerrilleras en Cuba: de la colonia a la Sierra Maestra* (Madrid, 1975), 10–11.

12. James Hyde Clark, *Cuba and the Fight for Freedom* (Philadelphia, 1896), 418–22.

13. Foner closely followed Cuban nationalist historiography in everything. References to the machete are from his biography of Maceo, 20, 37, 174. See also Foner's *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism*, 2 vols. (New York, 1972), for an orthodox Nationalist-Marxist interpretation of the war and further discussion of the machete, in, for example, 1: 19–20.

writing of the Cubans' "favorite weapon" that it was "more deadly than the bullet of the most modern rifle."¹⁴

Thus the machete has come to dominate our understanding of combat in Cuba. Nevertheless, for anyone familiar with weaponry or tactics, something seems wrong with this picture. While it seems perfectly reasonable that the machete might, under certain conditions of close combat, prove a formidable weapon, the idea that men on horseback and armed with machetes defeated infantry arrayed in formation appears doubtful, even insulting to the memory of commanders like Maceo and Gómez, who usually knew better than to send men charging hopelessly into a hail of fire. Indeed, there is ample evidence, drawn from Cuban and Spanish battle diaries and memoirs and from medical records, to show that the Cubans used machetes only in very particular circumstances and that the main battlefield weapon was the rifle, just as it was for the Spanish.

How The Cubans Fought

An examination of four important battles bears out the contention that the Cubans did not rely on the machete in combat against the Spanish. Four of the most important Cuban victories aside from Maltiempo were Peralejo, Iguará, Ceja del Negro, and Victoria de las Tunas. On 13 July 1895 Cuban forces under Antonio Maceo ambushed a column of 1,500 Spaniards at Peralejo in Oriente province. In four hours of fighting, the Spanish suffered dozens of casualties, including the death of General Fidel Alonso Santocildes, before withdrawing to the city of Bayamo. Peralejo was important for a number of reasons. It produced a flood of volunteers, forced the Spanish to move about in fewer and larger columns, and allowed the revolution to consolidate its hold on Oriente province. Indeed, after Peralejo, most of Oriente remained "Cuba Libre" for the rest of the war.¹⁵

14. Joseph Smith, *The Spanish-American War: Conflict in the Caribbean and the Pacific, 1895–1902* (New York, 1994), 12–13. In truth, Smith paid very little attention to the Cuban-Spanish conflict. The same is true of the now-standard work by David Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898* (New York, 1983). Both authors were more interested in the American experience of war in the summer of 1898 than with warfare in the period 1895–98.

15. On Peralejo, see Miró, *Cuba*, 74–84; Souza, *Ensayo histórico sobre la invasión*, 51–65; and Sévero Gómez Núñez, *La acción de Peralejo* (Havana, 1897). Cuban estimates of Spanish casualties are no more reliable than Spanish estimates of Cuban casualties. Therefore, I have avoided all claims of the other side's losses and have chosen figures on Cuban casualties recorded by Cubans and of Spanish casualties recorded by the Spanish. Spanish casualties at Peralejo were high, by the standards of the war in Cuba. They consisted of 28 killed and 98 wounded. The Cubans

What part did the machete play in this important combat? Both Spanish and Cuban accounts of Peralejo described a battle in which Cuban infantry, concealed in the woods, fired upon the Spanish as they marched along the narrow road from Bayamo. Cuban cavalry came into play briefly at the beginning of the encounter. Maceo charged twice with the machete, but the attacks were beaten off by the Spanish infantry. However, the charges were merely feints designed to induce the Spanish column to close up ranks. This allowed Cuban infantry to move into position and to aim into massed squares of Spanish troops. The machete never came directly into play at Peralejo, but the well-aimed rifle fire of the Cuban infantry killed and wounded 126 Spanish soldiers.¹⁶

A similar scenario developed at the battle of Iguará on 3 December 1895, when Cuban forces ambushed a Spanish column near Sancti Spiritus east of Havana. Victory at Iguará, followed by Maltiempo, made possible the invasion of the West. As at Peralejo, Cuban cavalry charged in the opening minutes but only to force the Spanish to concentrate for protection against the horse. At that point, Cuban infantry, joined by the dismounted cavalry, poured rifle fire from prepared positions into the Spanish formation. The number of casualties on either side is, as usual, in dispute, but even Cuban sources agree that the machete caused very little damage.¹⁷

On 18 September 1896, Maceo defended the height of Ceja del Negro in Pinar del Rio, the westernmost province of Cuba, against a combined attack by several regiments of Spanish infantry. The battle was significant, because it was one of the few occasions on which the Cubans held ground against an all-out Spanish attack, and also because Maceo's victory saved a shipment from the United States of almost a thousand rifles, 500,000 rounds of ammunition, and 2,000 pounds of dynamite. These supplies were crucial to the survival of Cuban forces in the West, beleaguered since March by active Spanish persecution under a new governor general, Valeriano Weyler, a more ruthless opponent than Martínez Campos had been. Here too, however, the machete played no real part in the

suffered 118 casualties, according to Miró, *Cuba*, p. 81. The Spanish were forced to withdraw from the field, something they rarely had to do.

16. In addition to the works already cited, see Manuel Monfort y Prats, *Historia de la Guerra de Cuba* (San Juan, P.R., 1896), 141–46. Miró is probably cited most frequently in discussions of Peralejo, but his account is not reliable for the simple reason that he was not present at the battle, though he pretended he was. In fact, Miró's account of Peralejo was taken word-for-word from Gómez Núñez, except for some subtle changes designed to make the Cubans look even better than they did already. See Gómez Núñez, *La acción de Peralejo*, 16.

17. Miró, *Cuba*, 147–49. Miró estimated Cuban casualties at 37 against 33 for the Spanish, 7 of them by machete. Foner thought the Spanish lost 18 men killed and wounded against 13 for the Cubans. Foner, *Maceo*, 202–3.



fighting. The Cubans fought from behind defensive barriers, slaughtering advancing Spanish infantry with rifle fire until the Spanish gave up the assault.¹⁸

Calixto García and 4,000 Cubans laid siege on 25 August 1897 to the fortified town of Victoria de las Tunas in eastern Cuba. The garrison of 79 Spanish troops held out for three days before surrendering. The Cuban victory led to the capture of an impressive stock of weapons and supplies, including 1.5 million rounds of ammunition. It also showed the world that, despite the growing weakness of the insurrection in western Cuba, the revolution still held the initiative in Oriente. Decisive at Victoria de las Tunas were two new cannons and six machine guns brought over from the United States and operated by Americans. Against this arsenal the Spanish had poorly built fortifications and miserable little field guns that overheated and were ruined after fifty shots. In other words, Victoria de las Tunas fell to superior firepower not to the élan of the machete charge.¹⁹

Victoria de las Tunas was unusual in that Cuban forces did not possess many artillery pieces until late in the war. Peralejo, Iguará, and Ceja

18. Roig, *La guerra de Martí*, 145–47.

19. José García Acuña, *Impresiones y antecedentes de la guerra hispano-yanqui* (Madrid, 1911), 6. Frederick Funston provided the crucial artillery support to the siege. Thomas Crouch, *A Yankee Guerrillero: Frederick Funston and the Cuban Insurrection, 1896–1897* (Memphis, 1975), 110.

del Negro, on the other hand, were typical of combat on the island. The Cubans had developed the tactics employed in these battles during the first war for independence from 1868 to 1878.²⁰ In this "Ten Years' War," Gómez and Maceo had learned to use cavalry to move men rapidly across country. Once in position, the Cubans usually dismounted to fight, firing from concealed and protected positions against surprised Spanish columns. As one Spanish combatant noted, almost all of the Cubans had horses, "but they left them hidden when they fought, using them only to travel," as a result of which they moved more rapidly than the Spanish could, allowing the Cubans to concentrate quickly against small detachments and to flee just as quickly if faced with large Spanish forces. "Their main tactic was to fire from positions behind trees or broken terrain," but, according to the same Spanish source, they "neither took the offensive in machete charges nor waited for our bayonet attacks," but preferred to fire from a distance.²¹

In both the war of 1868–78 and in the war of 1895–98, the Cubans used the machete charge sparingly against Spanish troops, mainly against small, isolated units or for limited tactical purposes, for example, to give themselves time to retreat or redeploy. Above all the machete charge was used to force strung out enemy columns to form squares. Once in square, the Spanish became easy targets for Cuban rifle fire.²² The success of this tactic depended on being able to select the site of combat, an advantage generally enjoyed by the Cubans due to their more intimate knowledge of the terrain. Cuban forces ambushed the Spanish at river crossings, narrow roads, and paths amid dense jungle. They prepared these sites with trenches and other barriers to impede Spanish movements and protect Cuban troops.

Spanish weapons and tactics also played into the Cubans' hands. Spain equipped its infantry with the Mauser, the best rifle in the world at that time. The Mauser was a repeating weapon with superior rifling. It fired a bullet jacketed in nickel steel, which added greatly to the force and accuracy of the weapon. It also had a range (2,400 yards) four times

20. In this war, Gómez attacked a Spanish force with the machete at Tenda del Pino in November 1868, but did not resort to such a tactic again for another two years, when he attacked a small Spanish force camped at a sugar mill named Songüito de Wilson. In between, and for most of the war, Cubans fought with rifles, just as in 1895–98. Francisco Pérez Guzmán and Vileta Serrano Rubio, *Máximo Gómez, Aproximación a su cronología, 1836–1905* (Havana, 1986), 20.

21. Adolfo Jiménez Castellanos, *Sistema para combatir las insurrecciones en Cuba, según lo que aconseja la experiencia* (Madrid, 1883), 30.

22. Gómez gained his greatest victory of the Ten Years' War by employing this same tactic. In 1873, at Palo Seco, Gómez forced the crack counterinsurgency unit called the "Cazadores de Valmaseda" to form a square and then poured fire into them from behind a fence. Carlos Saiz Cidoncha, *Guerrillas en Cuba y otros países de ibero-américa* (Madrid, 1974), 48–49.

greater than the Remington, the weapon most commonly used by the insurgents. The Mauser was less likely to be affected by moisture or dirt entering the chamber, and, because it used smokeless power rounds, it did not produce the clouds of dense smoke older systems did, thus allowing an individual armed with the Mauser both to remain concealed and to preserve a clearer field of vision. Ironically, however, the more advanced Mauser was in many ways less effective than guns like the Remington. Because the Mauser fired at such a high velocity, it produced cleaner wounds, while older rifles often sent projectiles tumbling on an erratic and deadly course inside victims' bodies.²³ Bernabé Boza called the Mauser a "humanitarian weapon" because it produced wounds that "either killed immediately or were quickly cured."²⁴

The Cubans were also aided by the Spanish tactic of forming squares, an archaic battlefield formation to which European colonial armies remained addicted throughout the nineteenth century. Forming square was not entirely irrational given the poor marksmanship of Spanish infantry, who received almost no instruction in the use of their rifles. This lack of weapons training resulted in part from the decision of the Spanish army to introduce the Mauser in the middle of the war, forcing Spanish veterans to learn a new system in mid-campaign. In addition, the military issued weapons to new conscripts only after they arrived in Cuba, a regulation designed to prevent the dissemination of arms among the Spanish population, which Madrid had cause to fear in a century marked by civil war, social revolution, and violent regionalism. Thus, weapons regulations ruled out training in the Peninsula, with the result that Spanish troops were put into the field in Cuba without the slightest experience in handling or maintaining their firearms. Indeed, many fired their first live round in battle against Cuban forces, and, naturally, they missed their targets. For these reasons, Spanish officers chose to have their troops form square and fire in volleys, using the accurate and powerful Mauser as if it were a Brown Bess musket. This, they reasoned, was the only way to ensure that their men would hit anything.²⁵

Unfortunately for Spain's conscripts, these battlefield tactics made them easy targets for the Cubans, who were armed with a variety of their own rifles, including some Mausers.²⁶ Cubans were reputed to be superb

23. Frederick Funston was almost killed by a Mauser round, but the bullet passed cleanly through him, through a tree, and killed a Cuban soldier.

24. Boza, *Mi diario de la guerra*, 27. For a full discussion of the Mauser, see *El fusil Mauser español* (Madrid, 1894).

25. Jiménez Castellanos, *Sistema para combatir las insurrecciones en Cuba*, 96, 114–15.

26. The Liberation Army used a wide variety of firearms—Springfields, Mausers, Winchesters, Remingtons, and various pistols and other guns. Grover Flint, an American who fought alongside the Cubans, recalled that the men in his unit were armed

shots. They treated their weapons with great care. Training was informal but constant, even too frequent for the taste of Gómez, who feared the accidents caused by the over-handling of weapons, a problem from which Spanish troops could have benefitted.²⁷ In any case, the Cubans used their rifles as they were meant to be used, carefully aiming, often from behind cover, at individual targets. One Spanish officer recalled that he rarely even saw the enemy, much less the business end of a machete, since the Cubans always fired from great distances or from behind cover and fled before the Spanish could respond.²⁸ Máximo Gómez described these very tactics in his diary. Our advantage, he wrote, was that "our soldiers, always hidden behind brush and broken terrain, fired at point blank range." This was "something the Spanish could never do," because they were always the aggressors, and in a war like that fought in Cuba "the advantage always goes to the one who waits and not to the one who advances."²⁹

Against Cuban troops deployed for ambush as described by Gómez, Spanish volleys had little effect. Indeed, volleys would have been most effective against cavalymen charging with machetes. Thus, it is not surprising to find that on the few occasions when the Cubans committed themselves to frontal machete attacks against Spanish infantry formed into defensive squares, they usually suffered high casualties. At Coliseo on 29 December 1895, Spanish squares decimated three successive machete charges, allowing the Cuban cavalry to get no closer than fifty yards.³⁰ At Paso Real on 1 February 1896, Maceo sent 2,000 men against 900 Spanish infantry settled into an excellent defensive position. The Cubans suffered 262 casualties and the Spanish 46.³¹ One week later, at the bridge over the Río Hondo, Maceo sent his men charging into Spanish infantry again. The Cubans lost a hundred men. The new recruits from Pinar del Río—the westernmost province in Cuba invaded by Maceo in January 1896—suffered especially severe losses. Of the fifty Pinareños ordered into the charge, twenty-five were shot from their saddles, proof of bravery and of the foolhardy trust raw recruits put in the machete.³² On 8 October 1896, Máximo Gómez led 479 horsemen in a

with Remingtons, Mausers, Winchesters, shotguns, and pistols. Grover Flint, *Marching with Gomez* (Boston, 1898), 24.

27. Boza, *Mi diario de la guerra*, 27.

28. The same individual described the start of many a day as follows: "The enemy, who rose earlier than us, sounded reveille in our camp by shooting at our sentries." Ricardo Burguete y Lana, *¡La guerra! Cuba: Diario de un testigo* (Barcelona, 1902), 95, 105, 137.

29. Gómez, *Diario*, 394.

30. Boza, *Mi diario de la guerra*, 84.

31. Letter of General Luque, displayed in the Army Museum in Madrid.

32. Ramiro Guerra y Sanchez et al., eds. *Historia de la nación cubana*, 6: 230.

charge against a larger number of Spanish infantry under General Castellanos at "el Desmayo." Frederick Funston, who was present, recalled that the Cubans lost about half of the men committed to the charge and all but 100 horses, while inflicting minor damage on the Spanish infantry. Once again, Mausers proved more deadly than men armed with machetes. In all three cases (and many more could be cited), machete charges were acts of desperation born of a lack of ammunition or the need to protect impedimenta from advancing enemy troops. They definitely were not the tactic of first choice.³³

Medical Evidence on the Use of the Machete

Based on internal evidence from battle diaries, memoirs, and first-hand histories, most of them Cuban, it is clear that the Liberation Army did not rely on the machete in the way so many authors have assumed. The records of Spanish military hospitals provide further evidence that machetes were not as deadly as the mythology has suggested. For example, data published in 1901 showed that of 4,187 men treated in Cuba for wounds in 1896, only 13 percent had suffered injuries from machetes. Projectiles, mainly from Remingtons, accounted for 70 percent of all wounds.³⁴ More detailed data are available for individual military hospitals and clinics, whose records have been collected in the military archives in Segovia. Table 1 shows the wounds examined at the military hospital of Havana month by month during the year 1896. The hospital took in 776 wounded soldiers. Only 15 had been stabbed or cut with machetes or other unidentified cutting instruments. (Some of these latter may have been swords or bayonets, but more likely they were machetes, and so I have counted them as such.) On the other hand, 740 men were shot, mostly by rifle fire, although 11 apparently received wounds from "*perdigones*," probably shotgun pellets. The 21 injuries listed in the category "other" include contusions, two stab wounds positively identified as caused by weapons other than machetes, and injuries from dynamite blasts. Thus, only 2 percent of all of the wounds treated at the main hospital in Havana were caused by machetes or cutting instruments of any kind, while 95 percent were caused by projectiles, almost all of them rounds from Remingtons, Winchesters, and Mausers.

33. Crouch, *A Yankee Guerrillero*, 68.

34. Angel de Larra y Cerezo, *Datos para la historia de la campaña sanitaria en la guerra de Cuba (apuntes estadísticos relativos al año 1896)* (Madrid, 1901).

Table 1
Wounds Examined at the Hospital in Havana in 1896

| <u>Month</u> | <u>Bullet</u> | <u>Machete</u> | <u>Other</u> | <u>Total</u> | <u>% Machete</u> |
|-----------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|
| January | 19 | 3 | 2 | 24 | 13 |
| February | 24 | 1 | 2 | 27 | 4 |
| March | 57 | 4 | 1 | 62 | 7 |
| April | 110 | 1 | 2 | 113 | 1 |
| May | 14 | 0 | 0 | 14 | 0 |
| June | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| July | 37 | 2 | 0 | 39 | 5 |
| August | 39 | 1 | 2 | 42 | 2 |
| September | 56 | 0 | 0 | 56 | 0 |
| October | 269 | 1 | 6 | 276 | 0 |
| November | 91 | 2 | 5 | 98 | 2 |
| <u>December</u> | <u>22</u> | <u>0</u> | <u>1</u> | <u>23</u> | <u>0</u> |
| Total | 740 | 15 | 21 | 776 | 2 |

Source: Archivo General Militar, Segovia, Sección 2a, División 4a, Legajo K1.

Information from fourteen additional hospitals covering various periods of the war indicate that 88 percent of wounds were caused by rifle bullets, and fewer than 7 percent by cuts, only some of which were caused by machetes.³⁵ Detailed records for the year 1895 collected at three of the largest of these hospitals are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Wounds Examined at Three Spanish Hospitals in 1895

| <u>Hospital</u> | <u>Bullet</u> | <u>Machete</u> | <u>Other</u> | <u>Total</u> | <u>% Machete</u> |
|-----------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|
| Holguín | 31 | 8 | 2 | 41 | 20 |
| Manzanillo | 76 | 9 | 10 | 95 | 9 |
| <u>Santiago</u> | <u>160</u> | <u>7</u> | <u>16</u> | <u>183</u> | <u>4</u> |
| Total | 267 | 24 | 28 | 319 | 8 |

Source: Archivo General Militar, Segovia, Sección 2a, División 4a, Legajo K1.

Not recorded in the data are some of the subjective impressions about the wounds. Most of the wounds were not fatal. Indeed, most were not serious enough to result in tickets home to Spain. The machete wounds, in particular, tended to be insignificant, and at least one was self-inflicted. Gunshot wounds, on the other hand, were much more

35. Archivo General Militar de Segovia (AGM), Legajos K1-K8.

likely to be listed as “grave” than cutting and stabbing wounds, which were usually listed as “light.” Finally, one doctor remarked that some of the cut and stab wounds he saw appeared to have occurred after individuals were first shot, rendering them vulnerable to machete attack. Thus, both objective and subjective medical data support the impression gained from military diaries and memoirs, namely, that the rifle, not the machete was the Cubans’ most important arm. This conclusion forces us to recast the military history of the war in Cuba, with machetes left out. It also forces us to think more seriously about the sources of Cuban firepower and the development of effective tactics using rifles and other firearms. Finally, it leads us to wonder what machetes really contributed to the liberation of Cuba.

The American Supply of Weapons

Where did the Cubans secure their arms? The answer, of course, is from the Spanish troops they defeated and from the United States. The Cubans captured great caches of weapons and ammunition in a few big victories against Spanish convoys or garrison towns, as at Victoria de las Tunas. However, most of their war matériel came from the United States. The Cuban Revolutionary Party, with agents in New York, Washington, and southern ports and with the backing of a large Cuban emigré community, organized dozens of “filibustering” expeditions from the United States to Cuba.³⁶ With the help of sympathetic or self-interested Americans, these expeditions succeeded in keeping the Liberation Army supplied with armaments.³⁷

The Spanish government attempted to interdict this supply line, but its naval forces were inadequate to the task. Even when one of the

36. The term “filibustero” comes from the name given to pirates in the West Indies in the seventeenth century. In the mid-nineteenth century it came to describe military adventurers from the United States who attempted on various occasions to overthrow governments in Central America and the West Indies. On Cuban emigrés and the war effort, see Juan Casasús, *La emigración cubana y la independencia de Cuba* (Havana, 1953); José A. Adán, *El Lobbyismo en la Independencia de Cuba* (Miami, 1977); Gerald E. Poyo, “With All and for the Good of All”: *The Emergence of Popular Nationalism in the Cuban Communities of the United States, 1848–1898* (Durham, N.C., 1989); and Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Essays on Cuban History: Historiography and Research* (Gainesville, Fla., 1995), especially chapters 2, 5, and 6.

37. As an example of how Americans aided Cuba, one Cuban recalled that the New York City police, knowing who the Cubans were, never stopped expeditions but rather wished the Cubans good sailing. Ramiro Cabrera, *¡A Sitio Herrera!* (Havana, 1922), 96–100. In one week in August 1896 the “Dauntless” landed two 12-pound cannons, 500 shells for them, 2,600 rifles and carbines, 858,000 rounds of ammunition, and other equipment. Crouch, *A Yankee Guerrillero*, 37.

Spanish gunboats patrolling the long Cuban coastline spotted a *filibustero*, chances were it would not be able to catch the faster Cuban-American boat.³⁸ Thus, of the more than fifty expeditions sent to Cuba from the United States, only two were detained by Spanish vessels. The Spanish government hired Pinkertons to spy on Cubans and traffic out of American ports, but any hope of stopping the well-organized Cuban system of expeditions depended, ultimately, on the ability of the United States government to enforce its laws against gun-running from American waters.³⁹

The United States government tried, periodically, to stop expeditions, and succeeded on a number of occasions, but it—or local judges—often allowed the captured boats and Cuban patriots to go free. The weakness of the United States federal government in places like Florida and Georgia, combined with the support given to the Cubans by local authorities, ensured that a majority of the expeditions got through, to the disgust of Spanish officials.⁴⁰

These expeditions ensured the Cuban Liberation Army access to weapons and ammunition. This was evident at Ceja del Negro and Victoria de las Tunas, as described above. The Cuban problem with arms supplies had more to do with the regularity of deliveries rather than any absolute shortage. For example, there were times when army units in the East, where most expeditions from the United States landed, had more munitions than they could use, while forces in the West faced shortages. In addition, supplies of weapons and ammunition were more precarious at the beginning than at the end of the war. Midway through the invasion

38. Philip Foner got it wrong when he wrote: "With the Spanish navy in complete control of the Cuban waters, the arrival of supply boats was perilous and uncertain." The arrival may have been perilous, but not because of Spanish gunboats. On the Spanish navy, see José María Gárate Córdoba and Enrique Manera Regueyra, *La armada y la cultura militar en el siglo XIX*, vol. 4 of Miguel Alonso Baquer and Mario Hernández Sánchez-Barba, eds., *Las fuerzas armadas españolas* (Madrid, 1987). The pictures of Spain's coastal gunboats in Nicolás Heredia y Mota, *Crónicas de la Guerra de Cuba* (Havana, 1957), speak volumes about the poor quality of these vessels.

39. Cuban historians have emphasized United States opposition to arms running. Souza thought only "twenty something" expeditions left the United States for Cuba. Souza, *Ensayo histórico sobre la invasión*, 90–91. In fact, over fifty expeditions were launched, according to Octavio Avelino Delgado, "The Spanish Army in Cuba, 1868–1898: An Institutional Study" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1980), 2: 525–33. Another scholar thought that some seventy expeditions were sent to Cuba. Rafael Labián y Arias, in *Episodios de las guerras por la independencia de Cuba* (Miami, n.d.), 53. Vital Fite, in *Las desdichas de la patria* (Madrid, 1899), 45, thought that sixty-three "filibustering" expeditions had set out for Cuba.

40. A disgust apparent in the telegram of Enrique Dupuy de Lôme to Martínez Campos, 8 October 1895, Servicio Histórico Militar, Legajo 159.

of western Cuba, in December 1895, the Liberation Army almost ran out of cartridges, but by 1897 most Cuban soldiers had adequate ammunition, at least in the East. In fact, in the last two years of the war, the Cubans lacked almost everything but armaments. Thus, in October 1897, Cuban General José María Rodríguez, writing to Gómez, complained that what his men needed were not more arms but clothing and food.⁴¹ An American fighting with the Cubans noted that even when the troops were reduced to clothing themselves in gunny sacks, they could still cinch the sacks up with cartridge belts.⁴² And one Spanish commander commented in February 1898 that, although the Cubans were starving and practically naked, they were "well armed."⁴³ Therefore, although the Cuban revolution may have been in bad shape in some ways once the glory days of the invasion in the winter of 1895–96 were over, they still had adequate military supplies that allowed them, at the very least, to harass Spanish troops with almost daily gunfire.

When the Machete Worked

Of course, the availability and effective use of rifles, dynamite, machine guns, and artillery by the Cubans did not mean that the machete did not play a role in their victory. For one thing, there was Maltiempo, an anomaly that needs explaining. What happened at Maltiempo that allowed the Cubans to use their machetes with such deadly effect? Part of the blame must lie with the Spanish commander, Colonel Arizón. Arizón had 1,500 troops at his disposal to face the Cuban invasion force, which numbered some 4,000 men at the time. Yet he chose to divide his little army into three columns. This decision was a sign of Arizón's exasperation more than of his arrogance. The Cubans had been refusing battle with large Spanish forces. Instead, their strategy was to burn cane fields, destroy sugar mills, attack small outposts, gain recruits, and avoid serious combat. Such a strategy, frustrating to the Spanish, could turn even the most cautious commander into a gambler, willing to risk his men in the hope of luring the Cubans into a real battle.⁴⁴ This is what happened to Arizón. He hoped the Cubans would engage one fragment of his command, so that he could attack with the

41. Captured correspondence in Servicio Histórico Militar, Madrid, Legajo 159.

42. Grover Flint, *Marching with Gomez* (Boston, 1898), 21.

43. Ibid.

44. This is precisely the error Santocildes had made at Peralejo. Santocildes, with about 400 men actually went looking for Maceo, who had 3,000. He wrote before his last battle: "I will go in search of Maceo—now you will see and will be convinced that I do not drag my feet but rather know how to perform and do perform my duty." Souza, *Ensayo histórico sobre la invasión*, 65.

other two, forcing a decisive combat. The first part of the ploy worked: the Cubans attacked. However, with overwhelming superiority, the machete became a deadly weapon, and the battle was over before Arizón could react.⁴⁵

Why did the Cubans not use their usual tactic of firing from prepared positions? In this instance, there were two reasons for the decision to charge immediately with the machete. First, the Cubans were almost out of ammunition. Indeed, Gómez had briefly considered abandoning the invasion of western Cuba a few days before Maltiempo due to a lack of cartridges. Only lobbying by Maceo convinced Gómez that it might be possible to capture some convoy or column using only the machete and thereby replenish their supply of ammunition from Spanish stocks. This showed that Gómez, for one, had little faith in the machete as a weapon. Even Maceo argued for surprise machete attacks on convoys in order to capture supplies not for frontal assaults on Spanish forces. In any case, the Cubans had an insufficient number of rounds for a firefight at Maltiempo and had to attack with machetes.⁴⁶

The second reason Gómez and Maceo attacked with machetes at Maltiempo was that the tiny column Arizón first sent against them was made up of troops from the Bailén battalion. Gómez knew that Bailén had landed in Cuba just days before, and that they would be untrained and likely to break if faced with a horde of men on horseback waving machetes. Indeed, this is precisely what happened. The destruction of the Bailén battalion proved critical to the Cuban revolution, for out of the spoils of battle, the Cubans recovered, together with Bailén's colors and archives, enough ammunition to allow the invasion to proceed. The great Cuban victory at Maltiempo with the machete was, however, the result of a series of errors and circumstances that would never be repeated. General Manuel Piedra, wounded three times in the battle, commented on the anomaly of Maltiempo: "I must say, in defense of the Spanish army, that, neither before nor after, in the whole course of the campaign, did I see soldiers lose their morale and organization like those at Mal Tiempo."⁴⁷

Whenever machetes came into play, there was a potential for horrific wounds. The surgeons at the military hospital of Manzanillo saw one patient with ten machete wounds, six to the hands and forearms indicating an attempt to ward off the blows, three to the back indicating flight, and a death blow that opened up the cranium. Another man was brought in with his hand hanging from his arm by a thin string of flesh.

45. *Ibid.*, 144.

46. *Ibid.*, 149–50.

47. *Ibid.*, 144–49.

The sight of such wounds certainly frightened raw conscripts. It may be that the terrible possibility of a machete attack demoralized Spanish troops in ways that are difficult to measure.⁴⁸

The Cubans managed the machete with great skill, a measure of their familiarity with the tool. Most Cuban troops were peasants or cane cutters who had used machetes since childhood. In battle the machete was an old companion, almost another appendage. This facility with the machete gave Cuban troops an important advantage over Spanish cavalrymen armed with sabers. The saber was an old and specialized apparatus. Most Spanish troops had never seen a saber much less used one before joining the army. One might think that joining the cavalry would change this situation, that cavalrymen would receive instruction in the use of their swords. Incredibly, however, military regulations forbade troops to unsheathe their weapons or engage in sword play in the interests of safety and subordination, making training with the blade difficult. Thus, experienced horsemen with machetes must have sometimes found themselves facing men unable to wield their sabers effectively.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, a person armed with a machete suffered certain disadvantages in hand-to-hand fighting against someone armed with a saber. Though Cubans seem to have kept their machetes sharper than the Spanish did their sabers, the unprotected grips and the shorter length of the machete made it less formidable. Also, while a saber is an excellent weapon for both thrusting and cutting, the machete is only really good for the latter. Even the Cubans recognized these deficiencies and developed machetes with hilts, longer blades, and pointed tips.⁵⁰

The machete did, however, have several decisive advantages over the saber as well as over the bayonet. The bayonet and saber were of little use except in battle. In contrast, the machete was an all-purpose tool. For example, it was good for slaughtering animals, a daily necessity in any military camp. The main job of Cuban veteran Esteban Montejo was to go out each night with two or three companions to catch pigs, which farmers allowed to roam loose. Montejo's technique was to chase a particular pig and, still on horseback, to reach down with a machete and hack off the hind leg. He recalled how the leg "flew away and the pig couldn't run any more" and how the "the pig bled and squealed a lot," adding, "I believe that that is what I did most in that war, catch animals."⁵¹

48. Archivo General Militar, Segovia, Sección 2a, División 4a, Legajo K1.

49. Leopoldo Barrios Carrión, *Bosquejo Geográfico Militar de la Provincia de Puerto Príncipe* (Barcelona, 1881), 109–11.

50. Ibid. The author also noted that successful machete attacks usually occurred "against forces in flight or taken by surprise and who therefore do not defend themselves."

51. Barnett, *Biografía de un cimarrón*, 162–69.

The machete was useful for digging trenches, erecting stockades and roadblocks, cutting firewood, building makeshift shelters, and a hundred other things beside. Above all, it was the perfect tool for cutting a path through the *manigua*, the dense tropical jungle that once covered vast areas of Cuba. In the rainy season, from May to November, Cuban dirt roads became impassable, and new ones had to be cut through the *manigua*. In turn, these new paths became muddy traps after a week's use, and within a few months the jungle reclaimed them. As a result, new roads had constantly to be hacked through the vegetation. The saber was useless for such work, the machete ideal. The machete was, therefore, a key to mobility in Cuba. Of course, the Spanish quickly realized this and began to "arm" a portion of their troops with machetes to aid them in the work of Sisyphus that movement in Cuba entailed.⁵²

Finally, although battles like Maltiempo were rare, the Cubans did use the machete routinely in one particular kind of combat situation: the battle against civilians who aided the Spanish cause and against traitors who fought for Spain. The War of Liberation was also a civil war, and civil wars usually produce the worst kind of atrocities. It was in this civil war that the machete performed best.⁵³

Thousands of Cubans "collaborated" with the Spanish regime, that is, they received some form of official payment, worked or sold goods in enemy-held towns, or otherwise tried to maintain "business as usual" in the midst of the war. Cubans working for the colonial government faced severe penalties if captured by Liberation forces. Mail couriers, for example, were killed if they fell captive, although, ironically, Spanish soldiers were treated well when captured.⁵⁴ On one occasion, Gómez sentenced three peasants to death for the crime of cutting wood and selling it in a Spanish-held town.⁵⁵ Gómez and Maceo also ordered the death penalty

52. Ibid., 58. The machete gave the Cubans greater mobility in yet another way. Moving through the dense *manigua* carrying the long mauser with attached bayonet or balancing a rifle in one hand and a saber in the other was almost impossible, the arms becoming entangled in the brush and preventing rapid movement. Cuban troops, with a shorter rifle in one hand and a machete in the other ran smoothly without losing their balance or becoming entangled in the undergrowth. Adolfo Jiménez Castellanos, *Sistema para combatir las insurrecciones en Cuba*, 91-92.

53. Louis A. Pérez has pointed out that the wars between 1868 and 1898 were in many ways civil wars and that the insistence of Cuban separatists on the term "invasion" to describe the irruption of eastern troops into western Cuba is a sign that, in some measure, this was a war between the poor East and the rich West. *Essays on Cuban History* (Gainesville, Fla., 1995), 204.

54. Valeriano Weyler y Nicolau, *Mi mando en Cuba*, 5 vols. (Madrid, 1910-11), 1: 30.

55. In this case, however, the men were later released. Boza, *Mi diario de la guerra*, 42-43.

for any Cuban who suggested that a negotiated settlement with Spain might be preferable to continuing warfare.⁵⁶ Cubans found traveling without safe conducts signed by officials of the Liberation Army were assumed to be collaborators and were supposed to be executed as well.⁵⁷

The Liberation Army faced a particular problem, however, enforcing its writ in Spanish-held territories, by definition the place one was most likely to find collaborators. Their difficulty stemmed from the fact that the Spanish did not, of course, allow Cubans to walk around armed in zones they controlled. How then could unarmed Cuban patriots discipline collaborators? The answer is that they used the machete. The machete was too ubiquitous for Spain to outlaw. Every peasant and agricultural laborer had to have a machete. As a result, it was the ideal weapon for use against Cuban collaborators, themselves likely to be unarmed or armed just with machetes.

In addition to passive collaborators, at least 60,000 Cubans fought on the Spanish side during the war, most of them designated as "Volunteers," who served mainly in urban militias.⁵⁸ There were also thousands of pro-Spanish Cuban guerrillas.⁵⁹ The Volunteers did not often participate in actual combat, unless, as rarely happened, Liberation forces overran a town policed and defended by Volunteers. Guerrillas, on the other hand, constituted the heart of many convoys and Spanish columns. In addition, Cuban planters employed private guerrillas to protect their property against the Liberation Army.⁶⁰ Finally, it is clear that the incidence of real collaboration was much greater in western Cuban than in Oriente. In the West, whole regions had to be disciplined into

56. Miró, *Cuba*, 67.

57. Flint, *Marching with Gomez*, 25.

58. Foner, *Antonio Maceo*, 172.

59. At war's end there were still 15,892 Cuban guerrillas fighting for Spain. Avelino Delgado, "The Spanish Army in Cuba," 275. Spanish general Luis Pando noted that as late as the winter of 1897-98, 25,000 Cuban guerrillas still fought under Spanish colors and that another 40,000 could have been recruited for the right price. Luis M. Pando, *Documento presentado al senado* (22 October 1898) (Madrid, 1899). It is noteworthy that these numbers exceed those of the Liberation Army.

60. Sugar mills and estates were pro-Spanish almost by definition, and they had to be protected by private armies. Boza recalled that each mill was like "an enemy fortress" held by men who were usually Cubans. Boza, *Mi diario de la guerra*, 196-97. One planter in Matanzas, at his own expense, built fourteen forts and maintained 150 men to protect his fields, buildings, refinery, and 2,000 workers who brought in and processed the sugar harvest. José Menéndez Caravía, *La Guerra en Cuba. Su origen y desarrollo, reformas necesarias para terminarla e impedir la propaganda filibustera* (Madrid, 1896), 5-11.

entering into the revolutionary fold, and this required the application of revolutionary terror.⁶¹

Naturally, Cubans who fought for the Spanish became special targets of patriotic wrath. When captured, they were supposed to be put to death. Given the reliance of the Cubans on sporadic deliveries of ammunition from the United States, military justice could not always be carried out by firing squad. Instead, condemned men were taken to the "tree of justice" where they would be "enguasimada," i.e. hanged from a guásima tree. The alternative, of course, was execution with the machete. One member of the Liberation Army recalled that his unit captured six Cubans in one particular battle. The captives were forced to dig a trench, next to which they were lined up. Then each had the top of his head hacked off with a machete, the whole mess falling forward into the collective grave.⁶² The Cuban official Quintin Banderas used the machete in a sadistic game he played with captives. According to a Cuban eyewitness Banderas would ask a captive his name, and when the captive was about to give it, he would respond "te ñamabas" (you used to be named) and "cut off his head."⁶³ Frederick Funston witnessed a number of atrocities committed by Cubans against other Cubans. After Las Tunas, for example, Calixto García had forty Cuban turncoats hacked to death with machetes en masse.⁶⁴ Such practices made the machete a formidable threat to collaborators and captured turncoats.

Conclusion

The evidence from Cuban and Spanish accounts of battles and from medical records is overwhelming, and it all points in the same direction: the Cuban Liberation Army did not rely on the machete to fight Spanish troops. They had better weapons, mostly from the United States, and they developed effective strategies and tactics using those weapons. The machete did serve the Revolution well, but mainly as a tool and as a weapon in the civil war against Cubans who sided with Spain or who tried to remain outside of the conflict.

61. In his diary, Bernabé Boza described the feeling he and the other Orientales had when they invaded pro-Spanish western Cuba: "We marched at 5 a.m. [on 15 December 1895] toward the West. We are all serious and apprehensive, as circumstances merit. We have to enter the territory of . . . the sugar cane . . . or as one adjutant to the general put it, we are crossing "the Pyrenees" and entering "Spain." Boza, *Mi diario de la guerra*, 74.

62. Emilio Rodríguez Mendoza, *En la Manigua* (Valparaíso, 1900), 75.

63. Barnet, *Biografía de un cimarrón*, 158.

64. Crouch, *A Yankee Guerrillero*, 118, 80–83.

It seems puzzling, then, that so many commentators, artists, and historians have placed the machete at the center of military narratives about the Cuban war. The reason this has been so may be traced to divisions among Cubans during the war and frustration with the United States afterwards. From 1895 to 1898, Cubans were deeply divided, especially along regional lines. Orientales and Habaneros, for example, were not only different, they did not even like each other. Indeed, many people in Havana and the West sided with Spain and experienced the war as an invasion by Orientales whose stated purpose was to destroy the economy of the more developed western provinces. This regional difference became a political and military one, in short, a civil war, and this accounted for the ferocity of fighting among Cubans. The revolution was also plagued by divisions along class lines. Even in Oriente the Cuban revolution was not spontaneously generated from below by peasants. Instead, intellectuals, planters, and experienced politicians and generals organized and led the movement. Some of these men had as little contact with the common people (and, incidentally, the machete) as any group so constituted. Finally, the Liberation Army was divided along racial lines, as was Cuban society generally.⁶⁵ Thus, revolutionary elites, in control of a movement in constant danger of fragmentation, had good cause rhetorically to adopt the machete, the implement of the cane cutter and the peasant, the ubiquitous tool carried by unarmed men and women who came into the insurrectionary camp, as a symbol of national unity. The machete as a tool and weapon was a symbol of pride for Cubans, especially Cuban men. It was a fetish to ward off Spanish bullets. The leaders of the revolution, though they obviously knew how battles were really fought and won in Cuba, were not likely to dispel the myth of the machete's power for the sake of historical accuracy.

The social divisions outlined above continued under the Plattist Republic (1902–34). Indeed, under the period of informal United States political control in Cuba, such divisions may have increased. In response, nationalist scholars in Cuba developed a view of the War of Liberation that emphasized Cuban unity, even unanimity, in the struggle with Spain. They also insisted that troops of the Liberation Army had defeated Spain on their own, without the need for American aid or inter-

65. While Cuban accounts generally hold with Foner that "the Liberation Army was completely integrated," the reality was that it was racially divided, like Cuba itself. For example, white Cubans normally did not even allow blacks in their homes. José Muñiz de Quevedo, *Ajiaco: Apuntes de un soldado* (Madrid, 1898), 42–43. A colonel in the Liberation Army complained in a private letter of the "cowardly racism" and the "disorderly conduct of the Cuban huns—the Oriental invaders." He worried that the "brutal negro element" had gained the upper hand in the Liberation Army and would destroy Cuba. Servicio Histórico Militar, Madrid, Legajo 155.

vention.⁶⁶ The machete functioned to support this contention, now almost sacred in Cuba. For if peasants and ex-slaves armed with machetes had really defeated Spain, then American aid in the period 1895–98 and the intervention of the United States after April 1898 were at best unnecessary and at worst acts of aggression against Cuban sovereignty. This, of course, is precisely the view most Cuban scholars take of American intervention.

After 1959, the romance of the machete deepened, as scholars like Miguel Barnet fixed upon the machete as a symbol of the populist and proletarian credentials of the War of Liberation. The machete served the Castro regime as a visible sign that Cubans owed no debt to America for the existence of Cuba as an independent nation. Indeed, in the long run, perhaps the machete has been more valuable as an icon for rhetorical use against both Spanish and American imperialism than it ever was as a weapon.

66. Among many works of this nature that could be cited is Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, *Cuba no debe su independencia a los Estados Unidos* (Havana, 1950).