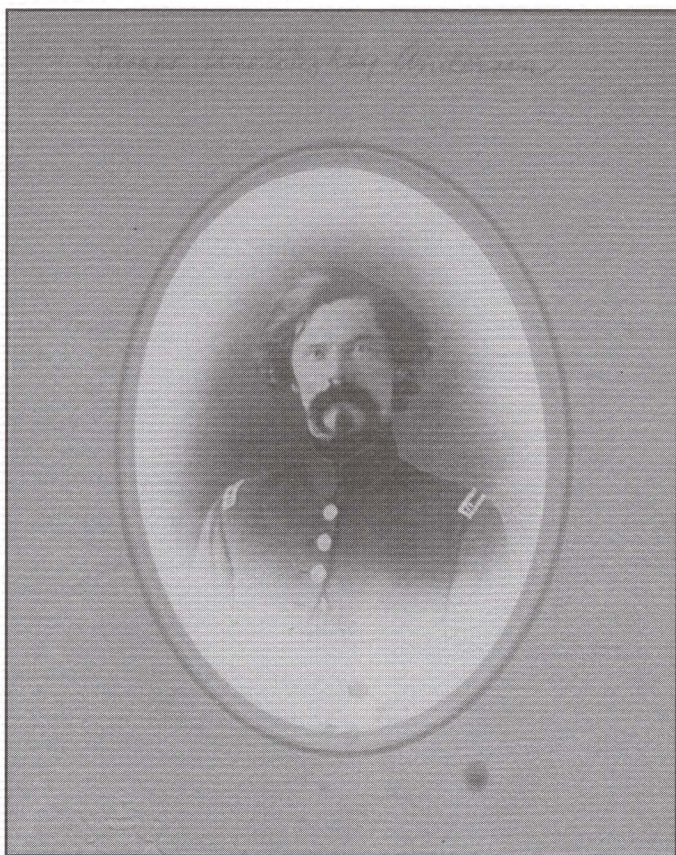


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Inside the Cuban Revolution: Fidel Castro and the Urban Underground.

By Julia E. Sweig. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002. xx, 255 pp. List of illustrations, acknowledgments, abbreviations, about the research, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.)

Cuban studies, like former Soviet studies, is a bipolar field. This is partly because the Castro regime is a zealous guardian of its revolutionary image as it plays into current politics. As a result, the

Cuban government carefully screens the writings and political ideology of all scholars allowed access to official documents. Julia Sweig arrived in Havana in 1995 with the right credentials. Her book preface expresses gratitude to various Cuban government officials and friends comprising a who's who of activists against the U.S. embargo on Cuba during the last three decades.

This work, a revision of the author's Ph.D. dissertation, analyzes the struggle of Fidel Castro's 26th of July Movement (M-26-7) against the Fulgencio Batista dictatorship from November 1956 to July 1958. Sweig recounts how the M-26-7 urban underground, which provided the recruits, weapons, and funds for the guerrillas in the mountains, initially had a leading role in decision making, until Castro imposed absolute control over the movement. The "heart and soul" of this book is based on nearly one thousand historic documents from the Cuban Council of State Archives, previously unavailable to scholars. Yet, the author admits that there is "still-classified" material that she was unable to examine, despite her repeated requests, especially the correspondence between Fidel Castro and former president Carlos Prío, and the Celia Sánchez collection.

Sweig is politically selective regarding her oral sources. She conducted nineteen interviews in Havana, including former socialite Naty Revuelta, the mother of Castro's out-of-wedlock daughter Alina. The author omitted interviewing leading revolutionary participants who are dissidents in Cuba or in exile. These include Gustavo Arcos, Huber Matos, Pedro Díaz Lanz, Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo, Carlos Franqui, Manuel Ray, Raúl Chibás, and Millo Ochoa, who are mentioned in the book, and Castro's sister Juanita, who lives in Miami. These persons have been minimized or excised from the official historiography produced in Cuba, and Sweig has abided by that pattern.

The author had difficulty describing the terrorist campaign waged by M-26-7 with kidnappings, airline hijackings, assassinations, and indiscriminate bombings in schools, nightclubs, theaters, and other public places. According to the *New York Times*, these attacks intensified during the last three months of the revolution, when three hundred bombs exploded in Havana. Sweig downplays these incidents and refers to them with euphemisms such as "sabotage" (used-twenty-four times), "the underground's harassment campaign," and "massive display of firepower by the militia." Sweig naively asks, "Had Fidel approved of this strategy?"

She portrays Castro as an infallible leader detached from the terrorist acts committed by his underlings. The most heinous of these crimes, overlooked by Sweig, was the first international airline hijacking in history. Five men wearing M-26-7 armbands seized a commercial Cubana Viscount plane, Flight 495 from Miami to Varadero on 1 November 1958. It crashed into Nipe Bay, killing seventeen passengers and crew, including women, children, and six U.S. citizens.

In describing the revolutionary triumph, Sweig omitted analyzing the major impact of the U.S. arms embargo on the Batista regime in March 1958 and the ultimatum for Batista to step down delivered by the U.S. Ambassador on 17 December 1958. There is also no mention of the participation of twenty-five Americans who fought with the guerrillas, including *Comandante* William Morgan, or the role of Afro-Cubans in the revolution, none of whom appear in any of the twenty-two photos in the book.

Sweig acknowledged that her work "does not represent an in-depth examination" of the Cuban revolution, whose full history "has yet to be written." She lamented that during her last meeting with Fidel Castro in 2001, he agreed to speak with her about the early revolutionary period, but had not done so when her work went to press. The author hopes that her book "will raise enough questions to prompt him to schedule an interview." The recent wave of repression in Cuba indicates that her wait for the interview may be a long one.