

THE MONCADA ATTACK

Birth of the Cuban Revolution

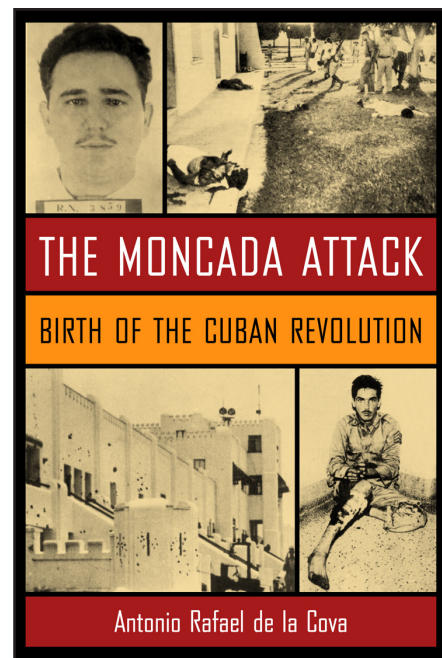
Antonio Rafael de la Cova

No account of Fidel Castro's rise to power is complete without mention of the failed attacks of July 26, 1953, on the Cuban army garrisons at Moncada and Bayamo. Yet no single volume to date has offered a comprehensive assessment of the assault that set the Cuban Revolution into motion and for which the 26 of July Movement was named. In this thorough study, Antonio Rafael de la Cova views this initial overthrow attempt as a propaganda victory that marked the start of Castro's ascent to national power. Drawing from three decades of interviews with more than one hundred participants—including surviving rebels, military and government personnel, and politicians—de la Cova screens historical facts from popular fictions to build an accurate account of this turning point in Cuban history and the Cold War.

In July of 1953, aided by his brother Raúl, Fidel Castro led 160 sparsely armed and poorly trained followers in simultaneous assaults on two Cuban army posts, declaring as his goal the restoration of constitutional democracy on the island. Skirmishes lasted only minutes on both fronts as the insurgents failed to take the garrisons and were killed, captured, or dispersed without contingency plans. A master of manipulation, Castro was later able to recast this humiliating military defeat as a political victory when Major General Fulgencio Batista's troops summarily executed more than fifty rebel prisoners, garnering the ire of the people.

De la Cova chronicles the assaults and their aftermath, with a special focus on countering false statements later made by Castro at his subsequent trial and in his published defense speech *History Will Absolve Me*—a required text for Cuban schoolchildren to this day. Through research and interviews, de la Cova brings to light the persistent falsehoods told of atrocities committed by Batista's soldiers and Castro's rebels. The myths surrounding the assault provided superb fodder for building support for the successful guerrilla campaign that brought Castro to power in 1959. Assessing the impact of this mythology, de la Cova presents a detailed survey of the lasting importance of the Moncada attack and its place in history as the birth of the Cuban revolution.

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A native of Havana, **Antonio Rafael de la Cova** is an assistant professor of Latino studies at Indiana University, Bloomington. He holds a Ph.D. in history from West Virginia University and is the author of *Cuban Confederate Colonel: The Life of Ambrosio José Gonzales*.

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