

REPRESENTING THE REVOLUTION: PUBLIC HISTORY AND THE MONCADA BARRACKS IN SANTIAGO DE CUBA

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Abstract. Is history still the handmaiden of the Cuban revolution, as Louis A. Pérez argued 30 years ago? In this article we explore how historical narratives, specifically concerning the Moncada Barracks assault of 1953, are incorporated into Cuban political culture. The event—the opening salvo in the armed struggle against Fulgencio Batista—is arguably the most commemorated event in Cuban revolutionary history. A close examination of commemorative practices, especially the contents of three museum exhibits in Santiago de Cuba, show that an aura of religiosity is cultivated around the victims of Batista's backlash against the rebels. The exhibits work to link the Moncada assault with other key events in Cuban history and to reinforce the status of the Moncada generation as the canonical generation of Cuban history.

Resumen. Fue la historia misma la sierva de la revolución Cubana como Louis A. Pérez declaró 30 años atrás? En este artículo exploramos la forma que las narrativas históricas específicamente en todo del asalto al Cuartel Moncada en 1953, se incorporan a la cultura política cubana. El evento, que la salva de apertura en al lucha armada contra Fulgencio Batista, es sin duda el evento más commerado en la historia revolucionaria cubana. Un examen detallado de las prácticas conmemorativas, especialmente el contenido de tres piezas de museos en Santiago de Cuba, muestran que un aura de religiosidad se cultiva las víctimas de reacción de Batista contra los rebeldes. Las exhibiciones vinculan

el asalto al Moncada con otros eventos en la historia de Cuba y refuerzan el estado de la generación canónica de la historia cubana.

Introduction¹

In 1980, historian Louis A. Pérez, Jr., famously declared that history itself was the handmaiden of the Cuban revolution. In its first two decades, revolutionary Cuba officially revived studies of the 19th-century Wars of Independence, sanctified heroes, and dramatized history in film and print. Its 1968 slogan, *Cien años de lucha* ("A hundred years of struggle"), effectively connected the Cuban Wars of Independence with the struggles of peasants, workers, women, and Afro-Cubans for a better life (Pérez 1980, 87). Echoing the cynical view that ruling elites impose a view of history merely to legitimate their own rule (Ripoll 1994; see e.g. Samuel 1994, 16; Miller 2003), Pérez acknowledged that the Cuban government used history as a "deliberate device for garnering loyalty and sacrifice" (1980, 89).

However, in concluding his article, Pérez also recognized another, more benign and transcendent, function that history serves among a people engaged on a common path. In Cuba, he wrote,

history has contributed mightily to the creation of a national solidarity, for it has broadened the area of common experience and brought collective solace. In the end, this expanded and clarified past has functioned as an object of appreciation, a certification of some meaning in collective endeavors and evidence of membership in a community. (Pérez 1980, 89)

In this article three decades later, we return to the question of how historical narratives are incorporated into Cuban political culture. Do official historical narratives continue to dominate as they did in those first two decades? How has the passage of a generation affected the way history is contextualized by official sources? What do recent trends in commemoration of historical events indicate about the future of history in Cuba? Does Cuban national history still offer its citizens meaning and membership?

We address these questions with a very close focus on one set of historical narratives: accounts of the assault on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba on 26 July 1953. The Moncada Barracks assault was the opening salvo in the armed struggle against the administration of Fulgencio Batista, leading to its overthrow five years later. Focusing on commemoration of this event has two advantages. First, while the "mnemonic landscape" of Havana has been a frequent theme of scholarly writing about Cuba (Gropas 2007; Quiroga 2005), less attention has been paid to the province of Oriente, where most revolutionary activity in the 1950s actually took place. Santiago is Cuba's second largest city and home to more national and local monuments than any other Cuban city (Pérez Herrero 1983). Literature for tourists calls it "a monument city" (Larramendi, Hernández, and Martínez 2006, 46). Virtually every epoch of Cuban history is memorialized in public structures that have been built or rebuilt across the decades. For example, the 1530 home of Diego Velásquez de Cuéllar has been restored as the Cuban Museum of Historical Environment, a massive and modern equestrian statue of General Antonio Maceo built in the 1990s presides over the *Plaza de la Revolución*, and the infamous San Juan Hill is now a meticulously groomed monument park dedicated to US and Cuban fighters in the Wars of Independence against Spain.

Despite the plethora of monuments and shrines, the mustard-hued battlements of the Moncada Barracks remain Santiago de Cuba's most iconic symbol. Thus the second reason for focusing on this event: its ubiquity and longevity as a target of Cuban commemoration. Every year since 1959, the government has celebrated July 26 with a national holiday, community mobilizations and programs, reenactments, and recitations. Each year a national celebration brings out massive numbers of citizens to participate in the commemorations. In his defence speech at his trial just after the Moncada Barracks assault, Fidel Castro predicted that "history will absolve me," and much of the deliberate historical work that Pérez documents in the revolutionary government's first two decades revolved around establishing the importance and meaning of this signal event in the Cuban historical imagination, and ensuring that absolution.

In this article, we first describe the Moncada Barracks assault, highlighting some of the details that are recounted in the official and

unofficial narratives about the incident. Then we briefly describe how the assault is commemorated in Cuba in print media, events, and monuments. The three museums in Santiago dedicated to the assault are described and compared, with special attention to the way they handle hierarchies of race and gender, the aura of religiosity that imbues discourse about the event, and the layering of memories from different time periods in all three exhibits. We then consider the timing of the commemorations of the Moncada Barracks assault from the point of view of generational experiences of history, and return to compare Pérez's 1980 observations with ours 30 years later.

The Moncada Barracks Assault²

The Moncada Barracks was an army base and arsenal in Santiago, whose name had changed after independence to honour José Guillermo Moncada, an *independista* who had been imprisoned there in 1893. The arsenal had a long association with oppression. In 1912, the



Figure 1. A former army base in Santiago, the Moncada Barracks now serve as a school, named The 26th of July, as well as a museum commemorating the first attacks that spurred the 1959 Revolution.

forces stationed at Moncada Barracks were responsible for the massacre of some three thousand Afro-Cubans in the "Race War" of 1912 (Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs 2000, xii; see also Gott 2004, 124). In July 1953, Fidel Castro gathered with his core group at Granjita Siboney, a farm just east of Santiago. They hid 16 vehicles in backyard sheds and hundreds of firearms in a dry well there. The plan was to seize control of the arsenal at the Moncada Barracks, the nearby Palace of Justice, and Saturnino Lora Hospital, as well as a smaller garrison in another nearby village. More than 100 young men, mostly recruits from the Orthodox Party, had been trained in the year since Batista's March 1952 coup (Castro and Ramonet 2006, 107). The date was chosen for its practical value: in late July Santiago was in the midst of carnival celebrations, and the rebels imagined that the soldiers inside would be exhausted and caught off guard at 5:15 a.m. on a Sunday morning. However, even before the assault began, its organizers were thinking about the broader historical meaning that the year signified. The centenary of Cuban national hero José Martí had been celebrated earlier that year with demonstrations against Batista organized by the Federation of University Students (FEU) at the University of Havana (Rojas 1979). Portraits of Martí graced the walls of virtually every public space, and the perpetrators of the Moncada Barracks assault, who call him its "intellectual author," would repeatedly invoke the moral authority of the "Apostle" of Cuban history.

The plan was to dress in homemade army sergeants' uniforms to surprise the soldiers in the barracks, overcome them, and ultimately win them over to the side of the rebels. They would then gain control over the weapons there, and proclaim the success of a second "Sergeants' Uprising." With this, the rebels hearkened back to another event in Cuban history: the 1933 Sergeants' Uprising, in which a group of lower-ranking soldiers, including the young Fulgencio Batista, mutinied at an army camp near Havana and were able to force a change in government (Gott 2004, 137).

Many aspects of the assault on Moncada went wrong: the barracks had unexpected defences, some of the forces lost their way in the streets of Santiago, and the rebels were woefully ill-equipped. Five of the rebels were killed in the gunfight that ensued, many were captured, and those who could retreat did so. Then, with unprecedented brutality, Batista's army rounded up more than 60 rebels and dragged

them back to the Moncada Barracks over the next few days. There, many were horribly tortured, dozens were executed, and some were held over for trial (Dosal 2006, 68). Some of the tortured bodies were strewn on the barracks grounds to make it look like the aftermath of a firefight for the benefit of newspaper photographs (de la Cova 2007, 156); the chief of the regiment, Colonel del Río Chaviano, announced on the radio that 30 to 40 of the rebels had been killed during the attack.

The public knew that normalcy was over. Huberman and Sweezy wrote that, after the Moncada assault, "there began the sort of blood bath which was to characterize the Batista regime and bring the total number of his victims to 20,000 before he was finally overthrown" (1960, 29). Vilma Espín gave an eyewitness account:

People were in the middle of the street, talking angrily, because they knew what was going on without knowing exactly who was being killed. You could hear gun shots and could tell they were killing people. All the time, trucks were carrying bodies to the cemetery. There was a terrible anger in those streets ... It was that indignation of the 26th of July, that desperate will to save the prisoners, which created the conditions for what happened later. (quoted in Franqui 1968, 178–179)

In the *New York Times* on 22 August 1953, R. Hart Phillips attested to the repression of civil rights when he reported from Havana: "A great silence has fallen over Cuba as a result of the new so-called public-order decree issued by the Batista Government. It is a great silence, but not a complete silence. It affects political discussions, criticisms of the Government and dissemination of reports and rumors adverse to the present regime" (Phillips 1953, 5).

Six days after the Moncada assaults, Fidel Castro, his brother Raúl, and a few others were captured. In one oft-repeated narrative, among Fidel's captors was an Afro-Cuban lieutenant in the Rural Guard, Pedro Sarria, who deliberately delivered Castro to the Santiago police station rather than back to the Moncada Barracks, effectively saving his life (Gott 2004, 149–150; Huberman and Sweezy 1960, 29). Castro was held prisoner for several weeks, and then tried in a makeshift courtroom in the Saturnino Lora hospital behind the

Moncada Barracks. Fidel and Raúl Castro, Juan Almeida, and other *Moncadistas* were sentenced to prison but released after less than two years. Less than a month after their release, the anti-Batista movement coalesced around the new red and black banner, *Movimiento 26 de Julio*. It was this movement that won its ultimate victory over Batista five years later.

Remembering the Moncada Barracks Assault³

When representatives of the revolution entered the Moncada Barracks in the early days of 1959, according to the docent at the museum there, the old bloodstains from the 1953 massacre were still discernible in its back rooms. Most of the building was almost immediately transformed into a school named for the 26th of July; Fidel himself drove the bulldozer to begin the conversion (*New York Times*, 10 January 1960). The date and the place of the assault have been continually commemorated ever since. The commemorations fall into four broad categories: official narratives in popular media, events in which people actively participate; monuments and other places of memory; and museum exhibits.

Narratives in Popular Media

The burgeoning interest in revolutionary history in Cuba from the early 1960s onward was not limited to academics, but carried over into the activities of print, broadcast, cinematic, and civil organizations (Pérez 1985, 6). Here we look at one example from the print media, in the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) newspaper *Granma*, which was founded in October 1965.⁴ Pérez (1985, 8) names the PCC as one of the most active organizations in historical work at the local and national levels, covering all activities from archiving documents and writing narratives to creating museum presentations.

Over the course of a few days in July 1966, more than 25 pages of *Granma* were devoted to or included references to the anniversary, including a detailed account of the unfolding of the assault by journalist Marta Rojas, information about each of the men killed during and after the assault, reports on the ceremonies at the *Plaza de la Revolución* in Havana and elsewhere, assessments of the Moncada Assault's relevance to other Latin American struggles, reports on special guests

in Cuba to help celebrate the event (who that year included the singer Josephine Baker and delegates from numerous European, Asian, and African countries) and of course the texts of speeches. Every July since then, *Granma* coverage begins in the days before the 26th of July, discusses the history of the event, commemorates its heroes, reports on the celebrations after they take place, publishes the speeches given, and gives details about celebrations outside Cuba. The amount of coverage seems consistent. In 2001, *Granma* published roughly the same number of pages (22) commemorating July 26 as it did in 1966.

Active Participation

July 26 is one of five Cuban national holidays and, as mentioned before, it is celebrated both nationally, in a different city or town each year, and locally, in public squares across Cuba. From *Granma*'s coverage in 1966 it is clear that many thousands participated in events in Havana, the Playa Girón, Matanzas, and other cities and towns across Cuba. The 2001 coverage reports that over 1,200,000 participated, many in front of the United States Special Interests Section offices in Havana. At these events, audiences listened to hours of speeches about the events, sacrifices, and heroes of the Moncada Barracks assault, the significance of the event in Cuban history, and its connection to contemporary struggles. Photos show throngs of supporters carrying placards and Cuban flags.

Santiago is selected as the city of focus for the national celebration on most five-year anniversaries (1973, 1978, 1983, 1988, etc.). Meanwhile, every year in Santiago there are locally based celebrations including annual re-enactments in which participants meet at a school near the Granjita Siboney farmhouse and retrace the paths that the combatants took on the morning of 26 July 1953.⁵ One informant, a woman of the "revolution generation" (Krull and Kobayashi's [2009] term), could remember these events going back for many years. She also recalled 1973's 20th anniversary celebration as being the most massive and far-reaching.

Monuments and Sites of Memory

Walkowitz and Knauer (2004, 5) define monuments as places that are "time-honored, spatially fixed and unquestioningly acknowledged as 'public history' sites." The concept of mnemonic landscapes has

been used to capture the idea of an interconnected network of such sites (Gropas 2007). As the location of so much revolutionary activity from 1953 through 1959, the streets of Santiago de Cuba form such a landscape for remembering the revolution. In assessing the revolutionary importance of the city, Raúl Castro wrote, "There is no stone in Santiago de Cuba that has not served as a pedestal for a hero" (Larramendi et al. 2006, 8).

Speaking about the 60 men killed in the Moncada assault in his 1953 defence speech, Fidel Castro predicted that "their liberated land will surely erect a monument to honour the memory of the Martyrs of the Centennial" (Castro 2005, 53). Once victorious, his government lost no time in building a memorial in the cemetery of St. Iphigenia in Santiago, in which those remains of the martyrs that could be recovered were reburied. Called the Altarpiece for the Heroes and located adjacent to the mausoleum of José Martí (Radio Rebelde 2009), the monument features a wall with the names of the martyrs, beginning with second-in-command Abel Santamaría, who was brutally tortured and killed in the days following the attack. A large bas relief in front of the wall shows bearded rebels struggling against the forces of tyranny while in the foreground a martyr dies in his mother's arms (Veigas 2005, 127).

In 1973, in time for the 20th anniversary, 20 new monuments were commissioned and constructed along the 10-mile road between Granjita Siboney and Santiago. Each is unique in design and materials, and includes the first names and occupations of three of the men killed in the assault and its aftermath. The 20th, on the grounds of the Granjita Siboney farmhouse, exclusively honours Abel Santamaría. Of the 20 monuments, about half are constructed of concrete slabs in modernist styles. Two are very natural, using only large boulders to affix the name and occupation labels set in landscaped areas. Several use walls constructed of local stones; one is brick.

The occupations are quite specific and so vary considerably; 55 names among 19 monuments included 39 different occupations, among the most frequent of which were carpenter, driver, agricultural worker, bricklayer, and commercial traveller. The pains that were taken to include occupations may be explained by something revealed in an interview at the time. As the 20th anniversary of Moncada approached, Herbert Matthews of the *New York Times* interviewed Fidel

Castro in September 1972 and asked him why he chose the men he did for the assault. "He wanted men of the people, what he called 'los humildes,' not middle class or students or intellectuals whom he felt that he would not be able to trust, perhaps remembering his own hectic university career" (Matthews 1973, 37). None of the *Moncadistas* on these monuments is labelled "student." When we visited these monuments in 2010, most were in good repair with tidy landscaping, but others showed signs of wear, especially those closest to Santiago. One day we came across a work crew of eight gardeners tending to one of the monuments, and we saw about a dozen Cubans in total using the monuments as places to sit in the shade or to give carthorses a chance to rest and graze.

In 1978 a substantial urban monument for Abel Santamaría was inaugurated (*Granma* 25 July 1978).⁶ The monument, the focal point of the Parque Abel Santamaría behind the Moncada Barracks, is starkly modernist and reminiscent of a Soviet aesthetic—its shape recalls

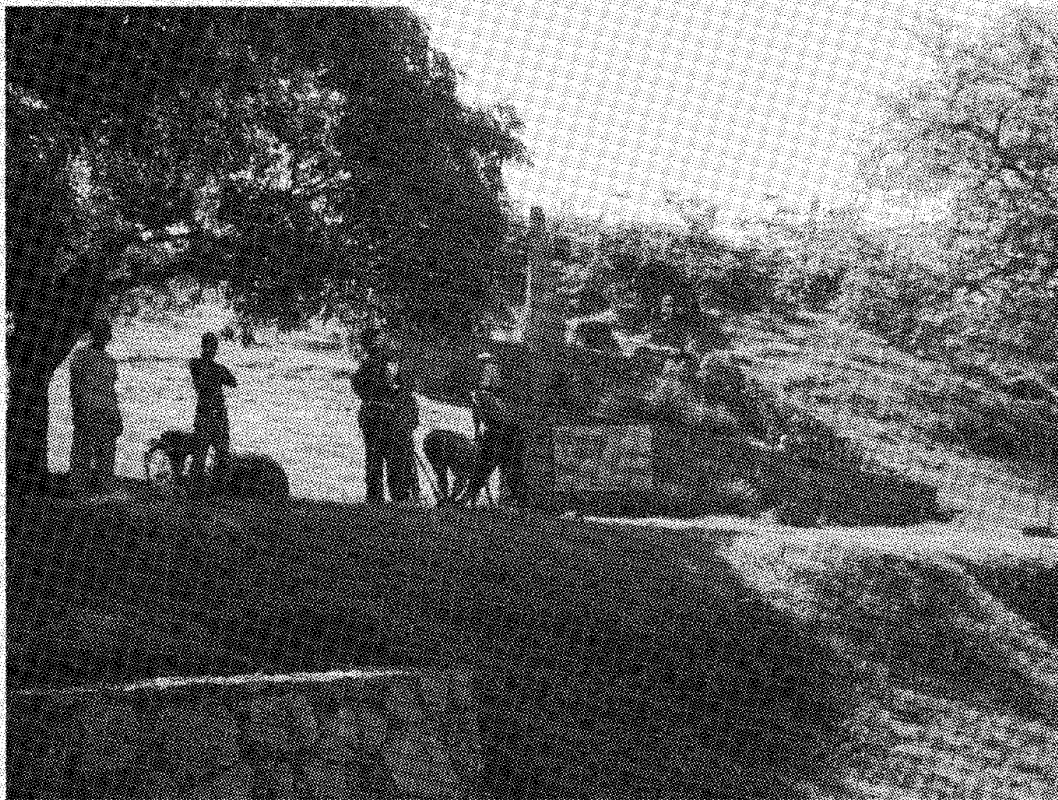


Figure 2. One of the monuments to the martyrs of 26 July. This one is dedicated to brothers Wilfredo and Horacio, who are identified as farm workers, and Pedro, a cattleman. A crew is tidying the grounds.

the cubic lines of the Soviet embassy building in Miramar, Havana. A substantial stone cube sits atop a pedestal. Abel Santamaría's face is carved on one face of the cube; José Martí's is on an adjacent face. On the third side is a single star, as on Cuba's flag, and a quote from José Martí: *Morir por la patria es vivir* ("To die for one's country is to live"). The last side is a simple geometric design representing six bayonets of tyranny. When it was built, the pedestal stood in a pool of water, and a waterfall gave the illusion of a wall of water surrounding it. According to *Ecured.cu*, the official Cuban information wiki, the water represents the purity of the ideals of youth, and the many jets forming the waterfall represent the comingling of the ideas of Martí with the ideas of the centenary generation, embodied by Santamaría (*Ecured* 2012a). When we saw the monument in 2005 and 2010, the waterfall was not operational.

Museums

Three museums commemorate the Moncada Barracks assault in Santiago de Cuba: the earliest, opening in 1967, is in the Villa Blanca at Granjita Siboney, 10 miles outside Santiago, from which the rebels launched their attack.⁷ The museum in the Moncada itself was developed between 1967 and 1973, when it had its official opening. In 1973, the Saturnino Lora Hospital behind the barracks opened as a museum dedicated to Abel Santamaría.

A systematic examination of the elements included in each museum shows that posters made specifically for the exhibits, usually combining multiple visual and written materials into coherent narratives, make up about a quarter of the 1967 exhibit at Granjita Siboney and about half of the 1973 exhibits at Moncada and Saturnino Lora. These posters enable a more thorough framing and contextualization of the official narrative, and the increased dependence on them in the two newer museums perhaps represents a relative consolidation of the official narrative in the years before the 20th anniversary of the attack. Other elements found in the exhibits are photographs, displays of clothing and personal effects of the participants, weapons used by both sides, paintings, sculptures, dioramas and replicas, installations and physical spaces that are treated as exhibit elements, and other material artifacts. Because each museum had its own specific point of view on the story, a word about each of them is in order.

GRANJITA SIBONEY

The museum at Granjita is housed in the Villa Blanca, the small farmhouse where the core group of *Moncadistas* stored weapons and cars, and where they met the day before the attack. It is a neat white house with red trim, whose visual charm is undercut by the unrepaired bullet holes that span the façade. The paint has been updated, but the damage done by machine-gun spray is left unrepaired.⁸ The distinctive character of this exhibit is its focus on the logistics of the attack and the role of the farmhouse itself in the event. The story of housing and transporting the hundred combatants around Santiago is told with tangible documents, like rental agreements, receipts, and even car keys. Some of the homemade soldiers' uniforms are on view, along with a sewing machine that was used to make them. Weapons used in the assault are on display. The physical spaces of the villa are treated as exhibits, such as the room purportedly used by Haydée Santamaría and Melba Hernández and the dry well where weapons were hidden.

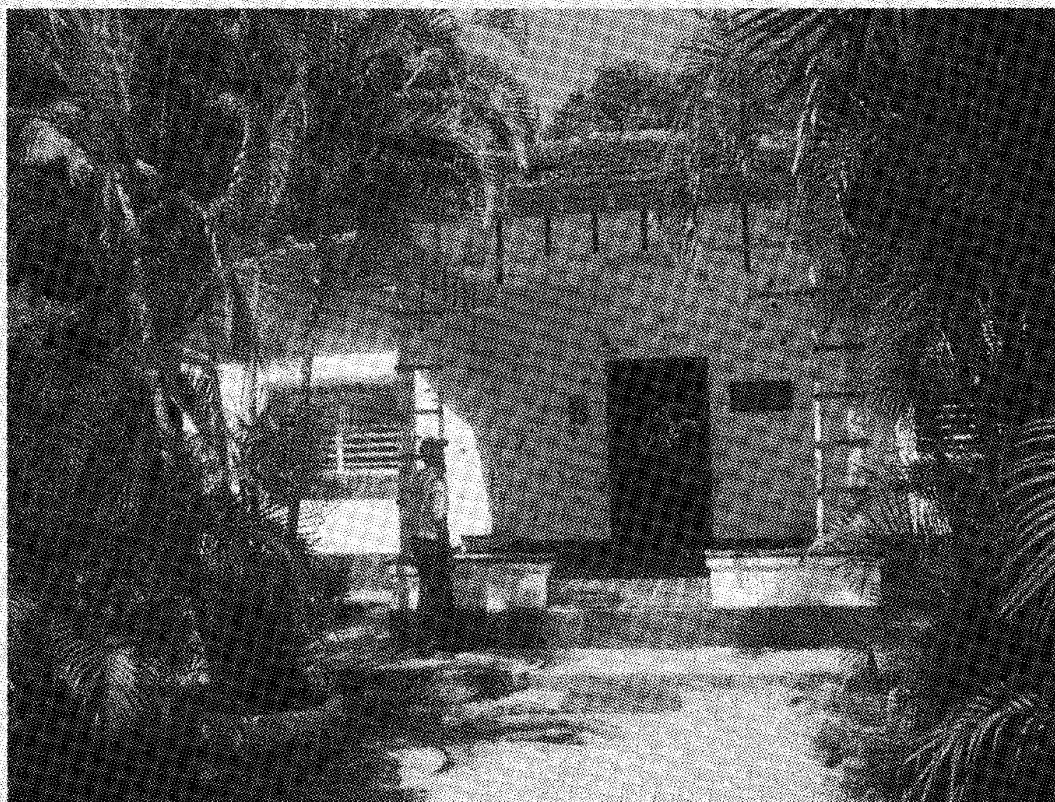


Figure 3. Granjita Siboney, the farmstead where Fidel Castro and his revolutionaries planned their attack on the Moncada and stockpiled weapons.

MUSEO HISTÓRICO 26 DE JULIO — CUARTEL MONCADA

El cuartel Moncada ("The Moncada Barracks") is a large building with distinctive battlements, rebuilt after a fire in the late 1930s in an art deco style (López Rodríguez 1994, 38), and painted white and dark yellow. Unrepaired bullet holes are visible across the façade. The museum was inaugurated between 1967 and 1973 and is now a site of interest for tourists in the city of Santiago. Open year-round, the museum is well-staffed; it was one of the few we encountered where an English-speaking guide was available. The exhibits are arranged chronologically, from the Wars of Independence through the immediate pre-Revolution period, the attack on the Barracks, the landing of the yacht *Granma*, subsequent battles, and the victory in 1959.

As at Granjita, some elements of the structure are exhibits unto themselves. The docent pointed out the room where the torture and killing of the *Moncadistas* took place as well as the office of the head of Batista's intelligence force, the *Servicio de Inteligencia Regional* (SIR), who ordered the killings. Like all the museums described here and many others in Cuba, the level of detail in the Moncada Mu-



Figure 4. Photographs displayed at the Moncada Barracks Museum of those rebels killed in the Moncada Barracks assault and its aftermath.

seum is striking. For example, one poster shows the exact number of soldiers in the Moncada Barracks on the morning of the assault: 1,065 in all, broken down here into 10 distinct categories, including 27 soldiers in the music band. The diorama of the 10 blocks surrounding the barracks is painstakingly detailed, and includes tiny automobiles whose very colours are said to be historically accurate. This museum's special focus is of course the assault and its aftermath. Here a central focus is the 60-plus young men who were killed and the many who were brutally tortured. Instruments of torture are on display, as are photographs of mutilated bodies. A second unique aspect of Moncada is that there seems to be an urgency here to tell the whole story, from 1868 through 1959, that is not as pronounced in the other two museums. This destination is no doubt the largest and most popular of the three museums discussed here, and it tells a more complete narrative.

MUSEO ABEL SANTAMARÍA CUADRARO

The Saturnino Lora hospital behind the barracks was the site of two important events. First, one group of rebels, including the two young women and a doctor recruited at the last minute, stormed the hospital on 26 July to prepare to treat the wounded in the assault on the barracks nearby. Although hospital staff sought to protect them, the rebels were eventually overcome by soldiers and captured. Many were tortured and killed. The second event took place three months later, when a room in the hospital became a makeshift courtroom for the trials of the *Moncadistas*. It was here that Fidel delivered his famous "History will absolve me" defense speech. That room is on display, decorated as it may have been at the time of the trial.

Unlike the other two museums, there are no displays of weapons here; instead considerable attention is paid to the building's original medical mission. Some period hospital equipment furnishes one room and posters detail the history of the building, including the story of Dr. Joaquin Castillo Duany, who worked with General Maceo in the Wars of Independence and was appointed director of the hospital in 1899. Two posters pay homage to Dr. Mario Muñoz Monroy, the doctor who was recruited at the last minute to join in the 1953 assault.

Race/Ethnicity and Gender

The question of representation of race/ethnicity and gender is a complex one in the Moncada official narratives. Both racial and gender hierarchies are treated very obliquely in the exhibits. There are, however, specific and oft-repeated subnarratives about Afro-Cubans and women. The vast majority of the *Moncadistas* were men of European origin. The group included a few Afro-Cubans in both the rank-and-file and the leadership, and one significant subnarrative concerns the Afro-Cuban Lt. Pedro Sarría. Women of European descent were also involved in the attack and its presentation. Haydée Santamaría and Melba Hernandez were *Moncadistas*, and the archivist behind the scenes was also a woman.

Lt. Pedro Sarría captured Fidel and his group in the mountains and saved their lives by delivering them to a police station instead of back to Moncada. Sarría is almost always identified as Afro-Cuban, including by the docent at the Moncada Barracks, where his uniform and pen are on display. Fidel Castro described him as “a tall black man” to Ignacio Ramonet (Castro and Ramonet 2006, 162); Ecured. cu (2012b) identifies him as having three grandparents who were born slaves, and one grandfather from Spain (see also de la Cova 2007, 186). Although only one of the *Moncadistas* portrayed in an artistic rendering of all of those who died seems to be unambiguously of African descent, another Afro-Cuban participant who survived was Juan Almeida, who eventually rose to the rank of commander along with Ché Guevara, Raúl Castro, and Camilo Cienfuegos. Unlike Sarría’s, Almeida’s ethnicity is not usually foregrounded. It seems that only selected subnarratives are associated with ethnicity. The absence of elements of racial justice in the official narrative may reflect the emphasis on class over race in the discourse of the Cuban revolutionary government (see, e.g., Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs 2000, 5).

Likewise, women participants enter the narrative only in specific stories. As mentioned before, two women—Haydée Santamaría and Melba Hernandez—were part of the group that seized control of the hospital. Haydée was an activist in the Orthodox Party Youth Organization whose Havana apartment served as the planning venue for the assault. Melba Hernandez was a lawyer and student activist. Both were captured in the Hospital Saturnino Lora and spent six months in prison.

The two women are part of all three exhibits. In the Moncada museum, two photographs of them are incorporated into posters about the arrests and the reunions after release from prison. The docent spoke about the women's experiences; the torture and deaths of Haydée's brother Abel and her fiancé Boris occurred within their earshot in the days following the assault, and Haydée was shown the eyes of her brother and the testicles of her fiancé. Although Franqui retells those details (1968, 18), Herbert Matthews cast doubt on this account (de la Cova 2006, 165) and Santamaría does not repeat the story in her own account of the aftermath (Franqui 1968, 74–75). The two women are specially commemorated in the museum in the Saturnino Lora, including documents, personal effects, and a quote from Fidel Castro above their photograph: "The name of the Cuban woman was never put in such a high place of heroism and dignity."

In Granjita Siboney, the women are singled out, and one room of the Villa Blanca is identified as theirs. In it are two twin beds that were part of the furniture owned by its last private owner, decorated in the red-and-white style that the docent identified as the favourite of the woman of the house. Each bed is covered in a lacy white coverlet, and portraits of the women hang on the wall. On the bed beneath Haydée Santamaría's portrait are a small bunch of red artificial flowers; the guide said that they were placed there at the time of Santamaría's death in 1980. The other rooms in the Villa Blanca are exhibition rooms; there is no indication where the men who were in the house that night slept. The permanence that the room conveys erases the historical fact that one of the women spent perhaps four nights at the Villa; the other was there for one night. It is a curiously chaste and somewhat infantilizing installation. Yet, given the resources that the museum organizers had to work with, including the set of charming furniture that matched the décor of the outside as well as the inside of the house and portrait photos of the women, it seems to have been designed as a considerable tribute to them.

It is likely that another woman—Celia Sánchez—was both the archivist and the chief decision-maker behind the exhibits at all three of the museums. When the installations were originally made, Sánchez was Fidel Castro's closest associate and was the lifelong friend of Haydée Santamaría. At Sánchez's initiative, the Office of Historical Matters (*Oficina de Asuntos Históricos*) was founded in

1964, and Sánchez remained in control of that office through the late 1970s. Sánchez was not a *Moncadista* but was central to the struggle from 1954 onwards. During the rebels' years in the Sierra Maestra, Sánchez was in charge of obtaining supplies for the guerrillas and was apparently dedicated to rescuing and safeguarding for posterity documents from the revolutionary struggle. According to the docent at the Moncada Barracks Museum, Celia Sánchez was the single individual who saved most if not all of the clothing, personal effects, documents, and material artifacts on display at all three museums. It has been said that she was "a notorious note-taker and note-receiver, and that she preserved those records for posterity" (Haney 2005, 131). Julia Sweig calls Celia Sánchez "the revolution's chief document collector" (2009, 28) and the BBC singled her out as archivist of the revolution (Pressly 2011).

All national elites use historical narratives to consolidate and legitimize their own authority. One way that this is accomplished in Cuban political culture in particular is by imbuing historical events with an aura of religiosity. Another is by layering memories of the revolution of the 1950s with the 19th-century Wars of Independence. Each of these is addressed in the next two sections.

Discussion: Aura of Religiosity

In Cuba religious symbols drawn from Roman Catholicism and Afro-Cuban spiritual practices infuse political discourse (see, e.g., Valdéz 2001; Miller 2000). Fidel Castro himself is well-read in Jesuit and other religious thought, and was educated at Havana's College of the Marian Fathers (see especially Castro and Betto 1985; Franqui 1968, 6). The symbols selected by the rebels often incorporated religious as well as political symbolism. Some speculate that the red and black banner chosen to represent the *Movimiento 26 de Julio* references the colours of the god Elegguá (Miller 2000, 39); others see instead the influence of the Spanish anarchists' flag.

José Martí is the strongest symbolic presence in the exhibitions related to the Moncada Barracks assault. Martí is present at the very beginning and very end of a visitor's stroll through the Moncada Barracks. One of the first displays is the commemorative plate reminding visitors that the Moncada Barracks were attacked 100 years

after Martí's birth. The final image is a photographic collage showing Fidel Castro in the Sierra Maestra, with rucksack and fatigues, superimposed over the face of Martí.

In 1980, John Kirk argued that the revolutionary government of Cuba had radically transformed the way José Martí is presented. The traditional, pre-revolutionary view of Martí was "as a saintly, Christ-like figure" but "apolitical, uncontroversial and essentially neutral"; this view emphasized Martí's biographical details, psychology, and fondness for the United States, where he lived in exile (Kirk 1980, 129). This traditional view of Martí reached its pinnacle in 1953, the centenary of his birth and the same year that the challenge from the left emerged in university demonstrations. The revolutionary view of Martí saw him "as a convinced anti-imperialist, as a man with a profound interest in the situation of the working class, and as a dedicated revolutionary" (Kirk 1980, 139).

Kirk asserts that the new view of Martí is uninterested in his religiosity, but he is still treated as a sacred hero both in Castro's 1953 speech and in these displays. Referring repeatedly to Martí as "the Apostle" in his October 1953 speech, Castro treats the writings of Martí and the history of Cuba as sacred texts:

We are proud of the history of our country; we learned it in school and have grown up hearing of freedom, justice and human rights. We were taught to venerate the glorious example of our heroes and martyrs.... We were taught that for the guidance of Cuba's free citizens, the Apostle wrote in his book *The Age of Gold*: "The man who abides by unjust laws and permits any man to trample and mistreat the country in which he was born is not an honorable man..." (Castro 2005, 83–84)

Castro argued that the *Moncadistas* were inspired by Martí and wanted to keep his memory alive. The actions of Batista were so contrary to Martí's philosophy that it was tantamount to silencing him:

It seemed that the Apostle would die during his Centennial. It seemed that his memory would be extinguished forever. So great was the affront! But he is alive; he has not died. His people are rebellious. His people are worthy. His people are faithful to his memory. There are Cubans who have fallen

defending his doctrines. There are young men who in magnificent selflessness came to die beside his tomb, giving their blood and their lives so that he could keep on living in the heart of his nation. Cuba, what would have become of you had you let your Apostle die? (Castro 2005, 84–85)

At the same time, the Moncada museum implicitly acknowledges the Batista government's own claim to the legacy of Martí. In one of the most striking spaces in the museum, the office where the chief of SIR presided and gave the orders to torture and kill the captured rebels, are two side-by-side portraits, one of Batista and one of Martí. Leaving it as it probably was in 1953 is evidence that official Cuban history recognizes some nuances in the narrative. Near the end of the Granjita Siboney exhibit is a poster that includes a quote from Martí, "Who stands with Cuba today stands for all times," surrounded by photographic images of Cuba's international allies, such as Yasser Arafat and Julius Nyerere. Thus Martí is linked with the contributions that Cuba was making in the early 1970s to liberation struggles in Africa and the Middle East.

Besides sanctifying Martí, references to the dozens of young men who died in the execution and aftermath of the assault as "martyrs" occurs in Castro's 1953 speech, throughout the exhibits in the museums, and at the Altarpiece for the Heroes in the St. Iphigenia cemetery. At one point in his 1953 speech, Castro claims that the martyrs will gain immortality through their ideas and deeds:

My comrades, furthermore, are neither dead nor forgotten; they live today, more than ever, and their murderers will view with dismay the immortality of the victorious spirit of their ideas. Let the Apostle speak for me: "There is a limit to the tears we can shed at the tombs of the dead. Such limit is the infinite love for the homeland and its glory, a love that never falters, loses hope, nor grows faint. For the graves of the martyrs are the most splendid altars of our reverence."

[...] When one dies

In the arms of a grateful country

Agony ends, prison chains break and

At last, with death, life begins. (Castro 2005, 61–62)

The attention to the martyrs' suffering echoes the Roman Catholic focus on the suffering of Christ. At Moncada, five display elements focus on the lives of the 60 young men whose lives were lost in the assault and its aftermath; another seven elements are concerned exclusively with the torture of the victims. Finally, the personal artifacts of the participants are treated in the same manner as the Catholic church treats the relics of saints. Car keys, bottles that had been used as Molotov cocktails, pens, and even the eight single-peso bills that were in Castro's possession when he was captured are treated as worthy of display.

Layering of Memory

On the morning of 1 August 1953, soldiers from Batista's Rural Guard searching the mountains for Fidel Castro and the other rebels found them asleep and without defences in an old shed. According to Castro, the soldiers and the rebels began to argue immediately about one thing: which group represented continuity with the independence struggles of the past:

The argument ... started from almost the very beginning. They were screaming at us—"Listen good, you blankety-blank, we're the heirs of the Liberation Army" and things like that. That's the way those miserable, murderous soldiers thought—somebody had put that in their heads. So we'd tell them, "We're the only ones who are the heirs of the Liberation Army." (Castro and Ramonet 2006, 161)

Regardless of the accuracy of this particular account, it demonstrates the importance for the rebels, and for the government they formed, that their efforts be seen as a continuation of the Wars of Independence that Cubans waged in the 19th century, a point underlined by Pérez and others (Gropas 2007, 536; Miller 2003, 148). Pérez writes that it reached its culmination in 1968:

The themes of struggle and the continuity of the revolutionary processes became fused by the late 1960s in a unifying historical construct—"cien años de lucha." Cuban history was placed in a broad contextual sweep of the century-long strug-

gle from 1868 to 1968 during which successive generations of Cubans were summoned by history to serve the needs of the patria. (Pérez 1980, 86)

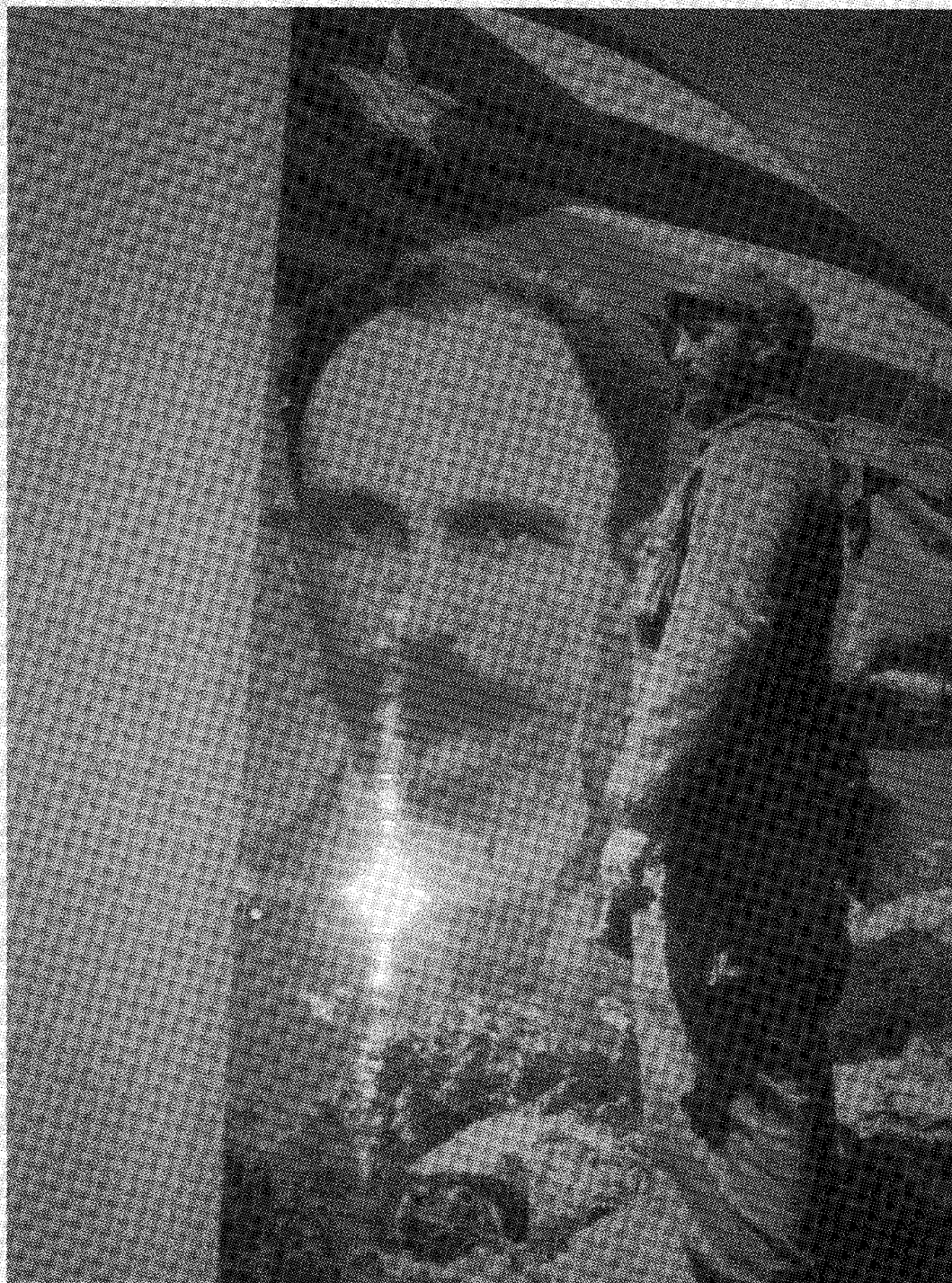


Figure 5. A popular poster depicting José Martí serving as inspiration for Fidel Castro and, by extension, drawing parallels between Martí's struggle and the Revolution.

In his interviews with Ignacio Ramonet, Fidel Castro emphasized this point. When asked if the Moncada assault marked the beginning of the Cuban Revolution, Castro replied: "That wouldn't be completely fair, because the Cuban Revolution began with the first War of Independence in 1868, which started in Oriente province on 10 October of that year" (Castro and Ramonet 2006, 135).

The layering process had already begun in July 1953, when the Cuban rebels claimed that the *Moncadistas* were the "centenary generation" who were inspired by the 100th anniversary of José Martí's birth. This was echoed in 1968 with the slogan "cien años de lucha":

The generation of the *Centenario* was linked inextricably to previous generations in the historic quest for self-determination, political democracy, economic freedom, and social justice. Legitimacy was in part derived from, and continuity affirmed with, past struggles. Through the historicity conferred on the Revolution, the Generation of the *Centenario* advanced its claim to redeem and defend the ideals of the Generation of '68, the Generation of '95, and the Generation of '33. (Pérez 1985, 3)

Do the museums honouring the Moncada Barracks assault likewise compress generations of struggle? Table 1 compares the three museums based on what time period is represented by the elements in the exhibit. The figures confirm that while all three museums include references to the Wars of Independence, the Moncada Barracks museum narrates each period of history through the triumph of the revolution most completely. Its attention to the period 1954–59 enables the museum to serve as an eastern equivalent of Havana's much larger Museum of the Revolution.⁹

Why 1973?

The Moncada Barracks assault is recognized every year in Cuba, but the 20th anniversary celebration in 1973 was by far the largest and produced the most lasting alterations to the mnemonic landscape. Two of the three museums opened that year, and the monuments to the martyrs were installed along the road to Granjita Siboney. Pérez

also recognized the 1970s as the culmination of intense museum building, reporting that by 1978, 45 museums had been established nationwide, 25 of which were history museums (Pérez 1985, 10). Our Santiago informant who was old enough to have experienced the 1973 celebration first-hand in Santiago recalled its huge scope. Did the early 1970s, and 1973 in particular, represent a peak of commemorative activity?

The literature suggests several possible reasons that 1973 was so huge in scope. The Cuban economy was quite strong; GDP was on the rise, averaging 3.8% growth from 1965 to 1975 (Staten 2003, 110). Cuba was entering a period that analysts of the time called institutionalization, as the revolutionary government developed more permanent institutions, such as the first national elections, the first party conference, and decentralized decision making (Azicri 1979, 70). Though this trend predicted a diminution of attention to "moral incentives and subjectivism (idealism)" and toward more pragmatic approaches to motivating the work force (Azicri 1979, 65), the museum openings and commissioned sculptures might represent a concretization of the symbolic uses of history practiced by the government through the 1970s.

In general, theorists of social memory point to the 20th anniversary of significant events as the most frequently commemorated. Igartua and Paez (1997, 82) argue that 20 years is the optimal time to

TABLE 1

Time Periods Represented by Museum Exhibit Elements

Time period	Granjita Siboney	Saturnino Lora	Moncada Barracks
1868-98	1	2	8
1899-1952	3	4	7
1953	30	34	27
1954-56	1	1	12
1957-Jan. 1959	0	0	11
Feb. 1959-present	1	0	1
Multiple	2	2	2
Total	38	43	68

provide psychological distance from the event, but more importantly, the generation that experienced the event first-hand has now accumulated the social resources needed for commemoration activities. The time of life when people obtain their memories of important national events points to the importance of generational membership as the salient one in Cuban historical narratives (Krull and Kobayashi 2009). Pérez argued that the government does the history work to convince the post-Moncada generation of the importance of the Revolution (1985, 3). The “generation work” accomplished in these museums is worth exploring in more detail.

Locking In the Canonical Generation

In their study of the war stories of Israelis, Ben-Ze’ev and Lomsky-Feder use the term “canonical generation” to refer to “a generational unit that identifies itself and is identified with the national canon” (2009, 1047), that is, with the key cultural symbols that represent the formal order (Ben-Ze’ev and Lomsky-Feder 2009, 1051). Biographical memories overlap with collective memories of key events in national history. They write: “A group identified as canonical is more visible and vocal, namely given public standing and space. Yet the price for this salience is that their agency is more tightly controlled. Hence, while the canonical generation enjoys a symbolic authority, it is entrapped within its social role, with little leeway for agency” (Ben-Ze’ev and Lomsky-Feder 2009, 1060).

One of the key contemporary narratives about Cuba’s politics is the tenacity of the generation of the *Moncadistas* and its reluctance to pass the baton to younger leadership.¹⁰ The museums commemorating the Moncada Barracks assault, when viewed from a generational perspective, celebrate a narrow cohort of Cuban youth of the 1950s. Referring again to Table 1, only 2 of the 149 elements represent post-1959 Cuba, and the exceptions prove the rule. One, at the Moncada Barracks, shows contemporary schoolchildren at the 26th of July School waving red flags. The caption is taken from Fidel Castro’s defence speech: “Cuba, what would have become of you had you let your Apostle die?” The other, at Granjita Siboney, is a photograph of the Villa Blanca in 1962. It is significant that both these objects refer back to the 1953 assault rather than actual contemporary activities.

Not every museum in Cuba focuses so exclusively on this canonical cohort. But given all the sites we visited, the museums in Santiago accomplish more generation work than other presentations of official history. References to the cohort as a distinctive group are reinforced with visual images of groups of young people working together or posing for group photographs. This generation has had the power to tell its narrative and present its point of view in the styles of presentation that one sees throughout the museums. The continuity of narrative style and discourse over time, from the 1953 speech through the exhibits in the museums at Granjita Siboney, Parque Abel Santamaría, the Museum of the Revolution in Havana, and the Moncada museum would probably be inconceivable without the strong stamp of the canonical generation.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this article we noted that historian Louis A. Pérez, Jr., saw history as the “handmaiden” of the Cuban revolution. The revolutionary government used history to invoke loyalty and selflessness on the part of citizens and to build national solidarity (1985, 89). Our study of the ways that the Moncada Barracks assault has been commemorated in Cuba shows that the government still invests considerable resources in the restoration and preservation of historic sites and monuments, but the impetus to establish new museums and monuments dedicated to the Moncada Barracks reached its peak in the early 1970s. By embodying the symbolic values of the historic narrative in the material artifacts enclosed in glass cases in the museums, the revolutionary government was institutionalizing its symbolic capital at the same time as it institutionalized other aspects of the revolution.

What are the values embedded in these exhibits? Respect for medical practice, a part of Cuban anti-imperialism since the 1800s, figures prominently in the Museum in the Saturnino Lora Hospital.¹¹ Respect for military tactics and strategy, or what Fidel Castro has called “the art of war” (Castro and Ramonet 2006, 177), is reflected in the attention to weaponry and in maps of troop movements in the Moncada Barracks Museum. The foregrounding of the humble ones—*los humildes*—as both the beneficiaries of the revolutionary

struggle and its martyrs is evident in the Altarpiece for the Heroes and monuments built along the road to Granjita Siboney. Yearly reminders of the loss of these young revolutionaries can impart a "collective solace" (Pérez 1980, 89) in which all Cubans may partake.

Although the way history is presented in Cuba is sometimes derided for its over-attention to detail, or its bluntness, we talked with many Cubans, especially in Santiago, who expressed deep and sincere pride in their nation's origins and accomplishments.¹² Their social memories of the Moncada Barracks assault and its significance are kept alive by the annual celebrations and proximity to the historical sites. Each anniversary of the assault remains a key opportunity to mobilize citizens for mass demonstrations that give the government the opportunity to discursively connect the events of the current day with the courage and sacrifice of the Moncada martyrs.

Concretization of the Moncada narrative in the early 1970s maximized the influence of Cuba's canonical generation, which formally assumes canonical status in these exhibits. How generational change will affect the next 30 years of 26 July celebrations remains to be seen. Given the consistency Cuba has shown in maintaining the national monuments from every epoch and the longevity of these exhibits, its narrative is unlikely to undergo serious challenge in the near future.

Notes

- 1 The authors acknowledge the assistance of the librarians at the University of Florida's Center for Latin American Studies, the Great Lakes Colleges Association's New Directions Initiative, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the office of the Provost of Denison University and the Department of Anthropology at East Carolina University. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Caribbean Studies Association, where association members provided valuable feedback. Two anonymous reviewers provided helpful very suggestions. Finally, we appreciate the assistance of Juan Jesús Moreno Padrón and other Cubans who assisted us in our research travels.
- 2 How academic historians remember the Moncada Barracks is a separate but fascinating subject. Here we rely on standard histories of Cuba such as Dosal (2006), Farber (2006), Gott (2004), Staten (2003), and Sweig (2009). We also make use of Cuban sources such as Castro and Ramonet (2006) and Rojas (1979, 1983). We were judicious in our use of sources dedicated

- to making a political argument, such as de la Cova (2007) on the right and Huberman and Sweezy (1960) on the left.
- 3 We made two data collection trips to Santiago de Cuba, in the summers of 2005 and 2010, to visit museums, monuments, and national heritage sites, documenting these in approximately 2,000 photographs, videos, and audio recordings of docents' explanations of the museums we visited. In Santiago, we visited nine museums and dozens of monuments. We engaged many *Santiagueros* in conversations about commemorating history, and a few of these discussions evolved into more formal interviews that we taped. In Havana, we visited and photographed at least a dozen monuments and national historical sites.
 - 4 The newspaper name itself is a historical reference to the boat that brought Fidel and his followers back to Cuba from Mexico in 1956.
 - 5 See Bonilla (2011, especially 315–316) for a comprehensive discussion of experiencing history through memory walks.
 - 6 Here we cover only monuments for the martyrs in Santiago. Others were built in hometowns of *Moncadistas* across Cuba, such as the *Monumento a Mártires de Artemisa* in Artemisa, built in 1979. Sculptor René Valdés Cedeño (1916–76) designed this monument (Veigas 2005, 443).
 - 7 At least one museum honors the Moncada martyrs outside Santiago. The home of Dr. Mario Muñoz Monroy in Colón (Matanzas) was opened in July 1974 as *Casa de los Mártires del Moncada*.
 - 8 One guidebook reports that the bullet holes were plastered over in the 1950s and were restored when the building was made a museum.
 - 9 Another Santiago museum that narrates the history of the 1954–59 period is the Museum of the Clandestine Struggle. The birthplace of the hero of that struggle, Frank País, is also a museum.
 - 10 One billboard around Santiago shows Raúl and Fidel Castro, and reads “Rebelde ayer, hospitalaria hoy, heroica siempre.” Some Havana residents relished our initial mistranslation: “Rebellious yesterday, hospitalized today...”
 - 11 Medical students who were murdered by Spanish forces in 1871 are still remembered each 27 November (Bardach and Agüero 2007, 7).
 - 12 On the issue of detail, one of us was told that the Museum of the Revolution in Havana housed the toothpick that Ernesto “Ché” Guevara used in January 1957; that is a slight exaggeration.

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