

THE CUBAN REVOLUTION AND MEDIA COVERAGE

¡Hay un barbudo en mi portada! La etapa insurreccional cubana a través de los medios de comunicación y la propaganda 1952–1958. By Patricia Calvo González. Madrid: Iberoamericana; Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert, 2021. Pp. 295. \$33.00 paper.
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In the introduction to her new book, Patricia Calvo González cites Che Guevara's assertion, uttered during the guerrilla struggle against the Batista dictatorship (1956–59), "Los periodistas serán los historiadores de esta Revolución" (22). This study largely succeeds in substantiating Guevara's prediction, making the convincing case that journalists, both domestic and international, played a fundamental role in securing the rebels' victory, if not as historians as such, then certainly as influential storytellers and image-makers. Even though much existing scholarship explores the strategic use of the media to consolidate the Cuban Revolution's hold on power post-1959, Calvo González adds a new perspective by investigating the rebel leaders' relationship with the press from the uprising's nascent stages. In so doing, she argues persuasively that

their rise to power is as much a story of a successful public relations campaign as it is of the physical overthrow of the former regime.

Chapter 1 offers a helpful contextual overview of the global press in the 1950s, pointing out the era's leading news outlets, both in Cuba and internationally. Chapters 2 to 5 then chronicle chronologically some of the seminal news articles and photographic reports that covered the insurrection, organized into four categories: the mainstream press and the clandestine Cuban press in Chapters 2 and 3, and the international press, comprising the US media (Chapter 4), and European and Latin American journalism (Chapter 5). Regarding the Cuban press, Calvo González demonstrates that the scant coverage and lack of overt media support the rebels received at home—Fidel Castro even wrote to Cuban journalists imploring them to visit the guerrilla camps—was a determining factor in their decision to engage directly with foreign reporters, whose work was unconstrained by intermittent censorship under Batista. Censorship thus worked in the rebels' favor, leading them to denounce Batista abroad, while the dictator himself neglected the opportunity to use foreign media to manage the regime's public relations crisis.

Calvo González's analysis of international press coverage clearly reveals the unfolding of a cohesive narrative across media outlets that romanticized the insurrection and its leaders, particularly Castro, who quickly came to personify the entire struggle. A great deal of literature already exists concerning the media mythmaking around the guerrillas, but this book does well to shed light on some of the lesser-known voices in this respect, moving beyond the well-worn focus on *New York Times* reporter Herbert Matthews. Indeed, one of the book's main contributions is its discussion of Latin American press coverage. Calvo González makes the valid observation that Latin American journalists had a more personal identification with the Cuban insurrection, recognizing the potential for similar revolutionary uprisings in their respective nation-states. Some, such as the Mexican Miguel Camín, criticized US media reporting, seeing it as a barrier to Latin American readers understanding, in all its intensity, the drama experienced by their "hermanos en sangre, religión y idioma" (232). Interestingly, the Uruguayan Carlos María Gutiérrez was one of few reporters to place Castro in the context of a much wider movement, one that stretched beyond the sierra rebels to their historically overlooked *llano* counterparts.

Despite these differences in perspective, international media discourse surrounding the rebels was overwhelmingly positive. This favorable representation, argues Calvo González, can be partly explained by the tight control the rebels maintained over the narrative. For example, although journalists were routinely invited to spend time with them, their visits rarely coincided with key military actions; media accounts of those events were thus filtered through the guerrillas' own retrospective, and unavoidably subjective, retelling to the next visiting reporter. Calvo González refers to these deliberate attempts to guide media discourse as forming part of a "marketing

revolucionario” strategy (24; 254), which went beyond mere propaganda to involve image management and the “selling” of that image to a press—and public—that were hungry to consume it.

The book could dispense with some of its emphasis on quantitative data, presented in numerous graphs and charts, as the contribution to the overarching analysis is not always clear. That minor criticism notwithstanding, the accessible writing style and the inclusion of images of primary materials make for an engaging read. Overall, this well-researched book constitutes a valuable resource for those seeking a more complex understanding of the many factors beyond the guerrilla struggle that brought the Cuban Revolution to power.

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