

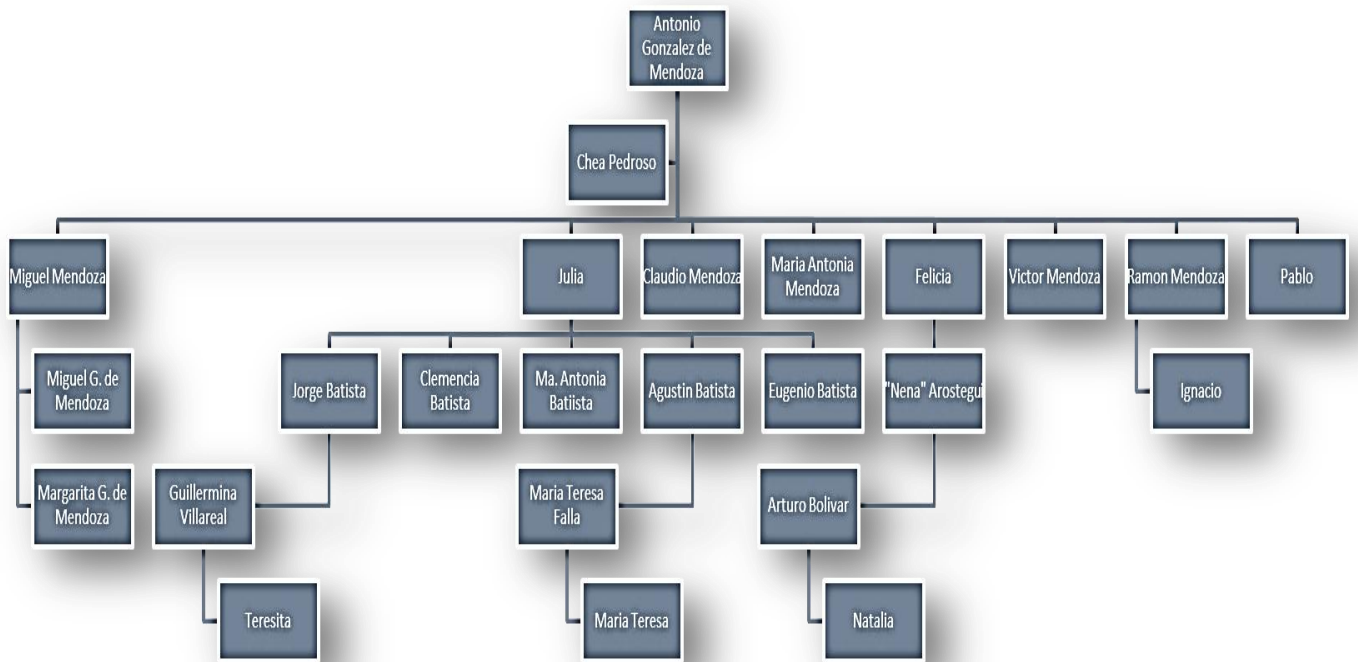
PART V

Revolutionaries, politicians, officers and their mothers, wives and daughters

In the 19th century Cuban nationalists fought the Spanish with military campaigns launched from the United States. Twenty years later the new generation of nationalists, with their target an American-backed dictator, introduced a modern style of combat. It was developed underground, rooted in Havana's university campus, and deployed in the capital's public spaces. Instead of wielding machetes and rifles the rebels of the 1920's wore straw boaters, were adept at jury-rigging consumer objects with hand-made explosives, and belonged to the best clubs. In the elegant new neighborhoods, the downtown cafes, and other stamping-grounds of the political leaders, the roar of the twenties could without warning turn into the boom of a detonated bomb.

Under the dictator Gerardo Machado, the corruption that had plagued earlier administrations was flagrantly practiced and American economic influence was embraced like never before. This was the background to, on one hand, the radical actions and on the other the conservative entrenchment of branches of the Gonzalez de Mendoza family. Within the larger society the tension culminated in a grass-roots revolution in the summer of 1933. The enactment of opposing values within the social microcosm of the family would be repeated. As a Cuban rite of passage the children born to the generation of the 1920's would respond in divergent ways to another seismic political event thirty years later.

The political and economic upheavals of the twenties and early thirties hit hard a social class that was used to security. Men who were politically active were in danger of being the target of popular anger or official prosecution. If this danger was realized their dependents suffered the loss of their sole source of income leaving wives to, with few marketable skills and resources, maintain the family's place in society. In the framework of deeply etched gender roles of the traditional Cuban family, the trauma of this insecurity left some of the daughters of marginalized or absent fathers with an elusive yearning for a heroic male figure.



Chapter 13 Students and Bombs

The ice-cream maker bomb incident

On June 10, 1932, a young man hid a 47-pound dynamite bomb in an old-fashioned ice-cream maker and carefully placed it on the curb of Havana's Quinta Avenida. He was intending to detonate it the moment a black Lincoln with shaded windows drove by. It passed this location at the same time every day on the way to Havana's leisure spots west of the Almendares River. Meanwhile, in the city centre, President Machado was called back to the presidential palace as he was about to leave. A witness had alerted the staff to the presence of the explosives on his route; moreover, he identified the would-be presidential assassin by name; it was Ignacio Gonzalez de Mendoza.¹



Quinta Avenida 1932, photo: Gustavo Rumbaut

The attempted bombing had been planned, if not with the tacit approval of Ignacio's immediate family, at least in the spirit of their opposition to Machado. An American diplomat, Lamar Schweyer, wrote, "...that night the servants of the Mendoza family had to take from the refrigerator the bottles of champagne which were being got ready to celebrate the death of the dictator."²

¹ del Río, Natalia Bolívar. *Vértigo del Tiempo, Memorias de Nena Aróstegui*, Habana: Ediciones Boloña, 2006

quoting Lionel Soto: *La revolución precursora de 1933*, Editorial Si-Mar S.A., La Habana, 1995, p. 113: On the 10th of June 1932 the "bomba sorbetera" which contained 47 pounds of dynamite was placed in a curb on Quinta Avenida on the route taken daily by Machado in his Lincoln on his way to the Jaimitas or Mariel where he went in search of rest and entertainment. Just before the time when the car was to pass the bomb, a gardener—Elpidio Martinez Gonzalez—revealed the plot to the authorities so preventing the assassination. The gardener was generously rewarded by Machado and shortly after the trial left for Spain where he mysteriously died.

² Thomas, Hugh. *Cuba, or, The Pursuit of Freedom*. Da Capo Press Inc., 1998 (re-print of original New York: 1977 edition) 595, quoting Lamar Schweyer, 31-33; and del Rio: 66

This was not, as it turned out, Ignacio's first terrorist act. Several months after his arrest he was tried for a parcel bomb campaign carried out in the spring of that same year. In that incident he had been successful in dispatching Artemisa's Chief of Police Díaz, who had been targeted as the assassin of a group of insurgents. Other intended victims on the force were alerted and prevented from opening their lethal mail.³ Ignacio's initiatives were part of a chain of attacks and counter-attacks that threw the island into a state of crisis in the first years of the 1930s and culminated in a revolution in August 1933.

The ice cream-maker bomb incident "el incidente de la bomba sorbetera" as it became known, exposed the deep distrust of Gerardo Machado in the higher echelons of Havana society. Unlike the sterling class credentials of former Cuban presidents, Tomás Estrada Palma (1902-1908) and Narciso Menocal (1913-1921), Machado's background was humble, even shady. He was a former butcher from Santa Clara, reputedly the son of a cattle rustler who sold the previous night's plunder from his tiled counters. He was appointed President Gomez's deputy chief of the armed forces in 1909 and, continuing in the fold of the Liberal Party reaped the rewards of their election victory under Alfredo Zayas in 1921. Appointed as director of the Compañía Cubana de Electricidad by this American subsidiary's head office, he became rich and had access to the company coffers to bankroll his successful election bid in 1924.⁴

Dictatorship: "el Machadato"

Nicknamed "the Tropical Mussolini"⁵ Machado was the consummate Latin American dictator. Following this tradition, he made his way to the top of business and political circles through his power in the military. As he modernized the army, Machado also promoted his military cronies into key government positions so guaranteeing his influence in the legislature. After his election, to keep the unemployed off the streets, he initiated two ambitious public work projects: the building of a central highway spanning the entire island and the construction of the "Capitolio" a White House-imitation congress building. These were made possible by loans from Washington that forwarded money to the island as a guarantee against revolution. American political leaders were further reassured by Machado's promise of zero tolerance to labor disruptions.⁶

It was in 1927, when he altered the constitution to lengthen his term of office from four to six years, that he triggered widespread opposition. The brutality with which he responded to this, particularly with the student groups, sealed his notoriety. It was said that upon the departure of

³ del Río

⁴ Gott Richard. *Cuba a new History*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2004. 130

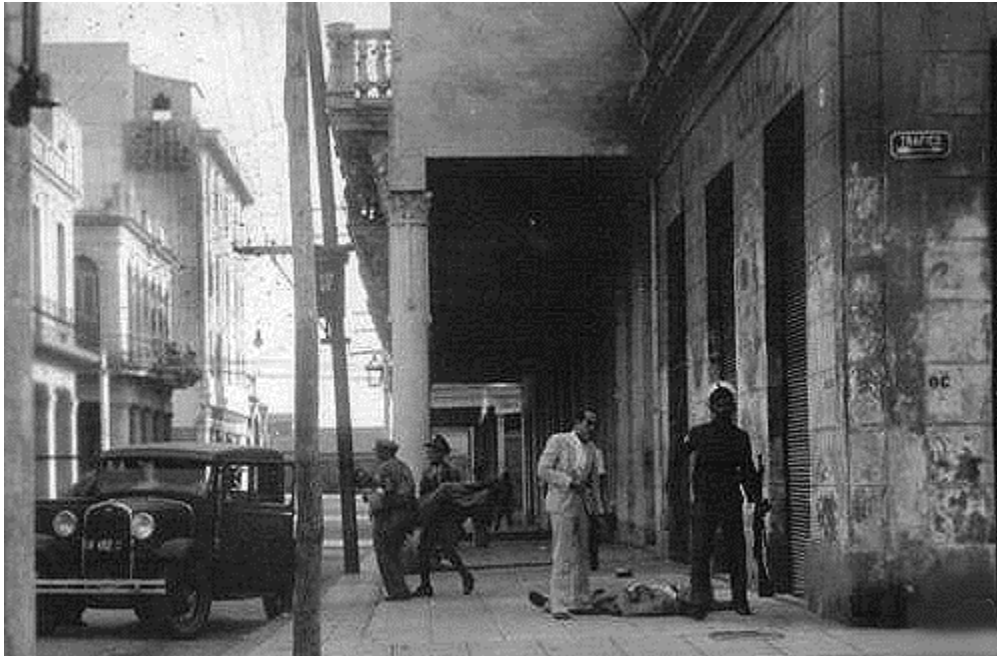
⁵ Gott attributes the nickname to student leader Julio Antonio Mella, 130

⁶ Ibid.

President Coolidge after the 1928 Pan American conference during which he praised Cuban democracy, Machado ordered four students to be tied to weights and thrown off the Morro Castle to be eaten by sharks.⁷

Young Cubans Feel Struggle for Independence Betrayed by U.S. Influence

In their efforts to bring down Machado, Ignacio and his fellow students saw themselves grasping the revolutionary torch from the generation that three decades earlier had fought for independence. As Hugh Thomas points out, the combat had never really ceased. “The bloodshed fed on the persistent instability of the period since 1902 and on the memory of the rebellion against Spain.”⁸



”Police find one dead and one wounded on Zulueta Street” 1933 [Secretos Cuba](#)

While Machado’s opponents saw themselves as extending the colonial struggle, they also understood the complexity of their neo-colonial situation. The Platt Amendment, giving the U.S. the power to intervene militarily as it deemed necessary, long an irritant to all nationalists, had

⁷ Thomas, 587

⁸ Thomas: “Indeed, it was all too easy for both government and opposition to slip into the role of Spaniards and Nationalists—with the U.S. playing a similar if more ambiguous role than in the 1890s, its home territory acting as a base for rebels, its citizens in Cuba being a support of the Cuban government, both helping to provide specific financial assistance and giving general political backing.” 587

been an election issue in 1924 and Machado's platform included the repeal of the amendment. Nevertheless, Cubans understood the pivotal role of their northern neighbours in the outcome of any successful uprising. Some of Machado's opposition looked to terrorist tactics as a way of alarming American business interests, thereby forcing a removal of Machado through another military intervention. Others feared this prospect. Viewing it as an unpardonable assault on Cuban sovereignty they angrily denounced those looking towards the north for solutions as "Plattistas."

Along with many of his generation, Ignacio felt the growing American involvement in the island to be an impediment to its natural political evolution. In his eyes, the legacy of his father, who had fought in the war, had been betrayed by the U.S. insinuating itself and then exploiting Cuba's struggle to establish its sovereignty. Ironically, it was to be through the intervention of his family's American connections that Ignacio was saved from being immediately taken to the firing squad.

Ignacio's Safety Net

Upon hearing of Ignacio's arrest, his mother rushed to defend him, whereupon she too was arrested, imprisoned and sentenced to fourteen years in jail. Her niece, Nena Aróstegui, while protesting the injustice of this, at the same time admits that Mariana de la Torre had been very open in her criticism of Machado: "It's true that Mariana, being from Santiago and therefore fiery and spirited, had made her dissatisfaction with Machado widely known but this did not justify such a reprisal."⁹ The absence of Ramon Mendoza, the head of the family, must have been keenly felt. He had died from influenza in Washington eleven years earlier.

Ramon's connections in the US capital had its roots in his service with the American army during the Spanish-American war when he served as an aide to General Lawton. While in Santiago for the decisive final battles he met Mariana de la Torre who belonged to one of the city's leading families. Their union shared in the triumph of the American-Cuban military alliance and the birth of the republic.

Although they were staunch supporters of Cuba's fight for independence, Ignacio's father was the exception among the Mendozas in having involved himself in combat. His example was felt three decades later by his son who, like many others, invoked the struggle against despotism. It was clear to the opponents of Machado that the U.S. had lost their moral leadership and was now supporting an iron-fisted ruler. To complicate matters within the family, American interests and by virtue of their investments those of many Mendozas were dependent on such a regime as Machado's that could guarantee stability.

Student Revolutionaries

Student opposition groups looked to other Latin American campuses for their models of organization and resistance. They dismissed the Cuban tradition of armed exiles landing and calling for an island-wide spontaneous insurrection. This approach was discredited by the former

⁹ del Rio "Es cierto que tia Mariana—oriental fogosa y vehemente donde las hubiese—habia hecho publica y notoria gala de su desafeccion al machadato, pero ello no justificaba en modo alguno la inicua represalia." 66

president Menocal and the son of former president Gomez and Colonel Carlos Mendieta. This group of “old boys” sailed from the Havana Yacht Club and landed at Rio Verde in Pinar del Rio in August 1931, where they were promptly arrested. In what was intended as a coordinated movement, forty men landed at Gibara on the north coast of Oriente. Again, the attack was summarily quashed, this time by the first use of the Cuban air force that caused the bombing of the town of Gibara and led to casualties and deaths of civilians as well as insurgents. The inglorious military epic had lasted exactly four days.¹⁰

Less than a month later, in retaliation for the killing of an army officer that was retribution for the attempted arrest of Mendieta, Machado closed the Havana Yacht Club.¹¹ Menocal and Mendieta were briefly imprisoned and then released, reflecting not only the understanding that their incarceration would be a liability as a rallying point for opposition but that Mendieta was now a military hack who in no way posed a threat to Machado’s modern professional army.

The *Directorio Estudiantil*, the leading student opposition group, banned by Machado in 1927, had by 1930 re-formed as an underground party. Many members of the so-called student groups were not enrolled in any university but were known as such for their activism. The *Directorio* was to be the source for the youthful, reformist leaders that came to power after Machado’s fall.

Ignacio Gonzalez de Mendoza was a member of the *Ala Izquierda Estudiantil* (Student Left Wing), along with Jose Antonio Guerra who was the son of Ramiro Guerra, a minister of Machado. The *Ala* was a student splinter group from the Communist party whose members sought “absolute economic and political liberation from the foreign yoke and the native tyranny.”¹² Members believed that capitalism and imperialism were at the root of Cuba’s problems. Since Communist principles dictated that only the impulse of workers and peasants could be the basis of a revolution, the *Ala* worked hard to recruit members from those sectors.¹³

A non-student opposition group, the ABC, whose acronym reflected the cell structure with which it guarded the identity of its members, attracted members of a disaffected middle class. Its 1932 manifesto was based on the Italian fascist program of 1919.¹⁴ Forced underground and held together by a pledge of secrecy that offered scant opportunity for ideological debate, all the

¹⁰ Gott, 131

¹¹ Thomas, 591

¹² Thomas, 592

¹³ Whitney, Robert. *State and revolution in Cuba: mass mobilization and political change, 1920-1940*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2001).77

¹⁴ Gott, 134

opposition groups were fairly amorphous, attracting recruits not through their ideas but the allure of their violent tactics.¹⁵

The siren call of explosives

A vignette from the period is offered in Carlos Eire's award-winning account of his Havana childhood. Through a family anecdote, he evokes the spirit of the legendary bombers of the 1920s. The setting is a living room in El Vedado where his relative, a young terrorist, has taken refuge. The bomber enjoys his handiwork almost as a concert in which the explosions swell and climax as they grow in power and proximity. The scene takes place in a residence not far from Eire's school, Colegio de La Salle.

My ...cousin Rafael, would tell me years later how Miguel would show up at his house in El Vedado, just one block from my fourth-grade classroom, at odd hours of the night, and ask for a drink. Then he'd sit in a comfortable chair, with his drink, looking at his watch. "Twenty more seconds, and you'll hear a big one." There was a *BOOOOOM!* somewhere off in the distance. "Forty seconds, and you'll hear another." *BOOOOOM!.... BOOOOOM!*....again, off in the distance. "Muy bien! Wait another twenty minutes. They'll sound closer." Some conversation would follow, usually not about the bombs, but about those things that interested guys in their twenties in Havana back then. I can't fill in those details, sorry. I wasn't lucky enough to be in my twenties in Havana before the world changed. But my cousin Rafael tells me it was unbelievably wonderful. Wonderful enough to plant bombs and blow up ships in Havana Harbor, just so it could stay that way. *BOOOOOM!.... BOOOOOM... BOOOOOM!* Twenty minutes later, definitely closer. "Good. They worked. Now wait another ten minutes for the finale." *BOOOOOOOOM!* Very close this time. Hard to tell, exactly, but close. "Great! Wonderful! Such beautiful drumming. Perfect. That will show the bastards! Sons of whores! *Cabrones, hijos de puta!* Is it all right if I stay here until morning?"¹⁶

Reciprocal Urban Terrorism

Students demanded Machado's resignation in a campus meeting early in November 1930. By law neither the military nor the police could enter the precincts of the university. The institution was duly shut down and fifty two staff members fired. In the following months students fanned into the city demonstrating in public places and unleashing widespread fear by planting bombs in theatres and cinemas. Hugh Thomas outlines the chain of increasingly violent acts and reprisals in the period leading-up to Ignacio Mendoza's attempted assassination in 1932.

¹⁵Gott, 134

¹⁶ Eire, Carlos, *Waiting for Snow in Havana, Confessions of a Cuban Boy* (New York: The Free Press, , 2003) 234

Thereafter violence began in earnest, the ABC and students returning *coup* for *coup* the brutalities of police and army. Bombs were laid nightly. Real experts in explosives such as López Rubio advised enthusiastic amateurs such as the Valdés Daussa brothers, ... The police arrested the Valdés brothers and Alpízar, but the judge released them due to absence of proof. Thereupon the police, who had followed orders to behave legally for some months, started to kill again. In response, Captain Calvo was finally caught by ABC and killed, while Carlos García Sierra, a Machadista politico, was blown up in his study. The ABC's bomb explosive expert, López Rubio, was killed in return. On 20 May 1932, the student Ignacio Mendoza and his friends blew up Lieutenant Díaz, Chief of Police at Artemisa, with a parcel bomb, and several other police chiefs were also killed.¹⁷

Ignacio's package bomb campaign, nicknamed by the press when it came to court as "the prosecution of the perfumed packages" *el proceso de los paquetes perfumados*, for the fact that they were sprayed with perfume, according to Nena Aróstegui, was an act of righteous vengeance for the brutal assassination of the rebels who had risen with Mendieta.¹⁸

Later that June of 1932, after the arrest of Ignacio and his mother, the ABC shot a senior member of Machado's government, Senate President Clemente Vásquez Bello, as he left the Havana Yacht Club. It was part of a plot to lure politicians to the local cemetery where a bomb was set to detonate during the anticipated burial. A cemetery gardener found the cache of explosives after the burial of Vásquez Bello in his native Santa Clara. The day after his murder the three Freyre de Andrade brothers, among whom Gonzalo was well known as having successfully defended members of the Machado opposition, were gunned down on the orders of the Secretary of the Interior.¹⁹

¹⁷ Thomas, 595

¹⁸ *Pero la relative tranquilidad fue efimera, pues Ignacio como los demas condenados por lo de la bomba sorbetera, fueron sometidos a un Nuevo proceso, el llamado "Proceso de Artemisa" que, al igual que el anterior, estuvo signado por la arbitrariedad y el abuso de poder. (El proceso de Artemisa, o el de los paquetes perfumados, iniciado el 19 de septiembre de 1932—dato tomado del reportaje de Bohemia titulado "El proceso de los paquetes perfumados" que obra en el album familiar), se referia a hechos ocurridos antes del 10 de junio, fecha en que se descubrio el complot de la bomba sorbetera. El dia 20 de mayo de 1932 el teniente Enrique Diaz Diez, jefe del puesto de Artemisa, que habia asesinado a mansalva a varios de los sublevados de Rio Verde, murio al estallarle entre las manos, mientras lo abria, un paquete perfumado recibido por via postal. Otros destinatarios de paquetes similares salvaron la vida por la rapidez con que los mandos represivos, una vez muerto Diaz Diez, alertaron a la oficialidad. Como autores directos de estos hechos fueron procesados y condenados Ignacio Gonzalez de Mendoza y demas condenados del proceso de la bomba sorbetera. —Gonzalo de Quesada: ob. cit—) del Rio: 68*

¹⁹ "Meantime, the day after the Vásquez Bello murder, three eminent members of the Conservative opposition, the Freyre de Andrade brothers, (brothers of Estrada's minister) and Miguel Angel Aguiar, a deputy, were in reprisal shot by the police, apparently on the orders of the Secretary of the Interior, Octavio Zubizarreta." Thomas, 598

The family context for the Freyre de Andrade murders, as disclosed by Nena Aróstegui Mendoza, is that Gonzalo was the exclusive target for his role as the legal counsel for Ignacio and Mariana.²⁰ Gonzalo Freyre was a close relative of theirs through his sister Maria Teresa Freyre, who was the wife of Claudio Mendoza. According to Nena, Machado's assassins found the three brothers Gonzalo, Guillermo and Leopoldo together in the family home and, not being able to identify Gonzalo, killed all three. As proof of the hand of Machado's unofficial henchmen, known as *la porra*, in the massacre Nena reproduces a typewritten note that was delivered anonymously to the family some time before the tragedy:

OPOSICIONISTAS COBARDES

Continúen asesinando, que por cada uno de los nuestros que caiga eliminaremos por lo menos media docena de los de ustedes, seleccionados entre catedráticos, estudiantes y profesionales de los cuales conservamos cuidadosamente en nuestros archivos, los domicilios y lugares que frecuentan.

No importa que se escondan debajo de las faldas de mujeres más o menos "distinguidas", porque de allí los sacaremos y los mataremos como a perros.

LA VANGUARDIA LIBERAL

COWARD OPPOSITIONISTS

Keep assassinating because for every one of ours that falls we will eliminate at least half a dozen of yours, selected from among university professors, students and professionals for which we have carefully recorded the addresses of your homes and places that you frequent. It doesn't matter that you hide under the skirts of more or less "distinguished" women because we will come and take you out of there and kill you like dogs. THE LIBERAL VANGUARD

Nena interprets the "distinguished women" reference as relating to Mariana's social status as a member of the Santiago aristocracy and widow of a distinguished patriot and the so-called "Liberal Vanguard" as a mocking reference to Machado's company of thugs. President Machado

²⁰ *Tan pronto Machado supo la muerte de Vásquez Bello; dio la orden de que grupos de "la porra" salieran a cazar enemigos. Alrededor de las tres de la tarde, siete asesinos irrumpieron con la máxima violencia en la mansión de Gonzalo y lo masacraron junto con sus dos hermanos. También fue abatido Miguel Ángel Aguiar al abrir la puerta de su casa. Ricardo Dolz y Carlos Manuel de la Cruz lograron esconderse y salvaron la vida. La desfachatez criminal de la tiranía llegó al extremo de que en el periódico Heraldo de Cuba de ese día, apareció la noticia de la muerte de los Freyre de Andrade, cuando ellos estaban todavía vivos. Por otra parte, se anunció en la misma noticia la ejecución de Dolz, cuando en realidad él ya había escapado.*

himself, feigning ignorance of the Ministerial source of the assassination order, announced his intent to visit and offer his condolences to Maria Teresa Freyre Mendoza, wife of one of the leading lawyers and bankers in Havana. The latter, understandably, refused him: “He had better not dare to visit for I will never receive him.” (The death of her brothers capped-off three decades of tragedy for Maria Teresa; for as Nena observes, she had lost all three of her daughters as young adults, one in a fire and the other two in road accidents.)²¹ Mariana remained in the women’s prison in Guanabacoa for two months awaiting her trial. After her sentencing she was, through the intercessions of highly-placed members of Cuban society as well as through the family’s influential American network, permitted to go into exile in the United States. Although he was ultimately released before serving his full life sentence, Ignacio continued in jail for some years with the constant fear of being expedited by order of the authorities.²²

Maria Teresa Freyre, Opposition to Machado, Search for Independent Cuban Identity

The Freyre de Andrade name carried nationalistic honor. The assassinated men were the younger brothers of a high-ranking military figure from the war of independence, Fernando Freyre de Andrade (1863-1929), who after the war occupied various government posts. Maria Teresa Freyre, another member of the family and student activist, fled to Paris upon the assassination of her uncles. There, she organized anti-Machado exiles of all ideological stripes into a coalition. Alejo Carpentier, while serving as the art critic for the Havana magazine *Carteles*, was accused of being a Communist and kicked-off the island. He worked with Maria Teresa on a pamphlet campaign denouncing Machado’s crimes.²³ Along with lawyer ethnographer Fernando Ortiz, who, in New York, was also calling world attention to Machado’s despotism, these individuals in the previous decade had spear-headed explorations of cultural nationalism through the arts. The mission of social action through expression of genuine popular culture was at the heart of their Declaration of the *Grupo Minorista* in May 7, 1927.²⁴ The members’ search for *Cubanidad* most notably involved a rejection of colonial influences. Afro-Cuban culture, its spirit of synthesis, its

²¹ *En la década de los diez, y en el lapso aproximado de un lustro, había perdido a sus tres hijas, dos de ellas jóvenes, saludables y hermosas, a causa de accidentes fatales. Y ahora, a los sesenta y siete años de edad, este horrendo golpe del asesinato de tres de sus hermanos. Machado, queriendo justificar ante ella una pretendida inocencia, le anuncio su visita. “Que no se atreva a venir pues no voy a recibirlo.” Tal fue la escueta respuesta que dicto a tía su corazón destrozado.*

²² *Tía Mariana pertenecía a la aristocracia santiaguera: De la Torre y Sánchez Grinan eran sus apellidos. Y las presiones ejercidas en su favor por la alta sociedad del país, pero sobre todo la intervención de instituciones y autoridades norteamericanas, hicieron que fuese puesta en libertad y enviada a los Estados Unidos poco después de haberse dictado sentencia. Con tía en los Estados Unidos e Ignacio cumpliendo la condena que se le había impuesto, la familia alcanzo cierta tranquilidad, pues, dadas las circunstancias, era difícil aunque no imposible, que Ignacio fuese asesinado en la cárcel.*

²³ Cairo, Ana, [Carpentier, María Teresa y el combate antimachadista en París](#), La Jiribilla (Accessed 30 July 2012)

²⁴ Vázquez Diaz, Ramón. “The School of Havana: Between Tradition and Modernity” *Cuba Art and History from 1868 to Today*. Bondil, ed. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. 2008

originality and role in the spiritual resistance to enslavement became a potent focal point for national identity.²⁵

Background to Dictatorship “Dance of the Millions,” the Plummet of Sugar Prices and Economic Crisis

The lead-up to Ignacio’s terrorist activities was the political tension that had been building throughout the 1920s. While the object of fury was Machado’s style of rule, his hold on power was made possible by the economic crises of the period.

After years of stability and economic growth from the increase in sugar prices during the Great War, the price lost its moorings and skyrocketed overnight. Nicknamed “the dance of the millions” the phenomenon was caused by the lifting of war-time price controls on sugar. Bankers offered Cuban sugar producers enormous credit on future crops. By the spring of 1920 fortunes were made and within the year lost again as sugar took a precipitous fall on the stock market. From nine cents a pound at the beginning of 1920 to twenty-two cents in May, below ten cents in September and by December four cents a pound. Cuban producers, unable to pay loans secured using sugar as collateral, put the heavily invested and freshly organized raft of Cuban banks in jeopardy. On the sixth of October there was a run on the banks and by the end of the crisis most of the island’s banks had been liquidated.²⁶

The economic free-fall coincided with the elections in the fall of 1921. Alfredo Zayas, former Liberal opponent and now Conservative stand-in for Menocal, won an election that was blatantly rigged. The new president had to humbly plead New York financiers for loans to bail-out economy. The stipulation of Congress when authorizing the loans from J.P. Morgan was that first, a government representative would oversee the conditions for the re-opening of the Cuban banks, and second, there would be fundamental reforms to make the Cuban government more accountable. A national census was drawn-up to serve as a guideline for electoral and other reforms. These included the passing of a new electoral code and the limit of one term per president.

In that transitional year of 1921, Ignacio’s father Ramon Mendoza died of pneumonia in Washington. His body was brought back to be buried in the family tomb in the Colón cemetery. Ramon had likely been an enthusiastic proponent of U.S. involvement in Cuban affairs; his death came at a moment when Cubans were confronting the consequences of dependence on their northern neighbour. Despite the best efforts and partly due to the worst effects of the temporary American administrations, the republic had not been able to develop a strong civil society with

²⁵ “Among intellectuals and writers ...already by 1920 there was a tendency to identify the “real” Cuba with the Negroes, the slaves who had made the sugar industry, especially after the dawning realization of the contribution made to Cuban rhythm, dancing, folklore, generally by Negroes—a realization which began seriously to gather weight form about 1906 under the inspiration of Fernando Ortiz.” Thomas, 601

²⁶ Perez Jr.,L., Martinez Lotz, L.,*Cuban Studies* 36, University of Pittsburg Press, November 2005, 70

democratic habits; instead, government corruption was unabated and American and Spanish ownership penetrated the economy like never before.

During the decade of the twenties the old military leaders Gomez, Menocal and Mendieta proved themselves incapable of a legitimate leadership. This power vacuum benefitted Machado who, with his paramilitary gangs, kept any form of dissent cowed or operating underground. The generation of the 1920's grew up witnessing regular cycles of presidential corruption, election rigging and American military interventions. Machado's abuse of political office for personal economic gain in concert with his strong-arm oppression of dissent with full support of the Americans was the final straw. The disenchantment of Cuban students was complete; it was time they took things into their own hands. Ignacio's attempted bombing exemplifies the shift in tactics from exile leaders landing with arms and leading a rural insurrection to urban terrorism by students organized within the university campus.

The women, on the other hand, deal with their own sources of anger. They suffer from being in the traditionally narrow domestic roles. As a result of the marginalisation of their husbands, they would claim more independence through their new economic importance in preserving the family's standard of living.

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Chapter 14 Prelude and Aftermath to a Revolution

“What century are you living in?” pointedly asked a 1924 advertisement for “Social” a Havana tabloid that offered advice on the newest trends in fashion, home decor, and travel. Its readership was Cubans with a good cash flow who despite the economic crash four years earlier could still acquire the latest necessities. Products seen on cinema screens and the pages of magazines were widely accessible thanks to low import duties on U.S. goods. It was a historical moment when, if one had money, distractions and escape from the dire domestic political situation were readily available.

Like all Cubans, Antonio and Chea’s 60-odd grandchildren were affected by the economic boom. Typifying their generation, they used what spending power they had to enjoy their participation in the modern world through personal mobility. Within Havana, old social habits were giving way. In the Mendoza family, the formality that had ruled the Amargura colonial-era home was replaced by the more relaxed etiquette of the Havana Yacht Club and the Vedado Tennis Club. There, Cubans of a common age, education and income level socialized and played in the new tempo.

Cars re-defined urban living, providing instant access to what had formerly been destinations of day-long or weekend trips. An improved civic roadwork expanded over the Almendares River connecting Havana residents to the shoreline municipalities of Miramar, Marianao, and Mariel. There, in the western subdivisions amidst tropical landscaping, the modern leisure lifestyle prevailed.

Havana became known as a place of spectacle. A magnet for culture buffs and sport fans, the city attracted the highest calibre of theatre and dance companies, the most celebrated soloists and champion athletes. A short airplane hop from major cities of the American eastern seaboard, it offered a fast jolt of adrenalin in the form of shows, drink and sun. The period craze for music and dancing was nurtured by its many hotels and clubs. Such bar inventions as the Daiquiri cocktail made with Bacardi’s uniquely mixable light rum from Santiago went forth from Havana bars to countless North American living rooms. Racing, of both horses and cars drew crowds to purpose-built tracks in the suburbs. Car rallies were also held in the city often with tragic results.

Street-side cafes, most notably along the Prado, competed for clients with orchestras that provided a growing range of popular music styles based on Afro-Cuban rhythms. The pianist and composer Ernesto Lecuona, and entertainers Rita Montaner, and Ignacio Jacinto Villa “Bola de Nieve” became known as outstanding innovators of music and cabaret. Their acts, developed through intensive touring to world capitals, integrated Cuban with European and American musical genres. They embodied the spirit of Havana as a creative fulcrum where influences from afar were remixed into enervating popular music and dance.

Above all, travel became an emblem of the contemporary life. Every year in the hottest weeks of the summer, Havana society was partly transplanted to New York City: at the Hotel McAlpin on Broadway and 34th street, Cuban guests were invited to register at the press offices of “Social”

within the hotel itself. The magazine's lounge offered visitors comfortable chairs and periodicals to brush-up on news from home during their post-shopping relaxation.²⁷



...ra que estamos en pleno verano, nuestras mejores familias se dirigen hacia las playas norteañas buscando alivio al bochorno. Y es el momento de recordarles que al llegar a New York, en las oficinas de nuestro colega, la revista *Social*, en el número del gran Hotel McAlpin, situado éste en el cruce de Broadway con la calle 34.

En los salones, bellamente decorados de *Social*, hallará el viajero cómodos muebles donde descansar después de unas horas de viaje, revistas y diarios de toda la América Latina, recados y otras comodidades más. Se da *gratuitamente* información sobre hora de trenes, ruta de vapores, lista de tiendas, etc. Deje, amigo lector de *Social*, de visitar nuestros salones. Seré recibido por nuestro representante el señor Carlos Pujol, quien tendrá mucho gusto en servirle de guía o de consultar en sus oficinas en la gran metrópoli.

Carteles Vol. VII No. 12, Julio 20, 1924. p.32

²⁷ Carteles Vol. VII No. 12, Julio 20, 1924., 32

Havana from the 1880's onward had seen a gradual demise of the *paseo*, the strolls and carriage rides that had daily brought together a wide spectrum of the population along the Prado. The haves and have-nots increasingly lived far apart. The planned residential neighbourhoods drew those with money away from the mixed-use, mixed-income centre. In El Cerro, formerly an enclave of the well-to-do south of the colonial core, the rich abandoned their homes as labourers drawn by such establishments as the downtown cigar factories settled there in increasing numbers. The lower middle class settled in the newer housing on the hills to the south, and the poor in shanty-towns on the perimeter.

Beginning in 1919, strikes and other social disturbances created a more politically charged atmosphere within the old city changing the feel of its ancient public spaces. The visible signs of instability in the city core only increased through the following decade. An economic downward turn that began with the 1929 stock market crash turned what had already been a steady stream of poor from the countryside into a human tide of despair. Starving farmers and their dispossessed families occupied park benches, begged in street corners and wandered the streets.



Walker Evans, Havana, 1933 [Evans](#)

Mendoza and Falla Links to Machado

The entrepreneurial Mendoza family members were among those who came safely out of the roller-coaster economic ride after the First World War. This was, in part, due to their favourable relationship with the political administrations including that of Machado. His regime, in the Cuban tradition of sinecure and cronyism, had many carefully chosen allies and beneficiaries. Among these were individuals within or closely connected to the Mendozas. Most notable among these was Laureano Falla, who had provided Machado with generous funding for his 1924 run for the presidency. Upon winning, the latter made Viriato Gutierrez, Falla's son-in-law

responsible for economic policy.²⁸ Another individual within the Mendoza family, the army officer Arturo Bolivar, husband of Nena Aróstegui, was among the military class that kept Machado in power. Finally, Antonio Mendoza, the eldest son of Miguel who had taken over that family's sugar interests would perhaps have been perceived as Machadista by virtue of his involvement in negotiating a favourable share of a sugar quota system set-up under the Machado's administration and deeply resented for favouring American interests.²⁹ In fact, Antonio's affiliations represented the winners in the post-war Cuban sugar industry.

By 1925 the descent of the price of sugar that had begun in 1920 had stabilized yet continued to experience downward pressure. Cubans largely felt foreign, including American, protectionist tariffs were at fault for the decreasing prices.³⁰ To add to their ire, Machado, bending to American pressure set a limit on production for each Cuban mill. There were complaints that heavy lobbying from those closest to the government resulted in their being awarded a preferential share of the national quota. Antonio Mendoza lobbied for the American Sugar Refining Company. His family had built Cunagua and Jaronú and he was now the manager of these American-owned enterprises.

Unfortunately, as Cuba cut production other producers around the world increased output resulting in a further plunge in prices. The Cuban Sugar Restriction Law that put quotas on the next six crops was steered among others by Mendoza kinsman Jacinto Pedroso, as well Viriato Gutierrez. On the island this became known as the "Tarafa Law" for the manner in which it predisposed the growth of Machado's Tarafa and other Camaguey mills owned by Machado and American interests.

Through the 1926 marriage of Maria Teresa Falla (sister-in-law of Viriato Gutierrez) to Agustín Batista Gonzalez de Mendoza some of the Batista men were awarded government-controlled positions. These included Ernesto and Jorge Batista. The latter worked as a civil engineer on Machado's Havana municipal infrastructure project. His wife, Guillermina Villareal, also benefiting from Falla-based influence, was first a school superintendent in Las Villas and then a mathematics teacher in the Havana Normal School.³¹

²⁸ Zanetti, Oscar, and García Alejandro. *Sugar & Railroads, A Cuban History, 1837-1959*. Translated by Franklin W. Knight and Mary Todd. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987, 462

²⁹ McAvoy, Muriel. *Sugar Baron, Manuel Rionda and the Fortunes of Pre-Castro Cuba*, (Gainesville: University of Florida. 2003) 191

³⁰ "Sugar producers both in Cuba and the United States were quick to blame the sharp downturn in prices to the foreign "overproduction" stimulated by protectionist policies." description of the quota system Zanetti, Garcia, 184-191

³¹ Teresita Batista

Economic and political conditions split Cuban society in the 1920s. Under Machado, the corruption that had plagued earlier administrations was flagrant. Moreover, American economic influence was embraced like never before. This was the background to, on the one hand the radical actions and on the other the conservative entrenchment of branches of the same family. Within the larger society the tension culminated in a grass-roots revolution in the summer of 1933. The enactment of opposing values within the social microcosm of the family would recur three decades later. The children born to the generation of the 1920's would, as their own Cuban rite of passage, respond in divergent ways to yet another seismic political event in 1959.

Prelude to the Revolution

Whatever anxiety existed in the years just before 1933 is not reflected in the family photographs and accounts. Vimeo, a website containing archival Cuban newsreels and home movies, offers glimpses of the Batista Falla clan. In the front garden of B and 13th Streets the children of Agustin Batista and Maria Teresa Falla play together with their cousin Teresita Batista. On the family yacht en route to Varadero one can see Lola Bonet, her sons-in-laws and daughters. Everyone seems carefree yet it was a moment of crisis.



[Actividades Infantiles en los años 20 Vimeo](#)

Above and below, stills from Batista Falla home movies circa early 1930's



[Comienzo de la temporada de playa en Varadero Vimeo](#)

In the preceding decade, the Mendoza extended family had been swelling in numbers. Nena remembers that, as the crowd of children who had grown up together in Amargura began to marry, the volume of celebration made for a frenetic pace of church attendance. “What a lot of engagements, weddings and baptism started from that moment on! Some seasons we ran from one church to another to be able to assist such a quantity of nuptial and baptismal ceremony!”³² Nena herself was married in 1928 to Arturo Bolívar in the church of the Sagrado Corazon, the El Vedado parish that was one block from the Falla-Batista residential enclave.

Two years earlier Maria Teresa Falla had wed Agustín Batista and they had installed themselves several doors from the other members of the Falla family at the intersection of B and 13th Avenues. This was the home base for Laureano Falla and Lola Bonet, their married daughters and husbands including Viriato Gutierrez, Machado’s right-hand man married to Isabel Falla. Jorge and Guillermina would join this residential family cluster, when after their marriage in 1929 they moved into a nearby apartment. Beyond the Tennis and Yacht Club, the focal points of the family were the La Salle and Sagrado Corazon schools. The Batistas as well as the Falla Bonets were a close-knit family and there was much visiting back and forth in the afternoons, especially on holidays.³³ During these years, the Batista family members seem in constant

³² *Qué de peticiones de manos, bodas y bautizos a partir de entonces! Temporada hubo que prácticamente nos la pasamos corriendo de una iglesia a otra para poder asistir a tanta ceremonia nupcial o bautismal.* del Rio, 74

³³ Teresita Batista

movement and mention of their travel to the United States and Europe³⁴ begins to feature prominently in Julia Batista Mendoza's journal. In 1933, their criss-crossing of the island and journeys to places beyond reflects both some of the family members' capacity to take part in such prescient cultural events as World Fairs and, in a seemingly minor way, the upheaval at home, as others escaped violence in the countryside.

In January Consuelo returned from a visit with Viriato Gutierrez and Lala Falla at the Central Adelaida. In May, Agustin and his family, along with Ernesto, left for six months of travel to Europe. In June, Clemencia and her husband visit the World Fair in Chicago while Maria Antonia stay with their children in Bagüanos. In September, Eugenio travelled to Chicago for the World Fair and from then to Princeton where he was to teach a course. The same month Enriqueta went to Chicago to the fair and continues on to New York for a visit. On the 12th of September, Clemencia and her daughters arrive in Havana fleeing the labour unrest at the Bagüanos mill. The striking workers barred the maids from her house; the family left for fear of their lives. In October Consuelo went to Paris invited by Lola Falla for three months.³⁵

In her journal, Julia gives a succinct description of Mendieta and Menocal's Rio Verde uprising; however, this event is overshadowed by her true focus, namely the comings and goings, operations, births and deaths, of the family.³⁶ She noted on the 25 of February 1932, that Melchor had suffered an angina attack but that the discomfort had quickly passed and he had spent only a few days in bed. A month later, he had a second attack and this time the pain was intense. He died on the afternoon of 24 March while talking to Julia. "*A las 3 y 15 hablando conmigo con su mano en la mia viró los ojos roncó dos veces y cesó de respirar...*" (At 3:15 while talking to me with his hand in mine his eyes turned upward, he snorted twice and stopped breathing...). Two months later, Julia felt an abnormal growth on her throat glands and, after consulting her brother-in-law Gonzalo Arosteguí, she had the cancerous growth removed.³⁷ The following year there were more operations but she died on April 16, 1934.

³⁴ When Julia's sons Eugenio and later, Agustin took long sojourns in Europe they sent her letters, the latter concentrating on cultural sites and the former on his humorous adventures. These were sent directly to Julia but meant also to be passed around to other family members. As more casual tourists, Julia's other children, Julio, Clemencia and Maria Antonia also traveled to Europe in the 1920s. Contact with the seats of western civilization was highly prized in a family that set a high standard on personal development.

³⁵ Julia Batista

³⁶ El 16 de Agosto vino Clemencia con sus hijos de Bagüanos y paso acá 3 semanas, yendo después a ocupar la casa de Oscar Hernández por haber llegado Jorge su marido, y estar allí mas cómodos por estar los dueños en Europa. *El 9 o 10 de Agosto estalló la revolución que venía preparándose bajo la dirección de Menocal y Mendieta, estos se fueron al campo pero fueron capturados enseguida. En Gibara desembarcó una expedición que traía armas; pero al día siguiente cayeron estas en poder del gobierno que atacó a los rebeldes por aire, mar y tierra, con estos dos golpes se presentaron los demás alzados, durando solo 15 días la revuelta.* (italics mine) El 10 de Agosto, digo Septiembre se opero Gabriel Batista de apendicitis en la Clínica de Reyes, y ha quedado muy bien. 11 de Octubre nace Julio Batista y Falla, muy hermoso pesando 9 lbs 6 oz..." 84-6

³⁷ Julia Batista

Although she was ill during her final year, Julia maintained her activities at the centre of her family. All the while tracking the extensive movements of her grown children, she had the energy to give refuge to the family of one daughter who had been caught in the labor uprising of the sugar mills, and to look after the children of another so that she could attend the Chicago World Fair. Meantime, like all Cubans, she was witnessing and interpreting the complicated sequence of events leading up to and following the comparative straightforward popular uprising that was the August 1933 revolution.

In May 1933, when revolution seemed inevitable, Washington's special envoy Sumner Welles arrived in the city. His mandate was to resolve the crisis so preventing further loss of life and damage to American investments.³⁸ Welles convinced pro-Machado government members that the U.S. had lost confidence in their leader. Escalating violence and street protests that culminated in a general strike in early August lent credibility to Welles urgent plea to the government to avert a revolution by ousting the president. Machado was finally convinced to resign and left abruptly by plane.

A letter³⁹ sent to Ernesto Batista by his brother Agustín from France dated August 15 reflects on the course of events, the American strategy in appointments in the transitional government and the consequences of these for the family:

What appears obvious is that Machado has fallen and fled the country during which time there has been serious social disorder. I have received several telegrams from home and from the offices of Falla and Claudio informing me that all of our families are safe. We have also been warned that Lala's (Adelaida's) home has been looted, although I think that the damage could not have been as serious as others since the papers make no mention of it. I'm assuming that the fall was the result of the military taking affairs into their own hands as it became known that the Americans would not support Machado after the position that Sumner Welles had taken. The latter I think is to blame for everything that has happened to this point and also what will follow. I am reassured by the appointments to the new cabinet; these are promising and respectable if they are successful in dominating the situation. They are signal evidence that Washington has intervened in the composition of the cabinet and will be following their actions closely. In Public Works they've put Montoulieu, a graduate of Harvard who Machado had directing the "Special Fund for Public Works," and is related to us through Alvaro Sánchez; in (Hacienda, Home Office?) is Daniel Compte, one of Machado's men... Castillo Porkonoy has been designated Secretary of State without any merit, in my opinion, other than having been a graduate of West Point. The paper also mentions that they offered Justice Secretary to Antonio (the

³⁸ Alfredo José Estrada, *Havana, Autobiography of a City*, PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, New York, 2008

³⁹ From a collection of letters from Agustín to Julia and other family members describing his travels collected in "Cartas de Viaje," an unpublished bound volume.

son of Miguel) but that he rejected it. I think this must be an error and they must have meant Claudio because for that position one has to be a lawyer...⁴⁰



Jorge Batista

⁴⁰ Carta a Ernesto de Agustin Batista, 49 La Bourboule, Agosto 15, 1933

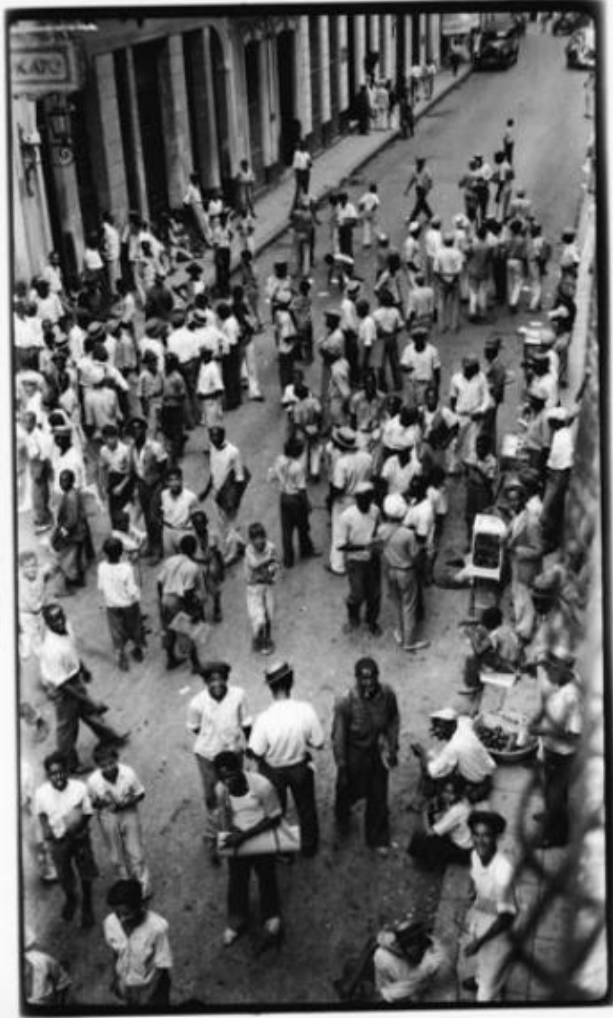
“...Sin embargo, lo que si parece cierto es que Machado ha caído y se ha ausentado del país, en el cual han ocurrido graves desórdenes. He tenido varios cables de casa, de la oficina de Falla y de Claudio, en los que me dicen que todas nuestras familias están bien. También nos han avisado que la casa de Lala fue saqueada, pero me imagino que el daño no habrá sido tanto como en otras porque los periodicos no mencionan el hecho.”

...

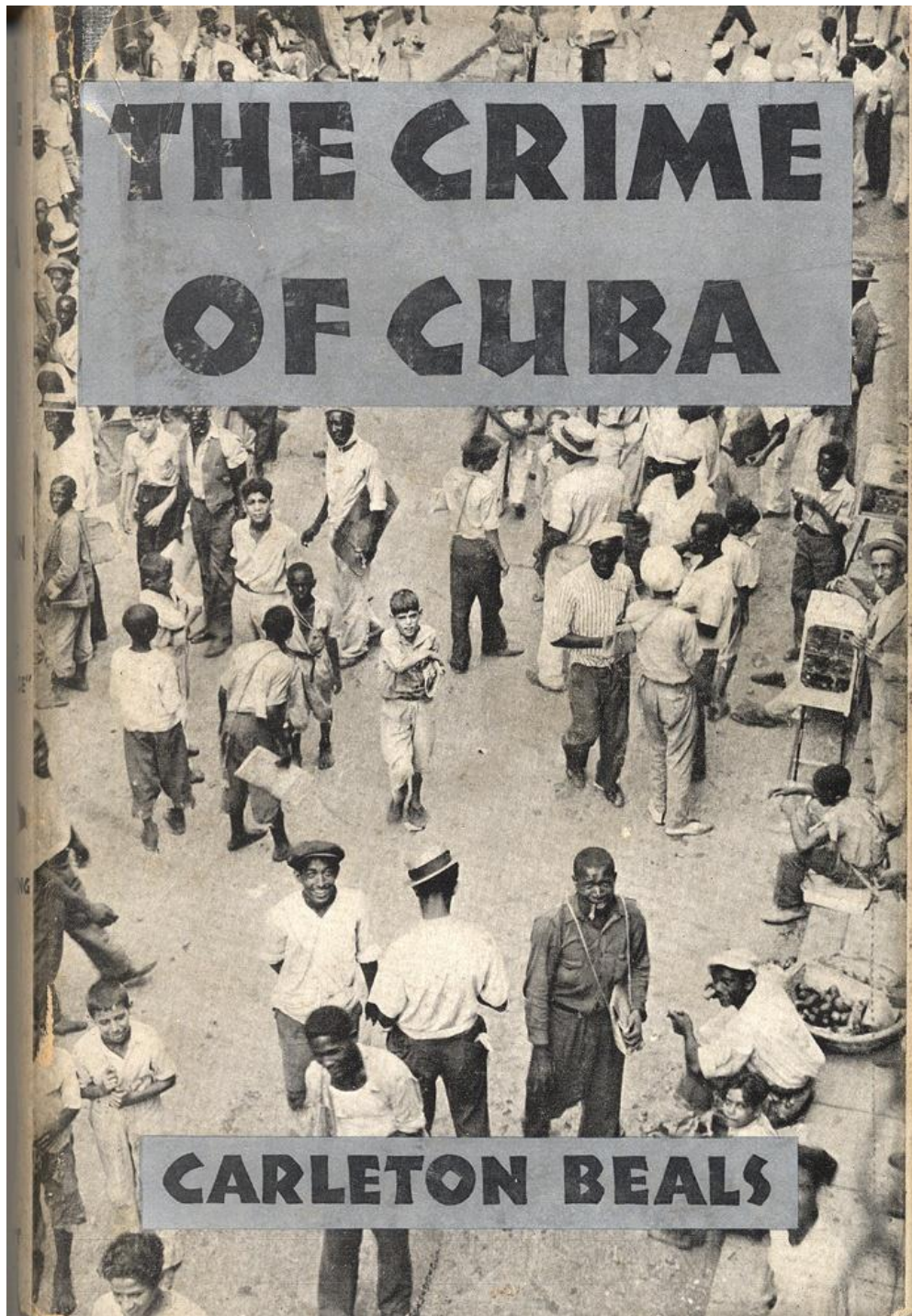
Atando cabos deduzco que la caída fue debida a la desafección del ejército y que ésta sobrevino al hacerse notorio que los americanos no mantenían su apoyo con la actitud asumida por Welles, a quien creo que hay que culpar por todo lo sucedido y lo que ocurra de aquí en adelante. Una noticia tranquilizadora es la de los primeros nombres del nuevo gabinete, que prometen garantía y respeto si logran dominar la situación, y son señal evidente de que Washington ha intervenido en la constitución del gabinete y que seguirá de cerca los acotamientos.

En Obras Públicas han puesto a Montouliou graduado de Harvard a quien Machado tenía en la Dirección del Fondo Especial de Obras Públicas y que está relacionado con nosotros por medio de Alvaro Sánchez; en Hacienda está Daniel Compte, hombre de Machado en la Comisión Técnica Arancelaria; la Secretaría de la Presidencia la ocupa Raúl de Cárdenas que, aunque del campo de la oposición, es una persona decente; Castillo Porkonoy ha sido designado Secretario de la Guerra, sin más mérito a mi juicio que el de ser graduado de West Point. También dice el periódico que la Secretaría de Justicia se la ofrecieron a Antonio y que la rechazó, pero yo me imagino que es un error y que ha sido Claudio, pues para ese cargo hay que ser abogado.”

Teresa Casas Batista



Walker Evans, Havana Street, Havana Cuba Crowd of Men on Street, From Above, Havana, 1933 documentation of the tumultuous time of a Cuban revolt against the ruling Machado government published originally as one of 31 illustrations for *The Crime of Cuba* by Carleton Beals Company, Philadelphia, 1933 [Click Photography](#)



Walker Evans, Havana Street, Havana Cuba Crowd of Men on Street, From Above, detail

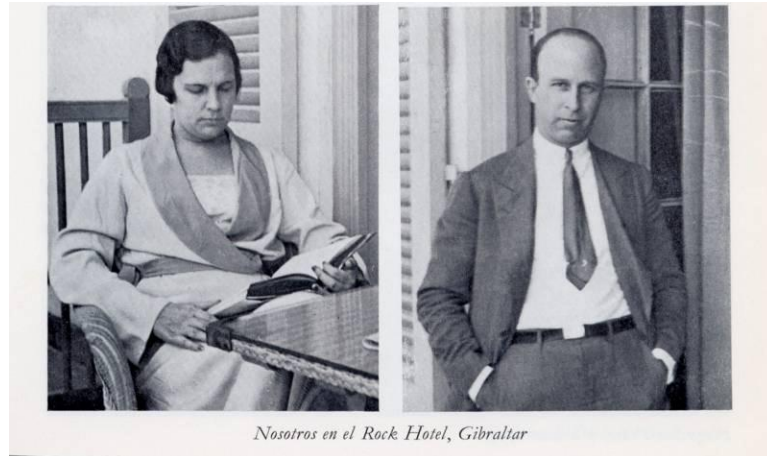


photo of Maria Teresa Batista Falla and Agustín Batista from Agustín Batista's *Cartas de Viaje*)

At the conclusion of the letter, Agustín's mentions that in any correspondence sent to Cuba, Ernesto must be very guarded. He also mentions that the latter's job would certainly be lost.

In the end, Agustín's work in analysing the new cabinet was premature. The government midwived by Sumner Welles lasted only three weeks. In the meantime, the city was turned upside down as, in a fury of vengeance anyone associated with the fallen administration was attacked. Alfredo Jose Entrada, a writer, later recalled his horror at the barbarities he witnessed on the streets of Havana.

The typhoon of violence that then swept over Havana is without parallel, before or after. After Machado fled, the guards abandoned their posts and the crowd stormed the Presidential Palace. . . . Disguised in women's clothing, the Chief of Police managed to hide for a couple of days but was soon discovered heading for the docks. According to some accounts, he committed suicide before the mob reached him, but his body was mutilated, hung from a streetlight, and set afire. Mansions of prominent Machadistas were looted, as were many government ministries and other buildings, such as the Manzana de Gómez. It has been estimated that one thousand people were killed, though the figure was probably higher. Many used the chaos to settle old scores, and cries of "Porrista!" were enough to send many running out of fear. One eyewitness told me, nearly three quarters of a century later, that he recalled seeing severed heads and limbs on the streets."⁴¹

As the spirit of revolutionary fervor spread to the countryside, sugar mills were taken over by their workers among them, Jorge's former place of work, Jaronú. "Within less than a month the number of mills under labor control was estimated at thirty-six. Soviets (workers' groups) were reported to have been organized at Mabay, Jaronú, Senado, Santa Lucía, and other centrales. Workers At various points, mill managers were held prisoners

⁴¹ Estrada, 178-79

by workers. Labor guards were formed, armed with clubs, sticks and a few revolvers..., a red armband serving as uniform. Workers fraternized with the soldiers and police.”⁴²

In the months of July through December of that tumultuous year the amount of travel by Julia’s family peaked. Although one would not know it from Agustin Batista’s upbeat accounts, all of the Falla and Gutierrez relatives must have had a bad scare before making it safely to their ancestral mansion in the village of Anero in northern Spain where they took refuge from mid-July to mid-August. In a letter to his mother from Paris dated August 15th Agustin writes:

It was difficult to leave the village where we had been having such a good time. Especially in the last month when we were all reunited and the season reached a high pitch of amusement. We were more than fifty people in the house because beyond our own families we had with us almost the entire time Antonio Monasterio with his wife and two daughters and Amparo Suero with four children. In mid-July the summer season began in Santander and we had some very pleasurable dinners and teas at the Tennis Club. They play the *son* a lot and the other day a woman from the orchestra praised my dancing. I don’t think I danced particularly well rather that with my having gained weight and the fashion for tight-fitting clothes, with my new curves the dance acquired a fresh level of suggestiveness. If I’ve said something in bad taste blot it out.⁴³

But it was unlikely that Julia at that juncture had time to worry about possible lapses in decorum in her son’s letters from Europe; by the 12th of September she was fully focused on the arrival at her home of family members, refugees from Bagüanos. Clemencia and her young daughters’ lives had been turned upside down by the strike of the agricultural workers and they remained in the capital for several months waiting for things to calm down in the countryside.

Far away from Havana, Agustin and Maria Teresa spent that fall attending music festivals, reunions with friends and water cures in celebrated spas. They took up residence in Paris, until early November when they departed for the United States. Consuelo was invited to join Lola Falla in Paris for some months... In the midst of the revolution the experience of the family is curiously divided between the increasingly confined and dangerous melt-down of society on the island and the limitless horizons of a cosmopolitan world.

⁴² *Problems of the New Cuba*, Foreign Policy Association, New York, 1935, p. 183 as quoted in Richard Gott, *Cuba a new History*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2004

⁴³ *Mucho nos costó dejar la aldea donde también la estábamos pasando. Sobre todo el último mes cuando estuvimos todos reunidos que la temporada alcanzó una animación extraordinaria. Eramos más de cincuenta personas en la casa, pues además de nuestras familias tuvimos casi todo el tiempo a Antonio Monasterio con su mujer y dos hijas y a Amparo Suero con cuatro hijos./ A mediados de julio comenzó la temporada de verano en Santander y tuvimos varias comidas y té en el Tennis que resultaron muy agradables. Tocan mucho el son y el último día que bailé una mujer de la orquesta se salió del balcón de la música para felicitarme por lo bien que lo había hecho. Yo no creo que lo bailé bien sino que como he engordado y me han crecido ciertas curvas del cuerpo que la ropa estrecha hace resaltar más, los movimientos del baile resultaban más significativos y la señora no pudo reprimir sus muestras de agrado. Si he dicho algo feo, que lo tachen.” (Batista, Cartas, 50)*



Lala, Isabelita, Maria Teresa y Mana Adelaida en La Bourboule

photo of the Falla Bonet women from Agustin Batista's *Cartas de Viaje*

Agustin's correspondence from Europe reflects his central role in the family by the 1930s, a role he embraces with diligence, affection and respect. To each member of his large family including in-laws he interprets his travels according to the specific member's interest. For example the chronicle of his visit to the Vatican is directed to his nun sisters and his observations are filtered through his knowledge of their particular interest in his experience. The tone of this missive is a masterful balance of respect and awe for the power of the Church and irreverent joy in some of its more archaic trappings.

His letter to Jorge, the engineer, makes fun of Venice's need for major engineering overhaul of its canals. In his letter to Enriqueta, to whom he has left responsibilities as his secretary, he reminds her of the urgency of his information needs while absent from his office but also affectionately involves her in his adventures. Ernesto, who is in Europe at the same time as Agustin in 1933 is enlisted, with his architectural expertise, to oversee renovations in the Falla's Anero mansion. To his mother he writes with reassurance and confidence of his pleasure in the Falla family reunion in Anero during the height of the persecutions of the Machadistas. He is

Teresa Casas Batista

also careful to give her license to expunge from his letter a remark that she might consider controversial for the letters were widely circulated among the family after being sent to an individual addressee. Agustin reveals himself as a consummate yet discrete leader perhaps having grasped early how to diplomatically manoeuvre through the labyrinth of a large and ideologically varied family. His letters reveal an ability to embrace the often contrasting values and personalities of his Falla and Mendoza relatives and to skillfully administer to these all the while juggling the considerable demands of business and pleasure. Above and beyond that, he is a doting father; noting his son's wonder on board the ship bound for Spain he writes: "Agustin Falla, the other night, discovered that the moon is coming with us to Spain"



Julia and Melchor, photograph of an undated photo displayed in the small family history exhibition, G. de Mendoza 2007 reunion

The 1933 revolution, four months after Melchor's death in April, marks the beginning of the final six months of Julia's life; the diagnosis of terminal cancer confirmed after surgery failed to halt its course. She had conferred with a priest over the advisability of the surgery; her instinct was that it was spiritually important to submit to her death without intervention. She agreed to the surgery only after being assured that she might still be useful to her charities were her life to be prolonged. One senses that Julia could face death without anguish not only because of the strength of her faith but because Melchor was gone and all of her children, with the exception of Melchorito who would always remain a bachelor, had embarked on their own marriages, families and careers.

Julia's closure to the family chronicle and her exit from life coincides with a key moment of change to the Cuban economy, its politics and the life of the Gonzalez de Mendoza family. The 1933 revolution presaged another thirty years later that again forces the family to embark on trips to the U.S. or Europe with the full expectation that on that occasion, like all the others, there would be a return.

Through the passage of her life beginning with year of her birth, 1860 and that of her death, 1934, Julia Gonzalez de Mendoza saw two major wars of independence and one revolution. These cataclysms came around at intervals of thirty years—1869, 1899 and 1933. On each occasion there was a decision to be made: At what point should the family flee for safety in advance of advancing armies, angry looting mobs or arrests of suspected dissidents?

In the wars of independence the family, presided over by Don Antonio, made the move more or less in concert, as a group. By 1933 the division of the family into its constituent branches and the corresponding variety of political sympathies and affiliations of these made a united response to violent political change a thing of the past. The fact is that the same business and social ties that made it possible for the Mendozas to triumph after the demise of the colonial economy to its transformation into a system allied with American interests and dependent on government patronage implicated the family in the circumstances that led to the 1933 revolution. Occupying both sides of the political spectrum the Mendoza family, despite its members' travels, was in the eye of the storm in the final days of a dictator's rule.

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Chapter 15 Batista Ascendant

The Castle at the foot of the Hotel Nacional

A Havana icon, the Hotel Nacional sits on a rock outcrop high above the Malecón, the city's ocean drive. Its strategic vantage point was used in the eighteenth century for a battery that defended the western end of the city. More than a century later the abandoned canons were incorporated into the landscaped gardens for the hotel's opening in December of 1930. The building was designed by American architects McKim, Mead and White, with Art Deco inspiration, created an atmosphere of baronial manor luxury. It was known as the pre-eminent Cuban-owned hotel; however, the paint was still fresh when less than three years later it became the setting for a full-blown military siege. The conflict pitted Sergeant Fulgencio Batista, who the previous month had taken control of the army, against officers loyal to President Machado.

At the foot of the hotel, where Calle 19, Reina and O intersect, sits a mansion that currently is painted brown with white trim so that it resembles a giant chocolate cake. The owner of this miniature Mozarabic-style castle between 1916 until his death in 1927 was Ricardo Labrador Piloto. The other members of his household were, first, Maria his grown daughter and widow of Antonio Rodriguez, and second, Saturnino Rodriguez, widower of his daughter Eloisa.⁴⁴ With plenty of space within the mansion to keep them apart, this collection of individuals bereft of their spouses and related to each other only by marriage never melded into a family group. Here, at the northern extreme of El Vedado they could feel the marine winds blowing constantly through the windows and hear Maria's insistent complaint that the salt spray ate away at her lace curtains.⁴⁵ Then a far more disruptive intrusion than the ocean winds broke the calm of the household: at 8 a.m. on the morning of October 2, 1933 its members were woken by the shuddering vibrations of heavy artillery above them on the grounds of the Hotel Nacional.



[Caída del gobierno de Gerardo Machado Vimeo](#) Web. November 23, 2011.

⁴⁴ Armando, the son of Antonio Rodriguez also lived in the household until his marriage.

⁴⁵ Eduardo Casas remembers this detail, second-hand from his mother, about his highly fastidious great-aunt.



WHERE CUBAN OFFICERS DEFY GRAU SAN MARTIN

THE HOTEL NATIONAL, HAVANA, CUBA, WHERE 500 CUBAN OFFICERS DEFY THE ADMINISTRATION OF PRESIDENT GRAU SAN MARTIN, AND DEMAND THE RETURN OF THEIR FORMER LEADER, DE CESPEDES. THE OFFICERS ARE HEAVILY ARMED, AND HAVE BEEN INCREASING THEIR STOCK OF AMMUNITION IN THE EVENT THAT THE PRESIDENT TRIES TO FORCE THEM OUT. THE HOTEL IS THE RESIDENCE OF U.S. AMBASSADOR SUMNER WELLES, AND MANY AMERICAN TOURISTS ARE STAYING THERE.

ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO
FS 9/12/33 CA

Panic Among Machado Officers

For several weeks in September, nervous officers of the Cuban army had been discretely checking in to El Nacional. There, they joined American civilians seeking refuge from the violence on the street. The turmoil unleashed by the fall of Machado had not died down with the formation of a provisional government under Carlos Manuel Cespedes. Mob rule followed the hasty exit of all members of the police force. In this vacuum, Batista assumed control of the army and demanded the resignation of the Machado loyalist officers. His aim was to give the impression that he was spearheading a soldiers' coup to prevent a reactionary officer-led overthrow of the post-Machado government.

In the hotel, the officers closely grasped the firearms that had been demanded from them; a number had been members of the Olympic shooting team and they intended to exercise their marksmanship if necessary. Heads leaned out of the hotel windows scanning the sea in hope of seeing the American warships that would take the Hotel Nacional's politically stranded guests off the island. Sumner Welles who, it seemed clear now, had failed to provide for an orderly post-Machado transition waited tensely in the tinder-box with the rest.

Two months earlier, he had been in the thick of negotiations for the dictator's exit from power. Knowing that the army's support was crucial, Welles had included army chief Colonel Sanguily in drawing up the charge that would finally remove Machado from office. Hugh Thomas describes this process and the panic it triggered within the officer class.

In the morning of 11 August, Welles apparently had a preliminary meeting with Colonel Sanguily... at this meeting in the house of Antonio González de Mendoza, one of the most important lawyers in Havana, the eventual *pronunciamiento* against Machado, such as it was, was planned. ...Rumor spread of an officers' revolt. Troops were observed moving about. The palace guard was tripled. Machine guns were mounted on the top of the buildings and in Zayas Park. Cavalry and infantry were drawn up ready for action at Campo Colombia.⁴⁶

Unfortunately for the officers their leader bolted. The following day Machado left by plane and Colonel Sanguily died of natural causes shortly after. To the relief of most of the population, the opportunity for an officers' coup had passed. Sumner Welles gave his blessing to the provisional government headed by Carlos Manuel Cespedes in which the dominant opposition group, the ABC, was invited to have representation in cabinet. The green ABC flags flew everywhere as people and cars choked the streets in a frenzy of triumph and hope. Anyone associated with Machado, in fear of their lives, fled or went into hiding. The collective anger that quickly followed the euphoria was discharged in attacks on what individual Machadistas could be found as well as on the property of any that couldn't.

⁴⁶ Thomas, Hugh. *Cuba, or, The Pursuit of Freedom*. Da Capo Press Inc., 1998 (re-print of original New York: 1977 edition) 622



[Caida del gobierno de Gerardo Machado.](#) Web. November 23, 2011.



Mid-Week Pictorial cover, August 26, 1933 [secretos cuba](#)

By early September 1933, the provisional Cespedes-led government had been in place for three weeks but the unleashed anger had not died down. Along with the loss of public order there was

Teresa Casas Batista

resentment against Welles' rigging of the transitional government with men allied with American interests. Any credibility Cespedes may once have enjoyed quickly dissipated with his lack of control over the situation. In the civil free-fall, army clerk Fulgencio Batista took command of the army. This became known as "the seargents' revolt" and it promoted itself as a popular uprising against the elitism of the officer class. Batista gave further legitimacy to his army takeover by tapping the Directorio Estudiantil as the new ruling party.⁴⁷

On the day of the coup, as Batista ordered the soldiers to disarm their superiors, career officers such as Arturo Bolívar, the husband of Nena Aróstegui Mendoza must have realized that they were in a no-win situation. Writer Richard Gott offers Luis Aguilar's eye-witness report of the volatile situation in the barracks and on the streets. "...the army's role in the ouster of Machado had provoked a deep crisis. Many of the officers who remained in their positions had been loyal to Machado to the end; others had acted too late to save themselves from being accused of being Machadistas. On the other hand, the soldiers were on the streets and had fraternized with the people. The moral authority of the officers was thus undermined, and most of them were unwilling to give orders or to take any step that might provoke a hostile reaction."⁴⁸

Ramon Casas, expulsion from Güines

At the home of Ramon Casas and his wife Celia Rodriguez Piloto on Paseo between Linea and 11th Streets, Celia, hearing of the siege at the Hotel Nacional, wondered if her father and relatives in their castle-mansion were safe. The sight of mobs roaming the streets heightened her anxiety, reviving memories of the previous year's looting of her husband's medical offices in the rural town of Güines. Back in 1921, two years after his marriage, he had opened a medical and dental clinic there at number 13 Clemente Fernandez Street. Ramon, who was with her in the house, had for at least a year been unable to return to his regular commuting existence between the city and Güines. Over a decade of work seemed now in ashes. Ill-advised, he had entered into politics at the worst moment.⁴⁹ Ramon had been elected as a member of the general assembly in 1928.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ An August 1933 statement by the Directorio Estudiantil reads: "With this chaotic state in the country, without the principle of authority and with many Machado-stained men still in the armed forces, the Directorio decided to launch its revolutionary action, with the relatively untarnished section of the armed forces who with great patriotic organization and responsibility, acted energetically but without needing to fire a single gun, cleansing in this way the glorious uniform of the Army, which was on the edge of dishonour, because of the collaboration of its leaders with the *Machadato*. Gott, 138 and Thomas, 640-41

⁴⁸ Aguilar, Luis. "Cuba c. 1860-c.1930" in Leslie Bethel (ed.), *Cuba a Short History*, 1993 p.40 as cited by Gott

⁴⁹ He had launched his medical practice in Güayos, a village in the province of Santa Clara in 1920.

⁵⁰ Eduardo Casas: Ramon Casas Bacallao was gregarious and popular, not an intellectual or reformist, The reason he became involved in politics was that he was very influential in Güines and his family advised him "if you have a reputation in Guines use this to go into politics. Accordingly, he ran for office and won as provincial counselor for the province of Havana.

By 1932, people in his district had begun to feel the bite of the depression and disgust for Machado. When Ramon's party formed a coalition with the president his constituents turned against him. Forced to rely on his wife's inherited mortgages as the primary source of family income, Ramon would suffer his marginalization during the following years of political instability and then economic paralysis.

Celia and Ramon's eldest son was 12 years old in 1933. He along with Raul, a year younger, and five-year-old Eddy attended Colegio de La Salle in El Vedado. But that year, they had been frequently missing classes when the school, for fear of bombs, advised parents to keep their sons at home.



Far left Ramon Casas with hand on the shoulder of his wife, Celia Rodriguez, Güines, 1925

Arturo Bolivar and the Siege of the Hotel Nacional

The seargent's revolt was a coup within the army whose political legitimacy came through its alliance with the student opposition group Directorio Estudiantil. This ideologically committed group, unlike the ABC that preceded it in government for a brief three weeks, was serious about reform. The students chose a professor, Grau San Martin, as the president and began to quickly pass legislation. There was a widespread support for these instant civil reforms in tandem with military force to assert calm. Batista's take-over of the army effectively scotched the remnants of Machado's power in the form of the old guard in the military that could pose a threat to the populist government. By mid-September Arturo Bolivar and his fellow career officers recognized that their number was up.

Teresa Casas Batista



September 10, 1933 [secretos cuba](#)

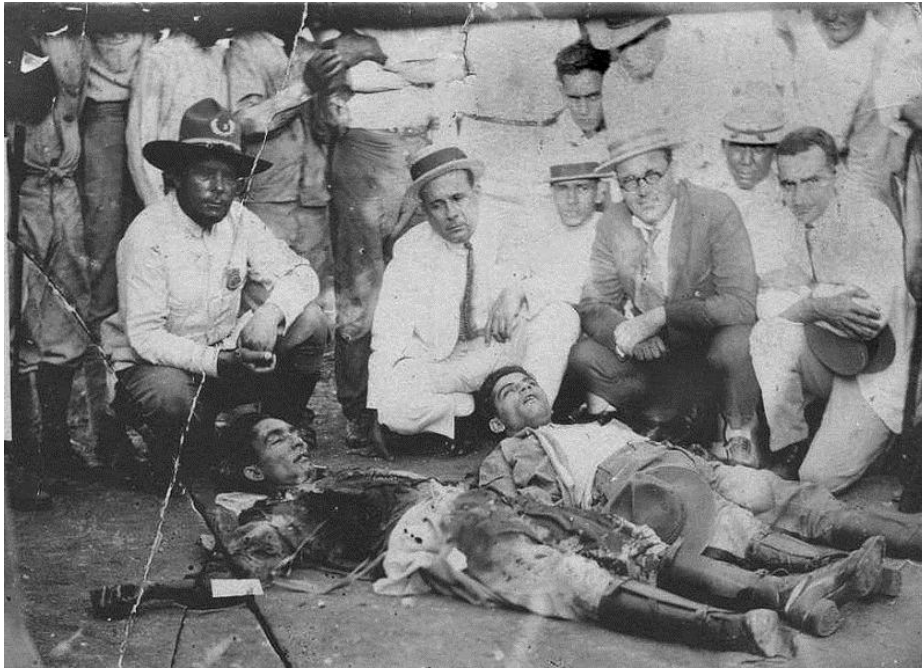
Sumner Welles confronted his failure to maintain control over the Cuban situation. Perceived as an enemy of the people for his blatant paternalism in designing an American-oriented provisional government, Welles waited at the Hotel Nacional for the arrival of a ship with marines to come to guard or evacuate him and his fellow citizens. As September went by, former officers of Machado joined the Americans. They began to arrive in small groups until they numbered several hundred. On the second of October, Batista attacked the hotel. The officers took position by the windows. As crack shots they successfully took out many of Batista's men: the majority of the eighty killed during the day-long siege were fighting outside the hotel.

Julia Batista Gonzalez de Mendoza records in her journal that on the second of October there was an eight-hour bombardment of the hotel that resulted in the surrender of Machado's officers. She notes that those who were not killed were attacked as they left the hotel and then taken to various prisons. She does not however mention the presence of a family member in the besieged hotel or the role her brother Victor played in the event.

It is left to Nena Aróstegui Mendoza to note her uncle's role in the attempt to bring the incident to a peaceful end. Her account of the siege is based on the sounds heard by all residents of El Vedado and in her memory the canon fire resonated with her fear for her husband. "...because of the canon fire, we had to evacuate our house on L and 13th Streets and they took me to the Hill's home on Calzada and 2nd from there I continued listening to the heat of the battle. ... A delegation from the Red Cross, led by my uncle Victor Gonzalez who was its Treasurer, arrived at the hotel to mediate in the conflict. The ceasefire requested by the Red Cross was broken at 3

p.m. and the thunder of gunfire was again heard until around 4 pm, when the officers surrendered.”⁵¹

Even after the battle died down Nena remained in dread. Going by the ugly mood against the officers she knew that her husband would be in the gravest danger *after* his arrest. “Sometime after, a new round of gunfire was heard, a cruel and un-necessary aggression against the men, who unarmed and in single file, were waiting to be taken to the prison.”⁵²



“bodies from the disturbances of 1933” [secretos cuba](#)

Nena Aróstegui Protects her Husband

Havana’s prisons, located in the ancient forts around the city were well known to the Aróstegui Mendoza family members, for Nena’s brother Gonzalo had been imprisoned for 15 days during Machado’s rule. Wives and mothers going in search from one prison to another and then as a last, painful recourse to the morgue was a well-known ritual. For Nena, taking part in it must

⁵¹ *A causa de aquel cañoneo tuvimos que desalojar nuestra casa de L y 13 y me llevaron para la casa de los Hill., en Calzada y 2; desde allí seguí escuchando el fragor de la batalla, que cesó poco después de las 12:00 del día.* del Rio, 115

⁵² *Al hotel había llegado una representación de la Cruz Roja Cubana, presidida por su tesorero, mi tío Víctor González de Mendoza, para mediar en el conflicto. Pasadas las 3:00 de la tarde quedó rota la tregua solicitada por la Cruz Roja, y volvió a escucharse el tronar de las armas hasta alrededor de las 4:00, cuando los oficiales se habían rendidos. Algo después se oyó una nueva balacera, la de la cruel e innecesaria agresión contra los hombres que, en fila e inermes, esperaban ser conducidos a prisión.* Ibid.

have brought to mind her aunt's recent arrest under the same circumstances.⁵³ To further complicate matters she was close to giving birth.

At last, she found the prison where her husband was being held. Informed that he would shortly be taken to another in the Isle of Pines, she ran back to her home to pack and get her car. During his transfer, she followed to ensure that he would not be killed in transit. A common way to execute prisoners was to claim that they had been shot in an attempted escape; she kept the military truck constantly in her line of vision. Once at the Isle of Pines, Nena remained vigilantly near her husband's prison only breaking watch long enough to return to Havana to give birth to their son. Expediting little Gonzalo, as customary, to the care of a nanny Nena immediately resumed to her position outside of the building where her husband is incarcerated.

Years later, looking back at that moment when she drove rapidly keeping the military truck constantly in her line of vision, she comments with humorous detachment that it was the only instance in which she had ever followed a man. With the graceful self-deprecation of a genteel Cuban wife she effectively inverts her position from defender of her husband's life to adoring camp follower.

Batista Consolidates His Power

Less than a month later, on the 8th of November, Havana residents once again heard explosions. This time it was the remnants of Machado's former officer corps as they carried out a simultaneous series of air and land attacks. The uprising did not receive the support that had been promised and the attackers were left high and dry, retreating finally into the Atarés castle which they believed was impregnable. After heavy bombardment that proved that this was not the case, they were taken prisoner and their numbers swelled the already very full jails in the various forts around the city.⁵⁴

Richard Gott claims that Fulgencio Batista's successful attack on El Nacional and subsequent quashing of a second uprising by Machado-loyal officers consolidated his military authority and so cleared the road for his uncontested power for the next three decades. This was because the army was now overwhelmingly stacked with his supporters. Former soldiers, who previously had

⁵³ *La noticia de la masacre se propaló rápidamente: qué angustia tan grande. Boli me había enviado con tío Victor su sortija y algunos otros artículos de uso personal. ¿Serían aquellos sus últimos recuerdos? La familia comenzó a buscarlo. Decían que no estaba entre los hombres trasladados a la Fortaleza de la Cabaña. En el Castillo del Príncipe contestaron que su nombre no aparecía en las relaciones de los allí recluidos; en le Campamento de Colombia no quisieron recibir a miembros de la familia que allí fueron a interesarse por él. Y entonces empezó el tético recorrido por los hospitales y el necrocomio, hasta que al fin supimos que sí estaba en el Castillo del Príncipe.*

⁵⁴ *El 8 de Noviembre a la madrugada nos despertaron unos aeroplanos volando sobre la ciudad, y el ruido de tiros y ametralladoras. Esta vez se sublevó la aviación seguidas por los cuarteles de Dragones, S. Ambrosio y algunas estaciones de policia, creyendo se les unirían todas las fuerzas; pero no siendo así, los sublevados se internaron en Atarés creyendolo inexpugnable y habiendolas sitiado el día 9 de el ejercito, se rindieron despues de varias horas de bombardeo, con bajas por ambas partes, y fueron presos a distintas fortalezas. del Rio, 106*

no hope of advancement because the officer class traditionally came from the white middle and upper classes, now formed the majority of the officer corps. In the military-civil marriage of the post-Machado governments, Batista with his newly constituted army was now the dominant partner.⁵⁵ According to this interpretation, Arturo Bolivar in taking up arms perversely strengthened Batista's hold not only on the army but also the population whose memory of Machado's tyranny would, from then on, be the benchmark for intolerable as opposed to tolerable form of military dictatorship. Bolivar's daughter Natalia, to expunge what to her must have seemed a grievous political misstep by her father, twenty years later would become a member of an anti-Batista revolutionary urban underground, helping to lay the groundwork for Fidel Castro's victory.

The Radicalization of "Tony" Guiteras and the Kidnapping of Eutimio Falla

Antonio "Tony" Guiteras⁵⁶ was a Directorio Estudiantil leader appointed Minister of the Interior in President Grau San Martin's "100 Day Government." In today's Cuba he is a bead in the holy rosary of revolutionary martyrs. As Minister of the Interior, he refused to service the debt on American loans made to Machado; further, he nationalized Chaparra and Delicias, the two mills of the Cuban American Sugar Corporation, and nationalized Cuban Electric, a subsidiary of an American company much resented for its high rates.⁵⁷ All actions, needless to say, antagonized Washington.

Legislation passed by the Grau government included an eight-hour work day, land reform, autonomy for the University of Havana, a new ministry of Labour, a law stipulating that 50% of all rural workers had to be Cuban, reduced loan interest rates, suffrage for women, a cut in the electrical rates, and last and immensely popular, the abrogation of the Platt Amendment.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Gott Richard. *Cuba a new History*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 200 140

⁵⁶ Guiteras's views reflected an eclectic mix of revolutionary influences...He shared the anti-imperialist politics of the age and, drawing on anarchist roots, advocated rural and urban armed struggle, assaults on army barracks and the assassination of policemen and members of the government. He was a firm believer in direct action, the propaganda of the deed, derived from Blanqui and the Spanish anarchists, and was much criticised by the Communists for his voluntarism and his predilection for violence Guiteras was assassinated, along with his Venezuelan comrade Carlos Aponte, in Matanzas province in 1935.Gott, Richard. *Cuba: A New History*. Yale University Press, 2004

⁵⁷ Gott, 140

⁵⁸ Simons, Geoff. *From Conquistador to Castro*, (St. Martin's Press, 1996) 252



[Caida del gobierno de Gerardo Machado](#) Web. November 23, 2011.

By January of 1934 Batista, alarmed by the reforms of Grau and under pressure from Washington, shifted his support to Carlos Mendieta and overturned many of the reforms. Grau resigned within the week. Mendieta was now only nominally president; authority rested entirely on Batista, he would continue to dominate the country until the next revolution in 1959.

A general strike was called to protest against the forced removal of the president by the army, but it failed to enlist enough support. Tony Guiteras, taking up a more radical politics, founded the revolutionary organization Joven Cuba. Dismayed by the suddenly thwarted revolution many students who had been active in bringing down Machado joined Guiteras and continued the armed struggle in the form of terrorist actions against members of the government, the police and the army.



Antonio Guiteras

After a year of leading strikes and protests that culminated in a General Strike in March 1935 Guiteras and his followers triggered a wave of repression from Batista and Mendieta. This included the imposition of martial law, closing of the university and the arrest and torture of political activists. By the spring of that year Guiteras was on the run from police. With a select band of women and men he planned to escape the island and set up an off-shore training school for a guerrilla army that would return to topple Batista. In desperate need of money it was decided to kidnap one of the wealthiest men in Cuba, Eutimio Falla Bonet, the only son of

Laureano Falla. The story on front page of “The New York Times” of April 10, 1935 recreates what followed:

Señor Falla’s automobile was halted last Wednesday right here by a group of men armed with machine guns and riding in two automobiles. He was taken to a house in the Vedado section. Later, his attorney Ricardo Cervera, withdrew from the National City Bank branch here \$300,000 in \$100 bills, the serial numbers of which were recorded. Upon being freed Señor Falla left for the United States, and his family reported the case to the police. Heavy guards have been thrown around the homes of all members of Señor Falla’s family because they have received threats of death if the police are not immediately withdrawn from the case. Several persons were arrested when they attempted to deposit in banks bills identified as part of the ransom money. So far about \$1,500 has been recovered by the police. It appears that the money has been widely circulated since it was paid to the kidnapers. Cuban authorities are inclined to believe the crime was perpetrated by a radical organization, Joven Cuba, headed by Dr. Antonio Guiteras, former Secretary of the Interior. He is now sought by the police.

Nine days later, the same paper updates the story: “Dr. Antonio Guiteras... was indicted in absentia today as leader of the group that kidnapped Eutimio Falla Bonet and received a ransom of \$300,000.”⁵⁹ The following month, fleeing the police who were hunting him for the kidnapping of Eutimio, Guiteras with his group of revolutionaries was about to sail from Matanzas to Mexico when they were surrounded and killed in a hail of machine-gun fire.⁶⁰

A 1949 Hollywood film directed by John Huston, “We Were Strangers”, is based on the novel by Robert Sylvester that, in turn is loosely based on Guiteras’ revolutionary exploits with its heroic climax in a police shoot-out. In later years, in family conversations, there would occasionally be mention of “el secuestro de Eutimio” (Eutimio’s kidnapping).⁶¹ Without speaking directly about the incident, it was a benchmark of the fear experienced as this branch of the Mendoza family became a target for anti-Machado mobs and terrorists. If the bitterness over revolutions’ cost began in that decade, it would grow exponentially thirty years later. The dominance of the military, its dependence on killing and torture to repress dissent and the corresponding revolutionary attacks against it made violence an ingrained part of Cuban life.

⁵⁹ *The New York Times*, April 19, p. 14

⁶⁰ Gott, 142

⁶¹ Teresita Batista in reference to conversations in the Falla-Batista household.



Movie poster “We Were Strangers”1949

Louis Pérez points to the role of American gangster movies in shaping the Cuban fascination with urban gun culture. The genre, with its adrenalin-inducing gunfire and fast cars, fed the Cuban machista’s predilection for violence.⁶² Another Cuban of the same generation, Carlos Eire, writes about the dominance of machista culture that prevailed in his 1950’s Havana boyhood.⁶³ His depiction of the cowboy, gangster and terrorist games as well as pervasive bullying in the streets, schoolyards and playgrounds exposes the culture’s formative intertwining of masculinity with power through violence.

Batista, the force behind a series of puppet presidents, led the country during the balance of the depression. He permitted political parties to form. Grau San Martin created the middle class based Partido Revolucionario Auténtico, shortened to simply the Auténticos. The Communists organized as the Partido Unión Revolucionaria. Sanctioned as a legitimate political party by Batista in return for party support, they formed a union movement that developed a symbiotic relationship with the Ministry of Labor.

The movement for legal reforms that had rallied students in the revolution of 1933 outlived Tony Guiteras. After the elections of November 1939, the Auténticos won a majority in the elected assembly and the following year passed a constitution introducing important labor rights,

⁶² Perez, Louis A. Jr. *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture*, (UNC Press. 2000). 297

⁶³ Eire, Carlos, *Waiting for Snow in Havana, Confessions of a Cuban Boy* (New York: The Free Press, 2003) .234

freedom of association, freedom to vote in elections and referendums for adults over the age of 20 including women.



Dedicado al Hon. L. S. de Besa
 por el Coronel Tulgencio
Batista y Zaldívar.
 M. M. y M. Jefe del Ejército
 Constitucional de la República
 de Cuba.
 A él se debe la Paz,
 el progreso y la tranquilidad
 y la felicidad que hoy
 reina en Cuba. -
 Es hombre de gran talento
 y jefe sobresaliente. -
 A Mr de Besa le
 dispensa su amistad
 valerosa y sincera.

Photo portrait of Batista dedicated by him to Mr. de Besa. Under his name and title are written the words, "To him is owed the peace, progress, tranquility and happiness that today prevails in Cuba. He is a man of great talent and an outstanding leader. To Mr. de Besa he sends his warm and sincere friendship." secretos.cuba

While the country enjoyed the economic boom of the war years Batista would preside over a politics of accommodation and compromise. Stability was achieved by brokering support from the most powerful interest groups in return for government granted privileges. His “benign caudillo” image stood for protection from violence. This, combined with his pragmatic clientelism, and ambitious capital projects won him a following during the prosperous years of the Second World War when sugar prices again climbed. The election as president of Grau San Martín in 1944 and Prio Socarras in 1948 enabled the continuation of his behind-the-scenes power. However, by 1952 these politicians were discredited and impending elections brought Batista and the country again to a dangerous political crossroads: democratic elections once again threatened the power of the status quo.

It was Batista’s March 10, 1952 coup that gave Cubans incontrovertible evidence that their country was a totalitarian regime. Those Cubans who had come of age with the 1933 revolution were now the parents of a generation who, in turn, would need to respond to a dictator’s ruthless control of government and brutal repression of opposition.

Members of the Mendoza family were, by virtue of their dominant roles in joint investments with Americans, implicated with Machado’s power base. The dictator’s support both within the island and in the north was fueled in great part by widespread fear of communists, anarchists and other radicals that posed a threat to the status quo. Mendoza senior men, as leaders within the new economy based on sugar, real estate and tourism, became negotiators in the most acutely dangerous moments of the last days of Machado precisely because, as members of judiciary (Antonio) or leaders of such charitable organizations as Red Cross (Victor) they had the credibility and remove from politics to act as moderators between opposing parties. The perception that the electorate’s choice was between stability under dictatorship and instability as the price of reform, planted by Machado and then Batista, was to color the political outlook for the succeeding decades and peak again with the Cold War.

In 1931, references to the tense political situation for the first time begin to appear in Julia’s notes on the family. It is as if with fewer dependents she can at last absorb, if only fragmentarily, the course of history. However, there is no mention of the arrests of her nephew Ignacio and his mother. Neither is there of her brother, Victor’s role in negotiations to end to the Hotel Nacional siege nor her nephew Antonio’s attempt to moderate between Sumner Welles and representatives of Machado. Most curiously, Julia omits the street violence that included the looting of Isabel Falla’s newly purchased Neo-classical mansion and that of Viriato Gutierrez and Lala Falla across the street from where she herself lived.

On the other hand, she describes Clemencia’s fear for her life and flight from Bagüanos. Also, she details the seemingly mundane travel plans of many family members such as their trips to the Chicago World Fair. Did she narrow her emotional line of vision to the members of her immediate family? This seems likely given the diversity of positions towards Machado and various degrees of separation to his regime among members of the extended family along with her noted reticence to write anything that might offend or embarrass her relatives.

Nena's Aróstegui's memories, along with those of the following generation's Eddy Casas, fill in the larger picture of family life at this turbulent time. The effects of the revolution and its aftermath penetrated deep into the domestic and emotional lives of Cuban families. Nena and Eddy highlight the domestic fallout from the political and economic situation, specifically the toll on the wives and children of the men professionally sidelined after 1933.

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The New York Times, April 10, 1935, front page

The New York Times, April 19, 1935, p. 14

Chapter 16 Caregiver Wives, Sidelined Husbands, Rebel Daughters

The Traditional Role of Cuban Wives

Scholars of Cuban women's history emphasize that, as a rule, women have avoided a direct confrontation with the patriarchy. Understanding this to be an unviable goal, their strategy has been to use their limited political influence in support of social programs to protect the family and children in need. Equally, in private life, traditionally women have staked their own value and dignity on supportive roles.⁶⁴ During exile, war, depression or revolution, the priority for Cuban women has been to maintain the integrity and continuity of the family. After 1933, this could mean temporarily taking up employment to decrease the pressure on the man and bridge the period of need.⁶⁵ Wives became crucial in maintaining the morale of their husbands and holding families together during depression that came on the heels of the 1933 revolution. In the households of Celia Casas Rodriguez, Nena Bolivar Aróstegui, and Guillermina Batista Villareal, for the family to survive the role of wife had to be subtly re-interpreted.

In *Next Year in Cuba: a Cubano's Coming of Age in America*, Gustavo Pérez Firmat describes how in the social clubs in Cuba, men played dominos while women played canasta. While in the former game the goal is to create linear, sequential patterns in which one domino is connected to another, canasta, in contrast, requires scanning the emerging patterns in the table of face-up cards. Pérez Firmat sees the gender preferences for these two games as a logical outcome of the way men and women in Cuba were trained to approach life. While men were taught to obtain and consolidate their power-base by following the links of male collegial networks, women were schooled to be adaptive and collaborative in order to accommodate the patriarchal structure of the family and society.⁶⁶

Pérez Firmat connects this to his father's incapacity, removed his Havana network, to adapt to life in America after his displacement by the 1959 revolution. However it applies equally to the vulnerability and disorientation of such men as Ramon Casas and Arturo Bolivar who with the 1933 revolution were suddenly and traumatically stranded from their professions and their networks—the former temporarily and the latter irrevocably.

⁶⁴ See: Catherine Davies, *A Place in the Sun? Women Writers in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (London: Zed Books, 1997) and Stoner, K. Lynn. *From the house to the streets: the Cuban women's movement for legal reform*. Duke University Press. 1997

⁶⁵ Stoner, K. Lynn. *From the house to the streets: the Cuban women's movement for legal reform* (Duke University Press. 1997)

⁶⁶ Pérez Firmat, *Next Year in Cuba: a Cubano's Coming of Age in America* (Arte Publico Press: 1995) 104

Jorge Batista, on the other hand, had already a string of professional setbacks that may have toughened him to face the loss of his Machado government sinecure position. Throughout the 1920s he had unsuccessfully attempted to run a colonia with his brother just before the crash in sugar prices. In addition, he had suffered a series of painful accidents while working with industrial machinery in Jaronú. Losing his municipal engineering job was just one more hurdle to overcome. Fortunately, the Mendoza investments were so stable that family members were buffered from the worst effects of the depression. His brother Agustín, owner of the Sevilla Biltmore Hotel, offered Jorge a job overseeing its physical plant as well as the electric Laundromat. The Sevilla Biltmore Hotel's architecturally acclaimed 1920 renovations included a state of the art electric steam dry-cleaning service. This turned out to be a profitable enough business that it kept Jorge's family comfortable until his death in 1937.⁶⁷ His challenge as a Cuban male was of an entirely different order, namely to adapt to a household designed around his wife's administration of her private school.

Celia: downwardly mobile relatives and her struggle to keep her sons in LaSalle

More than a decade into their marriage, as she told her son later in life, Celia Rodriguez and Ramon Casas had both begun to realize that they had been very young and inexperienced when they married. Theirs was a union of opposites drawn together through an alliance of their two families and the shadows of domineering or abandoning parental figures. Ramon was the middle son of the Gallego entrepreneur Eduardo Casas and his over-indulgent, earth-bound criollo mother Rita Bacallao. In the tradition of the mother in the colonial-era Cuban arch-novel *Cecilia Valdés*, she expressed love to her five sons through gifts and an absence of discipline. After the death of her husband Rita met often with Ricardo Piloto, Celia's grandfather, who oversaw the Casas family's finances. During the visits between the two families Ramon and Celia were drawn to each other and after a short courtship, married in 1918. With the promise of an end to her years of loneliness, Celia, two credits short of her High School Diploma, put aside her dreams of becoming a teacher.⁶⁸



Left to right: Raul, Eduardo, Celia Rodriguez de Casas, and Ramon Casas

⁶⁷ Teresita Batista

⁶⁸ Eduardo Casas

Celia's father, Saturnino, was a loyal Machadista who was known to frequently say: "Lo que hace falta aquí es mucho palo." (What's needed in this case is a sound whipping.) With no consolation from him or her emotionally remote aunt, "Titi Maria", there was even less hope of it from her mother-in-law. With aggressive defensiveness, Rita thought of Celia as pretentious and arrogant. Tall, formidably corseted and perennially dressed in furs and jewels, she prided herself on her independence and anti-establishment attitudes. Evidence of her dominance over her extended family is the fact that two of her sons chose their spouses from within its fold. The youngest of her sons, Gonzalo, married his maternal first cousin Olga Tarrau Bacallao. The third-born, Guillermo, married Luisa Bacallao Coca his mother's sister. Tomas, the eldest never married and lived always with his mother.⁶⁹

Rita, the daughter of Filomena Coca and Tomas Bacallao, was the eldest of approximately a dozen female children. From her girlhood she ruled as the surrogate mother to her siblings, a situation that offered her plenty of scope to develop a commanding manner. She had little respect for Celia, whom she called "La Marquesa," seeing her as the product of a pampered family with little understanding of the real world. To this archetypal criolla matron, Celia's interest in literature, spirituality and search for wider cultural horizons were evidence of her delusional self-importance.

In 1935, Piloto's descendants sold the Mozarabic castle style mansion and disbanded. Celia's father, Saturnino and aunt "Titi Maria" moved into her home. By this time, the former had likely begun a slow decline that would end in his painful death of lung cancer seven years later.

Eighteen years after escaping from the castle full of uncongenial relatives, Celia found that she is again in their midst; however this time she is no longer their dependent but expected to care for their needs. Her maternal grandfather Ricardo Piloto's widowed second wife through some dextrous legal maneuvers had assumed complete control of her husband's inheritance. Armando, Celia's younger brother had already married and moved away.

To add to Celia's financial worries, Rita's sons, her husband's brothers have gone through their share of the Casas inheritance and come to her seeking urgently needed loans to pay off gambling debts. Celia begins to sell the jewelry inherited from her mother.

⁶⁹ By birth order, Rita's sons were named Tomas, Eduardo, Guillermo, Gonzalo, Ramon, Oscar. The names of her many sisters included, America, Maria Amalia, Agripina, Celia, and Luisa.



Raul, Eduardo, and Ramon Casas with their grandfather, Saturnino Rodriguez, circa 1935

For Celia, the challenge of running her mixed household included paying her sons' school fees for their education would guarantee the security that had eluded the family. Celia also covered the costs for Oscar, the son of one of Ramon's brothers, to attend La Salle. He had been ejected from another private school after his father was unable to pay. Rita's continual advancement of money to her sons, even to those who had demonstrated a weakness for gambling and a propensity for bad investments, had ended in disaster. The sudden and humbling destitution of the millionaire's sons, the proverbial descent from millionaire to beggar, "de milionario a pordiosero", was the fate not only the Casas but many other Cuban families during the nineteen twenties and thirties.⁷⁰

Nena Aróstegui works to maintain private school education for her children

According to Nena Aróstegui, it was a bold move for a woman of her class to declare her intention to work for a living. While unpaid charity-related activity was socially appropriate, to work for pay was a humiliating declaration that the family was unable to take care of its dependents. She recalls that in her childhood, following this patriarchal social code, her grandfather Don Antonio Gonzalez de Mendoza dispensed allowances to the wives of family members as well as widows of servants and other employees.

In the upper classes it was considered humiliating for the entire family if one of its women had to work. As Nena points out, "When the father died, if the woman was single or a widow, or if she was married and did not inherit, the men of the family would assume her expenses thereby putting her in a situation of terrible dependency that could on occasion be humiliating. . In the 1930s it was still very badly seen that women from good families should work. For example, after the events at the Hotel Nacional my husband was left without an occupation and without hopes of quickly finding one

⁷⁰ Eduardo Casas

because his career had been in the military and his specialty had been shooting, that obviously, had little application in civil life, I therefore decided to work. That was a day of great sadness in my family. I confronted them and declared that while my children are not yet educated I would work.”⁷¹

While Nena represents it as a moment of brave self-assertion, having been raised in the tradition of dependence on males, it must have been traumatic both for herself and Celia to see the helplessness of their husbands. To make it through the lean years Ramon worked part-time at an Emergency Clinic, Celia derived some income from her mortgages and the pawning of her property.⁷² Nena found a job as a clerk in a hospital to help her supplement whatever family allowance she may have still been receiving. The position was obtained through her father and brother’s connections in the Ministry of Health, for they were both doctors.⁷³

It was a point of pride for Nena that she was not a *botellera*, someone who held a government sinecure position and never reported for work. In the hospital, the coarse language of fellow employees took her aback. Despite this class culture shock, she put up with the job for twenty-five years and when it was taken away from her, after the 1959 revolution, she complained bitterly.⁷⁴ Beyond taking care of their husbands, for Nena and Celia the prime directive was to give the children an education so that they could maintain their toehold in their social class and would never suffer the vulnerability that they themselves had felt in the 1930s.

Celia Sinks into a Depression

For Celia the accumulation of responsibility, compounded by unresolved emotional issues from her childhood created profound anxiety. This flowered into a severe clinical depression after her father’s death in 1942. She had always suffered from night terrors that caused her to scream in her sleep. Now, her anxiety took form around the possibility that Ramon would, like his father, die suddenly, leaving her widowed and unable to finance the education of her sons. Accordingly she urged her eldest son Ramon to apply himself to his studies assuring him that it was more than likely that the family would be relying on him sooner or later as breadwinner. Even Eddy, in his early teen years was sent to train as a typist to finance his own education if necessary. More

⁷¹ *En las clases se consideraba como vejatorio para toda la familia, que una de sus mujeres tuviese que trabajar. Y cuando moría el padre, si la mujer era soltera o enviudaba, si era casada y no heredaba medios de fortuna, alguno de los hombres de la familia asumía sus gastos, lo que la colocaba en una situación terriblemente dependiente, y en muchas ocasiones humillante. ...Todavía en la década de los años treinta se veía muy mal que las mujeres de familias pudientes trabajasen. Por ejemplo, cuando después de los sucesos del hotel Nacional mi esposo se quedó sin ocupación, y sin posibilidad de encontrar rápidamente un nuevo destino, pues su especialización en la carrera militar fue el tiro, que, obviamente, no tiene aplicación en la vida civil, yo decidí comenzar a trabajar. ...Aquel fue un día de tristeza en mi casa. La familia se reunió y yo dije: “Bueno, a mi no me importa. Mientras mis hijos no estén educados, yo estoy trabajando.”...Pero uno de los rasgos de abuelito que siempre recordare fue su tradición de pagar todos los meses, hasta su muerte, a todos los que habían trabajado en la casa o el bufete y además pasar mesadas a las viudas de los empleados de ambos lugares. dal Rio, 88*

⁷² Eduardo Casas

⁷³ del Río, Natalia Bolívar. *Vértigo del Tiempo, Memorias de Nena Aróstegui*, (Habana: Ediciones Boloña, 2006)

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

rewardingly, he studied French with a private tutor to prepare him to earn a living through teaching. Celia's fear of Ramon's sudden death grew from serial abandonments: first by her mother's early death, then by Ramon's loss of employment, and last by her father's painful death. Limits imposed by her over-protective father and husband, such as being unable to go out in public unescorted, aggravated her anxieties.⁷⁵

Eddy was close to his mother during this difficult period and thereafter remained a favorite confidante. Back in the 1920s having given birth to two males, it was generally felt that Celia deserved a girl from her last pregnancy. Eddy born six years after the second boy was the last, favored, and adored child. Celia chose to share with him her amorphous fears. These, as intrinsic to her as her love, intelligence, and humor, had a potent effect on him.⁷⁶

Their mother-son attachment is expressed in a series of candid portraits taken by street photographers in the early 1940s. Celia appears immaculately groomed alongside Eddy, who often escorted his mother downtown after coming home from school. He looks somewhat absent-mindedly ruffled but compliant in his La Salle uniform.

⁷⁵ Eduardo Casas

⁷⁶ Ibid.



“Eddy” Casas. Ca 1940

Above, Celia Rodriguez de Casas and Eduardo

Celia’s depression was triggered by the palliative care she gave to her father, the need to support her extended family and the effort of confronting the incompatibility between herself and her husband. She was given the most up-to-date treatment, electro-shock, psychotherapy and after a rest, a prescription that she be granted more independence and take on a job that afforded her distraction and distance from the home. Like Nena, Celia was given a clerical position, in her case filing, in one of the government ministries; she too kept her job until the revolution.⁷⁷

Guillermina Administrator of School and Family

Guillermina Villareal on the other hand was not confined by conservative family attitudes or paternalistic restrictions; her father had died when she was only three and she had grown up in a world of self-sufficient women. Marrying late in life, she had a fully formed career and plans for how to further develop and exploit her talent for administration and teaching. The loss of Jorge’s

⁷⁷ Ibid.

engineering job along with her own post at the teacher training school represented a challenge that she was ready to take on.

Teresita Batista Villareal remembered that her mother set up a school around the year 1935-36. She had a partner in this, a woman who lived with the family for a year. At that time also a governess was hired to begin Teresita's education at home. The school prospered and the next year, in 1937, they moved to 13 and B, close to the Falla families. "We lived in a large apartment with a large private room with a washroom for Jorge. Guillermina slept in a bed beside Teresita's bed. The chauffeur for the school's bus picked up the students, he then took Jorge to work, and then returned to take Guillermina wherever she needed to go."⁷⁸ These arrangements where institutional and domestic administration overlapped facilitated Guillermina's need for a trusted partner in the school's administration, for physically closeness to her daughter and an integration of the latter's early childhood education into their shared daily life. Whether they answered Jorge's needs is not known.



Jorge Batista and Teresita Batista y Villareal, on the steps of "B y 13" November 13, 1931

Jorge, who had been left epileptic from an ear operation and experienced seizures during his adult years, died of a cerebral haemorrhage in 1937. After his death, Guillermina tried to continue with her school. As Teresita remembers it, her father's death brought her and her mother closer to the extended family but in a position of increased dependence. "We first went to live with the unmarried Batistas, Julio, Enriqueta, Consuelo and Eugenio; Victor, their uncle, also lived with them. After that we moved to a hotel that was located near Lolita (Lola Falla) because she (Guillermina) paid her a visit every afternoon. I attended St. George's, one of the best schools in Havana. We were members of the Yacht Club as Guillermina was a widow of a member; we were "genteel poor."⁷⁹

Two photographs of Teresita and Guillermina reflect their merged identities. The first hints at the marginalization of Jorge from their relationship while he was still alive. The second reveals how the trauma of his death further bonded them. In the former, a five-year-old Teresita is in front of a group of her Batista uncles. Her mother stands directly behind like a solemn totem pole, hands possessively on her daughter's shoulders. Jorge, to the side, tentatively holds out a finger

⁷⁸ Teresita Batista

⁷⁹ Ibid.

towards his daughter. The girl looks glumly at the photographer under her giant bow. The second photograph, likely taken not long after Jorge's death, is a small mother and daughter portrait. Guillermina's stoic, set expression is reflected on the seven-year-old Teresita who leans towards her mother. The protective bond between them is palpable.



Left to Right, Julio, Jorge Batista, Guillermina Villarea, Victor Batista, Nanny, Teresita in front



Guillermina Villareal de Batista and Teresita Batista

As an adolescent Teresita hated the series of apartments that her mother would decorate and move into only to later find a better prospect and start the nesting process afresh. Her daughter was not fooled by the promise of each move, what she herself wanted was a real home and in her mind this was symbolized by a family house. When Teresita married, she planned it with her

Teresa Casas Batista

mother—a house in Miramar that would, through her creation of a real family with her husband, become by extension, her mother’s unrealized home. By then however it was too late, for her husband protested silently but vehemently this odd triangulation of domestic life by entering into his first serious manic episode of a previously undiagnosed bipolar disorder.⁸⁰

Rebel Daughters; Missing Fathers

Teresita recognized the painful entanglement that was her relationship with her mother and nurtured a life-long resentment towards her for denying her a separate identity. Her husband was always taken aback by the intensity of Teresita’s anger: “Yo le decía, “cuando vas a perdonar tu madre?” (I would ask her, “When will you forgive your mother?) “Y ella respondía “Si tú habrías tenido alguien que te había negado tu persona...” (And she would reply, “If you had had someone who had denied you your very self.”)⁸¹

As a girl, Teresita looked to her Falla and Batista female relatives for protection from her controlling mother. “Clemencia (Batista), Rosa’s mother, loved my father and was very kind to me for his sake. I would land at her house whenever I had a fight with my mother or I would invite myself to lunch or visit. She never pried or gave advice. Her one piece of advice was... that I should dress better, if only for the sake of public decorum. And that as far as I remember was only once, when I said I preferred spending my money in staying for lunch at the Yacht Club.” The Batista women took her under their wing, compensating as much as possible for their brother’s absence.⁸²

However, it was in 1946 at the College of New Rochelle on the outskirts of New York City when Teresita felt for the first time that she could successfully find her own path. That year, aged 16, she lived on the campus of the women’s Catholic college, made friends with young, independent-minded Americans and found a rich source of role models. Under the influence of its progressive, Ursuline faculty her world expanded beyond her mother. New Rochelle in the late forties was dedicated to forming intellectually, spiritually and socially committed graduates who could actively contribute in the modern world. After her freshman year, with a new sense of authority, Teresita successfully convinced her mother, who had rented an apartment in New York City in order to be close to her daughter, to go back to Havana.

The women who were born at the turn of the nineteenth century saw their female children as needing the preparation they were denied or struggled to attain. Women of privilege such as Nena and Celia worked exclusively as homemakers until dire need, economic or psychological, caused their families to find them work outside the home. Despite having found solace in her relationship with her third son, Celia sank into a paralyzing depression after a decade of struggle with the stresses of family and finances. Her son was witness to his mother’s diminishment in an authoritarian family environment where she had much responsibility and little power.

In contrast to Celia, Guillermina, with practiced determination pushed aside emotions that she could not handle. Her focus was on outward activity. An expert interior decorator, cook and

⁸⁰ Eduardo Casas

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Teresita Casas

seamstress she was nevertheless, according to her daughter, a signal failure in creating a nurturing home. What Guillermina did pass on to her daughter, a solid education and a spirit of independence even rebellion, only served to increase the pain of their relationship.

Eddy and Teresita were formed by their mothers' dependence on them. For the former, Teresita's daughter-anger was like his own mother's keen resentment that as a motherless child she was emotionally abandoned by her aunt and, as a wife dominated by her mother-in-law. Worthy companions for their mothers, from an early age Teresita and Eddy had accompanied these women in their struggles for self-assertion and so were primed to do so themselves.

Broken Dreams, the Two Natalias, Cuban National Monuments

In Latin cultures there is a heavy investment in the father figure. The patriarch ensures social stability and individual well-being for his dependents. A vacuum is created when the father loses his power, abdicates or dies. Wives and daughters are left in a vivid if abstract relationship with the absent male figure. This cultural reality is present in the life stories of Nena, and Celia. Paradoxically, in her negation of the need for father or husband, it also shaped Guillermina's life. The children of these women, most dramatically Natalia Bolivar Aróstegui and more discretely in the case of Eddy and Teresita, carried forward obscured or absent fathers into their adult lives.

A grotesque portrayal of Cuban gender roles is Wendy Gimbel's *Havana Dreams, A Story of a Cuban Family*, the tell-all story of the life and character of Fidel Castro's socialite mistress Naty Revuelta. "Naty" is portrayed, at the time of writing, in her old age as a Nora Desmond character endlessly re-living her moment in the limelight, namely her brief love affair with Fidel Castro in the mid-1950s.

In this study of how one generation's neuroses generates its shadow form in the next, Naty is portrayed as a victim of her own Republican-era mother's need to compensate for her first husband's betrayal. After being abandoned by him she marries an affluent second husband so that Naty can attend the exclusive Ruston School and later an American college. Naty obeys her mother's urging to find a stable, socially prominent and affluent husband in Havana. This marriage, however, is doomed, for Naty's inconsolable yearning for her dimly remembered and idealized father compounded by her mother's crude formula for happiness, marriage to a wealthy man, is the fertile ground for Naty's obsessive love for Castro.

After the revolution, Naty's husband and their daughter leave for the United States. She remains in Havana with the daughter she had with Fidel. For him, however, the affair is long over. He betrays their illegitimate daughter by not officially recognizing her, appearing only on several key celebrations in her life in a detached and commanding attitude. The pattern of generational rebellion starting with Naty, who through her affair rejects her mother's conventional ideas of feminine success, is played out again twenty years later by her daughter who mortifies Naty by leaving Cuba in a blaze of publicity as an instant anti-Castro icon.

Gimbel works her themes of dispossession, idealized romantic love and patriarchal dependence adroitly in her Cuban tale of woe. She uses the real-life scenario of three generations of betrayed women together living and dreaming of former days in their dilapidated Havana home to represent the tragedy of Cuban gender relations. Castro, the absent central character of the family

drama, with the triumph of the revolution was cast as the archetypal lover and patriarch. Gimbel outlines in the microcosm of Naty Revuelta's world how the projection for the passionate, possessive and protective male is rooted in an absent father.

“The saga of Naty Revuelta and her family brought me back into that lugubrious afternoon world: the angry, narrow quarrels between mothers and daughters, the excitement of illicit lovers, the challenge of eroticism, the search for a father, the doomed romanticism of it all. Naty enters the room. “Can we get the garden wall fixed?” Doña Natica asks. “That’s not possible,” answers her daughter, “the government only repairs national monuments. “But that’s fine,” her mother answers: “*We* are the national monuments.”⁸³

In the same book Wendy Gimbel describes Natalia Bolivar, the daughter of Nena Aróstegui, as the opposite of the frozen-in-time Naty Revuelta, someone who has been in the zeitgeist at every step of the revolution and continued to evolve according to the challenges of contemporary Cuba.

“Some people are more comfortable with change. Natalia Bolivar Aróstegui, a heavy-bosomed, energetic descendant of the *criollo* aristocracy...(is) an anthropologist who writes and lectures on *santeria* all over the world. Natalia has survived like some primordial amoeba, ingesting all the changes on the island. Educated at the fashionable Convent of the Sacred Heart in Havana, and New York’s Art Students League, this daughter of the oligarchy had turned from her debutante past and become a member of the student revolutionary movement at the University of Havana. Tortured by General Batista, disillusioned by Fidel, disgusted with the betrayal of the revolution, Natalia was still a vibrant part of her country’s present.”⁸⁴

If the revolution of 1933 spurred the women, no longer supported by fathers and husbands, to support their families, the daughters of those women twenty-five years later would assert their own values in opposition to that of their mothers. When I visited Natalia Bolivar, in Havana in 2006 with my parents, Teresita and Eddy, she reminisced with Teresita about an engagement party of a family member to which they had both been invited. Teresita remembered Natalia arriving late and disheveled, giving as her excuse the fact that she had been caught up in a student demonstration that had become ugly.

If Nena evolved her identity as a daring woman by driving the earliest cars around Havana her daughter went a step further. She joined the “Mujeres Opositoristas Unidas” Women’s United Opposition, and attended clandestine meetings at the home of one of her university professors. She became a member of the Directorio Revolucionario in 1955-56 as a result of having an affair with Jose Luis Wangüemert while they were both working at the National Museum. Caught, interrogated and tortured in 1958 by the police, she was released, sought asylum in the Brazilian

⁸³ Gimbel, Wendy, *Havana Dreams: A Story of a Cuba* (New York: Knopf, 1998) 217

⁸⁴ Ibid. 29

embassy and subsequently went underground in Havana, continuing such sabotage actions as the attack on the 15th Precinct Police Station.⁸⁵

The title of her mother Nena's memoir *Vertigo del Tiempo* (Vertigo of Time) refers to the trauma of experiencing two generations of her family members in extreme danger separated by a twenty five year interval. The first was her husband's arrest and transport to the Isle of Pines after the siege at the Hotel Nacional. Years later, she suffered through her daughter's imprisonment and interrogation as a suspected anti-Batista insurgent. Nena relates how she visited her daughter in the police headquarters and heard a dramatic exchange between Natalia and her interrogator.

...they have her in the Office of Investigation and I am given permission to go to see her. How cold I feel, my God, how cold. Despite the fact that we are in full summer I have to wear a coat. In the Office of Investigation they let me pass inside to be with her. The official who is in charge of her interrogation is pleasant and well educated; he greets me with much respect.

Let's see Natalia, he says, talk. If we were able to arrest you it's because one of your fellow revolutionaries has betrayed you. Look, aren't you known as "the witch"? Can't you see that we know everything?

--If you know everything why do you need me to talk?—answered my daughter.

--Because we need a series of details.

--Well toss the shells and ask them your question.⁸⁶

Given that Nena's account of this conversation was narrated to her grand-daughter, Natalia del Rio Bolivar who edited and compiled her memoir under the direction of her own mother, Natalia, this dialogue must be considered as an example of family hagiography. Natalia, in a published 1994 interview explained that her interest and training in Afro-Cuban ethnography under the direction of Lidia Cabrera began only in 1955 when she worked as a guide in the National Museum. That her underground name was "the witch" along with her bravado comments that insert an Afro-Cuban reference of "toss the shells" is likely a post-hoc salute to her current status as a popular authority on Santería practices.

Natalia Bolivar along with Naty Revuelta were drawn to revolutionary action through affairs with male revolutionary heroes, so disassociating themselves with their bourgeois mothers and, in Natalia Bolivar's case, with the embarrassingly counter-revolutionary antecedents of her

⁸⁵ del Río

⁸⁶ ... la tienen en el Buro de Investigaciones y me autorizan para ir a verla. *Que frío tan grande. A pesar de que estamos en lo más crudo del verano tengo que ponerme un abrigo. En el Buro de Investigación me permiten pasar y estar junto a ella. El oficial que la interroga, muy fino y agradable, me ha saludado con mucha reverencia. --Vamos, Natalia-le dice--, habla. Si hemos podido cogerte es porque un compañero tuyo te ha delatado. Mira, no es "La bruja" como te dicen? Ya tu ves que los sabemos todo?--Y si lo saben todo para que necesitan que yo hable?—contesto mi hija.--Porque queremos confirmar una serie de detalles. --Ay pues tire los caracoles y pregúnteles a ellos. Que sea sábado y venga de nuevo aquel elegante señor de bombín y chaqueta y eche atrás, muy atrás, las manecillas de los relojes.*

father. In contemporary Cuba, the two Natalias are defined by their status, as one caustically puts it, “national monuments.” Moreover, both women can be seen as the by-product of the 1930’s since their mothers pushed themselves to work or marry so that their daughters could attend the best private schools; Natalia attended St. George and Naty was a graduate of Ruston Academy. Both acquired a post-secondary education in the North and returned to Havana to subvert their mothers’ hopes for their finding security through marriage.

However, they are also a study in contrast for Natalia has won wide recognition not only in relation to her study of Santeria but as a pundit on contemporary Cuba. She holds forth on questions from the foreign press dealing with any aspect of life on the island. She hosts Santeria rituals in her apartment and invites outsiders to witness these. She has been awarded an honor by the Spanish government and was among the few people to receive a personal visit by the Arch Duchess of Luxembourg in 2008, on the latter’s first return visit to Cuba after her family’s exit just before the revolution. This makes sense only if it is added that she is Natalia’s relative. The Arch Duchess is Maria Teresa Mestre y Batista, the great grand-daughter of Antonio Gonzalez de Mendoza and the grand-daughter of Julia Batista, who in 1981 married the Crown Prince of Luxembourg.



Natalia Bolivar Aróstegui, Maria Teresa Mestre Batista, Arch Duchess of Luxembourg

The royal visit would surely have gratified Natalia’s mother, Nena and father, Arturo Bolivar, who had been dismayed by her study of *cosas de negros* “negro matters.”⁸⁷ It closed the story of the rise and fall of aristocratic entitlement, revolution and conformity, romantic love and family duty that shaped at four generations of women in a branch of the Gonzalez de Mendoza family.

Cuban women born with the republic to some degree escaped their narrow roles into greater independence through occupations outside the home. Often this freedom was permitted to them

⁸⁷ del Rio

by the absence of a male breadwinner or, a situation that became prevalent in the dips of the economy in the twenties and thirties, with the husband's unemployment. The stress of ensuring the family's wellbeing through the depression took a heavy toll on women such as Celia Rodriguez, who fell prey to mental illness after seeing her family safely through this precarious period. Although they were generally not politically active this generation of women, weaned on the promise of Cuba Libre, as well as educated in the standards of democracy and civil society were intolerant both of American political intervention and ineffective governance by their own countrymen. Their sons and daughters, born in the years of the depression would enjoy the relative stability and prosperity of the 1940s but ultimately be forced to define themselves before the extremism of the ensuing Cold War and revolution.

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Timeline

Abbreviations: b-birth m-marriage d-death

1920

sugar price controls lifted in 1919 leading to overnight fortunes as value skyrockets, however not long after it plunges; this period becomes known as “the dance of the millions”

By September banking system collapses

November: Alfredo Zayas, now a Conservative becomes president, backed by Menocal and assisted at the polls by “military aides”

1921

President Zayas requests loan from US banks

Condition of loan is curtailment of official corruption U.S. government representative sent to administer the terms for re-opening banks

Congress passes a new electoral code, cuts budget, and sets presidential one-term limit; central highway to be built; secretaries of departments to report on fiscal responsibility

d: Ramon G. de Mendoza in Washington of pneumonia, buried in Havana

b: Ramon Casas Rodriguez

1922

b: Raúl Casas Rodriguez

m: Clemencia with Jorge Hernandez Trelles

b: Isabel Ma. Fernandez Batista

Julia visits Adolfina in Santiago, Clemencia in Bagüanos, Jorge in Jaronú (near Ciego de Ávila)

1923

sugar prices rise

Teresa Casas Batista

founding of Grupo Minorista a group of intellectuals whose goal was to counter the neo-colonial condition of Cuba with the development of national expression

President Zayas requests loan from US banks

Condition of loan is curtailment of official corruption U.S. government representative sent to administer the terms for re-opening banks

Congress passes a new electoral code, cuts budget, and sets presidential one-term limit; central highway to be built; secretaries of departments to report on fiscal responsibility

1924

Eugenio awarded his degree in Architecture

Julia spends 15 days with Jorge in Jaronú

Jorge breaks his ribs as a result of an accident in the sugar mill and goes to Havana for treatment and convalescence

Eugenio travels to Europe invited by Leonardo Morales

Ernesto builds the Sacred Heart convent in Santiago

1925

May 20 Gerardo Machado, Liberal, becomes president; he was in on the creation of a national army, appointed deputy chief of the armed forces in 1909, then minister of the interior; he controlled the electrical company in Santa Clara and in 1920's became director of the Compañía Cubana de Electricidad

1926

m: Agustín to María Teresa Falla, daughter of Laureano Falla and Dolores Bonet

Drop in sugar prices

Jorge and Julio give up managing Jaronú due to low cane yield; Melchorito stays in Jaronú as "mayordomo" of the colonia Mirjal

Jorge returns to live at home

Huge cyclone in October

Matilde to Santiago as teacher; Adolfinia stays as teacher in Havana at the Cerro Sacred Heart School

1927

Teresa Casas Batista

Ricardo Piloto dies, leaves widow and two sons from second marriage

m: Victor to Esther del Pino

Julia to larger home because Victor wants to live with them. They move near B and 13 the location of Lola Falla's home, Agustin and Maria Teresa's home, as well as Adelaida and Isabel Falla and the La Salle school and chapel

Julio to Europe

Melchorito resigns from Jaronú

Jorge and Clemencia to Europe

Ernesto and Mary move to house they have built in new suburb of Miramar

1928

b: Eduardo Casas Rodriguez

Ramon Casas, elected and serves as "Consejero Provincial" for the province of la Habana, 1928-29-30.

Sugar prices continue to fall

b: Maria Teresa Falla

d: Felicia (diabetic ulcer) 500 masses, \$300 charity, 135 wreaths

m: Nena Aróstegui Gonzalez de Mendoza with Arturo Bolivar, army officer

Jorge engaged to Guillermina Villareal y Bonet niece of Lola Falla Bonet, wife of Laureano (11 June)

1929

Jorgito (Hernandez Batista) dies of cancer of the stomach

m: Jorge to Guillermina Villareal in chapel of Torrecilla, move into small apartment M and 48

1930

Eugenio receives MFA from Princeton

b: Teresita Batista Villareal (5 October)

1931

Jorge working as engineer in the Public Works Department, Guillermina teaching Mathematics in the Normal School (teacher training college) Teresita has an English-

Teresa Casas Batista

speaking nanny. Their residence, an apartment near B and 13, where the Fallas live in conveniently close for Guillermina's visits to Lola Falla.

August 10-14 attempted armed rebellion; ex-president Menocal, Colonel Carlos Mendieta sail from the Havana Yacht Club to land at Rio Verde in Pinar del Rio where they are arrested expedition lands in Gíbara in coordinated invasion but the following day they were attacked by air, land and sea.

Consuelo visits with Falla family in the Central Adelaida

Eugenio visits with Falla family in the Central Adelaida

Enriqueta, alone by plane, visits Clemencia for several days

16 August Clemencia comes with children to Havana

Agustin and Maria Teresa to New York City for a few months

b: Julio Batista Falla

1932

d: Melchor after a series of angina attacks, March

Jorge and Guillermina move out of Julia and Melchor's home at B and 13 to an apartment

Julia move: A no. 23 between 21 and 23 for economic reasons (Victor and Esther who had lived with Julia for 5 years had already moved away)

Julia is diagnosed with throat tumour and operated on, Clemencia and Maria Antonia, in turn, oversee her convalescence, April

Casas Rodriguez family moves to Havana from Güines so that the three sons may attend a good school. Ramon Casas commutes to Güines to maintain his medical/dental practice there. Several months after the move to Paseo between Linea and 11 Ramon's Güines office is sacked because he was a member of the party that had a coalition with Machado. This is the start of a prolonged period of unemployment for him; the family lives on Celia's inherited mortgages.

Ignacio, son of Ramon Gonzalez de Mendoza and Mariana de la Torre is arrested and charged with taking part in an attempted assassination of Machado (10 June). His mother rushes to his defence and is also arrested. He is also charged with having carried out a parcel bomb campaign the previous month that had killed the Chief of Police in Artemisa.

Gonzalo Freyre, counsel for the defence of Ignacio G. de Mendoza is assassinated along with two of his brothers in their home by Machado's henchmen. He is Julia's brother-in-law, Maria Teresa Freyre is the wife of Claudio G. de Mendoza, (27 September)

Julia travelling by car alone visits Clemencia in Bagüanos to welcome latest baby, Georgina, November

1933

Consuelo visits Lola Falla and Viriato Gutierrez in Central Adelaïda for Christmas.

Agustín and family embark for a six month tour of Europe, Ernesto also on board due to delicate health. May

Clemencia Batista and Jorge Hernandez Trelles go to the Chicago World Fair, July

August 12 Gerardo Machado is forced to leave Cuba, by resistance actions, a general strike, pressure from senior officers of Cuban Armed Forces and U.S. Ambassador Sumner Welles.

Carlos Manuel de Cespedes declared interim president, August supported by former underground movement the ABC and with the support of American consul, Sumner Welles

September 4 “Sergeant’s Revolt” under command of Batista with the support of the Directorio Estudiantil who appoint Grau San Martin as provisional president. Batista assumes control of the army

After Machado’s fall, Jorge and Guillermina lose their government appointed jobs and are forced to abandon their apartment and move in with Julia

Eugenio appointed to Architecture Faculty in Princeton, visits Chicago World Fair, September

October 2 Counter-revolt by officers loyal to Machado; they barricade themselves in the Hotel Nacional where many Americans had taken refuge and await American military intervention

Bombardment of Hotel Nacional where army officers who supported Machado had taken refuge and awaited American intervention that never materializes. Officers surrender and are arrested after a siege

Among the officers arrested is Arturo Bolivar, the husband of “Nena” Aróstegui, daughter of Felicia G. de Mendoza, and niece of Julia. He serves a prison term and after his release; having been trained as an army officer is unable to find suitable employment. Nena works as a hospital clerk to pay for the education of her children in the 1930s and 40s.

Enriqueta to Chicago World Fair and New York City with friends, September

Clemencia and family take refuge in Havana after being harassed on the sugar mill by strikers who also threatened the life of her husband Jorge Hernandez Trelles, administrator at the mill. October

Julia reports, sound of planes and machine guns at dawn. Air and military uprising that was not supported by larger army the rebels took refuge in Atarés Castle but were overpowered and arrested soon thereafter

November 9 Blas Hernández his followers and some ABC members make a stronghold in Atarés Castle they are defeated by Batista loyalists in bloody battle and Blas Hernández is murdered on surrender

1934

Biopsy of gland from Julia's throat sent for analysis in January, cancer has spread. Julia dies in April

Grau San Martin resigns presidency, Mendieta, backed by Batista becomes president

Eddy Casas attends La Salle in El Vedado with his two older brothers; he is in the same year as Agustín Batista Falla and the latter's cousin, Laureano Gutierrez Falla. Frequent bomb alerts cause La Salle administrators to cancel classes.

1935

Eutimio Falla is kidnapped by Antonio Guiteras and his followers. He is released after ransom is paid and Guiteras is gunned down attempting an escape from the island.

Maria Piloto de Rodriguez, the widow of Antonio moves into the home of Ramon Casas and her niece Celia Rodriguez. At the same time, the widower Saturnino, Celia's father, also moves in with the Casas Rodriguez family.

Jorge put in charge of the physical plant of the Sevilla Biltmore by Agustin, who was then the owner; this included the electric steam laundry, a business which proved to be lucrative.

1936

Guillermina sets up a private school, first with a partner, a woman who lived with the family in their apartment for a year, and then independently, the school prospered until, after the death of Jorge, she was forced to sell it.

1937

Jorge and Guillermina move to a house on 14 and B.

d. Jorge Batista of brain haemorrhage

the widow Guillermina, with daughter Teresita, moves into household of Julia's single adult children: Melchorito, Consuelo, and Enriqueta. She visits Lola Falla daily and maintains membership as widow of member in Havana Yacht Club where she teaches herself how to swim.

Teresita learns to speak Spanish and English at the same time with an American governess-nanny. She attends St. George's School for her primary and Merici Academy and Ruston for secondary schooling. She turns to her Mendoza aunts, notably Maria Antonia for comfort on the many occasions that she feels herself dominated by her mother. Her companions and family cohorts are Maria Teresa Batista Falla (daughter of Maria Teresa Falla), Isabel Fernandez Morrel Mendoza (daughter of Maria Antonia) and Rosa Hernandez Trelles Mendoza (daughter of Clemencia).

1942

d: Saturnino Rodriguez (Havana)

Celia Rodriguez, after nursing her father through a very painful case of terminal cancer, suffers a severe depression. After successful treatment she takes a job as a filing clerk to avoid the isolation of the family home.