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## THE LAST REVOLUTION?

Why did the revolution occur? The need for change was obvious to the new generation of Cuban nationalists. They were democratic in a country where democratic institutions had failed; anti-imperialist on an island dominated by a powerful neighbor; social reformers living under a progressive constitution only sporadically fulfilled; and they lived in a nation rich with resources, though most of its people lived in squalor. Fulgencio Batista's military coup seemed to be a signal to many that change through the electoral process was a forlorn hope.

On July 26, 1953, Fidel Castro led an attack on the Moncada army barracks in Oriente Province. It was not successful. Castro and twenty-six others survived to be jailed. About eighty of the 130 others were killed or captured, tortured, and murdered. Castro and several others were saved from this fate by the intervention of the

Roman Catholic bishop of Santiago, Pérez Serantes, a friend of Castro's father. At his trial Castro made his famous "History Will Absolve Me" speech, in which he outlined what he saw as the tragedy of Cuba's history and his vision of its future. Though sentenced to fifteen years in prison, he was freed in May 1955 as part of an amnesty by Batista, who was trying to raise his political prestige for the coming election. In July he joined his brother Raúl in Mexico to organize the revolutionary army with which he planned to overthrow the dictator.

November 30, 1956, was the date eighty-six rebels were scheduled to meet a guide on a beach west of Santiago de Cuba to begin the revolution. It did not happen. Their boat, the *Granma*, was overloaded in rough seas and finally grounded on a shoal off the beach. They struggled ashore on December 2 without heavy equipment,