

was almost an article of faith for them that the U.S., which had protected their interests in 1898 and 1933, would do so again.

ECONOMIC BASIS FOR DISCONTENT

Why did the revolution occur? We have looked at the political considerations but for many Cubans, perhaps the great majority, economic, not political issues, were critical.

In the period between the end of World War II and the success of the revolution in 1959, the economic situation of the Cuban people could accurately be described as good in comparison with most of the people of Latin America and the Caribbean. Despite this, some observers described Cubans as poor, citing statistics from the years 1950–1954 to support their contention.¹⁷ Their comparison was not with Latin America, however, but with the U.S. annual *per capita* income, which ranged from \$2,279 in Delaware to \$829 in Mississippi. In Cuba it was 312 pesos (the dollar and peso were on a par), about 38 percent of the lowest figure in the U.S., or about \$6 per week. *Per capita* figures, of course, reflect the middle range, so that many received much more, and many more, much less. The sharpest contrast was between urban and rural dwellers. This disparity can be seen very clearly in the table showing housing amenities. Cuba, according to the 1953 census, was 57 percent urban. It must be noted that the cities, especially Havana, were the center of middle- and upper-class life. The urban poor lived better than their rural brothers and sisters.

Housing Amenities in 1953 Rural and Urban Cuba¹⁸

(In percentages)

| Amenities | Rural | Urban | Total |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Water piped into house | 2.3 | 54.6 | 35.2 |
| Cistern water supply | 4.6 | 5.2 | 5.0 |
| Outside piping for water | 8.1 | 22.0 | 16.8 |
| River, well or spring water | 85.0 | 18.2 | 43.0 |
| Inside toilet | 3.1 | 42.8 | 28.0 |
| Outside toilet | 4.8 | 18.9 | 13.7 |
| Privy | 38.0 | 33.3 | 35.1 |
| No toilet or privy | 54.1 | 5.0 | 23.2 |
| Electricity | 9.1 | 87.0 | 58.2 |

Today it is difficult for many U.S. citizens, living in the twenty-first century with reasonably high standards of living, to fully understand the situations which poor people experienced fifty years ago in a different geographical, cultural, and political settings. However, as this information indicates, life was very difficult for many, with few or no amenities. It is clear that with people in the rural areas, sanitation was minimal. More than half (54.1 percent) of the rural families had no toilet or privy, while this was only true for five percent of urban families. This condition, combined with the fact that medical care was not accessible or affordable, explains the high rates of infection and death rates for rural children, who were not inoculated and received little schooling.