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Nineteenth Century Precedents of the Bay of Pigs
by José Manuel Hernández

Perhaps because the heart plays a role in their decision making, Cuban exiles have tended to overindulge in wishful thinking. The Bay of Pigs invasion is the most recent example. On the part of the United States "it was the most screwed-up operation there has ever been," as a Kennedy administration official once put it. But as far as the Cubans were concerned it can only be defined as the upshot of an act of sheer faith. Cubans were so convinced that the United States would never tolerate the existence of a communist enclave only ninety miles from its shores that they blinded themselves to the many danger signals indicative of failure that were there for everyone to see. Most of those who embarked on the ill-fated venture would have subscribed what one of the invaders later said. "I would have gone on that mission" he ruefully admitted, "with just fifty men and even if we had to swim." It never occurred to him, of course, that defeat was well within the realm of the possible.

We must not take him to task for this show of brave overconfidence, however, because what now appears to us as an uncommon act of guileless belief is far from a unique occurrence in the annals of Cuba. Cuban revolutionaries have often been prone to interpret reality in the terms most favorable to the attainment of their goals, and one of the earliest examples of this tendency might have been Father Félix Varela himself, the revered precursor of Cuba's independence. Not

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1 Paper presented at the Second Annual South Florida Symposium on Cuba sponsored by the Cuban Studies Association, Miami, September 13-14, 1997.


3 Ibid., p. 318.
that he was a full-fledged revolutionary. Today many Cubans visualize him as such only because of the writings of the first republican generation of Cuban historians, many of whom deformed his figure to make it suitable to their own political and religious prejudices. But the truth is that Varela was at best an averse revolutionary. He promoted revolution in Cuba only because it was the lesser of two evils, as we shall see.

As he surveyed the situation in the spring of 1826, when he published the seventh and last issue of his periodical *El Habanero*, Cuba’s separation from the mother country would come about not as a matter of choice but of necessity. It would be the almost inexorable outcome of a concatenation of events which he carefully mapped out as follows: although it was “a cadaver” politically and militarily, Spain would nonetheless persist in reconquering its lost possessions in the Americas using Cuba as a base for that purpose; for that reason the newly independent republics of Mexico and Gran Colombia would inevitably take action to drive the Spaniards from the island and thus wipe out this threat to their existence as sovereign nations. Mexico and Gran Colombia would succeed because the Spanish armies could not possibly triumph over the same forces that had vanquished them in the continent. The United States, true to its role of champion of liberty in the hemisphere, would not stand in the way of the attackers; and more than that, the United States would oppose the meddling of other European powers.

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4 He was criticized for his reluctance to launch a bloody revolution. See Antonio Bachiller y Morales, “Error político de Don Félix Varela: los contemporáneos y la posteridad,” *Revista Cubana*, 2 (October 1885), pp. 289-294.


6 “Tranquilidad de la Isla de Cuba,” *El Habanero*, II.

in Cuban affairs, thus preventing Spain from receiving assistance from its allies. Spain was therefore doomed as a colonial power, and the days of its domination in Cuba were numbered. Varela worried, nevertheless, about the bloodshed and devastation that an invasion from the mainland would bring about in the island, and it was at this point that he began to encourage his compatriots to sever the Spanish ties by their own resolve. He thought that acting in that way they would avoid most of such calamities. Whatever the cost, self-liberation would always be less costly than liberation from without.\(^8\)

That Varela was by no means a cassock-wearing Jacobin itching to send to the guillotine the enemies of liberty results very clearly from the various numbers of *El Habanero* --if one does more than glance through it. What is far less obvious is to what extent he was carried away by his ardent desire to see his country free from Spain’s shackles when he scrutinized the events crowding on each other around him and engaged, as he wrote, “in the observation of the facts and the anticipation of their consequences.” We know, of course, that none of his predictions came true. After a while the metropolis made no further attempts to regain control of its former colonies, and neither Mexico nor Gran Colombia made any serious effort to land their armies in Cuba. Spain’s monarchical allies did stay away from the Caribbean. But the United States at the proper moment let it be known that it would not countenance a political change in Cuba. The spiritual solidarity which according to Varela\(^9\) characterized international relations in the

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\(^8\) See, especially, “Tranquilidad...”; “Consideraciones sobre el estado actual de la Isla de Cuba,” *El Habanero*, I; “Paralelo entre la revolución que puede formarse en la Isla de Cuba por sus mismos habitantes y la que se formará por la invasión de tropas extranjeras,” “Diálogo que han tenido en esta ciudad un español partidario de la independencia y un paisano suyo anti independiente,” *El Habanero*, III; “Carta del editor de este papel a un amigo,” *El Habanero*, IV; “¿Qué deberá hacerse en caso de una invasión?” *El Habanero*, V; “Esperanzas frustradas”, “Reflexiones sobre los motivos que suelen alegarse para no intentar un cambio político en la Isla de Cuba,” *El Habanero*, VI.

hemisphere was nowhere to be seen. Must we conclude, then, that his scenario for the liberation of Cuba was merely a figment of the imagination? Did he really have any basis for charting Cuba's step-by-step way to freedom the way he did?

Varela was a teacher by profession and a philosopher by training. His logical mind, which in his youth had followed the scholastic format, perhaps structured too neatly the progression of events supposedly leading to Cuba's separation from Spain. But by the time he reached New York as a political refugee on December 15, 1823, there seemed to be some factual basis for his foretelling. Although it appeared that it was on the verge of self-destruction, Spain had not given up its imperial ambitions. Fighting was still going on in South America and the fortress of San Juan de Ulúa continued to be occupied by a group of Spanish royalists in Mexico. Liberal elements in Latin America were hailing with delight the Doctrine that President James Monroe had just proclaimed in Congress, stating that the New World was opposed to invasion or penetration from the Old. The Spanish-speaking colonies in New York and Philadelphia, moreover, had become sounding boards of rumor and gossip about the plans of Mexico and Gran Colombia to invade Cuba, to such an extent that the main sources of information of the island's Captain General in these matters were the Spanish minister in Philadelphia and most especially Tomás Stoughton, the Spanish consul in New York. Stoughton was a successful businessman and forthright Catholic of Irish descent who winked at Varela's political views and eventually became his acquaintance, for which reason it is possible to assume that the patriot-priest was aware of at least some of the available information about the concentrations of Mexican and Colombian troops, the naval forces at the disposal of the two republics, and the expeditions they were supposedly preparing.10 Can anyone justly

10 María Rosario Sevilla Soler, Las Antillas y la independencia de la América española (1808-1826) (Madrid-Sevilla: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas-Escuela de Estudios Hispano-
categorize him as a maker of Utopias because he drew entirely reasonable conclusions from the turbulent panorama of Cuba and Latin America at the time?¹¹

Three years later, however, the grounds for such inferences had turned shaky. Clearly, there was room for serious doubts. South America had consolidated its political emancipation with the victory of the liberating armies at Ayacucho (December 1824). San Juan de Ulua had finally surrendered and the Mexicans had at last assumed full control of their territory (November 1825). Spain's inability to reinforce adequately the garrison of the fortress had revealed that it lacked the economic resources and the military power to reconquer its mainland empire.¹² As the Panama Congress prepared to open (it convened in June 1826) talk about the imminence of a Mexican-Colombian action against Cuba had intensified, but Spain's confidential sources had begun to contradict each other to such an extent that the Spanish minister in Philadelphia finally concluded that the true purpose of all the unconfirmed reports and rumors was to dupe and misinform the Spanish authorities.¹³ Meanwhile, the United States had made it clear that its much acclaimed commitment to the defense of Latin American independence after all was not unconditional. On March 15, 1826, President John Quincy Adams had sent a message to Congress stating that Washington would not look with indifference at any decisions that eventually might be made in Panama about the

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¹¹ We did not mention in this context the conspiracy of the Rayos y Soles de Bolívar, which was supposed to break out in Cuba on August 17, 1823, because it did not influence Varela's thinking. He called it a "jarana." See "Conspiraciones en la Isla de Cuba," El Habanero, I.


¹³ Ibid., pp. 36-37.
political future of Cuba and Puerto Rico. Given the peculiar composition of the population of the two islands and the danger that they might ultimately fall into the hands of a European power other than Spain, the United States would make every effort to maintain the status quo on both of them.\(^{14}\)

When the Panama Congress finally met and nothing happened Varela surrendered all hope, suspended indefinitely the publication of *El Habanero*, and resigned himself to a long wait for Cuba’s independence. But until that moment, he clung tenaciously to his way of thinking, even when all signs appeared to indicate that events would not develop as he had once predicted. This becomes particularly discernible upon reading the last issue of his periodical where he insisted on his old themes as vigorously as ever. He admitted that the emerging Latin American states had little to fear from Spain’s continued possession of Cuba. Yet he kept maintaining that in time, even this innocuous vestige of Spanish power would be removed. Apropos of an article published by a Havana newspaper, he also took notice of President Adams’ message to Congress. The disappointing tone of the President’s remarks notwithstanding, he managed somehow to interpret them in the most favorable terms. For, as he saw it, the President was not opposed to political changes in Cuba if they were set on foot by Latin American powers. What Washington really dreaded was the convulsions that might result from such actions. Therefore, if they could be handled in such a way that no such convulsions would ensue the United States would not interfere. And, in any case, what right did the northern republic have to intervene in Cuban affairs? A United States intervention in Cuba would be “unjust and foolish.” It would be an action

"unworthy of a government which is reputed by everyone as the foremost advocate of freedom and self-determination in the whole world."  

For the time in which they were written these were indeed ingenuous affirmations, and one cannot but wonder why Varela made them. For by 1826, the United States had become an "object of suspicion" in Latin America, according to British Foreign Minister George Canning, and the patriot-priest was certainly a well-informed man. Not only was he in friendly terms with Spain’s representatives in the country, but he was surrounded by a group of former disciples (among whom was Gaspar Betancourt Cisneros, who had traveled to Colombia two years earlier seeking support for Cuba’s cause) all of whom were active in exile politics. The ministers for Colombia and Mexico to the United States, José María Salazar and Pablo Obregón, figured among his acquaintances, and he had the opportunity to converse and correspond with the controversial American diplomat Joel Roberts Poinsett, who was an active partisan of Cuba’s annexation to the United States. Moving among such people and frequently sharing with them ideas and opinions it was almost impossible that Varela should not have heard every now and then bits of information, comments, and even arguments about the true intentions of the United States regarding Cuba. Why was he not, then, somewhat more skeptical when he analyzed President Adams’ message in El Habanero? There is only one solution to this puzzle, which is that at the time, his heart prevailed over his intellect. The patriot and the polemicist simply overcame the logician and the politician.

At least Varela’s revolutionary message was not followed by bloodshed, among other things because it was never translated into practice. A quarter of a

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15 "Notas a una carta publicada en el Diario de La Habana," El Habanero, VI.

century later, however, Narciso López lost his life and that of many of his companions because he conjured up an excessively optimistic, but as events proved, a quite unreal picture of the pro-independence forces inside Cuba. It is irrelevant for our purposes whether he intended to create an independent Cuban republic or merely endeavored to bring it into being as a preliminary step for subsequent annexation to the United States, Texas style. What concerns us here is that on May 19, 1850, he landed in Cárdenas, on western Cuba’s north shore, at the head of about 500 American volunteers and occupied the city. Persuaded that the island was teeming with potential revolutionaries, he counted on recruiting enough men for him to be able to reach Havana eight days later with some thirty thousand soldiers.

But instead, he was met with a very chilly reception, because Cubans refused to show him even the least favor. Having learned that Spanish reinforcements were rapidly marching on Cárdenas, he reboarded the ship on which he had come, the Creole, and returned to the United States.

It was for this reason that when he began to organize yet another expedition to Cuba resolved that it would have to be preceded by a genuine internal uprising. This is precisely what happened while he was still recruiting his new army. On July 4, 1851, Joaquín de Agüero raised the banner of revolt in Camagüey at the head of a small band of conspirators. A few days later, on the twenty-third, Isidoro Armenteros staged a second revolt in Trinidad, Las Villas. It is common knowledge that both outbreaks were quickly suppressed by the Spanish authorities. This is not however what the United States newspapers informed their readers in the weeks that followed. According to the *New Orleans Delta*, for example, "the patriots [were] triumphant . . . and the [Spanish] government was panic stricken." The *New York Herald* went even further. The Cuban rebels had inflicted numerous casualties to the royalist army in Camagüey, and if they had subsequently fled into
the mountains it had only been for the purpose of gathering more arms and recruits. Since the Spanish troops were scattered all over the island, it would take time before they could concentrate. In the meantime, the rebel movement would be able to grow and become general, in which case the Spaniards would probably fall or pass to the other side. After all, the Herald’s correspondent added in a professorial tone, “the [Carlist] civil war has accustomed the [Spanish] army to change sides.”

At the time Narciso López enjoyed great popularity in the United States, for which the press was largely responsible. He had many friends and supporters among journalists (to the extent that in New Orleans he used to stay at the home of the Delta’s editor Laurent Ségur) and he therefore must have been familiar with the type of journalism then practiced in the country under the influence of the new popular dailies that were often called “pennies” after their cheap price. He must have known that penny editors did not hesitate to rely on hearsay, that they rarely bothered to verify information, and that in their quest for larger circulation and advertising they tended to publish what readers wanted to hear. He must have also known that his own followers frequently manipulated the press, which thus teemed with reports about secret expeditions, secret soldiers, and even the secret signs by which the conspirators identified each other. López was an artful and cunning man. How is it, then, that he did not think of checking the veracity of the stories about Cuba? Years later his chief aid, Ambrosio González del Valle, charged that the stories were part of a campaign carried out by Spanish agents for the purpose of precipitating López’s departure for Cuba and causing him to land where he could be more easily annihilated. The charge appears to be baseless, but

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was certainly plausible. How is it that such an intriguing possibility never crossed the suspicious mind of Narciso López?¹⁸

Perhaps it did. But he was an impatient man who was obsessed with the idea that Cuba was full of people who were just waiting for someone to sound the tocsin of insurrection in order to rise up in arms. He was also operating in New Orleans, which in those heady July days of 1851, was quite excited about Cuba and for Cuba. The city was in a blaze of oratory, Cuban flags, placards on the walls, and pro-López people expressing their sympathies everywhere: the newspapers, the Exchange, the street corners, the barrooms, and even the pulpit. Immersed in this emotionally charged atmosphere, the old caudillo was in a state of restlessness, chafing at the delay imposed by yet another decision that he himself had made after the Cádiz fiasco, that of recruiting a much larger army than the one that had briefly held the city. After a while, however, the pressure generated by the incessant reports of rebel victories in Cuba proved irresistible, and he changed his mind. He reasoned that it was more important to provide support for the rebellion in progress than to have a larger army under his command, and thus he resolved to depart immediately even though the force that he had recruited at that moment was still far below the troop strength requirements he had set. When he set out to sea on August 4, in an old steamer called the Pampero, he took with him even fewer men than the ones he had led to Cádiz---just over four hundred. The morale of the expeditionaries nonetheless was not affected by that fact. During a brief stopover at Key West additional reports were received about the gathering strength of the revolution in Cuba and the anxiety with which

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 45, 145-147, 220.
Cubans were awaiting the arrival of the expedition. Some of López’s officers became so excited that they ordered champagne brought aboard the Pampero.\(^{19}\)

Unfortunately, they did not know then what we know today. By the time that they left New Orleans Agüero and Armenteros had been captured, and both were stoically awaiting to be executed. Consequently, there was nothing to keep busy the Spanish troops in eastern Cuba, and as they were unloading the Pampero at El Morrillo, near Bahia Honda, Captain General José Gutiérrez de la Concha was already dispatching a small army to surround and choke them. No Cuban and no deserter from the Spanish forces joined them, as they had been led to expect, nor the revolt that López was told was about to erupt in Havana ever materialized. Indeed, after battling the Spaniards in a couple of encounters all the invaders did was to stall them off, hoping to elude them long enough for the Pampero, which had been ordered back to Florida, to return with reinforcements. But this never happened, either, although López, ever the optimist, counted on this possibility almost until he was betrayed by a peasant named José Antonio Castañeda and fell in the hands of his pursuers. About half of them were peasants who lived in the region.

Minutes before he faced a firing squad on a slope just outside Atarés Castle in Havana, William L. Crittenden, a West Point graduate who was the commander of one of López’s regiments, was able to write a short letter to his uncle, John J. Crittenden, who at the time was the Attorney General of the United States. “I was deceived by López,” the young man remarked. “He, as well as the public press assured me that the island was in a state of prosperous revolution.”\(^{20}\) Of course, we know enough about this infelicitous episode to realize that Crittenden was wrong,

\(^{19}\) Ibid., pp. 196-202.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 215.
because López deceived no one but himself. Like the Bay of Pigs invaders more than a century later, he landed in Cuba believing that the population en-masse was prepared to plunge into the whirlwind of revolution upon his arrival. And like the Bay of Pigs invaders, he met disaster when his expectations turned out to be wrong. In both cases failure could be attributed to faulty sources of information, although a more skeptical attitude on the part of the revolutionaries would have certainly helped.

The same applies in other cases in the 19th century in which the revolutionary leadership was equally impervious to the realities of life. To examine all of them would go beyond the limits of this paper. But we would not like to close it without at least beginning the spadework in respect to the most important of them all, namely, José Martí’s commitment to a brief war when he began to urge his compatriots to fight for independence. As we know, this commitment was not made lightly or on the spur of the moment, nor was it a deliberate misrepresentation of facts made by a propagandist for the purpose of emboldening his followers. Martí was so serious about it that he incorporated it into the Bases of the Cuban Revolutionary Party as one of the essential features of the new Cuban war.²¹ And he did so motivated by a long-standing preoccupation. Throughout his years of residence in the United States he had come to fear that if Cuba’s armed struggle for independence continued indefinitely without the immediate prospect of Cuban success it would create the conditions leading to American intervention and ultimately annexation of the island. As early as 1886, he had warned that in case of a protracted war “it may be our fate to have an astute neighbor let us bleed ourselves on his threshold until finally he can take whatever is left . . . in his

hostile, selfish and irreverent hands."  

And three years later he had confided to Gonzalo de Quesada that there was on foot "an iniquitous plan to put pressure on the island and drive it into war so as to fabricate a pretext to intervene in its affairs and with the credit won as a mediator and guarantor keep it for their own."  

A quick and successful war was Martí’s answer to the problem posed by American imperialistic ambitions. Cubans had to be in a position to present Washington their political emancipation as an accomplished fact. Otherwise the outcome of their endeavors might very well be a change of masters.

As things happened, Martí’s premonitions about American participation in the struggle for Cuban independence turned out to be prophetic. But what about the “brevity” that according to his revolutionary doctrine had to characterize Spain’s forceful expulsion from the island? How realistic was his expectation that this could be attained swiftly enough to keep the United States out of the conflict? Perhaps he had some inkling of the relatively small number of Spanish troops stationed in Cuba (15,000 in February 1895). Or perhaps he knew, too, that the incumbent Captain General, Antonio Calleja, was an appeaser.  

The fact that he was able to gather three relatively powerful expeditions in the Florida port of Fernandina, near Jacksonville, might have also contributed to strengthen his confidence in the feasibility of a quick success. What is certain, because he went on record in the matter, is that even after the United States authorities caught the expeditions he did not evince much respect for Spain’s ability to sustain a prolonged war effort nor for the combativeness of the quintos, the Spanish

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22 Ibid., p. 410.

23 Martí, Obras completas, Volume III, p. 197.

conscripts whom he reckoned indolent, undisciplined and ill-paid.\textsuperscript{25} He was convinced that the aptitude of Spaniards for “modern types of work and free government” was inferior to that of Cubans,\textsuperscript{26} and he trusted that the Spaniards living in Cuba would either support or refrain from opposing the revolution.\textsuperscript{27} His optimism about the shortness of the war accompanied him when he landed in Cuba in April 1895, and was implicit in many of the statements he made at the time. It underlay the exhortation he addressed to Bartolomé Masó on April 25,\textsuperscript{28} and was understood in one of the key paragraphs of his May 2 letter to the editor of the \textit{New York Herald}. “We will achieve victory without difficulty,” he told the editor exuding self-assurance.\textsuperscript{29}

It is difficult not to perceive that Martí’s way of looking at the war was not based on hard facts. For at the time the uprising began in eastern Cuba there were sufficient grounds to anticipate that the metropolis would hold fast to its colony and fight “until the last man and the last peseta,” as the chief of the Spanish government, Antonio Cánovas del Castillo, was fond of repeating.\textsuperscript{30} Cuba was to Spain an article of prestige, a prize possession that dated from the days of the “old” sixteenth century empire. It was regarded as part of the national territory, and it was feared that the trauma that its loss would produce would inevitably bring the collapse of the Restoration regime and the end of the Bourbon dynasty.

\begin{enumerate}
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Martí, \textit{Obras completas}, Volume I, 2, 272.
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p. 264.
  \item \textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 244.
  \item \textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p. 257.
  \item \textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p. 269.
  \item \textsuperscript{30} José Terrero, \textit{Historia de España} (Barcelona: Ramón Sopena, 1965), p. 614.
\end{enumerate}
Spain, furthermore, had much at stake in Cuba. It was not only that it exploited the island through taxes, a stifling tariff system, and a corrupt colonial administration, as Cubans charged. There were important Spanish social and economic concerns centered on its territory. Considerable money was invested in the plantation economy, and Catalan commerce, especially benefited greatly from the protectionist system, 60 percent of Catalan exports going to the Cuban market. These interests formed a powerful colonial lobby that was bent upon maintaining control of the island, as did the low-middle class of Spanish bureaucrats and shopkeepers who had emigrated in growing numbers from the peninsula throughout the century. They were the backbone of the Unión Constitucional party dedicated to keeping Cuba Spanish, and were notorious for their proprietary attitude. For different reasons, mostly patriotic and sentimental, this was nonetheless the attitude of most people in Spain, who generally stood behind the hard line policy of the Cánovas ministry toward the rebels. By 1897, nearly a quarter million troops had been poured into the rebellious colony, and neither Carlists nor Republicans had objected. Even the Catalan nationalists supported the policy until they thought that the chances of winning had evaporated.31

Curiously enough, Martí was aware of most of these conditioning factors. He knew Spain, its character, and the idiosyncracies of its people. Of the Spaniards he once wrote: “I know them individually and as a group.”32 Further on in the same writing he also remarked that Spain’s roots were deeper in Cuba than in any other Spanish possession, adding that Spaniards had never been as close to the heart of any Spanish American country at the time of the wars of


32 Martí, Obras completas, Volume I, 2, 409.
independence as they were to Cuba's heart. He fully realized how important was the colony's market for the metropolis, and he entertained no doubts about the exploitative nature of its rule. Possibly for these reasons, when he denounced as "a trap for the gullible" the administrative reforms proposed for Cuba by colonial minister Antonio Maura in 1893, he asserted emphatically that "the metropolis would never lift its armed hand from the colony that keeps alive its dreams of imperial grandiosity and feeds its political profit-making machine." And he was as straightforward when he issued the manifesto announcing to the Cuban people the constitution of the Cuban Revolutionary Party. He declared at that time that the party "did not ignore the difficulties and obstacles inherent in a war of independence against the last Spanish stronghold in the Americas and the efforts that the declining power of the metropolis will make to keep dominating the colony which is its mainstay."

Why, then, did Martí state in the same document, barely two paragraphs later, that "there was no reason for the new war to be as disjointed and prolonged as the previous one"? And why did he add immediately afterward that the new war "would easily overthrow an opponent whose only source of strength was the compliance of those capable of defying it"? We know that as befitted a man as creative and prolific as he, he was full of contradictions and ambivalences. As we have seen, however, his conceptualization of the war as a "brief" affair was not a romantic idealization but rather the result of a very precise political assessment of

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., p. 264.
36 Ibid., p. 340.
37 Ibid., p. 341.
the proclivities of politicians and diplomats in the United States. Why was he not as realistic in evaluating Spain's determination and strength? Did he really believe that Spanish power would be quickly shaken off and that the war would only last a few months? Until further research provides us --if at all possible-- with a fully documented answer to these questions the more reasonable conclusion seems to be that, in this matter, Martí, prompted by his nationalist ardor and his passion for his cause, stated as a fact what was actually a goal, an aspiration, a wish to be fulfilled. In other words --shall we dare to say it?-- like Varela nearly three quarters of a century before he was overcome by wishful thinking.

One last remark: in reaching this conclusion it has not been my intention--Heaven forbid!-- to second guess the Apostle of Cuba's independence nor Father Varela or Narciso López, for that matter. Had these men been as overly cautious as we ordinary mortals often are we would not be discussing their deeds. My purpose in scrutinizing the conspiracies and revolutionary schemes in which they involved themselves is rather to put in perspective the motivations of the Bay of Pigs invaders, to reach a better understanding of their decisions and commitments, and also to show that the brigade leader whom I mentioned at the beginning was really acting in the best revolutionary tradition when he manifested himself willing to swim to his target on the beach at the head of just a handful of men. The present generation and perhaps the following one, too, will have to pass before the Bay of Pigs operation can become the subject of serious historical study. But before any historian begins to use as source material some of the journalistic accounts published thus far, we better make clear that if the authors, explicitly or implicitly, second guess those involved in the landing it is only because they know about Cuba little more than to locate it on the map. The names of Martí, Varela and Narciso López will attest to that!
About the author

Jose Manuel Hernandez is one of the foremost historians of Cuba and a leading scholar of the history of U.S.-Cuba relations. Before his retirement in 1991, Dr. Hernandez was associate dean of the School of Languages and Linguistics at Georgetown University where he was also director of the Latin American Studies program and an adjunct professor of history.

His publications include: *Cuba and the United States: Intervention and Militarism, 1868-1933* and numerous articles in the *Encyclopedia of Latin American History*, the *Handbook of Latin American Studies*, and *Catholic Historical Review* among others. The Cuban Studies Association recently published another work by Hernandez, “Félix Varela: El primer cubano” in December 1996.

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