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Four Continents — IV: Latin America

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Forty-five years of reporting and editorial writing for The New York Times from every part of the world end for Mr. Matthews today. This is the last of four columns summarizing his observations on the past and future of global change.

For the United States, Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution brought Latin America to life after a long period of indifference and neglect. When Cuba's *Jefe Maximo* and his Government turned Communist and later almost brought on a nuclear war, somebody had to be blamed. I was.

The influence of journalism on history is a fascinating and controversial subject which has engendered much nonsense. I would not deny that as I sat with Fidel Castro, his brother Raul, Che Guevara and others up in the Sierra Maestra on the chilly morning of Feb. 17, 1957, Clio, the muse of history, touched me with her wand—or whatever she uses. The resulting publicity in The Times gave Castro and his guerrilla band a nationwide and even a worldwide fame that, chronologically, was the start of the most fantastic career of any leader in the whole course of Latin America's independent history.

However, Cuba was "ripe for revolution," as Arthur Schlesinger Jr. wrote for a State Department white paper. Fidel Castro was the man of destiny and nothing was going to stop him in the long run. His rise

not only transformed the island of Cuba, but it was the source of a ferment that has affected all of Latin America.

The Alliance for Progress is an answer which was devised to meet the challenge of the Cuban Revolution—incidentally by John F. Kennedy, the only United States President since Franklin D. Roosevelt to have any understanding of and feeling for Latin America.

Stability of Dictatorships

The 1950's, when I began working in Latin America, shaped up in a journalistic sense as a struggle against the many military dictators who then infested the area. The United States and the American business and banking world, which had understandable links with the Government, were either positively favorable or complacently receptive to the dictatorships because they brought a species of stability and the dictators were friendly to the United States. They all proclaimed an anti-Communism that was more nominal than real. Perón of Argentina, Pérez Jiménez of Venezuela, Somoza of Nicaragua, Trujillo of the Dominican Republic were outstanding examples.

Fortunately, they were all sensitive to criticism, especially from The New York Times. On one trip to Buenos Aires it was possible, by passing myself off as the uncle of an anti-Perónist university student who was being kept as a political prisoner

along with a dozen or more of his schoolmates, to get into the Villa de Voto prison, talk to the group in a visiting hour, and then to write a news dispatch while someone in New York did an editorial. In two days Perón had set the students free.

The differing responsibilities of government and journalism are a study in themselves. A newspaper can stand on principle—for instance that elected presidents in Latin-American countries should be allowed to serve out their terms. Washington accepts, and sometimes welcomes, military *coups d'état* if they oust inefficient or unfriendly presidents. The Central Intelligence Agency, as in the ouster of President Arbenz of Guatemala in 1954 and in the incredible fiasco of the Bay of Pigs in Cuba in 1961, is a ubiquitous, permanent and unwelcomed feature of Latin-American life.

Little Goodwill

American relations with Latin America—as in the blundering intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965—have not been successful in creating goodwill or stability. The separate nations are groping in different ways toward some form or forms of government that will suit their traditions and way of life—which are very different from ours.

All the wealth and all the power of the "Colossus of the North," it is obvious, cannot change what is happening in a small island ninety miles from the Florida shore. The United

States can conquer, devastate, destroy; it cannot impose its will. Coexistence, cooperation, economic, financial and technical aid, understanding, patience—these will help the Latin-American nations to create their own societies in their own image.

One always comes back to the fundamentals—those same old truisms: people want to live decent, healthy, dignified lives, and the way the world is going most Latin Americans cannot do so. There will be revolutions, every observer of the Latin-American scene tells us. Perhaps. Revolutions are cruel experiences for a nation. At best they are like surgical operations, painful but salutary.

Dissent Not Easy

The revolutionary, the reformer, the dissenter have never had easy roads to travel. Guerrilla fighter, political agitator, journalist—something is risked, whether it be life, freedom or the respect of the Establishment and of the majority.

Looking back over the kaleidoscopic changes in the world during these 45 years and passing in review the men and women who made the history of our times is a process that leaves some pride, some humility—and a sense of helplessness. There is, at least, a residue of satisfaction in thinking that one did not always go the way of the crowd.

A newspaperman walks with the great of many lands, but he must go his own way—right to the end of the road.