

July 26 is the day of days in Cuba

W. T. Whitney Jr.

It's Bayamo's turn this year on July 26. The capital city of Granma Province in eastern Cuba is hosting Cuba's Day of Nation Rebellion. Today, beginning at 6:30 AM, President Miguel Díaz-Canel, other Cuban leaders, and thousands of Cubans from the area have been celebrating young revolutionaries who, 66 years earlier on another July 26, attacked military barracks in Santiago de Cuba and in Bayamo.

Their leader was Fidel Castro, a young lawyer. They wanted to set off a national rebellion aimed at removing dictator Fulgencio Batista from power. In 1952 Batista staged a military coup to depose the liberal president Carlos Prío Socarrás.

Most of the revolutionaries died, mainly at the hands of their Batista captors. At his trial three months later, Castro delivered a speech titled "History Will Absolve Me" that became a manifesto of principles for the revolution that would follow. Castro identified independence leader Jose Marti as the revolution's intellectual author. 1953 was the centennial of Marti's birth.

Festivities and gatherings are taking place in cities and towns throughout the island and indeed in cities throughout the world, wherever supporters of Cuba's revolution are concentrated. Each year the 15 Cuban provinces compete in a contest of economic and social achievements to be chosen to present the central event of the day. The Political Bureau of Cuba's Communist party designates the winner.

Ceremonies began in many places on July 25. In Bayamo the "Ceremony of the Flags" took place in honor of both Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, a nearby resident who in 1868 assumed leadership of Cuba's First War for Independence, and Pedro Figueredo Cisneros, author of Cuba's national hymn.

Thousands of invited guests are attending the July 26 event in Bayamo's "Plaza of the Homeland, along with many more from the 13 municipalities of Granma Province. Cultural events involving some 300 actors, singers, musicians, and other performers are being staged throughout the day. A "political gala" called "From Moncada to the Future" takes place in the evening in a remodeled theater.

Prominent themes highlighted in Bayamo and elsewhere in Cuba include the "victory of ideas," "from Céspedes and Martí to Fidel," and "loyalty to the nation and its revolutionary principles." Speakers this year, including President Díaz-Canel, are denouncing all forms of U.S. aggression. Their ire is concentrated on Title III of the U.S. Helms Burton Law of 1996, which as of May 2019 is being implemented for the first time. With that law, the United States is trying to drive foreign investments away from Cuba.

In a perverse way the U.S government and its interventions have long occupied the agenda at Cuba's National Days of Rebellion. That's because the day commemorates the beginning of struggle that did achieve Cuba's national liberation – from the United States. The U.S. government and many Cuban exiles living in the United States look to May 20 as the day marking Cuban independence from Spain. Of course, Cuban rebels did defeat the forces of colonial Spain in 1898, but that independence from an oppressor nation quickly morphed into U.S. political and economic control of the island.

The façade of Cuban independence ended on January 1, 1959 when a revolutionary government took power, enabled by struggle that began on July 26, 1953. January 1 is another patriotic day in Cuba, but it plays second fiddle to the one celebrated today.

July 26 is about fighting a revolution and much more. As reflected in Fidel Castro's "History Will Absolve Me," Cuba's revolution seeks true national liberation and also social justice." Speakers on July 26 have long evoked the memory of Jose Marti as they testify to the continuity of Cuba's revolutionary struggle. That's presumably a message being sent to U.S. policy makers.

Every year Cuba solidarity groups in the United States and Puerto Rico are visiting in Cuba as July 26 approaches. Members of the various delegations receive invitations to attend the day's festivities, including the principal event at which the Cuban president speaks. Visiting in Cuba now are the Venceremos Brigade, this year defying U.S. regulations with its 50th annual visit to Cuba, and Puerto Rico's Juan Rius Rivera Brigade.

The New York – based Pastors for Peace delegation, having completed its 30th solidarity visit to Cuba in mid-July, won't be on hand on July 26. That these groups attend the July 26 celebrations attests to Cuba's appreciation for faithful support over many years.