Contents

Vilma Espín 11
Asela de los Santos 15
Yolanda Ferrer 19
Introduction
Mary-Alice Waters 23

PART I—FROM SANTIAGO DE CUBA TO THE REBEL ARMY SECOND FRONT

It Gave Us a Sense of Worth
Asela de los Santos 53

Military Order No. 50: Decree Establishing Department of Education in Second Front
November 2, 1958 117

Débora
Vilma Espín 121

PART II—BIRTH OF THE FEDERATION OF CUBAN WOMEN

What It Meant to Be Female Began to Change
Yolanda Ferrer 195

With No Preconceived Structure or Agenda
Vilma Espín 215

Chronology 289
Glossary of Individuals, Organizations, and Events 305

Index 329

MAPS
Cuba 1959 40
Oriente province 1958 50
Santiago de Cuba 1953 58
Eastern fronts 1958 84

PHOTOS
First photo section, following page 112
Second photo section, following page 208
Vilma Espín 10
Asela de los Santos 14
Yolanda Ferrer 18
July 26 Movement leadership meeting in Sierras, March 1958 49
Amnesty campaign, October 1954 66
Havana welcome for Freedom Caravan, January 8, 1959 74
Funeral procession for Frank País, July 1957 79
Rebel Army tax on coffee and sugar plantation owners, 1958 90
Mario Muñoz field hospital, Sierras, 1958 92
Rebel Army Teachers of combatants, Second Front, 1958 96
Congress of Peasants in Arms, September 1958 103
Engracia Blet, first peasant to receive land title, December 1959 104
Clodomira Acosta, Rebel Army messenger, 1958 116
Vilma Espín as student at University of Oriente, 1949 122
Pepito Tey, killed November 30, 1956 144
*New York Times* front page, February 24, 1957 148
Fidel Castro, Herbert Matthews, in Sierras, February 17, 1957 154
Mothers march, Santiago de Cuba, January 1957 163
Women confront US ambassador, Santiago, July 31, 1957 173
Negotiating release of detained US marines, July 1958 180
Raúl Castro, Vilma Espín, Jorge Risquet, José Causse, Second Front, late 1958 185
Organizing surrender of Moncada garrison, January 1, 1959 187
First issue of *Mujeres* magazine, November 1961 190
Asela de los Santos, Vilma Espín, Yolanda Ferrer, 2004 194
Delegation to women’s congress in Chile, November 1959 198
Yolanda Ferrer and Raúl Castro, 50th anniversary of FMC, August 23, 2010 213
Arson attack on El Encanto department store, April 1961 229
Ana Betancourt School, Havana, 1961 242
First graduating class of taxi drivers, the *Violeteras*, 1961 244
Women in workforce, 2011 262
Education and job training for former prostitutes, 1962 267
Construction brigade volunteers, Havana, 1990 274
Ana Betancourt, 1869 281
Women’s Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment of Guantánamo, 1988 287
Vilma Espín Guillois

Vilma Espín, a leader of the Cuban Revolution for more than fifty years, was born in 1930 in Santiago de Cuba, in Oriente province. Her mother, Margarita, was a housewife. Her father, José, was chief accountant of the Bacardi rum company and executive assistant to its president.

Espín entered the University of Oriente in 1948, a year after it opened. There she took part in her first political activity—the fight to win official recognition and funding from the government in Havana for the new university.

Following the military coup of March 10, 1952, that established the US-backed dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, she joined the Revolutionary National Movement, whose action coordinator in Oriente was student leader Frank País.

On July 26, 1953, 160 revolutionaries under the leadership of Fidel Castro carried out an armed attack on Batista’s military garrisons in Santiago de Cuba and Bayamo. As word spread that dozens of captured combatants had been tortured and killed, Espín and three other young women, one of whom was Asela de los Santos, went to the Moncada military compound to learn the truth. Espín soon joined the newly formed Oriente Revolutionary Action, led by País.

In May 1955 Castro and thirty-one other Moncada combatants who had been captured and imprisoned were freed
through a national amnesty campaign. The following month Castro led a regroupment of forces to found the July 26 Revolutionary Movement. Espín became one of its first members.

In 1954 Espín graduated as one of the first chemical engineers educated in Cuba and among the few women in the field. She left Cuba in the summer of 1955 for a year of study in the United States at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In June 1956, as she prepared to return to Cuba, she was asked by the July 26 Movement leadership to travel through Mexico to meet with Fidel Castro. July 26 Movement cadres were training there for what a few months later became the Granma expedition—the landing of the yacht Granma in eastern Cuba, transporting eighty-two combatants under Fidel Castro’s command to launch a revolutionary war to overthrow the Batista regime.

Upon her return to Santiago, Espín began to assume major responsibilities in the July 26 Movement, working closely with Frank País. She helped prepare the November 30, 1956, armed action there, intended to draw Batista’s military forces away from the area of the Granma landing. For a period of time, her family’s home became the organizing center for the July 26 Movement’s underground leadership in Santiago.

In February 1957, Espín took part in the first national leadership meeting of the July 26 Movement to be held in the Sierra Maestra mountains. In July, shortly before País was gunned down by Batista’s police, she became the July 26 Movement’s coordinator for Oriente province.

In June 1958, with Batista’s cops combing the province to find her, Espín was transferred to the Rebel Army’s Frank País Second Eastern Front. Following the July 1958 defeat of the Batista army’s “encircle and annihilate” offensive, the Second Front became a vast liberated zone north and east of Santiago that combatants under Raúl Castro defended and
in which they began to establish a civilian governmental structure. There Espín shouldered numerous responsibilities, including as an instructor in the school training combatants as teachers.

After the triumph over the dictatorship on January 1, 1959, women who wanted to organize to support the deepening revolutionary transformation turned for leadership to Espín, who was among the best known of the women who were leaders of the underground and Rebel Army combatants. She led the efforts to launch the Federation of Cuban Women and was its president and principal leader from its founding in August 1960 until her death in 2007.

Among her many responsibilities, Espín was director of the National Center on Sex Education, founded in 1989, and the National Commission for Attention to and Prevention of Social Problems, founded in 1986. She was vice president of the Women’s International Democratic Federation from 1973 on.

Espín was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party from its inception in 1965, a member of the party’s Political Bureau from 1980 to 1991, and a member of Cuba’s Council of State from 1976 on. As a member of the National Assembly of People’s Power from 1976 on, she chaired the Committee on Childhood, Youth, and Equality of Rights for Women. She received the honorary title Heroine of the Republic of Cuba in 2003.

Espín was married to Raúl Castro Ruz, minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces 1959–2008 and today president of the Council of State and Council of Ministers. They had four children.
Asela de los Santos Tamayo

ASELA DE LOS SANTOS was born in 1929 in Santiago de Cuba. Her father, José de los Santos, was a retired army lieutenant; her mother, Parmenia Tamayo, was a housewife. She entered the University of Oriente in 1949, shortly before student and faculty demonstrations won official recognition for the new institution. Studying there to become a teacher, she met Vilma Espín. The two became lifelong friends and comrades-in-arms.

De los Santos and Espín were among the students who immediately took to the streets to protest Fulgencio Batista’s US-backed military coup of March 10, 1952. In 1954 de los Santos graduated from the university and took a job teaching in nearby El Caney. That same year she began to work with Oriente Revolutionary Action, led by Frank País. In 1955 she joined the newly formed July 26 Revolutionary Movement, of which País became the central leader in Santiago and later its national action coordinator.

On November 30, 1956, de los Santos was among the July 26 Movement members who organized and carried out an armed action in Santiago de Cuba, which had been timed to coincide with the anticipated landing of the Granma. Soon after, de los Santos left her teaching job to devote herself full time to the July 26 Movement.
In March 1957 she worked alongside Celia Sánchez and Vilma Espín transporting the first fifty-one reinforcements for the Rebel Army from Santiago to Manzanillo, the staging point for the combatants joining the rebel front in the Sierra Maestra mountains. In July she was one of the July 26 Movement cadres who helped assure the success of the massive spontaneous outpouring that shut down the city of Santiago in response to the murder of Frank País.

In 1957–58 de los Santos made nine trips to Miami as a courier, arranging the transport of weapons, ammunition, money, and messages for the revolutionary movement in Cuba. In August 1958, on the proposal of Vilma Espín, de los Santos was transferred to the Rebel Army’s Frank País Second Eastern Front and placed in charge of the schools being organized there. Within months the Department of Education de los Santos headed had responsibility for four hundred primary schools as well as educational programs for the combatants, many of whom did not know how to read or write.

After the revolutionary victory of January 1, 1959, de los Santos remained in charge of schools in the area formerly governed by the Second Front. Later that year she accepted responsibility for education in all of Oriente province.

From 1960 to 1966 de los Santos worked alongside Vilma Espín in launching and building the Federation of Cuban Women. She served as organizational secretary of the FMC’s National Bureau, then as its general secretary. She is currently a member of the FMC’s National Committee and an adviser to its general secretary.

In 1965 de los Santos was a founding member of the Cuban Communist Party and served on its Central Committee from 1975 to 1991.

From 1966 to 1970, she was director of education for the Revolutionary Armed Forces, holding the rank of captain.
She helped establish the Camilo Cienfuegos Military Schools where students, popularly known as Camilitos, acquired military skills and training as they earned a high school degree.

In 1970 de los Santos became director of personnel training in the Ministry of Education. She was vice minister of education from 1974 to 1979 and minister from 1979 to 1981.

She is married to Reserve Division General José Ramón Fernández, vice president of the Council of Ministers. Fernández commanded the main column of combatants that in April 1961, at Playa Girón, defeated the US-organized “Bay of Pigs” invasion.

De los Santos was awarded the Order of Playa Girón in 2009 and received the honorary title Hero of Labor in 2011. She is today a researcher in the Revolutionary Armed Forces Office of History.
Yolanda Ferrer is general secretary of the Federation of Cuban Women. She is a member of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party and of the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba.

Born in 1946, Ferrer grew up in Havana. Her mother, Amparo, was an office worker. Her father, Roberto, had a small moving company.

An exemplary student at La Víbora high school, Ferrer was nominated for and became a member of the Union of Young Communists in 1962. She served as UJC general secretary at the school the following year. She graduated from the University of Havana in 1973 with a degree in political science.

In 1960, at age fourteen, Ferrer joined the Federation of Cuban Women, working first as a volunteer and later holding full-time responsibilities. She was a founding member of the revolutionary militias. During the 1961 national literacy campaign, she taught seven fishermen how to read and write.

Ferrer was a member of the FMC’s International Relations Committee until 1972. She was elected to the National Secretariat in 1973 and since then has held various federation responsibilities, including assistant to the president, Vilma Espín; secretary for political education; and secretary for political orientation. At the FMC’s fifth congress in 1990, Fer-
errer was elected FMC general secretary, and she has been reelected to that responsibility at its subsequent three congresses. Following Espín’s death, at the FMC congress in 2009 the office of general secretary became the federation’s highest leadership position.

Ferrer has been a member of the Communist Party since 1976 and of its Central Committee since 1980. From 1986 to 1991, she was an alternate member of the party’s Political Bureau. She has served as a deputy to the National Assembly of People’s Power since 1986, and in 2008 was elected by the assembly to the Council of State, Cuba’s highest government body.

From 1997 to 2004 Ferrer was a member of the United Nations committee of experts charged with monitoring progress toward achieving the goals of the UN’s 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Since 1992 she has been president of the Cuba Vietnam Friendship Association. She received the Order of Ana Betancourt awarded by the Council of State in 1985. Ferrer is married and has two children.
Introduction

BY MARY-ALICE WATERS

The phenomenon of women’s participation in the revolution is a revolution within another revolution.

If I were asked what is the most revolutionary thing the revolution is doing, I would answer that it is precisely this—the revolution that is occurring among the women of our country.

FIDEL CASTRO
December 9, 1966

True equality between men and women can become a reality only when the exploitation of both by capital has been abolished, and private work in the home has been transformed into a public industry.

FREDERICK ENGELS
July 5, 1885

THE MAKING OF A REVOLUTION WITHIN THE REVOLUTION is not a book about women. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it does not start with women, nor could it. This is a book about the Cuban Revolution. It is about the millions of working people—men and women, of all ages—who have made that socialist revolution, and how their actions transformed them as they fought to transform their world.

We had “no preconceived structure or agenda,” Vilma Espín says here. There was “just a desire by women . . . to
participate in a revolutionary process, whose aim was to transform the lives of those who had been exploited and discriminated against and create a better society for all.” And the leadership of the revolution responded.

Espín was a legendary combatant of the July 26 Movement in the Santiago de Cuba underground and the Rebel Army’s Second Front during the revolutionary war and mass popular struggle of the 1950s that brought down the bloody military dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. Following the January 1, 1959, victory, she became the central leader of the ongoing revolutionary activity that gave birth to the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), serving as its president until her death in 2007.

The Cuban Revolution began long before victorious Rebel Army columns entered Santiago de Cuba, Santa Clara, and Havana in the opening days of January 1959, propelled by popular insurrections and a mass general strike that swept the country.

It begins with the vanguard of men and women who came together in the wake of Batista’s March 10, 1952, coup, determined to oppose it at all costs. It begins with their unconditional rejection of a political system marked by decades of rampant corruption and subordination to the dictates of the Yankee imperialist colossus to the north. It begins with a determination to reknit the continuity of Cuba’s long history of struggle for national sovereignty, independence, and deep-going social reform.

The course of the revolution goes through the July 26, 1953, assaults on the Moncada army garrison in Santiago de Cuba and the Carlos Manuel de Céspedes barracks in Bayamo, led by Fidel Castro and Abel Santamaría, the actions that marked the opening of the revolutionary struggle. It proceeds through the years of patient work orga-
nizing a broad mass campaign for amnesty for the jailed combatants from the assault on Moncada and other political prisoners. It encompasses the nationwide effort to spread the popular revolutionary program presented by Castro in *History Will Absolve Me*, his courtroom defense of the Moncada fighters, which became the foundation of the July 26 Movement.

The channel of the revolution flows through the *Granma* expedition, which launched the revolutionary war at the end of 1956. Through the actions of the fledgling Rebel Army, as it consolidated support among the rural toilers of the Sierra Maestra mountains and other parts of eastern Cuba throughout 1957–58. Through its actions as it began to lead in practice toward the new economic and social relations that working people would soon create across the country.

The thread of that history, broadly known inside Cuba and elsewhere, runs through this book. What emerges with new sharpness and clarity in these pages is something that is less well-known. It is a picture of the *social revolution* led by the Rebel Army in the Sierras during the two years of the revolutionary war, and how that revolution prepared and educated those who were touched by it.

In the firsthand accounts of Asela de los Santos and Vilma Espín, we see the interaction between the Rebel Army combatants and the exploited, landless peasants and agricultural workers of the region. We see the ways in which they transform each other and together become a stronger, more conscious revolutionary force.

Through these accounts, we see the growing trust the Rebel Army wins among the rural poor, who are treated for the first time ever with respect and dignity. We see how the proletarian army-in-becoming responds to that trust, becoming ever more confident, clear-sighted, and class conscious.
as they fight together to expand education and health care and fulfill other long-cherished dreams of the toilers, even in the midst of a war. And we see the growing involvement of women, in the ranks and in the leadership.

The Rebel Army’s defeat of the Batista regime’s wishfully mislabeled “encircle and annihilate” operations, after three months of battle in mid 1958, opened the way for the rebels’ strategic military counteroffensive, leading to the rout and collapse of the tyranny a few months later. The recent publication of Fidel Castro’s two-volume account of the Rebel Army’s actions from May through December 1958—La victoria estratégica and La contraofensiva estratégica—makes an understanding of those crucial months of the revolutionary war more accessible than ever before.1

The withdrawal of Batista’s battered ground troops from large swaths of the mountainous regions of Cuba’s Oriente province—stretching north and east of Santiago de Cuba toward Guantánamo, Baracoa, and beyond—gave the revolutionary forces the necessary time and space to consolidate what was known as the Frank País Second Eastern Front. Deadly bombing raids and strafing runs by Batista’s air force continued throughout the region, which was controlled by the Rebel Army forces commanded by Raúl Castro. But in those closing months of the revolutionary war, the enemy’s largely demoralized foot soldiers ventured from their barracks less and less.

With broad popular support, the Rebel Army’s incipient government-in-arms increasingly displaced the crumbling structures of the capitalist regime in the region, as they or-

organized working people to take charge of health care and education, justice, agriculture, construction, communications, taxation, and established their own radio station and other means of providing news and orientation. The toilers within the Second Front began to implement the program outlined in *History Will Absolve Me*.

It became a “virtual republic,” as Vilma Espín affirms here. And one with a new class character.

A congress of peasants in arms was organized by the Rebel Army in September 1958, land reform was codified by military decree in the liberated territories, and titles were issued to those who worked the land.

More than four hundred primary schools were opened, organized by the Rebel Army’s department of education headed by Asela de los Santos, as peasant families enthusiastically carried out a census of the children, searched for suitable classrooms, found books, and built desks and benches. Nighttime classes for combatants often used the same premises.

Clinics and field hospitals were established, treating combatants, including wounded enemy soldiers, and local residents alike. They provided the first medical care most peasants had ever received.

With the participation of all, roads were repaired and new ones opened.

Taxes on output were collected from the owners of sugar mills, mining operations, and coffee plantations. The workers knew exactly how much had been produced and shipped out.

Disputes were settled and marriages celebrated.

A popular revolution, a proletarian revolution-in-becoming, was organized in the mountains of the east, as the workers and peasants mobilized to begin transforming social relations. It spread across Cuba with the victory of January 1, 1959.
“When a deepgoing revolution takes place women, who have been oppressed for millennia, want to take part,” Asela de los Santos reminds us here.

The growing participation of women was a seamless part of this revolutionary upheaval. Forged in the heat of popular mobilizations in the opening months of 1959, what became the Federation of Cuban Women grew out of women’s determination to participate in the revolution—not the other way around. As Vilma Espín describes, women insisted on organizing themselves, and being organized, into the most pressing tasks of the revolution. In the process they created an organization that would enable them to do just that.

Many years later, a journalist for the Cuban daily Granma asked Vilma Espín whether she had anticipated all this when she was fighting in the mountains of eastern Cuba. Had she ever imagined she would be so involved and identified with making—as Fidel Castro called it—a revolution within the revolution? Espín’s spontaneous response was:

Never! It hadn’t even remotely occurred to me that a women’s organization should exist. I had never even thought about it. I joined the struggle as part of a group that included young women and men. It never occurred to me we’d have to carry out special work with women. . . .

When the idea of creating a women’s organization was suggested to me, it came as a surprise. . . . But soon after it was created I realized that yes, it was indispensable. . . . It was an enormous revolutionary force.²

Part II of *The Making of a Revolution Within the Revolution* takes us through this “Birth of the Federation of Cuban Women” in interviews with Vilma Espín and Yolanda Ferrer. What strikes the reader more than anything else in Espín’s account is the absence of dogma or schemas, the absence of clotted political jargon. There was only one guide: opening the way for the broadest layers of women to become involved—with organization, effectiveness, and discipline—in ongoing struggles and the construction of a new social order.

In the beginning was the deed. Leaders were those who led.

“Learn in the morning and teach in the afternoon” became a popular revolutionary slogan, reflecting a fact of life. Often that meant doing so under fire—literally—as Washington tried unsuccessfully, over and over, to organize and arm a counterrevolutionary cadre. As on every other front of the advancing revolution, form followed content, and organizational structures were codified as the struggle permitted.

Nothing captures this better than the image of the school for young women from the countryside, training to staff child care centers, being strafed and bombed by US-based planes a few days prior to the US-organized invasion at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961. “Not a single one asked to go home,” Espín notes. “Everyone stayed.”

“When I talk about how the federation was created,” Espín says here,

I always emphasize that at the time we didn’t talk about women’s liberation. We didn’t talk about women’s emancipation, or the struggle for equality. We didn’t use those terms then. What we did talk about was participation. Women wanted to participate. . . .

There was real proof, every day, that the revolution
wasn’t just hot air, it wasn’t empty phrases of the kind people were used to hearing from politicians in the past. This was the genuine thing. And women wanted to be part of it, to do something. The more the revolutionary laws strengthened this conviction, the more women demanded a chance to contribute—and the more they saw how necessary their contribution was.

Cuba in the 1950s was one of the more economically developed countries of Latin America, not one of the poorest. Yet only 13.5 percent of women worked outside the home in 1953, many of them without pay. By 1981, barely twenty years after the triumph of the revolution, that figure had risen to 44.5 percent, and by 2008 stood at 59 percent.

In 1953, of those women in the workforce “with or without pay,” the largest single category, totaling more than 70,000, were domestic servants, a large proportion of whom were black. That was close to 30 percent of all women who had jobs. Some worked for as little as 20 cents a day or for room and board alone—which could mean a mat to sleep on and leftover food from the plates of their employer.

The social dynamic of the early years of the revolution is dramatically represented by the FMC-organized night schools for former domestic workers, women left with no way to make a living as their well-off employers abandoned the country. Retrained for jobs ranging from taxi drivers and auto mechanics to bank clerks, secretaries, child care workers, and poultry farmers, they began new lives—with confidence and pride.

The same dynamic was central to one of the most extensive FMC campaigns in the first years of the revolution, the establishment of the Ana Betancourt School for young peasant women. Between 1961 and 1963, twenty-one thousand, with their parents’ consent, came to Havana for an intensive
six-month course during which they learned to read and write, cut and sew, and acquired the foundations of scientific nutrition and hygiene. Some learned basic office-work skills as well.

One of the charges leveled against the Cuban Revolution by its opponents in other countries, often by women who came out of some of the feminist organizations of the 1960s and 70s, is that the FMC, by teaching women how to make clothes for themselves and their families, reinforced traditional female stereotypes. It bolstered women’s oppression rather than advancing women’s liberation, they claimed. In the Granma interview quoted earlier, Espín was asked if she still thought they had done the right thing.

“Yes, I do,” was her immediate answer, “because at that time it was what allowed us to draw women out of their homes. It’s what made it possible for young women from the Escambray mountains and the Baracoa region, where the counterrevolution was working intensively on peasant families, to come to the capital, learn what the revolution was really about, and become the first cadres of the revolution in those areas.

“This was important, not only in combating the counterrevolution,” Espín said, “but in terms of the development of women as cadres. . . . We started from where women were at to raise them to a new level.”

The revolution in women’s social, economic, and political status was not a phenomenon parallel to the revolutionary advance of Cuba’s toilers. It took place within that advance.

Addressing a leadership meeting of the Federation of Cuban Women in December 1966, Cuban prime minister Fidel Castro called attention to the antiwoman prejudices that prevailed in prerevolutionary Cuba, as throughout class societies the
world over. “Prejudices that have existed, not just for decades or centuries,” Castro said, “but for millennia.” He pointed to the belief that all a woman was good for was to scrub dishes, wash, iron, cook, keep house, and bear children—age-old prejudices that placed women in an inferior position in society. In effect women did not have a productive place in society.

Under capitalism, he went on, the big majority of women are “doubly exploited or doubly humiliated.”

A poor woman, whether a worker or belonging to a working-class family, was exploited simply because of her humbler status, because she was a worker. Moreover, within her own class, as a working woman, she was looked down on and underrated. Not only was she underestimated, exploited, and looked down on by the exploiting classes, but even within her own class she was the object of countless prejudices. . . .

There are two sectors in this country, two components of society that, aside from economic reasons, have had other motives for sympathizing with and feeling enthusiasm for the revolution: the black population of Cuba and the country’s women.

The political clarity and decisive leadership given the fight for women’s equality by Fidel Castro, the central leader of the Cuban Revolution for more than half a century, is one of the truest measures of the working-class character of that revolution and the caliber of its leadership. It has been so from the earliest days of the fight against the Batista dictatorship. That same clarity and decisiveness has been a guarantee of the revolutionary al-
liance of workers and farmers in Cuba over those decades.

At every point in the struggle, women were part of the vanguard and its leadership. Women such as Haydée Santamaría and Melba Hernández, who joined the assault on the Moncada military garrison in Santiago de Cuba on July 26, 1953. Women like Celia Sánchez, the principal organizer of the July 26 Movement in Manzanillo, the first woman to join the Rebel Army as a combatant, and a member of its general staff. Women like Vilma Espín, whose story you will read in the pages to follow.

The Cuban Revolution is distinguished from all previous revolutions in the history of the modern working-class movement, among other things, by the number of women who were central to its day-to-day leadership.

Moreover, the speed of women’s economic and social advances in the thirty years between 1960 and 1990—advances measured by education, employment, infant and maternal mortality rates, and other gauges—allowed Cuban women to conquer a degree of equality that it took women in the United States and other industrialized capitalist countries more than a century and a half to achieve.

But none of this was inevitable.

“One of the ways our revolution will be judged in coming years,” Fidel Castro told the Second Congress of the FMC in 1974, “is how we have resolved the problems facing women in our society and our country.”

Without the clear course charted by Fidel as well as other central leaders—including Abel Santamaría, Frank País, and Raúl Castro, all of whom readers come to know better in the pages of this book—the record of Cuba’s revolutionary struggle would have been far less exemplary. Espín notes, for example, that Frank País’s leadership and “attitude toward women” is what made it possible for women
in the July 26 Movement in Santiago de Cuba “to work as complete equals with men.”

The political determination of Fidel Castro to challenge the antiwoman prejudices held by some who were among the best cadres of the movement was demonstrated by the fight he waged in 1958 to organize the Mariana Grajales Women’s Platoon of the Rebel Army—something Espín points to as “an extraordinary moment in the history of women’s participation in the revolution.”

“Some of our comrades were still very machista,” Fidel told a June 1988 send-off for a battery of the First Women’s Anti-aircraft Artillery Regiment of Guantánamo leaving for Angola the next day. The women had volunteered for an internationalist mission, defending newly built airstrips in southern Angola from attack by the air force of the South African apartheid regime. Also invited to that gathering were ambassadors of African countries accredited in Cuba. Fidel continued:

Some of the men asked “How can you give those rifles to those women when we are unarmed?”

That reaction really made me mad. So I told one of them: “I’ll tell you why we’re going to give those rifles to those women: because they’re better soldiers than you.” I didn’t say another word.

We were living in a class society, a society where women were discriminated against, a society where a revolution had to come about, a revolution in which women would have to demonstrate their capacity and their merits.

“What was our objective?” Fidel asked.

First, we believed in women’s capacity, women’s courage, their capacity to fight; and second, we knew that such a
precedent would have enormous importance in the future, when the moment came to raise the question of equality in our society.3

The combat record of the Mariana Grajales Women’s Platoon proved to be one of the most outstanding in the revolutionary war. And the precedent set was never lost.

Addressing the guests from the diplomatic corps attending the send-off for the women’s antiaircraft regiment, Castro joked, “Perhaps our guests could be asking themselves this evening if it’s necessary for a battery of women to go to southern Angola … whether there are no more Cuban men to send over there and we have to resort to sending Cuban women. In truth, that’s not the way it is.”

The deployment of the women’s antiaircraft artillery battery to Angola “is not a military necessity,” Fidel told them. “It is a moral necessity, a revolutionary necessity.”

What the reader will find in these pages is the consistency of the revolutionary leadership of Cuba on the fight for women’s equality over more than half a century. And its continuity reaching all the way back to Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, founders of the modern working-class movement.

The three authors of this book, who knew each other and worked together over some five decades, reflect two different generations in the leadership of “a revolution

within the revolution.”

Espín and de los Santos were lifelong friends and co-combatants from their earliest days as students at the University of Oriente in Santiago de Cuba. Following the March 10, 1952, military coup that brought Batista to power, they were among the first to become involved in the struggle against the increasingly brutal US-backed dictatorship. They worked side by side in Santiago’s underground and in the Rebel Army’s Second Eastern Front. After the 1959 victory, de los Santos joined Espín from 1960 to 1966 in the leadership of the newly formed Federation of Cuban Women, serving as the organization’s first general secretary.

Yolanda Ferrer, general secretary of the Federation of Cuban Women today, tells the story of the tremendous leaps made by women in the first years of the revolution from a different perspective. She was part of a new generation, too young to have been involved in the struggle against the dictatorship, that threw itself into the great social battles that pushed forward the revolution. Barely in their teens, these young women joined the first militia units and helped build the communist youth organization. They formed the core of the historic countrywide campaign that in 1961, in a single year-long mobilization, wiped out illiteracy among the adult population of Cuba—23 percent of whom, the majority women, had never had the opportunity to learn to read or write.

It was the intertwining of these two generations in the tasks of the revolution that assured the energy and discipline of the campaigns that marked the character of the FMC at its birth. In the accounts of the three authors we see—first-hand—the impact of the revolutionary struggles that transformed them along with millions of other Cuban women, as they fought to build a society in which, as Frederick Engels
expressed it more than a hundred and twenty-five years ago, exploitation by capital has been abolished and “true equality between men and women can become a reality”—if the struggle continues.

The Making of a Revolution Within the Revolution would not have been possible without the extensive collaboration provided by the leadership of the Federation of Cuban Women over a number of years, including the help of its cadres in cities from Havana to Santiago de Cuba and Holguín.

Special thanks is due above all to FMC general secretary Yolanda Ferrer and to Asela de los Santos for the many hours they devoted to reading drafts, correcting errors, and explaining aspects of the history of the Cuban Revolution that would have otherwise remained obscure.

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The Office of Historical Affairs of the Council of State, through its director, Eugenio Suárez, and Elsa Montero, organizer of the photographic archive (and herself a Rebel Army messenger at fourteen and combatant in the Third Front under the command of Juan Almeida), provided invaluable assistance, making available numerous historic photos re-
produced in this book and identifying individuals, locations, dates, and circumstances of many others.

Directors of the archives at *Bohemia* and *Granma*, Magaly Miranda Martínez and Alejandro Debén, were generous in the time they made available to aid in the search for many other photos capturing specific moments and events in the history of the revolution.

Last but far from least, we express appreciation to the family of photographer Raúl Corrales for allowing reproduction, free of cost in this edition, not only of three photographs that are reproduced inside the book, but the evocative photo of a workers’ militia unit that appears on the cover.

The armed women department store employees in their white-dress workclothes—marching side by side on May 1, 1959, with their compañero brewery workers, each ready to give her or his life to defend their revolution—captures an indelible image of the vanguard of the Cuban working class at that decisive moment in the class struggle. It does so with an insight that few photographers other than Raúl Corrales ever achieved.

Department store salesperson was one of the few jobs deemed appropriate for a woman in Cuba in the 1950s. And there was good reason for them to be armed. Two of the most destructive actions of the counterrevolution were the fire-bombings of two famous department stores in central Havana, El Encanto and La Epoca. A militia member on guard duty that night, a woman like those on the cover of this book, died as she rushed back into the inferno of El Encanto to try to retrieve funds the workers had collected to build a child care center there. In 1960–61 alone, nine Havana department stores were the targets of such attacks.

*The Making of a Revolution Within the Revolution* is dedicated to the new generations of women and men, in Cuba and
worldwide, for whom the accurate history of the Cuban Revolution and how it was made is, and will be, an indispensable armament in the tumultuous class battles whose initial skirmishes are already upon us.

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