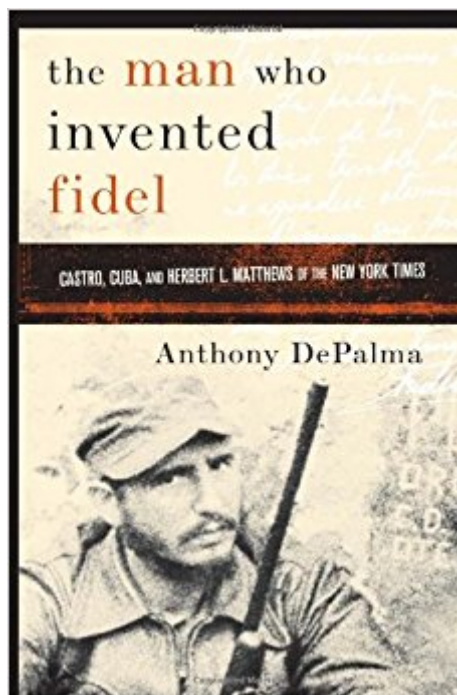




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# The Man Who Invented Fidel: Castro, Cuba, And Herbert L. Matthews Of The New York Times



## Synopsis

In 1957, Herbert L. Matthews of the New York Times, then considered one of the premiere foreign correspondents of his time, tracked down Fidel Castro in Cuba's Sierra Maestra mountains and returned with what was considered the scoop of the century. His heroic portrayal of Castro, who was then believed dead, had a powerful effect on American perceptions of Cuba, both in and out of the government, and profoundly influenced the fall of the Batista regime. When Castro emerged as a Soviet-backed dictator, Matthews became a scapegoat; his paper turned on him, his career foundered, and he was accused of betraying his country. In this fascinating book, New York Times reporter DePalma investigates the Matthews case to reveal how it contains the story not just of one newspaperman but of an age, not just how Castro came to power but how America determines who its enemies are. He re-creates the atmosphere of revolutionary Cuba and Cold War America, and clarifies the facts of Castro's ascension and political evolution from the many myths that have sprung up around them. Through a dramatic, ironic, in ways tragic story, *The Man Who Invented Fidel* offers provocative insights into Cuban politics, the Cuban-American relationship, and the many difficult balancing acts of responsible journalism.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In 1957, Herbert L. Matthews, a veteran foreign correspondent for the New York Times, trekked into the rugged Sierra Maestre in southeastern Cuba. There he interviewed a young lawyer, Fidel Castro, who had landed in Cuba several months earlier with the intention of waging guerrilla warfare to overthrow the Batista regime. Cuban government officials had claimed that Castro was dead and

that the rebels had been obliterated. But Matthews' interview confirmed that Castro and his movement survived. Furthermore, Matthews conveyed Castro's plans for a democratic, non-Communist revolution, which earned him the sympathy of many Americans from both political parties. When Castro's revolution quickly turned hard left, Matthews was condemned as either an apologist for Castro or a naive dupe who had served the interests of international communism. DePalma, also a New York Times correspondent, chronicles the career of Matthews and dispels many of the myths surrounding his interviews with Castro and his subsequent reporting on the Cuban revolution. This is an interesting and often surprising piece of investigative journalism. Jay Freeman

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"a riveting, illuminating and troubling work of reportage and history." -- Yukon News, January 10, 2007

While many will buy this book to learn about Cuba and Castro, I think its greater value will be for those interested in journalism. How close can a reporter be to his or her source before bias surely intrudes? When does a reporter's decided notions of what ought to happen, prevent even-handed and clear reporting? How much backing--or control-- should be given an experienced reporter by a newspaper's editors? To me, the story of Herbert L. Matthews is of current interest not because of what happened with Castro over fifty years ago--but of how it informs today's debate over current journalistic standards at The New York Times and other major media outlets.

DePalma, Anthony 2006 *The Man Who Invented Fidel: Castro, Cuba, and Herbert L. Matthews of The New York Times*. Public Affairs (Perseus), Cambridge MA ISBN-10 1586483323, ISBN-13 978-1586483326 This book is a cornucopia of factual information rarely found in other English language studies on Cuban matters. The significance of Ruby Phillips a reporter far more experienced and attuned to the Cuban circumstance that Matthews is well described. In my view DePalma still accepts far too readily some of the nonsense on the repression of the country folk "Los Montunos" in the Sierra; apparently the author did not fully realize these mountain peoples had considerable legal and constitutional protection; which gave them access to lawyers such as Manuel R. Penabaz Tobio. DePalma falls into the common error of labeling the Sierra Maestra inhabitants as "peasants," which is not an appropriate term for the once mounted and armed inhabitants of the area. However, to one has to give the author great credit for his mention of the background of Eutimio Guerra (pages 33 and 34 but apparently not included in the index); which is

more than most give to this AutÃ©ntico Party agrarian reform activist. Still the author accepts, without caveats, the Castro version of events which were used to justify Guerra's execution. Pages 83-84 tell how Celia prepared the illusion of a potent and far more numerous guerrilla forces for Matthews visit. Such a careful function, plus her role as armed guerrilla leader before Castro landed, and her ability to override or direct Castro in the mountains (described in other sources) seems far more consistent with a minder role, than merely that of a woman in love as she is often portrayed. On page 265 for example the author, unlike many academics and other Castro apologists, DePalma calls it close to reality e .g. "... For decades, all but the most radical works about Castro have essentially balanced his idealism and uncanny ability to survive against the ruthlessness of his dictatorship. To people everywhere in the ..." In summary balance this is an excellent book full of useful information and should be read by all those interested in Cuba and especially in the process of corruption of reporters which turns them into "Agents of Influence."

In this book we gain a semi-sympathetic portrait of an old dinosaur print media journalist who was NOT fair, not balanced who himself decided to "puff" up Castro. Others have noted how Castro "used" Matthews. To wit while in the tent with Matthews Castro had the same formation of men march around them repeatedly, to create the impression of a battalion instead of a platoon or company. Castro came along at a time when for the first time ever the media could create and annoint a heroic idol figure. The image captivated just enough folks so that inquiry into and analysis of policy, ideology was deemed un-necessary. Castro appealed to the long-suffering Cuban hopes for change. As to whether turning Cuba into a Cold War Soviet satellite/missile base was the plan from the git go? Who can really say? I think as with the current president there was a lot of "make it up as you go along" improvisation by the Castro brothers [although Raul appears to be far more sadistic, brutal and at the same time less ideological than el hermano grande] Many who worked so hard to bring Fidel to power werent communists: Raul Chibas and Huber Matos come to mind. To counter-balance this book make sure you read "Against All Hope" by Valladares and "Waiting for Snow in Havana" by Carlos Eire. In modern day journalism I'm sure ea and every statemt made by a Castro would be "fact-checked" by another writer who would have been detailed to go along with the Batista forces. No time since has any overseas writer been so willing to let statements go unexamined.

Very interesting. Herbert Matthews is now an obscure figure in history about whom much needs to be told.

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