



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

By Anthony DePalma

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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.

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### Editorial Review

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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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### Review

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

### About the Author

**Anthony DePalma** has been a correspondent and reporter at the *New York Times* for almost twenty years and is the author of *Here: A Biography of the New American Continent*. In 2003 he was awarded a fellowship at Notre Dame's Kellogg Institute for International Studies to research the role of the media in shaping America's foreign relations. He was recently part of the special team of reporters that looked into the impact of class divisions on life in the United States for the *Times*. He now writes about the environment. He and his wife, who was born in Cuba, live in Montclair, New Jersey.

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