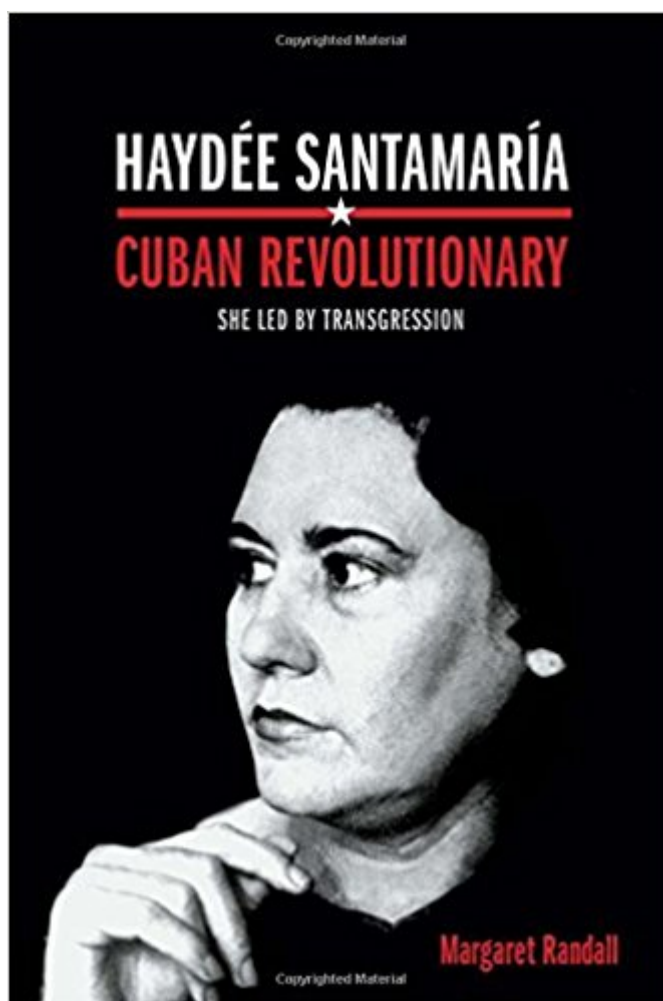


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Hayd e Santamar a, Cuban Revolutionary: She Led By Transgression



Synopsis

Taking part in the Cuban Revolution's first armed action in 1953, enduring the torture and killings of her brother and fiancé, assuming a leadership role in the underground movement, and smuggling weapons into Cuba, Haydée Santamaría was the only woman to participate in every phase of the Revolution. Virtually unknown outside of Cuba, Santamaría was a trusted member of Fidel Castro's inner circle and friend of Che Guevara. Following the Revolution's victory Santamaría founded and ran the cultural and arts institution Casa de las Americas, which attracted cutting-edge artists, exposed Cubans to some of the world's greatest creative minds, and protected queer, black, and feminist artists from state repression. Santamaría's suicide in 1980 caused confusion and discomfort throughout Cuba; despite her commitment to the Revolution, communist orthodoxy's disapproval of suicide prevented the Cuban leadership from mourning and celebrating her in the Plaza of the Revolution. In this impressionistic portrait of her friend Haydée Santamaría, Margaret Randall shows how one woman can help change the course of history.

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Customer Reviews

"Haydée Santamaría, Cuban Revolutionary is essential reading for all involved in the struggles for social justice, and for those devoted to literature, the arts, and imagination as a core ingredient in realizing another world. In Margaret Randall's literary hands, Haydée is a study of an ordinary, yet remarkable woman redefining herself through commitment to revolutionary change and to the people she loved. It is also a magnificent and sorrowful meditation on revolution, loss, gender,

and art. A major and outstanding book." (Bernardine Dohrn, activist, academic and clinical law professor, retired)"In her personal and passionate book, Margaret Randall dares to speak out about the pained silence surrounding Haydée Santamaría, perhaps the most important female figure of the Cuban revolution. Drawing on archives, interviews, memories, and imagination, Randall brings this complex woman to life, both to honor her quiet idealism and to mourn her death by suicide, which made it impossible for her to be seen as a proper national hero. This book opens the door to much-needed scholarship about the trauma suffered by women who sought to bring about social transformations on the island." (Ruth Behar, author of *Traveling Heavy: A Memoir in between Journeys*)"Santamaría's story is one which should be told, and Randall does so vividly and insightfully." (Publishers Weekly)"[T]he past is sometimes hard to put away, as Randall's loving elegy to Haydée Santamaría shows. Her life story demonstrates the heavy costs that prolonged revolutionary struggles can extract even from their apparent victors. A feminist sensibility adds poignancy to Randall's tender, impressionistic portrait of a self-effacing and melancholic yet much revered Cuban fighter." (Richard Feinberg *Foreign Affairs* 2015-09-01)"Margaret Randall brings a poet's voice to her work. She captures history, gleans it from correspondence, interviews, and research, but imbues it with an uncommon lyrical quality. Both of Randall's recent books make Cuba come alive. These books are well timed with the restoration of diplomatic relations and the easing of travel restrictions. They convey the vibrant history of revolutionary change. They also give human dimensions to the heroes of that revolution, reminding us what they risked, the losses they suffered, and what they were able to achieve." (Alice Embree *The Rag Blog* 2015-09-01)"The life of Haydée Santamaría was divided between a few days of heroism and decades of bureaucratic toil. A new biography by the poet and activist Margaret Randall, who knew and loved her, tells stories of courage and sacrifice that sometimes make her sound too amazing to be true." (Lorna Scott Fox *Bookforum* 2015-09-15)"Much more than a straightforward biography of one woman, this intimate account of revolution, bordering on the autobiographical at times, will surely inspire readers to ponder change in their own societies. ...Essential. All levels/libraries." (B. A. Lucero *Choice* 2016-01-01)"Haydée Santamaría, Cuban Revolutionary delves deftly into an extraordinary life, tying in the author's own experiences and memories of Santamaría with biographical facts and interviews to present a detailed, yet personal history that speaks not only of the successes of the Revolution, but also the personal impact that such upheaval can bring. ...Margaret Randall has created an engaging book that invites the reader to share in her reflections on arguably one of the most influential, but lesser known, figures of the Cuban revolution." (Katherine Bailey *LSE Review of Books* 2016-03-08)"In brisk, gripping prose,

Randall makes clear the challenges faced by a woman forging a new society in the second half of the twentieth century. . . . This is a deeply personal book about a heroic woman, written by someone justifiably proud to call Haydée Santamaría a friend." (Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt Monthly Review 2016-12-01)"[O]ne comes away with a sense of Santamaria as a principled and humane leader, as a woman before her time, and as an extraordinary, if flawed, human being. Because Randall is a poet her book is more lyrical and personal than academic in its approach. The end result is a book that sheds new light on one of Cuba's most vital, and least known, revolutionaries." (J. Patrice McSherry Journal of Global South Studies 2016-09-01)

Margaret Randall is the author of dozens of books of poetry and prose, including *Che on My Mind*, and the translator of *When Rains Became Floods: A Child Soldier's Story*, both also published by Duke University Press.

I had read and enjoyed two of Margaret Randall's books on the Nicaraguan Revolution, as well as her translation of Tomas Borge's 'Carlos the Dawn Is No Longer Beyond Our Reach.' That was a long time ago, and I hadn't read anything by her since, although I read a lot of what is available on Cuba in English. I would have preferred a biography of Cuban leader Haydée Santamaría, but until there is one in English, this work of love, along with books by and about some of her closest collaborators will have to suffice. The strength of this book is reminiscences of her by Randall and by others who worked with her. The weakness is there's so much left out, and much repetition, sometimes of things of great importance, but sometimes of words she may have spoken at a given moment, which because of repetition may be given greater weight than they merit. Her work at Casa de las Américas, the internationalist center for the arts Santamaría headed is what I knew the least about, and therefore what I learned the most from. I don't know of any other sources to recommend on this, although Che Guevara's work *Socialism and Man in Cuba*, mentioned several times in the book is important for understanding the revolution's approach to art, unfortunately not always lived up to, although both Santamaria and her husband of twenty years, Armando Hart, played a big role in restoring it after the five gray years. In my opinion, the Cuban internationalist intervention in Angola, which Cuba launched without first informing the Soviet Union also created a new situation (see *Cuba and Angola the War for Freedom*, as well as the works by Piero Gleijeses). Of course I agree with the author that Haydée Santamaría should have received a state funeral, but as someone who has struggled with lifelong depression, I know that few people

who haven't had that experience can understand suicide. And of course I agree that it's never about one thing.... Still, all the central party leaders were present. Nancy Stout's biography of Celia Sánchez, *One Day in December: Celia Sánchez and the Cuban Revolution* fills in some of the gaps, as does *Aldabonazo: Inside the Cuban Revolutionary Underground, 1952-58: A Participant's Account*, by Hart. *Women in Cuba: The making of a revolution within the revolution. From Santiago de Cuba and the Rebel Army, to the birth of the Federation of Cuban Women* has accounts of her by Vilma Espín and Asela de los Santos. *Che's Episodes of the Cuban Revolutionary War, 1956-58* is also must reading. For the broader impact of the Cuban Revolution in the world, and especially in the US, I recommend, among many books, *To Speak the Truth: Why Washington's 'Cold War' Against Cuba Doesn't End*, *Cuba and the Coming American Revolution*, and *It's the Poor Who Face the Savagery of the US Justice System: The Cuban Five Talk of Their Lives Within the Us Working Class*.

The other day I was telling my wife about this book, giving her a summary of what I'd learned about Haydée Santamaria. In the process of recounting her remarkable life, I got quite emotional and close to tears. This surprised me because while I was reading the book I was sometimes impatient with Margaret Randall's telling of the story. I wanted a more vivid, maybe cinematic, version of the events where I could see what was happening and not just hear about it. However, that is not what the author is up to and in the end her book has great impact as biography, history, political analysis, and poetry. One thing this book makes clear is that we in the US of A are deprived of the truth about the shining example of Cuba. Yes, the truth is available, but to access it, we have to circumvent sixty years of cold war lies, vilifications, and denigrations, all layer on because Cuba is proof that here is another way. Societies can organize themselves to take care of all their people and not just to funnel profit to the oligarchy. Randall presents the heroes and martyrs of the Cuban revolution, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Celia Sánchez, Haydée herself, among many others, as driven, principled, self-sacrificing, and humane. They were not perfect, but they were deeply deserving of our admiration and study. There is every reason to believe she is correct in this assessment.

Margaret Randall introduces one of the most remarkable, but little known, heroes of the Cuban revolution to North American readers in her important new book *Haydee Santamaria: Cuban Revolutionary*. Santamaria was the only woman to take part on all aspects of the revolution in the 1950s. Haydee, as she was known in Cuba, participated in the Moncada Barracks attack in which her brother Abel and her lover Boris Luis Santo Caloma were captured, brutally tortured, and

murdered by the Cuban army. She was captured, tortured, and imprisoned. As a leader of the urban resistance she smuggled arms and planned sabotage operations. She also fought alongside Fidel Castro and Che Guevara in the Sierra Maestra. After the triumph of the revolution, she founded Casa de las Americas, a path-breaking cultural institution that introduced the Cuban revolution to artists and intellectuals from around the world.

“This is not a biography,” Randall writes. “This is an impressionist portrait, written by a poet rather than a historian. Mine is a rebel and feminist lens.” Randall first wrote about Santamaria in her Cuba memoir, *To Change the World: My Years in Cuba* (Rutgers University Press, 2009). The two women became friends as they collaborated on art projects when Randall lived in Cuba (1969-80). I was spellbound by Santamaria’s description of her dealings with the Mafia to purchase weapons. The Mafia, which operated a colony of casinos, hotels, and nightclubs in prerevolutionary Cuba, sold arms to all sides in Cuba from Batista to Cuban rebel groups. I was forced to escape from one of those meetings with a pistol in my hand . . . Haydee recalled years later. “[W]hen I’d leave a meeting in the U.S., even if I took three or four showers I would feel dirty. I don’t want to give the false impression that any of those gangsters took advantage of me; they weren’t interested in a kid who barely weighed 90 pounds. But I was always afraid they might try to kidnap me in order to get money from Fidel. But she kept on transporting arms to the Sierra, and they [Cuban police] never caught me. Santamaria said the Mafia cheated the July 26th Movement, which did not get all the weapons it paid for. She asserted, “The ammunition we . . . were able to smuggle out was due to the courage of Cuban women, who traveled with it sewn into their skirts.” Haydee was wise beyond her years. “I think it has to be difficult for people to be violent, to go to war if it’s necessary,” she told Randall. “What you can’t lose . . . is your humanity . . . When someone had to place a bomb . . . I would always choose . . . the one who had the greatest consciousness, the greatest human qualities, so whoever it was wouldn’t get used to placing bombs, wouldn’t get pleasure out of placing bombs, so it would always hurt him to [have to do that.]” Her humanity was underscored when she adopted children of fallen revolutionaries from Cuba and elsewhere in Latin America and raised them with her biological children. -- Jack Colhoun is author of "Gangsterismo: The United States, Cuba, and the Mafia, 1933-1966" (OR Books, 2013)

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