

CASTRO, CHAVEZ & MORALES  
February 6, 2009

At the age of thirteen Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz helped organize a strike of sugar workers on his father's plantation. This could arguably have been the unofficial beginning of the Cuban Revolution which officially began January 1, 1959, and has spanned the presidencies of ten U.S. Presidents and is currently celebrating its fiftieth anniversary.

Castro was born August 13, 1926, on a sugar plantation in the province of Holguín. He was the third child born to Ángel Castro y Argiz, a Galician immigrant who became prosperous through work in the sugar industry and successful investing. His mother, Lina Ruz González, a household servant, was also of Galician background. Ángel Castro was married to another woman, Maria Luisa Argota, until Fidel was 15.

Castro has two brothers, Ramón and Raúl, and four sisters, all born out of wedlock. He also has two half siblings, who were raised by Ángel Castro's first wife. Ángel Castro divorced his first wife when Fidel was 15 and married Fidel's mother. Castro was formally recognized by his father when he was 17, and his surname was legally changed from Ruz to Castro.

Castro was an intellectually gifted student, more interested in sports than in academics. He was good at running, soccer and baseball, and in 1944 was awarded the prize as Cuba's best all-round school athlete. He spent the sixth through twelfth grades in private Catholic boarding schools, finishing high school at El Colegio de Belén, a Jesuit school in Havana in 1945.

He went on to study at the University of Havana and received a law degree in 1950. While at the University of Havana, his major academic interests were politics, sociology, history and agriculture.

When he was attending the Dolores school in Santiago, as an anti-American twelve-year-old, he wrote a letter to U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, expressing admiration and asking for a \$10 bill. Castro wrote:

*Santiago de Cuba  
November 6, 1940  
Mr. Franklin Roosevelt  
President of the United States*

*My good friend Roosevelt*

*I don't know very English, but I know it is much as to write to you.*

*I like to hear the radio, and I am very happy because I heard in it that you will be President for a new [periodo].*

*I am twelve years old. I am a boy but I think very much that I not think that I am writing to the President of the United States.*

*If you like, give me ten dollars bill green american, in the letter, because never, I have not seen a ten dollars bill green american and I would like to have one of them. My address is:*

*Sr. Fidel Castro  
Colegio Dolores  
Santiago De Cuba  
Oriente, Cuba*

*I don't know very English but I know very much Spanish and I suppose you don't know very Spanish but you know very English because you are American but I am not American.*

*Thank you very much*

*Good by Your friend. F Castro*

*Postscript: If you want to make your sheaps, I will show you the biggest [minas] of iron of the land. They are in Samyari, Orienta, Cuba. "If you like, give me a ten dollar bill green American, because never, I have not seen a ten dollar bill," signing the letter, "Thank you very much. Good by [sic]. Your friend, Fidel Castro."*

The letter was written on stolen Dolores letterhead and was the first entry in what would become a very long file with the U.S. State Department.

Dolores was a segregated school. Black students, no matter how intelligent, were excluded by a social dictum enforced by white families to protect their own privileges. At the country clubs, restaurants, and schools that served the elite, white was the only color that counted. In the 1940s, Dolores was no different.

The students at Dolores were not typical of Cuba, but of the people who ran it: the powerful, the rich, the talented, and the useful. It was their generation of frustrated, middle and upper class boys that would shape through its internal feuds and frustrations, the Cuban Revolution. Fidel Castro used, and eventually consumed, his own family, neighbors, relations by marriage, and those whom he knew through school, first from Santiago, and later from Havana. He used Dolores when he needed it – to protect him physically or politically, and in turn those who helped him would join the ranks of the regretful.

At thirteen, Castro helped to organize a strike of sugar workers on his father's plantation. In 1947 he joined the Cuban People's Party because of its campaign against corruption, injustice, poverty, unemployment and low wages. The Cuban People's Party accused government ministers of taking bribes and running the country for the benefit of the large U. S. corporations that had factories and offices in Cuba.

In 1947 he participated in a failed expeditionary force against the dictator of the Dominican Republic. In 1948, he was elected President of Law Students Assoc. which he represented at a Latin American University Students Congress in Colombia. The congress, openly anti-imperialist, coincided with a major civil war breaking out in Bogota in which Castro participated before leaving the country.

While still a student at the University of Havana, Castro married Mirta Díaz-Balart, a philosophy student whose wealthy family had political ties to Fulgencio Batista, military strongman in Cuba since 1933. They had one son, Fidel, Jr., in 1949. He became the head of Cuba's nuclear program.

After he finished his education, Castro became a lawyer in Havana. He often took cases of poor people who could not afford to pay him and was constantly short of money. His experience as a lawyer made him extremely critical of the inequalities in wealth that existed in Cuba. Like many

other Cubans, Castro resented the wealth and power of the American businessmen who appeared to control the country. Because Castro had no income with which to support his family, the marriage ended bitterly in 1955, first with divorce, and then with Fidel having his son kidnapped and taken to Mexico.

In 1951 Castro was a leader in the growing populist political movement led by the Ortodoxos, an anti-Communist nationalist group which promised major social, economic and political reforms, and aspired to gaining the presidency through electoral politics. Early in 1952, in preparation for upcoming elections scheduled for June, Castro began campaigning for a seat in congress as a replacement for Ortodoxo party leader Chibás, who had committed suicide. He was expected to win, however, elections were never held. On March 10 General Fulgencio Batista and a group of army conspirators overthrew the regime of Cuban President Carlos Prío Socarrás.

On July 26, 1953, Fidel Castro led a group of 123 men and women in an attack on the Moncada army barracks in Santiago. 69 attackers, and 19 soldiers and police were killed. Castro escaped but was later arrested. The officer who arrested Castro ignored orders to have him executed. He was delivered him to a civilian prison where he again came close to death. Captain Pelletier was instructed to put poison in Castro's food. He refused and instead revealed his orders to the Cuban people. Concerned about world opinion, Batista decided not to have Castro killed. He was tried and convicted of organizing an armed uprising and sentenced to 15 years in prison. During his trial he delivered a lengthy defense in what would become his most famous speech, *La historia me absolverá*, attacking Batista's regime and outlining his own political and economic ideas. In the speech, he declared: "I warn you, I am just beginning! If there is in your hearts a vestige of love for your country, love for humanity, love for justice, listen carefully... I know that the regime will try to suppress the truth by all possible means; I know that there will be a conspiracy to bury me in oblivion. But my voice will not be stifled – it will rise from my breast even when I feel most alone,

and my heart will give it all the fire that callous cowards deny it... Condemn me. It does not matter. History will absolve me.” His speech later became a book entitled *History Will Absolve Me*.

Granted political amnesty in May, 1955, Castro went into exile in Mexico. On Dec. 2, 1956, Castro, his brother Raúl, Che Guevara, Juan Almeida, and 80 other men landed in southern Oriente to initiate guerrilla war. 68 members of the group were killed or captured and they became known as the July 26 Movement (the date that Castro had attacked the Moncada barracks). From the Sierra Maestra mountains, Fidel organized a parallel government, established controlled territories with agricultural and manufacturing production, set up a radio station, and created an air force.

In 1958, forty-five organizations, including some which represented lawyers, architects, dentists, accountants and social workers, signed an open letter supporting the July 26 Movement. Castro, who had originally relied on the support of the poor, had gained the backing of the influential middle classes. Batista responded to this by sending more troops to the Sierra Maestra. Approximately 10,000 men were hunting for Castro. Although outnumbered, Castro's guerrillas inflicted defeat after defeat on Batista's troops.

The United States supplied Batista with planes, ships and tanks, but the advantage of using the latest technology, such as napalm, failed to win them victory against the guerrillas. In March 1958, the United States government, disillusioned with Batista's performance, suspended all arms shipments to Batista and suggested he hold elections.

He did, but the people showed their dissatisfaction with his government by refusing to vote. Over 75 per cent of the voters in Havana boycotted the polls. In some areas, such as Santiago, it was as high as 98 per cent. In November 1958, Batista's candidate for President, Andrés Rivero Aguero, won an election widely regarded as rigged.

In December 1958, U.S. Ambassador Earl E.T. Smith told Batista the United States would not back his government or his successor's and advised him to leave Cuba.

The Cuban Revolution began, on January 1, 1959, under Castro's leadership (with revolutionary Ernest "Che" Guevara). Affluent middle-class Cubans identified Fidel Castro with a return to constitutional rule, and the reaffirmation of civil and political rights. But for the majority, who envisioned a major re-structuring of the society, the issue was social justice. Once in power, Castro proved to be a persuasive and moving speaker, and a man who had the affection and support of the population. The popularity of the revolutionary regime unleashed a process of social radicalization, of which Castro became the major spokesman.

Batista fled to the Dominican Republic on January 1, 1959, and Castro, at the age of 32, assumed power, proclaimed a provisional government, and began public trials and executions of "criminals" of the Batista regime. José Miró Cardona, a law professor, created a new government with himself as prime minister and Manuel Urrutia Lleó as President on January 5. The United States officially recognized the new government two days later.

Castro marched into Havana on January 8, 1959, and assumed the post of Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. On February 16, he replaced Cardona as prime minister and appointed his brother, Raúl, commander of the armed forces. Castro began exerting an almost mystical hold over the Cuban masses. He lectured the Cubans on morality and public virtue, emphasized his commitment to democracy and social reform, and promised to hold free elections. He described his revolution as humanistic and promised his followers a nationalistic government that would respect private property and uphold Cuba's international obligations. Castro denied that he was a Communist.

The first exodus of refugees, mostly wealthy and upper-class Cubans, began to arrive in Miami.

In its first hundred days in office, Castro's government passed several new laws. Rents were cut by up to 50 per cent for low wage earners; wealth "illegally" acquired by Batista and his

followers was confiscated; the telephone company was nationalized and the rates were reduced by 50 per cent; land was redistributed among the peasants (including the land owned by the Castro family); and separate facilities for blacks and whites were abolished. Much of the land given to the peasants was owned by U.S. corporations, as was the telephone company. The U.S. government responded by telling Castro it would no longer be willing to supply the technology and technicians needed to run Cuba's economy. When this failed to change Castro's policies the U.S. reduced its orders for Cuban sugar.

Castro's response was to nationalize U.S. property worth \$850 million. He negotiated a deal with the Soviet Union and other communist countries in Eastern Europe, who agreed to purchase the sugar that the United States had refused to purchase. The Soviet Union also agreed to supply the weapons, technicians and machinery denied to Cuba by the United States.

Castro passed an agrarian reform law that confiscated inherited property. The avowed purpose of this law was to develop a class of independent farmers, however, the areas seized developed into state farms, and farmers became government employees. Purges or defections of military leaders became common, and these leaders were replaced with more radical and oftentimes Communist militants. Newspapers critical of these new leaders were quickly silenced.

In April, 1959, Castro and a delegation of industrial and international representatives visited the U.S. as guests of the Press Club. Castro hired one of the best public relations firms in the U.S. to prepare for the visit by him and his recently initiated government. Castro, in his rumpled fatigues and scruffy beard answered questions jokingly, denied any communist influence in his government, and ate hot dogs and hamburgers. He was refused a meeting with President Eisenhower but did meet with Vice President Nixon. He claimed he wanted good relations with the United States, that Cuba would not confiscate foreigners' properties, and promised to hold free elections. In May, 1959 Cuba expropriated all private land holdings larger than 3,200 acres.

In February 1960, a Cuban-Soviet trade agreement was signed, and soon after Cuba established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and most Communist countries. Several months later, when the three largest American oil refineries in Cuba refused to refine Soviet petroleum, Castro confiscated them. The United States retaliated by cutting the import quota on Cuba's sugar. Castro in turn nationalized other American properties, as well as many Cuban businesses. On Jan. 3, 1961, U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower broke relations with Cuba.

In March 1960, Eisenhower approved a CIA plan, with a budget of \$13 million, to overthrow Castro. Plans included a scheme to spray a television studio in which he was about to appear with an hallucinogenic drug and to contaminate his shoes with thallium which the CIA believed would cause the hair in his beard to fall out. These schemes were rejected and instead they decided to arrange the assassination of Castro. In September 1960, the director of the CIA, initiated talks with the Mafia. Robert Maheu, a veteran of CIA counter-espionage activities, was instructed to offer the Mafia \$150,000 to kill Fidel Castro. The Mafia were known to be angry with Castro for closing down their profitable brothels and casinos in Cuba and, if the assassins were killed or captured, the media would accept that the Mafia were working on their own. The FBI was brought into the plan as part of a deal which involved protection from investigations against the Mafia. Castro later complained that there were twenty CIA-sponsored attempts on his life. The Mafia was convinced that the Cuban Revolution could not be reversed by simply removing its leader, however, they played along with the plot to gain immunity from prosecution for criminal offenses committed in the United States. After Eisenhower retired, John F. Kennedy continued trying to assassinate Castro. This became known as Operation Freedom and was placed under the control of Robert Kennedy.

Fabian Escalante, who was Castro's bodyguard for many years, calculated the exact number of assassination schemes and/or attempts by the CIA to be 638. Some such attempts have included an exploding cigar, a fungal-infected scuba-diving suit, and a mafia-style shooting. One of the



attempts was by his ex-lover Marita Lorenz whom he met in 1959. She subsequently agreed to aid the CIA and attempted to smuggle a jar of cold cream containing poison pills into his room. When Castro realized, he reportedly gave her a gun and told her to kill him but her nerve failed. Castro once said in regards to the numerous attempts on his life, "If surviving assassination attempts were an Olympic event, I would win the gold medal."

On July 9, 1960, Nikita Khrushchev announced that the Soviet Union would protect Cuba militarily if the United States attacked the island and President Eisenhower countered that the U.S. would not permit "the establishment in the Western Hemisphere of a regime dominated by international communism." Two months later, Cuba received its first military aid from the Soviet Union.

On September 26, 1960, Castro addressed the United Nations in New York and expressed fear of U.S. aggression against Cuba. He stayed at the Hotel Theresa in Harlem, where his visitors included Khrushchev, Egyptian President Nasser, Indian Prime Minister Nehru and American Black Muslim leader Malcolm X.

In April 1961 a U.S. organized and led force of anti-Castro exiles (ordered by John F. Kennedy) was defeated by Cuba in the Bay of Pigs. Castro proclaimed this the "first defeat of American imperialism" in the western hemisphere. On April 14, 1961, B-26 planes began bombing Cuba's airfields. After the raids, Cuba was left with only eight planes and seven pilots. Two days later five merchant ships carrying 1,400 Cuban exiles arrived at the Bay of Pigs; two of the ships were sunk, including the ship that was carrying most of the supplies. Two of the planes that were attempting to give air-cover were shot down. Within seventy-two hours all the invading troops had been killed, wounded or had surrendered.

After the bombing raid on April 14th, Castro made a speech to the Cuban people. "The imperialists plan the crime, organize the crime, furnish the criminals with weapons for the crime, pay

the criminals, and then those criminals come here and murder the sons of seven honest workers. Why are they doing this? They can't forgive our being right under their very noses, seeing how we have made a revolution, a socialist revolution. Comrades, workers and peasants, this is a socialist and democratic revolution of the poor, by the poor and for the poor, we are ready to give our lives.” “The revolution has no time for elections. There is no more democratic government in Latin America than the revolutionary government. ... If Mr. Kennedy does not like Socialism, we do not like imperialism. We do not like capitalism.”

The failure of that invasion consolidated Castro's power, and in a nationally broadcast speech on December 2, 1961, Castro declared that he was a Marxist-Leninist and that Cuba was adopting Communism. He merged all groups that had fought against Batista into the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations, changed it later into the United Party of the Socialist Revolution, and transformed it into the Communist Party of Cuba in 1965. In retaliation, on February 7, 1962, the U.S. imposed an embargo against Cuba. The embargo has been in place for 47 years and was broadened during 1962 and 1963 to include a general travel ban for American tourists. The conflict escalated into the October 1962 missile crisis which brought the world to the brink of war.

In 1962, Castro's security and military forces began training leftist guerrillas from throughout Latin America. That lasted until the 1980s and eventually included Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Puerto Rico, Uruguay and Venezuela.

In July, 1962, twenty Soviet ships unloaded 3,000 to 4,000 Soviet bloc technicians and large quantities of weapons at four Cuban ports. In October 1962, Soviet missiles were discovered in Cuba. Khrushchev agreed to withdraw them after a tense face-off with the United States. In return, the United States agreed not to invade Cuba and to prevent others from doing so.

In 1965, revolution hero Ernesto “Che” Guevara led 120 Cubans on a six-month mission to fight alongside rebels in then-Belgian Congo. On October 8, 1967, Che Guevara was captured in Bolivia while leading a Cuban-sponsored guerrilla movement, and was executed.

In the 1970s, Cuba trained Palestinian guerrillas in Algeria and, in 1970, Castro shipped weapons to Chile’s Movement of the Revolutionary Left. In the 1970s and 1980s, Cuba financed and trained Puerto Rican pro-independence radicals who bombed several mainland U.S. civilian targets, killing four and wounding more than 50, and robbed \$7 million from a Wells Fargo truck in Connecticut in 1983.

By April 1970, the number of exiles registered at the Cuban Refugee Center in Miami reached 364,000.

Castro sent 500 tank drivers to fight in Syria in the Yom Kippur War against Israel in October 1973.

U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger started secret talks in 1974 with Cuban officials to explore ways of improving U.S.-Cuban relations.

In October 1975, Castro sent approximately 18,000 soldiers to Angola to help the Soviet-backed MPLA. Washington quickly suspended the Kissinger talks. Cuba’s military involvement in Angola lasted until 1991 and more than 300,000 Cuban soldiers and civilians served, and an estimated 2,000 died, in Angola.

A new constitution that institutionalized the Communist Party control took effect on December 3, 1976. Castro became President of the Council of State, with brother Raúl as Vice President.

In late 1977, about 10,000 Cuban soldiers were sent to defend Ethiopia’s Marxist government against an invasion by neighboring Somalia, and later to fight separatist guerrillas in the northern region of Eritrea.

Castro started a dialogue on November 20, 1978, with Cuban exiles through the Miami-based Committee of 75. They negotiated the freeing of political prisoners and family reunification, allowing exiles to visit Cuba and some Cubans to emigrate to join their families.

A short-lived era of detente and dialogue between Castro and the exile community began in January 1979. For the first time since 1959, exiles were allowed to visit Cuba and in the first month alone, 3,640 did.

In 1979, Cuba trained and armed leftist Sandinista guerrillas who overthrew Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza.

One of Castro's goals was to remove opposition to his rule, which he accomplished not only with executions and imprisonments, but through forced emigrations. In mid-April of 1980, Castro opened the port of Mariel to outsiders, particularly exiled Cubans living in Miami, FL., who sailed into port to claim their relatives. Taking advantage of the situation, Castro loaded boats with prison inmates, long-term psychiatric patients, and other social undesirables. During the government-directed exodus, over 120,000 Cubans left their homeland for sanctuary in the United States, causing a small crisis in Miami.

The U.S. and Cuban governments came to an agreement in June 1984 that allowed the U.S. deportation of about 2,700 Mariel criminals and mental patients. In exchange, Washington liberalized legal immigration, allowing 3,000 political prisoners and a maximum of 20,000 Cuban immigrants a year.

From February to October 1981, Cuban support for guerrilla movements strained relations with Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Jamaica. A Cuban-trained invasion force of Colombia's M-19 guerrillas was quickly defeated by the Colombian army.

In October 1983, U.S. troops invaded Grenada after Prime Minister Maurice Bishop and others were slain in a bloody coup. Several hundred Cubans building an airstrip, many of them

armed, were captured and later sent home. The Cubans' commander was later publicly disgraced by Castro for failing to fight to the death.

The U.S. government's Radio Marti started broadcasting to Cuba on May 20, 1985. Cuba viewed it as a hostile act and suspended the migration pact signed in 1984.

On November 21, 1987, Castro accepted reestablishment of the migration pact with Washington, which permitted 250,000 Cubans to immigrate to the United States by the mid-1990s.

On August 29, 1990, with Moscow halting its subsidies to Cuba (estimated at \$4 billion to \$6 billion a year) Cuba imposed severe rationing that cut fuel and energy consumption by up to 50 percent.

On July 26, 1993, Castro announced that because of the economic crisis, U.S. dollars would be permitted to circulate freely in Cuba, restrictions on exile visits would be lifted, activities that generate foreign-exchange funds would be promoted, and the tourist infrastructure would be expanded.

Alina Fernández Revuelta, Castro's daughter from a liaison with Natalia Revuelta, fled Cuba in disguise on December 20, 1993, and settled in the United States.

On August 5, 1994, hundreds of Havana residents took to the streets in the first massive protest against the government in 35 years. Castro later said anyone can leave, sparking what came to be known as the rafter crisis. Tens of thousands left the island.

In August 1994, President Clinton, in his first major reversal of U.S. policies on Cuban immigrants, ordered that rafters picked up at sea by the Coast Guard be taken to the U.S. Naval Base at Guantánamo Bay. Thousands arrived in Miami, but 30,000 were taken to Guantánamo.

On September 9, 1994, Cuba and the United States signed an accord. Cuba agreed to curb the exodus of rafters, and the United States agreed to grant legal entry to at least 20,000 Cubans a year.

In May, 1995, in another sweeping reversal of policy, President Clinton ordered that the 21,000 Cubans still at Guantánamo Bay be allowed into the United States, but that all refugees rescued at sea be returned to Cuba unless they could prove fear of persecution. Since the 1960s, the United States had welcomed all Cuban migrants as victims of the Cold War struggle against communism. The new policy became known as wet foot/dry foot because any Cuban who managed to set foot on U.S. soil was not turned back.

On November 25, 1999, a Cuban boy, Elián González, was rescued by fisherman off Fort Lauderdale after his mother and several other would-be refugees drowned when their boat capsized. Elián's arrival prompted an international custody battle that bitterly divided Cuban exiles and sparked an anti-exile backlash around the United States.

On April 22, 2000, the Elián impasse was broken at 5:07 a.m. when 131 federal agents wearing SWAT gear and packing submachine guns raided a Little Havana home and took the boy away. After the U.S. Supreme Court refused to intervene in the case, Elián returned to Cuba with his father where he was openly received by Castro.

In June 2001, Castro had a brief fainting spell while giving an outdoor speech before about 60,000 in 80-degree-plus weather, prompting renewed speculation about a possible successor.

In October 2001, Moscow announced the closing of the huge Russian electronic eavesdropping facility at Lourdes, outside Havana, an intelligence site that has been a decades-long source of friction between Moscow and the United States. The loss of rent was estimated at \$200 million a year, another blow to the struggling Cuban economy.

In May 2002, former President Jimmy Carter arrived in Cuba for a five-day stay. In an unprecedented and uncensored address to Cuban television, Carter called for an end to the U.S. embargo and appealed to Castro to allow democratic changes.

In June 2002, in an apparent rebuke to Carter, Castro led a march of thousands along Havana's seaside Malecón, rejecting any political opening. He became the first of eight million Cubans to sign a petition declaring the island's socialist system "untouchable."

In May 2004, President Bush's administration released a report by the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba and imposed tighter restrictions on travel and cash remittances to the island. Castro responded by announcing that U.S. dollars would be taken out of circulation. In October 2004, U.S. dollars were no longer accepted at stores and other businesses, and a 10 percent surcharge was imposed for exchanging dollars for local currency.

In March 2005, advancing a campaign of economic strengthening on the island, Castro announced that the so-called "convertible peso," which had been equal to the U.S. dollar since it was created a decade earlier, would increase in value by 8 percent. A fixed exchange rate for both sales and purchases of the convertible peso was implemented.

In November 2005, the Miami Herald reported that the CIA was convinced that Fidel Castro was suffering from Parkinson's disease. A day later, Castro said he would step down if he became too ill to govern, but insisted that he feels "better than ever."

That same month, Castro mobilized tens of thousands of young people as part of a campaign to counter official corruption and the "new rich." The campaign sent thousands of college-age youths to run gasoline stations, work in refineries and ride in fuel delivery trucks to monitor an industry where up to half of the product was being stolen.

Castro considered alcohol, drugs, gambling, homosexuality and prostitution major evils. He passed laws closing down casinos and night-clubs. Members of the Mafia, who had been heavily involved in running these places, were forced to leave the country.

Castro's loyal and devoted followers see him as a man of integrity, personal courage and selflessness. "Comandante, whatever may be the task, wherever it may be, whenever it may be" is

not an uncommon slogan. Others see him as a political and military guerilla as well as a terrorist who doesn't hesitate to export terrorism if he thinks it will serve his purposes.

His public speaking is the work of a craftsman who understands and uses well the psychology of Cubans. One author has called his ability a "rare oratorical virtuosity." He educates, instructs, explains, criticizes, persuades, and attacks. His oratory attempts to inspire confidence, to stir to action, to move. As he spends time speaking, his message gains clarity; but has a tendency to turn repetitive. Some of his impassioned political speeches have lasted as many as six hours. The spoken word is clearly one of the most important instruments Castro has at his command, as demonstrated when he was released from prison in 1955, and the Batista government allowed him to publish but did not permit him to speak in public.

Analysts see Fidel Castro as a leader who sacrifices anything in order to stay in power. He, on the other hand, claims that neither wealth, lust for glory, fame, nor prestige motivates him. He claims ideas, not power, motivate him.

The Cuban political system set up by Castro is an uneasy balance of formal institutions and charismatic authority. His leadership is based not on constitutional rule but on the permanent reaffirmation of the authority he receives from the mobilization of the population. His contact with the population is his very claim to power. He earned popular esteem in this fashion in 1959, and has continued that mode since. From the mid 1970s to 1986, he allowed a process of institutionalization to gain ground, while his own very personal touch diminished. But as changes in the USSR threatened the stability of his regime, he went back to the charismatic model.

Fidel Castro held a number of formal titles: Maximum Leader of the Revolution, Commander in Chief of the Cuban Armed Forces, President of the Republic, Chairman of the Council of State, Chairman of the Council of Ministers, First Secretary of the Communist Party, and Member of the National Assembly.



His greatest accomplishment is to have remained in power longer than any other Cuban ruler, despite the opposition of the United States.

Castro believed strongly in education. Before the revolution 23.6 per cent of the Cuban population was illiterate. In rural areas over half the population could not read or write and 61 per cent of the children did not go to school. Castro asked young students in the cities to travel to the countryside and teach the people to read and write. Cuba adopted the slogan: "If you don't know, learn. If you know, teach." Eventually free education was made available to all citizens and illiteracy in Cuba became a thing of the past.

Despite the improvements that he brought to Cuba - the country boasted a 94 percent literacy rate and an infant mortality rate of only 11 in 1,000 births in 1994 - Castro has been constantly condemned for human rights abuses. Political prisoners crowded Cuban jails, while homosexuals, intellectuals, political dissidents, and others were constant victims of government-sponsored violence. In 1989, perceiving him a threat, Castro authorized the execution of former friend General Arnaldo Ochoa Sanchez on trumped-up drug smuggling charges.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, Castro's revolution began to lose momentum. Without support from its Soviet allies, who had subsidized much of Cuba's economy, unemployment and inflation both grew. In addition to adopting a quasi-free market economy, encouraging international investment in Cuba, and developing a tourist industry designed to draw foreign currency into his country, Castro began pressing the United States to lift the trade embargo it had imposed upon Cuba since the revolution. The U.S. government remained firm, however, refusing to negotiate with Cuba on trade matters until Castro ended his dictatorial regime. In 1994, the U.S. Congress even tightened the embargo. "This country can only be ruled by the revolution," Castro responded, according to *U.S. News & World Report*; he reaffirmed his determination to retain control by threatening further emigrations of Cubans to Miami. Still, U.S.-Cuban relations had begun

to show signs of warming by the latter part of the 1990s. Castro visited the United States in 1996, and invited Cuban exiles then living in the United States to return to their homeland and start businesses. Resolute in his determination to preserve some form of socialism in his country, Castro prepared to groom a new generation of Cuban leaders while also effectively restoring stability to the Cuban economy and regaining support among its people.

On July 31 2006, Castro, after undergoing intestinal surgery for diverticulitis, transferred his responsibilities to the First Vice-President, his younger brother Raúl Castro. It was the first time Fidel Castro had relinquished power. On June 2, 2007, Castro appeared on Cuban Television with Vietnamese Communist Party Leader Nong Duc Manh looking somewhat healthier. On February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008 he stepped down for good, announcing he would not accept reelection to the posts of President and commander in chief.

On February 24, 2008, the National Assembly elected Raúl Castro to succeed Fidel as the 23<sup>rd</sup> President of Cuba. Fidel Castro remains the First Secretary of the Communist Party.

Among Castro's shortcomings can be noted Cuba's failure to become more economically self-sufficient, the inefficiency of the island's economy, and the remaining reliance on the export of sugar. From a political standpoint shortcomings have been: the association of dissent with counter-revolutionary activities, the repression of alternative political groups, and the failure to create institutions that would replace the charismatic type of political system.

From 1961 Cuba developed a special relationship with the USSR. Fidel Castro played a critical role in linking the two countries and in obtaining unusually beneficial terms of trade from the Soviets, a tie which further contributed to the deterioration of Cuba's relations with the United States.

In foreign affairs Castro moved closer to the Soviet Union, although the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 severely strained Cuban-Soviet relations. Castro had allowed the U.S.S.R. to install within Cuba's borders medium-range nuclear missiles aimed at the United States, ostensibly for the

defense of Cuba. When President Kennedy protested and negotiated the missiles removal directly with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, Castro felt humiliated. Shortly thereafter, pro-Soviet Cuban Communists were eliminated from positions of power. By 1964 the Organization of American States had ended all diplomatic relations with Cuba, effectively isolating that country in South America and increasing its dependence on the U.S.S.R.

The Cuban Missile Crisis was the first and only nuclear confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. The event appeared to frighten both sides and it marked a change in the development of the Cold War.

Castro remained dependent on the support of the Soviet Union. However, after the fall of communism in the Soviet Union in 1989 this economic help came to an end.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and Cuba's one major Latin American ally, Nicaragua, in the early 1990s, the Cuban government found itself in a precarious spot. However, in recent years, Castro has found new regional allies in Latin America. Regional Socialist and nationalist figures such as Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia have been ready allies.

Another source of conflict in Cuban-Soviet relations was Castro's determination to export his revolution. After the 1964 Havana Conference, the Soviet Union was temporarily able to slow down Castro's support for armed struggle in Latin America. But by 1966 Castro founded in Havana the Asia-Africa-Latin America People's Solidarity Organization to promote revolution on three continents. In July 1967 he formed the Latin American Solidarity Organization, specifically designed to foster violence in Latin America. Castro's efforts, however, were mostly unsuccessful, as evidenced by the failure of Che Guevara's guerrilla campaign in Bolivia in 1967. Nevertheless, Castro's efforts in this regard continued through the 1970s.

Until the end of 1964 Castro had attempted to maintain a position of neutrality in the Sino-Soviet dispute. But following the 1964 Havana Conference of pro-Soviet Latin American Communist parties, the Soviet Union pressured Castro into supporting its policies. Cuba's relations with China deteriorated, and early in 1966 Castro denounced the Peking regime. By supporting the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, he demonstrated his dependence on the Soviet Union as well as his determination to move closer to the Soviet camp. On August 23, 1968, Castro made a public gesture to the USSR that caused the Soviet leadership to reaffirm their support for him. Two days after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia to repress the Prague Spring, Castro took to the airwaves and publicly denounced the Czech rebellion. Castro warned the Cuban people about the Czechoslovakian 'counterrevolutionaries', who "were moving Czechoslovakia towards capitalism and into the arms of imperialists". He called the leaders of the rebellion "the agents of West Germany and fascist reactionary rabble." In return for his public backing of the invasion, at a time when many Soviet allies were deeming the invasion an infringement of Czechoslovakia's sovereignty, the Soviets bailed out the Cuban economy with extra loans and an immediate increase in oil exports.

By 1991 Cuba's special relations with the Soviets had ended, as the USSR disappeared, placing Cuba at its most difficult juncture since Fidel Castro seized power. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Cuba was left bankrupt and isolated by the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Eighty-five percent of its markets had disappeared, along with the subsidies and trade agreements that had supported its economy. The situation became desperate. Daily life was a struggle with extended gas and water outages, severe power shortages, and dwindling food supplies available for rationing. By 1994, the island's economy, which had survived over 30 years of sanctions by the US, teetered on the brink of collapse. Cuba was plunged into what was called the "Special Period" during which there were shortages of everything. To survive Cuba legalized the US dollar, turned to tourism, and encouraged the transfer of remittances in US dollars from Cubans living in the US to their relatives

on the island. Even as late as 2004, Cuba was forced to shut down 118 factories, including steel plants, sugar mills and paper processors for the month of October to deal with a crisis caused by fuel shortages. However Castro continued to exercise flexibility in coping with these crises. In 2005 thousands of Cuban doctors were sent to Venezuela in exchange for oil imports.

After the massive damage caused by Hurricane Michelle in 2001, Castro proposed a one-time cash purchase of food from the U.S. after declining a U.S. offer of humanitarian aid. The U.S. authorized the shipment of food in 2001, the first since the embargo was imposed in 1962.

Fidel Castro represented a wave of revolutionary experiments, and tried to integrate a Cuban historical tradition with European revolutionary theory. He has made important contributions to revolutionary strategy and tactics, while elucidating a Third World perspective of world affairs. He, like his guerrilla fighters, has aged. The elan and magic of earlier heroism no longer touches those who have been born since 1959, as it did their parents. It is doubtful that Fidel Castro will relinquish power; if he does not, then it remains an open question whether he succeeded in creating the means by which the nation and the revolution will survive his death.