

Still Fighting the Cold War: Castro vs. Bush

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INTRODUCTION

Shortly after the January 2001 inauguration, President George W. Bush repeated his campaign assertion that he had no plans to change current U.S. policy toward Cuba. Reflecting on this comment, three days later, Cuba's Fidel Castro told a college audience in Havana that he hoped the new President "was not as stupid as he sounded" (Jan.21, 2001-ABC Evening News).

Thus, the verbal war of words continues in today's Cold War relationship between the United States and Cuba. It is a war that began in the early 1950s when the United States became disillusioned with the actions and policies of revolutionary leader Fidel Castro whom the U.S. media had dubbed the George Washington of Cuba. Believing that Castro's overthrow of Dictator Batista signaled a new spirit of democracy for Cuba, the United States was prepared to provide financial and political support for the new regime. Castro visited the U.S. seeking economic concessions, but when it seemed U.S. was demanding too much in the areas of human rights, trade, and reforms, he turned to his brother Raul, a communist, who had secured a better deal with the Soviet Union.

U.S. criticism increased as Fidel Castro began holding televised trials of his political opponents, of former supporters who opposed his communist leaning, and of anyone critical of the new regime. His edicts nationalizing American and Cuban major businesses was costly not only to U.S. investors, but convinced many of Cuba's educated and wealthy class to flee the island. For many, their destinations were cities in the southeast United States; in particular Miami, Florida.

This teaching unit will focus on three major periods: the United States and its role in (1) Castro's Cuban Revolution, (2) the Cold War years highlighting events such the Bay of Pigs, U.S. sanctions, the Cuban Missile Crisis, Communist programs, Castro cleaning out his jails and mental institutions, the Elian crisis etc., and (3) Cuba after Castro. It is designed to provide background information on the history of U.S. relations with Cuba, not only for teachers, but also for students. The regular U.S. History curriculum has so much material to cover and so much pressure from the end-of-the-year course testing that coverage of U.S. relations with Cuba usually end with the Spanish American War and only brief mentions of the Bay of Pigs and Cuban Missile Crisis. In reviewing my AP Government students, none knew that we had actually supported Castro at one time or how relations deteriorated in the late 1950s.

UNIT OBJECTIVES: After completing this unit, students will be able to...

1. Explain early support and the later rift between the U.S. and Castro in the late 1950s and early 1960s.
2. Describe how Castro turned to communism and its effect on the U.S., especially in South Florida.
3. Explain the causes and effects of the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis.
4. Investigate the causes and effects of the great sea migration during the Carter years.
5. Explain how the fall of communism in Eastern Europe affected Cuba.
6. Describe factors that make it difficult for President Bush and Fidel Castro to improve relations.
7. Predict possible changes in Cuba after the death of Castro.

TAAS SKILLS: Students will be able to...

1. Debate pro and con issues.
2. Compare and contrast information.
3. Write grammatically correct essays.

TEKS: Students will be able to...

Describe U.S. foreign relations as part of the Cold War policies.

THE PRE-CUBAN REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD 1950

Visualize Cancun, Cosumel, or Nassau (Bahamas) today, and one will have an idea of the tourist attraction Havana, Cuba was for Americans in the 1950s. It offered sunny beaches, casinos, luxury hotels, all-night clubs (ranging from clubs featuring international performers to infamous porno performers), and shopping to your heart's content. Weekend trips to longer vacations were very popular with U.S. tourists. Wealthy Americans owned homes and businesses in Cuba, particularly in the sugar and fruit industries. Mafia families owned casinos and distribution centers for liquor and drugs. Anything you wanted was available if you had the money in this tropical paradise. The leader Fulgencio Batista was not adverse to accepting bribes from interested investors in the Cuban economy. (1)

Economically, the wealthy prospered, but the low-income people suffered low wages. The people endured poor housing, poor healthcare, and limited educational opportunities. Most had only agricultural skills. It was from this last group that Dr. Fidel Castro Ruiz would gain support for a revolution. (2)

THE ANATOMY OF THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

The Cuban Revolution had its roots in the goals of the Constitution of 1940, a radical, nationalist document that had never been fully implemented. It banned ownership of vast estates, discouraged foreign ownership of Cuban businesses, mandated full employment for all Cubans, gave complete control of the sugar industry (U.S. controlled in 1950s) to

the government, and allowed confiscation of private property for political or social needs. (3)

Introductory Activity

Geographic and Statistical Activities

A successful introductory activity would be to allow the students to use geographic skills and statistical analysis skills to become familiar with Cuba. These activities could include (A) completing of a map of Cuba and (B) completing a handout seeking statistical information on Cuba (*See Sample Handout A*). Depending on the ability of the class, you might want to make these activities an outside assignment or schedule a day at the library. Sources for this activity include the World Geography Series volume on Cuba, the *State of the World Atlas* (which includes every piece of statistical data you could possibly need), current Atlases, and encyclopedias.

The revolution against Dictator Fulgencio Batista was led by various groups angered by his policies, but it was Fidel Castro who was able to temporarily unite these forces into a successful rebellion and revolution. Fidel Castro was the university-educated son of a successful Spanish immigrant landowner. While attending the University of Havana in the late 1940s and earning a law degree, he supported rebel attempts to take control of the government. On July 26, 1953, Fidel organized a group of 150 rebels to attack the Moncada barracks at Santiago, Cuba. The attack failed, and Castro was among those arrested and given a prison term. At his trial, he did not defend his actions, but proceeded to attack the government for failure to provide for the people. He listed the failure of the government to achieve (a) redistribution of land, (b) a system of agricultural and industrial profit sharing, (c) the return of goods illegally confiscated by former members of the government, (d) the nationalization of the electricity and telephone companies, (e) agricultural cooperatives, and (f) reduction of urban rents. These issues would become the blueprint for Castro's July 26th Manifesto which would become the goals of his later successful revolution. (4)

Under pressure and criticism from the United States, the Cuban government released the prisoners on the condition that they leave Cuba. The group moved to a ranch near Mexico City and began training and organizing for an invasion of Cuba. Joining them and contributing his expertise on revolutions was Argentina's Che Guevara. Using United States connections, Castro sought and received financial support from Cuban exiles, U.S. supporters with Cuban investments, and (according to rumors) indirect aid provided by the U.S. government. (5)

In 1965, the Mexican police invaded the training camp, arrested the *barbados* (bearded ones), and upon their release, encouraged the group to leave Mexico as soon as possible. On November 27, 1956, the *Grandma*, a 65-foot yacht overloaded with rebels, sailed for Cuba planning on a successful invasion. The invasion failed due to lack of

surprise and to the lack of support from island supporters. Some of the surviving rebels made it to the Sierra Maestra Mountains where they set up headquarters that become a destination for all anti-Batista guerrillas. These mountainous areas become known as *free zones*, where the rebels established a form of self-government providing medical care, school, the administration of justice, and the collection taxes for the peasants, militants, and urban dwellers who made the mountains their home. Fidel Castro quickly assumed a leadership role and, with the assistance of New York Times writer Herbert Matthews, presented the rebels in a sympathetic manner gaining support especially in the United States. (6)

Castro's major problem was controlling the various anti-Batista forces and getting them to agree on a common strategy. Finally, the march to Havana began with the rebels successfully defeating Batista forces at various battle points. At dawn on January 1, 1959, after most of the government's military forces had disintegrated, President Batista fled Cuba and left a military junta in charge. The junta promptly tried to negotiate agreement with the rebels, but they were not interested. On January 2, Che Guevara and Comandante Cienfuegos entered Havana leading the rebel forces to cheering crowds. On January 8, Fidel Castro triumphantly entered Havana proclaiming a final victory for the July 26th Movement. (7)

Activities for Section on the Revolution

The background on the revolution may be used to prepare a short lecture on *How Castro Gained Power*. Possible activities would be to have the students:

- (A) Prepare a collage of newspaper and magazine articles describing the Cuban Revolution. The best sources are newspapers, especially the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, or various Florida newspapers. Magazines include *LIFE*, *Newsweek*, or *Time*. College and city libraries are the best places to find these materials. (Note: some of the collectible stores carry old magazines.)
- (B) Invite a Cuban immigrant who lived through the revolution to share his or her experiences with the class.

For extra credit, I would assign an activity called "What happened to them." Have interested students select one of the following and report their role in the revolution and what happened to them.

Che Guevara
Camilo Cienfuegos
Raul Castro
Raul Roa

Angel Fernandez
Armand Hart
Henri Matos

UNITED STATES RELATIONS WITH CUBA 1959-1990

Neither prior to nor immediately after the overthrow of Batista, did Castro indicate any pro-Communist ideas. While the U.S. government denied any support for Castro, it did little to assist Batista and did not delay in recognizing the new government. The relationship would soon become strained. (8)

The government began as moderate, but quickly drew criticism as it began with public trials and capital sentences of over 400 Batista supporters or employees. The Eisenhower administration strongly objected, but Castro retorted that the United States should stop complaining and remember the thousands who suffered as a result of Batista's policies. Some of the executions were televised; particularly controversial was the trial of Henry Matos, a respected revolutionary activist and former friend of Castro, who was framed primarily for opposing the pro-Communist policies of Raul Castro and Che Guevara. (9)

Castro began implementing many of the provisions of the July 26th Manifesto by declaring war on drugs (upsetting U.S. Mafia drug traffickers); closing down casinos (and angering U.S. investors); liberalizing access to the hotels, beaches and clubs; lowering rates on urban rent, telephones, medical services, electricity and books; and placing limitations on the importation of luxury items. Also, Castro approached educational reform by building more schools and sending out an army (est. over two million volunteers) of all ages, professions and mostly college students into the countryside to educate the masses. Within a short period of time, the illiteracy rate was lowered from 25 percent to 4 percent. A national healthcare program was implemented which, within two years, covered most of the people. Today over 3,000 doctors are graduated each year with the stipulation that they serve their first two years in the rural areas. The life expectancy has risen from 50 years in 1958 to 76 years in 1993. Infant mortality was lowered from 60 out of 1000 in 1958 to 10 out of 1000 in 1993. Cuba is now in the forefront of the biotechnology field. Morality has become a number one priority within the new Socialism's attempt to abolish drug trafficking and prostitution. Women's employment and status has improved and careers and jobs outside the home are "acceptable." In sports, professional sports were abolished, but sports were encouraged and Cuba stressed international competition. (Castro at one time sought to be drafted by an American Baseball team). (10)

Culture was another area which the revolutionaries emphasized. While they restricted criticism, pluralism and opposition, they did create a Casas de las Americas, a cultural program that set standards for Latin American intellectuals.

Most of the new Caribbean socialism was acceptable to the majority of Cubans until the land and agricultural reforms were announced. Large landowners were shocked to learn they would be limited to 1,000 acres. Land could not be sold (unless it was sold to the government), rented, or subdivided. Excess acreage would be used for collective farms. Urban young people were sent out to do agricultural work usually for six months

in order to learn respect and appreciate manual labor. Even more controversial was the nationalization of major industrial and commercial holdings, much of it owned by counter revolutionaries, Cuban exiles in the U.S.A., and foreign investors (many from the U.S.). Sugar companies, hotels, casinos, *haciendas*, and commercial enterprises were all taken over by the government. Owners or investors received no compensation. This action angered American investors who pressured the Kennedy administration to help them. (11)

With the public executions and the nationalization policies, the United States began to distance itself from Castro who had been hailed a hero at one time. In April of 1959, Fidel Castro visited the United States seeking economic aid. He was snubbed by President Eisenhower who had Vice President Nixon meet with him. The U.S. was demanding a cash settlement for investments lost because of Castro's agricultural and nationalization policies. Castro was not willing to comply since he lacked money, did not believe he needed to compensate persons who had taken advantage of the Cuban economy, and had a willing partner ready to release cash, economic aid, and weapons for a foothold in the Western Hemisphere - the Soviet Union. Unable to negotiate a deal with the United States, he turned to the Soviet Union and began signing economic agreements. (12)

The United States Cuban policy had one major objective - to derail the Cuban government. Hostilities increased when in May 1959 the French ship *Coubre*, carrying Belgium weapons, exploded in Havana harbor and the U.S. was blamed. Numerous tourist aircrafts were flying out of Florida with the intention of blowing up confiscated plantations. The Bay of Pigs invasion was being planned in Guatemala, and Castro's spies were aware of it. On January 3, 1961, President Eisenhower broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba just before leaving office. In early 1961 the U.S. issued an embargo against Cuba, pressuring the European allies to observe the embargo. U.S. imports from Cuba were forbidden, thereby, eliminating 80 percent of island's exports. This embargo caused severe shortages in Cuba.

In preparation for the Cuba Exile Brigade invasion, the CIA ordered a bombing of three airports in Cuba to prevent any aerial attack on the invasion group. On April 17, the doomed invasion at the Bay of Pigs began (*See Handout Three*). Between 1961 and 1963, over 30 CIA-sponsored attempts were made to assassinate Fidel Castro. The actual attempt had to be made by a Cuban, but attempts by guards, mistresses, waiters and counterrevolutionaries ended in failure. U.S. Cuban relations had clearly deteriorated and the Soviet Union was ready to replace the U.S.

In order to avoid another "Cuba," Kennedy established a series of programs to prevent the spread of communism by providing economic, medical, and educational aid to Latin America. These programs, the Alliance for Progress (which were actually admired by Castro), provided loans for economic and educational improvements and the Peace

Corps, which sent young and old people to spend two years in underdeveloped countries educating and working to modernize specific areas. (13)

More humiliating for Castro were the refugees who left Cuba. Between 1959 and 1973, about 600,000 white Cubans (7 percent of the island population) fled to the U.S. even though they were required to leave most valuables behind (in payment for Cuba's expense in educating them) and lose their properties (businesses, houses, land). They settled mostly in southern Florida in order to remain close to the relatives left behind and completely changed the cultural dynamics in South Florida. (14)

While Cuba suffered because of the embargo (which is still U.S. policy as well as travel restrictions to Cuba), it soon got the economy going with support from socialist countries. In 1962, nuclear weapons were placed in missile sites in Cuba. The Soviet Union now controlled an important missile location in the Western Hemisphere. This decision eventually led to the brink of nuclear war, the Cuban Missile Crisis during 13 days of October 1962. (15)

Student Activity: *The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962*

Event

In October 1962, a United States U-2 spy plane flying over Cuba took photos depicting Cuban construction of nuclear missile sites. One of the completed missiles had the capability to strike most U.S. major cities from Boston to as far south as Mexico City. The missiles were being provided by the Soviet Union.

Group Activity

Divide the class into groups of five and tell them that they are presidential advisors and need to develop a plan to recommend to President Kennedy.

U.S. Options

President assembles his major advisors including the members of the National Security Council and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (these are the heads of each military branch).

Objective

Decide on a plan to remove the missiles for Cuba and prevent construction of the missile sites. (Have the students read the options and select one or create an original option to present to the president.)

Option I

Military invasion of Cuba

Advantages: U.S. military forces superior; removal of missiles would be under U.S. supervision and verification.

Disadvantages: world opinion would be on the side of underdog Cuba, action would violate United Nations charter, Soviet Union might intervene on the side of Cuba and action could lead to World War III.

Option II

Peaceful negotiation; demands removal and promise not to invade.

Advantage: avoid war.

Disadvantages: no reasons for Cuba to comply; Soviets might demand that the U.S. remove missile sites in Turkey and Western Europe; Cubans might demand removal of U.S. naval forces from Guantanamo Bay.

Option III

Military blockade of Cuba to stop delivery of missiles to island.

Advantages: Plan applies pressure to Soviets, prevents outright invasion.

Disadvantages: U.S. demand to inspect Soviet ships for missiles could lead to a military confrontation and critics could interpret action as an act of war.

Implementation of activity

Groups could be asked to select one option or an alternative, or students could be asked to rank the options as first through third choice. After each group reports, have the class debate options and vote for one.

Resolution

After a major crisis in the Soviet presidium, a message arrived for President Kennedy in which Premier Nikita Khrushchev agreed to remove the sites and allow United Nations to oversee the removal. Hours later, a second message arrived demanding more requirements for the removal of the sites. Kennedy agreed to acknowledge the first message praising Khrushchev as a leader desiring to prevent war. (Some sources believe that Kennedy privately promised that the U.S. would not invade Cuba.)

Effects of the Crisis

1. A major victory for President Kennedy.
2. Castro is humiliated because throughout the crisis he was ignored and was not consulted on the Soviet agreement.

3. The Soviet Union was embarrassed and within one year Premier Khrushchev was exiled to a country estate and removed from power.
4. United Nations representatives oversaw the removal of missiles and missile sites.
5. Politically active Cuban exiles are unhappy because Castro was not removed from power.

Between 1962 and 1980 relations between the United States and Cuba remained strained. In the early sixties, Central Intelligence Agency agents tried to enlist Cubans to assassinate Fidel Castro (everyone from his mistress, advisers, and an ice cream vendor). The U.S. trade embargo continued, and travel restrictions increased. In November of 1963 the assassination of the president gave rise to rumors that Castro had hired Lee Harvey Oswald for the job in order to retaliate for the CIA attempts on his life. This rumor was never proven. Castro never insisted on the removal of the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo perhaps fearing an invasion from the U.S. In 1980, President Jimmy Carter was faced with a no-win situation when thousands of Cuban refugees descended on South Florida. (16)

Student Activity: *The 1980 Mariel Cuban Invasion*

Background

In 1980, economic and political discontent among Cubans led to an overflow of requests for visas at the Peruvian embassy. Others attempted to leave Cuba on any sea vessel available, which resulted in the drowning of many whom were trying to reach the closest shore, Florida. A public shootout between demonstrators who were trying to gain political asylum from Peru and Cuban security forces led to a suspension of visas from the Peruvian embassy. The Cuban revolutionary defense committees began demonstrating: “*Que as Vayan,*” meaning “Let Them Go.” An angry Castro announced that anyone could leave and that he was sending other undesirables. He began emptying out all prisons and mental asylums and forcing them in boats and ordering them to head for Florida.

Crisis

What is the U.S. government to do? Shoot them? Send them back to sea where they will probably die? Allow them to land? Grant political asylum? Do you allow them to scatter all over the city? Where do you house them? How do you feed them?

President Carter is faced with a major problem and the students need to advise him.

Student Activity:

Divide the class into groups, or answer the following questions as a class.

1. Do you process and investigate the refugees before allowing them to scatter throughout Florida?
2. Where will you house them temporarily?
3. How will you feed them?
4. How do you handle background checks?
5. Will you grant political asylum to some or all? (Political asylum is granted if a person can prove that by returning to his or her former country, he or she will suffer death or imprisonment for political, philosophical, or religious beliefs.)
6. How would you handle the following categories of refugees?
 - A. Political prisoners; persons jailed for criticizing the Cuban government
 - B. Criminals (murderers, thieves, rapists, etc.)
 - C. Families (with or without relatives in Florida)
 - D. Single persons
 - E. Children traveling alone
- 7 Which agencies would you use to handle this crisis? Think of civilian and government agencies.

(Note to teacher: after students have presented recommendations, tell them the actual resolutions.)

All were housed in tents at Miami Stadium (where the Miami Dolphins play) or placed in a refugee camp in Guantanamo Naval Base. The army provided tents, cots, guards, etc. The Red Cross provided medical attention, food, bedding, etc. Florida charities volunteered to place families and children in temporary homes with Cuban exiles and tried to arrange for jobs. Political asylum was granted to many political prisoners. Serious criminals and the mentally insane were placed in refugee camps established throughout the South and continue to remain there through the year 2001. In 1984, Fidel Castro signed an agreement to accept 3,000 criminals and mentally insane refugees with others to follow in the years to come. In return the U.S. would agree to issue 2,000 visas per year to Cuban who had relatives in the United States. The agreement quickly became void when the U.S. failed to issue the 2,000 visas. (17)

In 1994, Cubans once again began sailing to the U.S. trying to escape economic conditions that resulted from the loss of Soviet support. President Bill Clinton, fearing another embarrassing Mariel episode announced that any “boat people” caught would be sent to refugee camps in Panama and Guantanamo and would not be granted political asylum. In 1995, the U.S. agreed to restore the 2,000 visas per year granted to Cubans to remove the 15 to 20 thousand from the Guantanamo camp. Castro agreed to accept the remaining 6,000 refugees. (18)

The years between 1980 and 1999 did little to improve Cuban and U.S. relations. The Reagan and Bush administrations remained very anti communist so the proposals to remove the trade embargo against Cuba were not seriously considered. The fall of communism in the Soviet Union resulted in an economic crisis in Cuba when Soviet

economic aid stopped and Cuba had to go it alone. Castro worked hard to encourage tourism from Europe and South America. He managed to drive wedges into the Western Hemisphere trade embargo by negotiating trade agreements with Canada, Central and South American countries. (19)

U.S. CUBAN CRISIS: THE ELIAN EPISODE, 1999-2000

Background: In the fall of 1999, a young boy set sail with his mother and stepfather on an overcrowded boat headed from Miami. Everyone was drowned except Elian who was rescued and taken to Florida. His father Miguel Gonzales knew nothing about the voyage so he contacted relatives in Miami to take care of Elian until he could be sent back to Cuba. This action marked the beginning of a legal fight which brought world wide attention to the custody battle between Elian's Cuban exiled relatives who sought his guardianship in order to keep him in a free democratic environment and Elian's Cuban father in Cuba. He became a weapon of the Miami Cuban community to attack Castro and Cuban life. On the other side, the Justice Department, headed by Attorney General Janet Reno was ready to return Elian to Cuba, but the Miami relatives began a series of court maneuvers to prevent his deportation and to gain guardianship. This action brought severe criticism and pressure from Castro and the Cuban government which argued for restoration of parental custody to Miguel Gonzales. The custody battle became a media circus, with congressmen, presidential candidates, and talk shows focusing on the debate. Eventually, Mr. Gonzales, his second wife, Elian's teachers and classmates arrived in the U.S. to escort him home, but legal arguments continued and the Cuban relatives and supporters vowed to build a human, armed barricade around the Elian home in order to prevent his deportation. The final court decision was that Elian be returned to his father. In a controversial and surprise FBI raid, a SWAT team invaded the relative's home and forcibly took Elian to be reunited with his father. Amid cries of Gestapo tactics, the crisis ended and a celebration occurred in Cuba when Elian arrived with his family.

Questions for Discussion and Debate:

1. One of the arguments used by Elian's relatives was that in the USA he would have freedom, democracy, a better standard of living, and a better education. They added that it would be cruel to send him back to Cuba. The Cuban government argued that Elian was not living in poverty, that his father owned a car, that he attended a good elementary school, and that his father earned above the average wages because he worked at a popular tourist hotel. Most important, his father had parental rights, which were not subject to debate. Ask the students to determine which side made the most compelling arguments.
2. When the media circus took place, many critics pointed out that everyday immigrant children faced similar problems but they did not get the attention or sympathy from the media that Elian had received. Why do you think Elian's situation was different? Was all the attention justified?

WHAT IS THE FUTURE AFTER CASTRO?

In 2001, Fidel Castro celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his victory in Cuba. He has outlived the presidencies from Eisenhower to Gorge W. Bush. His collapse during a major national speech in July led to speculation that he is in ill health. He had designated his brother Raul Castro to succeed him in power. Raul has generally kept a low profile and there are rumors that his leadership would be challenged by others. Will Cuba remain communist after Castro? Will the U.S. resume diplomatic relations with Cuba after and not before the death of Castro. These questions remain to be answered. (20)

Final Activity:

Using Handout 4 on the *Future of Cuba*, have the students investigate articles about the future of Cuba and discuss possible scenarios.

Unit Handouts: Activity Sheets

Introductory Activity
Geographic and Statistical View of Cuba
Handout One

Cuba is located in which continent? _____
Capital city is: _____
Population: _____
Political system: _____
Economic system: _____
Major agricultural products: _____
Major industrial products: _____
Major trading partners: _____
Religion: _____
Literacy rate: _____
United Nations member? _____
Cars per 1000: _____
Land area: _____
Annual cigarette consumption per adult: _____
Telephone lines per 1000: _____

(Sources: Dan Smith, the *State of the World Atlas* [Special Edition for the 21st Century]
Almost all of the questions are from this book) It is published by Penguin Books Limited
375 Hudson Street, New York, NY, 100014.)

Castro Revolution Changes Cuban Life
Handout Two

Upon entering Havana, Fidel Castro promptly set about to change Cuban society, its economy, and its government. Describe below the changes and effects of his new policies.

- Areas of change: _____
- Changes and Effects: _____
- Education: _____
- Political Executions: _____
- Land Allocation: _____
- Medical Care: _____
- Casinos: _____
- Rents: _____
- Night Spots: _____
- Military Forces: _____
- Culture: _____
- Morality: _____

A Reading Activity
Bay of Pigs Invasion 1961: Cuban-U.S. Relations
Handout Three

Background:

In 1960, the Eisenhower administration gave approval for the training by the CIA of a Cuban Brigade comprised of Cuban exiles and counter revolutionaries. The CIA trained the exiles in Nicaragua and according to reports assured the exiles that U.S. air support would be provided for the invasion in order to neutralize the Cuban air force. They were told that counter revolutionaries on the island would provide added support upon landing in the Bay of Pigs.

The Kennedy Administration:

In 1961, John F. Kennedy became president and was informed of the training going on in Nicaragua but that the invasion was to be conducted by the exiles and would not involve action by the USA. Kennedy worried that overt U.S. action would violate various international pacts and treaties including the UN Charter and OAS (Organization of American States). Fidel Castro in Havana was well aware of the training in Nicaragua and prepared for what he considered the eventual U.S.-Cuban clash. Castro considered certain U.S. actions as proof that an invasion by the exile brigade was imminent. These signs included U.S. ban on American travel to Cuba on March 2nd, the sale of farm products to Cuba, and finally Kennedy's announcement in April of 1961 that there were no plans to invade Cuba. Castro prepared for the invasion.

The Invasion:

On April 16, the president gave the order to invade on April 17, 1961, but refused to allow the use of B-52 air strikes because they would have to flown from Florida and thus compromise the USA. The invasion was a disaster Castro had prepared well for, by arresting suspected CIA informants, counter- revolutionaries and anyone who might assist the invaders. He had scattered his troops all along possible invasion sites, and ordered a large military gun along the Bay of Pigs beach (simply because he saw it as an ideal landing site), and secretly prepared a few T-33 jets to attack the eight invading vessels. The landing was a massacre as exiles were shot on the beach and hundreds were arrested.

Effects:

Humiliation of the United States, which at first denied any involvement, was a victory for Castro who denounced the U.S. for its actions. President Kennedy blamed the CIA and the Pentagon for assuring him that the invasion could be achieved without U.S. support.

The CIA and the exiles blamed Kennedy for the failure by not providing proper air support.

Resolution:

Negotiations for the release of the prisoners took 20 months. At first Castro asked for 53 tractors in return for the prisoners. He allowed the exiles to elect 10 of their own to fly to the USA for the negotiations on condition that they promised to return to Cuba. The ten were allowed to clean up and wore their brigade uniform. They were allowed to bring mail and 660 pounds of gifts for their fellow prisoners. Eleanor Roosevelt agreed to head a tractor committee in order to gain the prisoners' release, and Castro quickly voiced support for her involvement. The Kennedy administration rejected the tractor deal and instead, after 20 months, sent a huge vessel with \$53 million worth of medicine and food.

Review Questions:

1. Who trained the Cuban exiles and where?
2. Why did Kennedy want to avoid obvious involvement?
3. How did Castro suspect that an invasion was imminent?
4. How did the invasion fail?
5. Why was it humiliating for the United States?

Discussion:

1. If you had been President Kennedy, would you have offered the 53 tractors or the medicine and food. Why or why not?
2. President John F. Kennedy: "I trusted them, but they lied to me." Who is he talking about and why?
3. According to historians, based on Kennedy's actions with the Bay of Pigs, Nikita Khrushchev, leader of the Soviet Union, became convinced by Castro's argument to send missiles to Cuba and Kennedy would do nothing. Why was this assumption valid or invalid?

For Further Investigation:

Among the many theories of the Kennedy assassination were: (1) Bitter Cuban exiles and CIA operatives were involved in the assassination or (2) Fidel Castro was behind it as a retaliation for the CIA attempts to overthrow and assassinate him. Investigate one of these theories and see if they could be true. (Source: *Texas Monthly* articles on Kennedy assassination theories.

1. In 1972, some of the Cuban exiles were part of the Watergate break-in. Investigate who these exiles were and how they became involved.

Wishful Thinking: Cuba Without Fidel Castro?
Handout Four

He has outlived the administrations of the United States Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton. He has survived imprisonment under Batista, the Bay of Pigs, the embargo by the USA, the Cuban missiles crisis, CIA assassination attempts, the Mariel episode, the fall of eastern European communism and loss of Soviet political and economic assistance. Since the fall of Soviet communism and the advancing age of President Castro, journalists have been predicting his demise and making predictions about life in Cuba after Castro. He has designated his brother, Raul Castro, a Marxist, but a less flamboyant personality, as his heir. Would Raul, without the presence of Fidel, be able to maintain power? This is a favorite topic for journalists.

Final activity:

Below is a list of books and articles written by journalists relating to the future of Cuba without Castro. Assign these articles to students and have them come up with analyses about the future of Cuba after Castro. Let them discuss what is it about Castro that allows him to remain in power and survive crisis after crisis.

Mallin, Jay. *Covering Castro: The Rise and Fall of Cuba's Communist Dictator*. R.R. Bowker, Reed, Elsevier Inc.: Vienna, 1992.

"Whither Fidel?" *The Congressional Quarterly Researcher* Vol.7, No.46. December 12, 1997.

Barak, Daphne, and others. "Semper Fidel? Awaiting Post-Castro Cuba." *The New Republic*, 11. October 30, 1995.

Mehegan, Sean. "Markets; Is Castro Convertible?" *Restaurant Business* No.7: 36. May 1, 1996.

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