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## The Origins of Socialism in Cuba: A Question Uncontested

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The Origins of Socialism in Cuba:  
A Question Uncontested

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
Of Bard College

By  
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**Abstract:**

This paper seeks to trace the origin of the shift towards Socialism in Cuba in 1961. It does so by providing three hypothetical answers to the question, the Cold War Answer, the Castro Answer, and Cuba's national identity as the Answer. These three narratives are put into conversation with each other, the first two ultimately holding some truth and value, but being ultimately defined as both subject to Cuba's historical national identity as the key identifying factor in the ultimate shift to Socialism in 1961.

**Introduction:**

Cuba's history is fraught with exploitation and conflict. Not too different from many other Latin American countries, Cuba's historical trajectory was largely influenced by colonial power, specifically the power of the Spanish Crown. Cuba's time as a colony lasted just over 400 years, and its identity was formed as a by-product of that period. While it became independent with the turn of the nineteenth century, Cuba fell prey to the economic power of its nextdoor neighbor, the United States. A victim to historical hegemony, an island of farmers and workers, time and time again felt the might of powers too large to stand up to, but not without resistance. The Cuban Revolution has become one of the most iconic cases of armed revolution in modern history. In a post-colonial world in which neoliberal hegemony reigns king, it has become nearly impossible to discuss opposition to the status quo without mention of the Cuban Revolution. The Revolution and its radical character, while not completely unique, remains one of the only cases of a successful armed revolution in Latin America which

proved able to sustain itself. This is of importance not only because Cuba embraced a Socialist identity, but also because it managed to sustain itself while facing direct opposition from the United States, which was also mere three hundred and thirty miles away from the shores of the island itself. The Cuban Revolution did not happen in isolation, and there are undoubtedly a variety of factors which led to the Revolution's success, but how the Revolution won is not the question which remains unanswered. The question is, with Castro's arrival in Havana and Batista stepping down from power in '59, the Cuban revolution had succeeded, but the revolutionaries had yet to publicly embrace any political identity or ideology. While Cuba like many other countries could have very well liberalized or shifted towards a more authoritarian dictatorship, Cuba took a radical turn towards Socialism, which for a small and fairly conservative country, many would have considered unlikely. The evolution of the Cuban state years after is another matter, but the initial embrace of Socialism was a radical shift for a nation like Cuba. So why did Cuba shift towards Socialism rather than liberalizing or imposing a more absolute Authoritarian state, and what significance might it have in understanding revolutionary trajectories and outcomes both in the past and the future?

In order to answer this question, there are three different positions which I might address as explanations for the ideological direction of the Cuban Revolution. The first explanation points to the global historical context of the revolutionary moment as the dominant factor in the push towards Socialism. Post World War II the United States emerged as the new hegemon alongside European powers. Neoliberal thought and globalization were growing at an accelerating rate, and post Fascism, the only major

political strain which had gained enough traction to oppose the West and the U.S.'s hegemony was Socialist thought. The Soviet Union became the de facto enemy of neoliberal empire on the global stage. By the fifties when the Cuban Revolution was put on track, the Cold War was raging. Gaining Cuba as an ally represented a significant advantage for the USSR and an imminent risk for the United States. Not only was Cuba hypothetically persuadable by the Soviets in the eyes of the U.S. government, but it was also in the backyard of the United States making it a strategic risk, even more so than some other larger countries in Latin America. This put Cuba directly between the USSR and the United States, and within the context of being tied down by the United States's hegemony, the clear direction for Cuba was to side with the USSR and their political ideology, which in this case was Socialism. Choosing a Socialist identity granted Cuba a clear language of anti-imperialism and Cuba had plenty of interest in the USSR's economic capabilities.

The second explanation credits the political shift towards Socialism in Cuba to Fidel Castro himself, as the key factor responsible for leading the shift from a populist revolution towards Socialism. Understanding Castro's role in the Cuban Revolution, as well as the creation of a Socialist state, post victory, is essential in understanding modern Cuba. Castro was the key unifying figure in organizing Cuba against Batista's regime. Not only did he lead the Revolution, but he also played a significant role in implementing political ideology into it. This explanation identifies the Revolution as a reflection of the personal politics of Castro himself. In this case the shift towards Socialism was only dependent on Castro and his comrades personal tendencies

towards Socialism, instead of any other form of political organization. Castro was a highly educated and elite member of Cuban society, and would eventually be influenced by other leftist figures, and as a result would then shift his revolutionary path towards Socialism rather than Liberalism, Authoritarianism, or any other political ideology. Socialism is reduced to a personal political choice of Castro as the leading factor in the post-revolutionary identity of Cuba, instead of a result of the global political moment of the Revolution. In this case Socialism functions as an ideology second to Castro's leadership.

The third potential explanation which stands out as the most convincing for Cuba's shift towards Socialism, post-revolution, nods to Cuba's internal historical trajectory as a nation and people, who's history had a fundamental tendency towards seeking liberation and independence. Socialism in this case, rather than simply just the political language of an allied power to Cuba, or the sentiment of one man, served as the only viable organization of politics which would allow for Cuba to liberate itself from the United States's power and the exploitative structures of Capitalism itself. Unlike many other Latin American countries, Cuba's modern history truly begins with Colonialism. As a result of the genocide of any indigenous presence that predated the Spanish's colonization of Cuba, the modern Cuban population's history began as slaves and those who came to the island during the colonial period. The Cuban identity has formed through a variety of key moments of self-liberation from different structural powers, starting with the abolition of slavery, and then moving on to liberation of Cuba from the Spanish Colonial network, and finally from Batista and the United States.

Thinkers such as José Martí wrote extensively about the creation of a unified Cuban people, who were united under a common identity which found solidarity in its struggle for freedom. This theory frames Cuba's shift towards Socialism as fundamentally connected to Cuba's political identity and history as a country, rather than simply dependent on the global politics of that specific moment, or the choices of Castro alone. In this case, the Revolution can be observed within the history of Cuba simply as the next step in the nation's push towards independence.

These three hypotheses undoubtedly all hold some truth in understanding the historical trajectory of Revolutionary Cuba. There isn't a case in which one answer is identified as the sole truth. However, for these theories to exist and function co-dependently, one of them needs to lead with the others under its wing. The intention of this paper is to identify which of the three is the likely factor in leading Cuba's history up until 1961.



## Chapter I: The Cold War Answer

In order to understand the impact of the geopolitical moment of the Cold War on the development of Cuba as a Socialist state, you have to begin by charting the relationship between the United States and Cuba. While relations existed in some capacity pre-colonial liberation, the brunt of relations between Cuba and the United States developed in relation to Cuba's independence status. With Cuba's liberation from the Spanish Colonial System at the turn of the 19th century, U.S. influence over the island of Cuba became a viable option for the first time in modern history. Considering the U.S.'s assistance in the liberation of Cuba itself, systematic infrastructure of dominance followed in tandem. Only three years after independence was established, Cuba accepted the Platt Amendment which served both to grant the U.S. land on the island to install a military presence, as well as make the U.S. the effective legal guardian and owner of the island as of 1901.<sup>1</sup> Cuba was barred from establishing any formal treaties with other governments, or forming any sort of military alliance with any nation other than the United States.<sup>2</sup> The Platt Amendment set the standard for roughly the next thirty years. Despite not holding absolute authority over the island, the United States maintained military oversight and would develop a strong influence over the island's various economic industries such as sugar cane and tobacco<sup>3</sup>, making the United States a sort of quasi-colonial power over post colonial Cuba. It wasn't until 1933 when Machado, the leader of Cuba at the time, was overthrown by a student

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<sup>1</sup> LeoGrande, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

movement.<sup>4</sup> Soon after, Fulgencio Batista, the leader of the Cuban military, led a coup against the newly established revolutionary government with the support of the United States.<sup>5</sup> Batista held power semi-consistently over the next twenty or so years. Batista did at one point succeed his power through a democratic election, only to seize power again eight years later through another coup in 1952.<sup>6</sup> It was soon after this point that Fidel Castro himself and other early revolutionaries sought to overthrow Batista's cruel and corrupt government. On July 26th, 1953, the revolutionaries led a charge on the Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba.<sup>7</sup> While this initial attempt at revolution failed, it laid the seeds to overthrow Batista only a few years later, and establishment of a revolutionary government of the likes which Cuba had never experienced.

The era between Spanish Colonial liberation and the Cuban Revolution was defined by the United States' strong anti-Soviet policy. Beginning with the Platt Amendment and following all the way through the U.S. government's lack of concern with the cruel and corrupt practices of the Batista regime, it becomes apparent how the Cold War pushed Cuba towards a Revolution and the embrace of Socialism as a method of self-liberation. While the broader narrative could be perceived as the U.S. acting as a sort of sentinel, under Batista, it was nearly impossible to deny the U.S. government's active acceptance of Batista's regime's practices in America's backyard, especially considering the fact that the United States continued to openly praise him.<sup>8</sup> In a chapter of William LeoGrande's book "Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of

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<sup>4</sup> Leogrande, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

Negotiations between Washington and Havana”, LeoGrande refers to Batista himself actually being bothered by just how publicly the United States’ supported his actions<sup>9</sup> “Ambassador Arthur Gardner, a political appointee, was such an ostentatious booster that even Batista was embarrassed by the Slavishness of his praise. ‘I’m glad Ambassador Gardner approves of my government,’ Batista quipped, ‘But I wish he wouldn’t talk about it so much.’”<sup>10</sup> This anecdote illustrates the apparent U.S. support for Batista and the public fashion in which it manifested. Upon the dawn of the end for Batista’s regime, the United States Government realized that Batista would fail, so rather than supporting the Revolutionaries, the U.S. Government actually tried to facilitate a shift of power over to other military officials who were against Castro’s movement, but would ultimately fail as well.<sup>11</sup> From the Platt Amendment to U.S. support of Batista, Cuba’s perception of the United States and their concern for the wellbeing and freedom of the Cuban people was not a favorable one. To put it simply, up until the Revolution itself, Cuba and the USA had far from productive relations, and for better or worse, they wouldn’t get a whole lot better after.

After the success of the Revolution in 1959, Castro’s Revolutionary government underwent a brief period of attempted relations with the United states government. In April of 1959, Castro himself was invited to the United States council on Foreign Relations.<sup>12</sup> Castro ended up walking out of the council on the grounds that the audience was preoccupied with concerns over Communism, rather than addressing the

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<sup>9</sup> LeoGrande, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> Plummer, p. 137.

reforms which the early revolutionary government sought to put into effect.<sup>13</sup> Brenda Gayle Plummer cites that initial intelligence had apparently pointed to a lack of “clout” among communists within the revolutionary government; more simply, they intended to push forward with campaigns of agrarian reform and social programs.<sup>14</sup> This early information provides insight showing that in the early days of the Revolution, political identity and theoretical frameworks seemed to stand second to the actual concrete reforms that the Revolutionaries sought. And perhaps it was that the United States narrative of fear and retroactive actions against Communist influence perhaps were what actually pushed Cuba towards Socialism and a relationship with the Soviets. Up until April of 1959, Cuba had still actually continued Batista’s policy of nonrecognition of the Soviet Union<sup>15</sup>, but with the blatant rejection of productive relations between the United States and the Revolutionary Government, Cuba shifted it’s avenues away from the U.S. and towards Soviet aid to fund its radical reforms.

Up until this point, it was expected that Cuba would continue to receive aid from the U.S., as it had done in the past, but when Castro left in April there had still been no requests for aid.<sup>16</sup> In February of 1960, Cuba broke it’s previous policy of Soviet non-recognition. Ché Guevara went to Eastern Europe to ultimately line up \$100 million in credit for Cuba to begin it’s intended process of industrialization and development.<sup>17</sup> Cuba’s industry had previously relied heavily on the sale of sugar to the United States in the past. Come February of 1960, the Soviet Union offered to pick up that exact market

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<sup>13</sup> Plummer, p. 137.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Prevost, p. 523.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

in the event that the United States ceased to purchase its portion of the market.<sup>18</sup>

Additionally the Soviets began to supply Cuba with oil in April of 1960 as an exchange for a supply of Cuban exports, however this oil led to another point of conflict between Cuba and the United States, who exactly would refine said oil.<sup>19</sup> The oil refineries in Cuba up to that point had been run by American owned companies, which under orders from the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, would not refine the Soviet oil. Cuba then nationalized the refineries, and in turn, Washington cut Cuba's sugar quota pushing Cuba even closer to the Soviet Union.<sup>20</sup> The first half of 1960 was a period in which Cuba was teetering in a spot between the United States and the Soviet Union as the two economic powers capable of supporting their economic and developmental ambitions. This economic support was essential to funding the radical social policy and infrastructure developments which the new government sought to create, and ultimately Cuba leaned towards the side of the Soviet Union as a result of the cold shoulder from the United States. The question of whether this was a choice made consciously by the Cuban government, or whether the United States left Cuba with no other option remains unclear. However the fact stands that U.S. policy towards Cuba meant that Soviet allyship was the only option to fund the reform which was essential to their movement.

The seizure of oil refineries in Cuba was one of the first of many acts of liberation from the United States which Cuba carried out post revolution. In August of 1960 the Cuban government took control of U.S. owned sugar plantations, followed not long after

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<sup>18</sup> Prevost, p. 523.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

in September of 1960, foreign banks were also taken over by the Cuban government.<sup>21</sup> Diplomatic relations were cut between the two nations, and the Eisenhower administration placed an embargo on exports to the island in January of 1961.<sup>22</sup> These acts of seizure and nationalization defined the future political identity of Cuba, as well as the Castro Regime's relationship with the United States and the Soviet Union in the decades to follow. Immediately following the Revolution, it became clear that Cuba was going to do whatever it needed to do to advance the developmental goals of the Revolution. Infrastructure needed to be created, and industry needed foreign economic backing to achieve the rates of development that the revolutionary government desired. However the exact source of this economic support was seemingly unclear in the early days. To imply that Cuba accepted support from the USSR on the grounds of political leanings stands in the face of the attempted acts of outreach to the United States for support. It's hard to imagine that Castro himself would have gone on a diplomatic trip to the United States under the pretense that they already planned to break from the United States economic frameworks in favor of those of the Soviet Union. Plummer's evidence of a lack of "clout" among the more Communist portion of the Revolution<sup>23</sup> gives us little reason to believe that the early days of the Revolutionary government were cemented in their disposition towards Communist power and Socialist ideology. Instead, given the actions up through 1960, the shift towards Soviet allyship can be observed more as a means to development, rather than a strictly ideological course of action. While it wouldn't be unfounded to claim that certain members of Revolution, such as Guevara

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<sup>21</sup> Prevost, p. 524.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Plummer, p. 137.

himself, had personal leanings towards more radical leftist politics, the diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba must be observed through an economic lense, rather than an ideological one, at least up through 1960.

When asking how and why Cuba ended up on a path towards Socialism, relations between the United States and Cuba give us reason to believe that on some level this shift was circumstantial. While there was a lack of evidence indicating that the government was inclined towards Socialist politics, it's obvious that the new government had every intention of doing whatever was necessary in order to deliver the levels of development and social reform which were core to their Revolution. Cuba found itself at a juncture in which it had two paths towards development, support from the United States, or support from the USSR. This choice was largely a pragmatic one, not an ideological one. The United States consistently held a systematic, as well as personal prejudice against Cuba, and as a result, pushed Cuba away towards Soviet allyship. United States foreign policy against Cuba acted in effect as a self fulfilling prophecy. Preconceived narratives regarding the propensity of Latin American countries to turn radically left was a documented fear in U.S. policy. The Eisenhower Administration's actions functioned on the basis that Cuba post revolution was destined to become an ally of the Soviets, and as a result was perceived and treated as an economic and military threat to the United State's hegemony in the Western Hemisphere. This notion required the continual isolation and attempted destabilization of the Revolutionary government. This aggressive economic policy itself forced the hand of Cuba towards it's only other viable ally at this point, the Soviet Union. Up until 1960 the intervention of the

United States was largely economic, that was until the attempted invasion of Playa Girón, also known as the Bay of Pigs. The Bay of Pigs can and should be observed as the essential ideological tipping point of the Cuban Government towards Socialism.

In March of 1960, President Eisenhower made the decision to create a military force largely composed of exiles of the Cuban Revolution who would attempt to overthrow the newly established Revolutionary Government.<sup>24</sup> The decision to create this force, as well as the decision to go forward with the invasion itself, were the product of a paranoid Cold War view. While Eisenhower's administration had hatched the plan in partnership with the CIA, President Kennedy came into the White House in 1961, and was in effect, forced to adopt it.<sup>25</sup> Louis Vandenbrouck argues that as Kennedy came into office and was given the option of either accepting Eisenhower and the CIA's plan, or abort it all together:

Kennedy's first policy decision on Cuba was not to choose a course of action among the various options available. Instead, it was to decide for or against an invasion project to which considerable resources had already been committed, and that a powerful agency vigorously promoted. The CIA's advocacy warrants looking at the operation from the perspective of bureaucratic politics.<sup>26</sup>

Vandenbroucke's point illustrates the internal friction created as a result of shifting power in the White House, and the tension caused by the Bureaucratic nature of the United States Government. Kennedy and the CIA continued forward with the Bay of

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<sup>24</sup> Prevost, p. 524.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Vandenbroucke, p. 473.



Pigs Invasion as a result of the Cold War fear based politics helmed by Eisenhower in the years before. Whether or not Kennedy considered the operation the ideal course of action is besides the fact, the reality was that the United States continued on course to attempt to intervene, with force, in an attempt to overthrow the Revolutionary Government in Cuba. Additionally, the actions of the CIA in years past lent the agency a certain amount of confidence in their capability to topple governments like Cuba's.<sup>27</sup> Vandembrouck references the CIA's specific success years earlier in toppling a leftist regime in Guatemala.<sup>28</sup> This confidence allowed the CIA, as Vandembrouck puts it, to have a "quasi-monopoly of information on the invasion by stressing the need for secrecy, thereby keeping all but a handful of White House advisors and top-level bureaucrats ignorant of the plan."<sup>29</sup> The moment of the Cold War, as well as the mild disarray created by a change in power in the White House, allowed the CIA to ensure that the United States would escalate their relationship with the new Cuban government to the point of outright intervention. This was a choice which in retrospect, was not only bad for the United States, considering that the Bay of Pigs Invasion would fail miserably, but it also served as the final push Cuba needed to commit to their relationship with Soviets, and perhaps Socialism itself. While the economic policies of 1959 and 1960 had made it semi clear that the United States Government didn't intend to support Cuba, the Bay of Pigs would redefine their relationship as a clear enemy of the Revolutionary Government and their movement altogether.

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<sup>27</sup> Vandembroucke, p. 473.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 474.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 475.

The details of the invasion itself make the reason for the shift even more obvious. After a short period of training, a CIA backed and trained group of Cuban exiles attempted to invade the island of Cuba on April 17th of 1961.<sup>30</sup> The operation was an absolute failure. The exiles were stopped almost immediately by local militias and any local supporters of the insurrection were picked out by government-organized committees and arrested.<sup>31</sup> This was an essential victory in the creation of a new anti-imperialist identity among the Cuban forces, Gary Prevost describes it as a “consolidation of Castro’s position by creating a solid identification between anti-imperialism of Cuban tradition and the victory of the forces under Castro.”<sup>32</sup> Prevost points to just how essential a moment this was, not only for relations between Cuba and the United States, but for Cuba’s developing social and political identity. The Invasion functioned as a unifying moment for the new Cuba to embrace both through its victory over those who it ousted in the revolution, but also from the imperial power that the U.S. had continued to try and impose. While seizing property and industry foreign companies was essential in putting Cuba on a trajectory towards independence from the U.S., a military victory against a U.S. intervention, which was composed of exiles of the Revolution connected all the dots. The new regime had now succeeded at taking control of industry, and at thwarting both Cuban opposition as well as the looming power of the United States. The Castro regime served as a David against the United States’ Goliath, and it was essential to forming a new unified national identity of anti-imperialism and soon after, Socialism.

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<sup>30</sup> Prevost, p. 524.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 524.

In tracing Cuba's trajectory towards Socialism in 1961, this history of triangular relations which put Cuba into a fragile balance between the United States and the Soviet Union, has to be included as a part of the answer. The Cold War pushed the Eisenhower administration, the CIA, and eventually the Kennedy administration into a state of hyper defense. The result was that the United States did whatever it could to oppose the Castro regime and the progress of Revolutionary Cuba, causing Cuba itself to look towards the Soviet Union. United States policy from the Platt Amendment, to the Bay of Pigs, created the problem which the U.S. proactively sought to prevent, Cuba's shift to the radical left. While the origins of the Cuban Revolution are seemingly adjacent to Socialist ideology, the early years lacked a clear set trajectory towards Socialist politics themselves. Cuba's struggle was more aligned along lines of industrial and productive capabilities. The Revolution sought first and foremost, to achieve its developmental goals. The priority was the creation of industry which would directly benefit Cuba rather than external actors like American corporations, as well as social programs which would benefit the workers and citizens of the island as the driving force behind political structures. The new Cuban government needed to seek external allies less so for political means, but more so for economic exchange in order to fund and make their productive goals a reality. U.S. policy forced the hand of the Cuban government to seek partnership with the Soviet Union. Additionally, hostile actions on the part of the United States, painted the United States and neoliberal power abroad as the new face of oppressive power which the Cuban people would put themselves opposite to. Socialism happened to be the ideology which best aligned with their set of

developmental goals for economic liberation, as well as creating a strong new political identity among a population which, up until this point, did not have a long history of explicitly political practice or activism. Unlike other countries which had flirted with more liberal structures of governance which might lend itself to a disposition towards other forms of governance, modern Cuba had only ever lived under Colonial structures, as well as the neocolonial structures of the United States and their industrial control of the island. This made the embrace of Socialism an easy choice considering that it prioritized the developmental goals which the Revolution called for, in addition to positioning Cuba in opposition to neoliberal power which the United States successfully framed itself as the embodiment of. If U.S. policy had taken a more productive and cooperative route with Cuba, one could speculate that perhaps Cuba might have embraced a more centrist model of development of infrastructure and social programs. The Cold War created a scenario in which a country like Cuba was essentially left with two choices, embrace Neoliberalism to attain U.S. funding, or embrace Socialist politics to gain the economic aid of the Soviet Union. Aggressive policy from the United States made Soviet support and Socialism the only choice for the Revolution. It's hard to imagine any scenario in which Cuba didn't lean towards Soviet support and Socialism given their history with the United States.

## Chapter II: The Castro Answer

When investigating the origin of the Cuban Revolution Fidel Castro himself is almost always considered an essential in defining the Revolution itself. Some historical narratives go as far as to personify the Revolution as Castro himself, implying that Castro literally was the Revolution, and that the two can not be separated. While part of this is surely due to the great lengths which American political culture has gone since 1959 to vilify Castro and make the Cuban Revolution the face of “evil Communist influence” in Latin America, the notion that Castro had deep ties to the origins and success of the movement is not incorrect. The Cuban Revolution was a grassroots revolution fought by the working and peasant classes of the island, however there was a clear and tight woven leadership structure which drove it, which was led by Castro himself. While American culture tends towards viewing Castro as a monstrous dictator, in Cuba he was, and to some extent still is perceived as an icon of liberation and Cuban identity at large. The image of Castro is a clear and timeless symbol of the Revolution and its ideology. Castro was the core of the Revolution in its most formative years, from the initial failure at the Moncada in 1952, to the guerilla invasion of Havana in 1959, he was a constant in both Cuban and international perception of the movement. Not to mention his leadership of the island beginning in 1959, which lasted just over four decades, only to then be passed off to his brother Raúl. While the 26th of July Movement (the name for the Revolutionary movement) was composed of a variety of figures and individuals, some of whom are remembered more than others, Castro was the face and leader of the Revolution. It's based on this clear consolidation of power in

Castro as both a leader and an icon, that one might hypothesize that Castro himself was the key indicator in shifting the Revolution's ideology towards Socialism, rather than any other political ideology or system.

In order to understand the effects which Fidel Castro had on the Cuban Revolution, we have to understand both his personal origins and the development of his ideological disposition over time. To start from the beginning, Fidel Castro was born on August 26th, 1926.<sup>33</sup> His father was a man named Angel Castro Argiz, who immigrated from Galicia Spain to Cuba at a young age to live with his uncle.<sup>34</sup> Fidel's mother was a woman named Lina Ruz Gonzalez.<sup>35</sup> Lina was from the Cuban province of Pinar del Rio, and she had originally actually worked as a cook in the Castro household.<sup>36</sup> While Fidel's parentage isn't directly of concern in understanding his later life, one can begin to chart out a path which led Castro to become the man who would lead the Revolution, as well as perhaps a man capable of directing the Cuban people towards Socialism. While Fidel's father was no man of great wealth, his Spanish origins granted him privileges, which would eventually lead to his son receiving an education, essential to his formation as a political thinker. Additionally we can hypothesize that Fidel's identity as the son of a Spanish immigrant as well as a working Cuban woman, lent him to both a persona which might be able to appeal both to some elites who sought national liberation, as well as the Cuban working class. Fidel's path of education was a seemingly turbulent one. His early years in grade school were spent in Santiago de

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<sup>33</sup> Lecuona, p. 47.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

Cuba at the Colegio La Salle of the Marist Brothers, where he struggled and reportedly cheated periodically.<sup>37</sup> At 15 he made his way back to Havana to enroll in the Colegio de Belen, a school attended by conservative elites.<sup>38</sup> Fidel's time at the Colegio de Belen was seemingly more productive than his education in the past. However rather than seeking an academically rigorous education, Fidel excelled at sports.<sup>39</sup> Up until this point Fidel seemed to lack a foundation for his ideological beliefs. In fact, rather than having early experiences with leftist politics, Lecuona argues that Fidel was likely "exposed to the fascist, ultrarightist philosophies of the Jesuits of Cuba, who sympathized with Spain's Franco."<sup>40</sup> Lecuona's point helps to create a timeline in which up till this point, Castro had likely formed very little of a personal ideological perspective, with Socialism being the least likely direction for him, at least up to this point.

The next chapter of Castro's life seems to be the first indication of any personal political development. Castro studied law at the University of Havana beginning in 1945.<sup>41</sup> Arriving at the end of the second world war, global politics shifted from a conflict between Democracy and Facism and more towards the impending conflict of the Cold War, the fight between Liberal politics and those of a more radical leftist nature.<sup>42</sup> This was the first time when Castro was clearly exposed to Communist politics. Two of Castro's first friends at the University were supposedly Communists.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, Fidel was a member of two different political organizations at the University, the Movimiento

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<sup>37</sup> Lecuona, p. 51.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>41</sup> Walker, p. 43.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

Socialista Revolucionario, and the Union Insurreccional Revolucionaria.<sup>44</sup> Fidel's political stance was clearly beginning to take shape, and based on his associations at the University, he seemed to be tending towards the far left. His public political activity only continued to grow from this point onwards. In 1947 Fidel began to publicly criticize the president at the time, as well as the future leader of Cuba, Batista, on the grounds of corruption.<sup>45</sup> Politics at large in Cuba during this moment would only continue to take a turn for the worse. In 1948 Carlos Prío was elected president of Cuba and gave unfettered access to Cuba to the American Mafia, creating the crime ridden climate that often infamously characterizes 1950's Cuba.<sup>46</sup> Castro continued a path towards leadership and anti-imperial rebellion in various forms during the 1950's. His time at the University of Havana can, and should be observed as a key shift in his political trajectory. Steven Walker paints a paradoxical picture of Fidel in these years which simultaneously shows him building a political identity, yet also distancing himself from organized politics at the University.<sup>47</sup> Walker states:

Fidel was now by no means an avowed Marxist, he gradually distanced himself from the UIR and had little contact with his communist friends. He later tells of the influence of Marxist-Leninist ideas and reading a part of *Das Kapital*, but implies that these were not forming part of any coherent political ideology. What seems to have been of much more significance was to identify with those fellow students and historical Cuban heroes

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<sup>44</sup> Walker, p. 43.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.



such as José Martí, and satiate his appetite for revolution and insurrection.

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Walker's analysis holds on the grounds that Fidel's experience with revolutionary thought and action, but the notion that his distancing from the UIR at the time is a direct indicator of his lack of ideological disposition towards leftist politics is less clear. The picture painted by his life overall, and the picture which the later Fidel has attempted to create retroactively seem to create a complicated and conflicting narrative. Fidel's early life allows us to understand him as a man deeply concerned with control and his own individuality. Fidel had little concern with committing to creating a fleshed out theory of political organization, he was always far more concerned with physical insurrection and rebellion. While Fidel may have distanced himself from the UIR for a variety of reasons, it's clear that he was more concerned with action and his own ability to lead than the theory behind his actions. Despite Fidel referencing the influence of leftist theory like that of Marx on his politics, Fidel claims that these texts were not key in his ideological disposition<sup>48</sup>. This sentiment makes Cuba's path towards Socialism a rather confusing one if Castro is the answer. Castro's political origins and associations have clear and traceable roots in Communism, but he claimed that these roots were not as important as they would logically seem, so why Socialism then?

One simple answer to this question is that Fidel's retrospective thoughts were simply a lie or misdirection. It's not hard to imagine that a leader like Castro would distance himself from the political tradition of Russia and European thought. There are a

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<sup>48</sup> Walker, p. 43.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

slew of reasons he could have done this. It's conceivable that he sought to create a political identity and legacy for the Cuban Revolution that didn't rely on the history of Russia and European political traditions. To tie his movement to that of Russia might in the eyes of some, make their accomplishments an extension of what Lenin and the USSR accomplished, instead of an entirely original movement. Additionally, there was clear frustration with the Soviets after the Russian Missile Crisis which might have pushed Castro towards distancing himself and the Revolution from Russia, as an act of political retribution. The potential reasons as to why Fidel made efforts to distance the Cuban Revolution from the Russian tradition of Communist revolution are abundant, but the point stands that, in the end, Castro chose to associate the Revolution with Socialism. While there is a notable difference between a proclamation of Socialism and Communism, Socialist politics still have their clear roots in the same tradition of radical politics which Russia, at least in the early days of the USSR, was a major part of. However in a more practical sense, to commit one's nation to socialism as a theoretical method for organization, can be separated from the historical origins of Socialism as a political ideology. Socialism as a framework for organization of production and distribution of capital, can and should be identified as a concept in this case, rather than an explicit statement of Soviet allship. It is only if we understand Castro's proclamation of Socialism strictly as a theory of organization, and that alone, that Castro's choice seems to make sense.

While we can attempt to hypothesize the intentions of Castro both in his early days as well as his retrospective reflections, we can additionally look to the many public

speeches to understand why he chose Socialism in the end. The first speech of major interest was Castro's self-defense statement at his own court trial, following the failure at the Moncada Barracks in 1953. The speech was given on the 16th of October, 1953, before the Emergency Session of the Court of Santiago de Cuba.<sup>50</sup> This speech marked the beginning of Castro's leadership in the 26th of July movement and eventually the Revolution as a whole. While Castro was serving in a legal capacity as he had been trained at the University of Havana, we can additionally point to traces of his growth as a leader and a political thinker. At one point in the speech Castro describes the personal makeup of the people who fought at Moncada in order to clarify the principle and political intentions of their movement:

The revolutionaries must proclaim their ideas courageously, define their principles and express their intentions so that no one is deceived, neither friend nor foe.

The people we counted on in our struggle were these:

Seven hundred thousand Cubans without work, who desire to earn their daily bread honestly without having to emigrate in search of livelihood.

Five Hundred thousand farm laborers inhabiting miserable shacks, who work four months of the year and starve for the rest of the year, sharing their misery with their children who have not an

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<sup>50</sup> Castro, *History Will Absolve Me*, p. 11.

inch of land to cultivate, and whose existence inspires compassion in any heart not made of stone.

Four hundred thousand industrial laborers and stevedores whose retirement funds have been embezzled, whose benefits have are being taken away, whose homes are wretched quarters, whose salaries pass from the hands of the boss to those of the usurer, whose future is a pay reduction and dismissal, whose life is eternal work and whose only rest is in the tomb.<sup>51</sup>

Castro's description serves multiple functions here. On a surface level, he is creating what many might view as a populist rhetoric regarding the people of Cuba and the tyranny of the corrupt ruling class. While this is true, Castro is also outlining a set of values which lends itself easily to Socialist ideology. One on hand his description of starvation and corporate corruption doesn't necessarily explicitly call for Socialism rather than some other form of governance. However, on the other, the last paragraph has a clear undertone of a Marxist critique of industrial Capitalism and the toll it takes on the working class. If we are to assume that critiques of the stripping of benefits and the theft of salary imply that Castro sees these as the rights of man, then the question shifts away from the content of the demands, and moves towards where these concepts originated from for Castro himself. These examples which he provides can be understood as either traces of an unclaimed political theory embedded in Castro's rhetoric, or a set of moral beliefs, which in time will lead to an alignment of Castro's

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<sup>51</sup> Castro, *History Will Absolve Me*, p. 34.

practical desires for his country and the theoretical necessities called for under Socialism. This chicken or the egg scenario is difficult to answer, but we can reach some manner of conclusion based on Castro's life before this speech. While Castro was clearly exposed to leftist theory in his university years, his activity revolved more around organizing and leadership, rather than a more academic and theoretically backed approach to his political action. Based on this, I would argue that while Castro had some exposure to Socialist politics up until this moment, his arguments against the Cuban government and exploitation were more likely rooted in a more moralistic tribal perspective rather than an academic and theoretical one.

Beyond this the speech at his trial, the development of Castro's perspective on the politics of Cuba continued to follow a path which was clearly rooted in leftist politics, but sought to define itself as something different. Castro focused on the goals and moralistic elements of their movement, instead of a theoretically grounded ideology. This became even more clear in May 1959 when Castro gave a speech in Havana on why he specifically argued that his movement was not Communist:

Then why do we say that our Revolution is not Communist? Why, when we prove that our ideals are different from Communist doctrine, that the Revolution is not Communist or Capitalist, that it is a revolution of its own . . . that it has its own ideology—entirely its own—which has a Cuban Basis and is entirely Cuban, entirely Latin

American, why then, do they start to accuse our Revolution of being something it is not?<sup>52</sup>

Despite the fact that the goals set by the Revolution as of 1959 shared a clear anatomy with Socialist thought, Castro made it very clear that his intention was to create a Revolution which would be clearly separated from Russian Revolution or other leftist movements of the era. Castro was unconcerned with the ideological origins of the political goals which his movement outlined, and far more bent on creating a movement which was based in a national identity and a popular desire for liberation. Castro again makes it clear that their Revolution holds authority over the identity and origin of their goals, rather than having the Cuban Revolution be perceived as a continuation of the ideological and practical history of leftist politics originating from Europe.

However, Castro's desire to abandon ties to the origins of European Leftist ideology didn't last long. It was two years later that Castro publicly recognized the shared goals of the Cuban Revolution and the reforms and structures of political organization called for under Socialism and the ideologies potential ability to achieve those goals:

Thus, I think that the ideal system, the most perfect encountered by man for governing a country (a system that does not aspire to be eternal but simply transitory, as are the stages which the history of a country which is destined to realize) is a system of government

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<sup>52</sup> Castro, *The Ideologies*, p. 314.

with a revolutionary, democratically organized party under collective leadership.<sup>53</sup>

This section of Castro's speech from 1961 illustrates the reason why Socialism was the political ideology which Castro ended upon in context to his earlier beliefs as a leader. Castro's initial disdain for Socialist politics was rooted in a desire for the creation of a uniquely Cuban political identity. Castro had feared that to identify as a Communist state or even a Socialist one represented a historical move to place the Cuban Revolution as a continuation of revolutionary politics in Russia, instead of continuing to advance the course of Cuban history in its own right. But come 61', Castro was apparently able to divorce the notion of Socialist politics from the historical and institutional implications of tying Cuba to the Soviet Union.

Castro's sentiment of Cuban independence functioning in tandem with his desire for revolutionary collective political organizing is what led to Cuba's embrace of Socialism. Castro's instinct to distance Cuba's historical trajectory from the Soviet Union brings the Cold War answer to the "Why Socialism" into serious question. While the rise of the Soviet Union is undoubtedly responsible for popularizing and bringing Socialist and Communist politics to the forefront of the international community, Cuba's journey to Socialism, at least through the perspective of Castro himself, can and should not be attributed completely to the international climate surrounding the Cuban Revolution.

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<sup>53</sup> Castro, *The Ideologies*, p. 328.

If one commits to the Castro answer as to “why Socialism?”, the implicit assumption is that Castro himself was responsible both for the notion of an exceptional and independent Cuban historical trajectory, as well as the desire for collective organization as the means to do so. While this argument is fairly convincing, I only see the latter of the two points to be correct. Castro was essential as a leader in the early years of the Cuban Revolution, and his decision, while maybe influenced by others, to embrace Socialist politics as the means to Cuba attaining the developmental goals it desired can and should be identified as the decisions of Castro himself. However, the concept of Cuban exceptionalism and internal growth did not begin with Castro, and he himself didn't claim so. Cuba's tradition of independence and liberation goes far beyond the Cuban Revolution. Individuals like José Martí championed these ideas, and the concept of self liberation is a constant throughout modern Cuban history. So while Castro himself was important in identifying Socialism as the political ideology capable of achieving their revolutionary goals, the desire for these goals should be perceived as a longer standing tradition in Cuban history.



### **Part III: Cuban Nationalism and Resistance as the Answer**

Discussions around modern Cuba and the Cuban Revolution have a tendency to perceive the Revolutionary moment as a seemingly isolated event. Conversations, from my experience in the U.S., seem to analyze the Cuban Revolution as an event largely defined by the Cold War, and rarely place it as one moment among many political developments for the island of Cuba in a longer history. The reality is that Cuba's political history, while not being particularly long, did not start and end with the Revolution. Cuba's history is far better understood as a broader series of political moments that when analyzed seem to show a clear trajectory and deep desire for independence. The moment of the Cold War clearly did have some effect on potential outcomes on the island, acting as a catalyst of sorts, but to see the Cold War and relations between Soviet Union and U.S. as the sole factor which dictated the future of Cuba, is plainly reductive and shortsighted. The argument that Castro himself was the main factor in determining the future of Cuba, again, holds some truth, but fails to see the whole picture. Castro was an essential conduit for the political desires and developmental aspirations for the island, but as mentioned before, Castro was not the first to seek liberation and rights for the people of Cuba living under a variety of inequitable and oppressive structures. So when attempting to ask ourselves, how exactly Cuba ended up Socialist, the seemingly obvious, yet often overlooked answer, is that the History of Cuba politically and socially was always on a trajectory towards liberation, and Socialism was an ideological tool

which among other methods in Cuba's history, offered a viable path closer to said independence.

While the historical circumstances which the island of Cuba has faced since it's colonization by the Spanish have varied, there remains one constant, a social and political identity defined by its opposition to forces of hegemony and oppression. Unlike some nations which have political histories which date long before the 16th century, as a result of indigenous populations<sup>54</sup>, Cuba's history is a fairly short one. Cuba's indigenous population was largely, if not entirely, wiped out by Spanish colonization in 1511.<sup>55</sup> After the establishment of the Spanish Colonial structures in Cuba, the island's working population was largely sustained by Slaves who were brought to the island.<sup>56</sup> Cuba's relationship with the slave trade is essential to understanding the broader arc of modern Cuban history. The first slaves arrived to the island in 1490 and the slave trade itself wasn't abolished until 1867.<sup>57</sup> Cuba's population was in a constant state of turnover, and the island was not able to sustain the growth of the slave population without continuously bringing more slaves to the island, the way that countries like the United States were able to.<sup>58</sup> This was the result of horrendous working conditions and a shockingly high mortality rate for slaves in Cuba.<sup>59</sup> The conditions of labor and systematic oppression of the slave class inevitably led to

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<sup>54</sup> Prevost, p. 517.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 517.

<sup>56</sup> Childs, p. 206.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Pérez, p. 98.

resistance, most notably beginning in the 19th century. Luis A. Pérez Jr. notes that this resistance often took one of two forms, the first and more common being small and generally isolated outbursts of violence and rebellions from slaves living and working in the agricultural industry of the Island (i.e. coffee, sugar, tobacco).<sup>60</sup> The latter form of resistance however, marks the development of collective organization of a more ideological nature.<sup>61</sup> Pérez identifies the political potential of this form of resistance as follows, “Uprisings of this type were the most feared. Possessed of ideological content and political purpose, their goal was the abolition of slavery, and therefore they threatened the very foundations of colonial political economy.”<sup>62</sup> Pérez’s identification of collective political organization against colonial structures should be identified as the early development of a Cuban political identity, which in this case, is defined by working class resistance against a European hegemonic structure designed to exploit workers (in this case slaves) for the sake of production capabilities.

Cuban resistance against exploitation under the slavery illustrates an early political trajectory which would be deeply formative of the political culture and society of Cuba in the decades to follow. While there was a clear void culturally and historically where the indigenous population of the island had occupied before colonization, a new identity of liberation from oppression would fill it. With the decrease of the slave trade in the late nineteenth century<sup>63</sup>, the Spanish

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<sup>60</sup> Pérez, p. 99.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

colonial structure remained. From this point on the object of opposition become Colonial rule itself, rather than the practice of the slave trade alone. As the slave trade decreased on the island, a shift in labor soon followed. While the slave trade itself eventually became illegal, labor itself remained unequal, and if anything the wage gap grew. Instead of having ex-slave labor fill the new wage based jobs on the island, a now growing white working population often filled these positions.<sup>64</sup> Pérez argues that “In some sectors, white migration had immediate and far-reaching effects. Indeed, this signified nothing less than the emergence of new social classes.”<sup>65</sup> Pérez describes how slavery itself faded, but liberation from exploitation did not, and a new class system emerged in which the workers of Cuba were restricted once again. The growing presence of a class based economy soon led to workers organizing unions to combat growing inequalities in industry.<sup>66</sup> For example, workers in the cigar industry formed a variety of unions, such as the Workers Mutual Aid Society, and labor publications followed suit soon after.<sup>67</sup> This brief period of labor organization resulted in swift actions against these movements from the Spanish Colonial administration in the late 1860’s<sup>68</sup>, which cemented Spain and Colonial structures as enemies of progress for the workers of Cuba. Cuba’s path of opposition and liberation continued, and the new face of the opposition was the exploitation of workers under Colonialism.

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<sup>64</sup> Pérez, p. 116.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

The end of the nineteenth century was essential not only for recontextualizing Cuban opposition to Colonization, but additionally for the profound impact culturally of political thinkers like José Martí on Cuba. Considerations of Martí's texts and work regarding Cuba must be considered when attempting to understand the political trajectory of the island. Martí's influence on Cuba going into the twentieth century can not be overstated. Even today, it's hard to walk around the city of Havana without seeing a bust of his head on every other block. Martí was one of the first thinkers in Cuba who focused not only on the physical liberation of the islanders, but also strongly advocated for the creation of a national identity. Félix Lizaso describes Martí's thought as, "He thought of freedom, but not as an end in itself. Beyond freedom was the nationality, the Cuban nationality which must be forged out of the desire of his compatriots."<sup>69</sup> Martí's notion of fostering a national identity was a monumental shift for an island which hitherto had not existed in such an apparent fashion, at least not in a publicly stated capacity. Advocacy for national identity was monumental culturally, but Martí also framed the creation of a Cuban national identity as the byproduct of fighting for the identity itself.<sup>70</sup> Lizaso describes Martí's conception of the relationship between nationhood and action as:

He wanted a country that was fought for and won by the efforts of its sons, one that could respect itself and be respected by others.

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<sup>69</sup> Lizaso, p. 210.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

The Cuban nation could be built only with pride in being a Cuban and a constant desire to be a better one. That pride, that duty was what he wanted to infiltrate in other souls.<sup>71</sup>

Martí's call for action as the act of creation of nationhood itself, would ultimately define the future of Cuba. While Cubans had fought in decades past for rights and against oppression under Colonialism, this radical redefinition allowed for those acts of liberation and rebellion to serve as the foundation for a common culture and solidarity. Cuba would define itself not by its institutional history, but by the acts that the people of Cuba carried out in an attempt to liberate themselves from the systems and structures which oppressed them. Nationhood was defined by a collective common struggle, rather than the history of an elite ruling class or imposing government. The result of this redefinition was an unrelenting desire for liberation and independence. To embrace reformism rather than revolution would be to betray the new foundation of what made modern Cuba a socially unified identity.

Spanish Colonial rule over Cuba ended in 1898<sup>72</sup>, however, as I discuss in the first section of the paper, U.S. occupation and influence soon filled its place. The institution of the Platt Amendment and foreign businesses growing control over the island continued to restrict Cuba from achieving true freedom as a nation. As the first half of the decade passed, economic conditions continuously declined for the island, ultimately leading to the abhorrent abuses committed by the Batista regime, backed by

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<sup>71</sup> Lizaso, p. 210.

<sup>72</sup> Prevost, p. 518.

the United States.<sup>73</sup> The new face of oppression for Cuba was Batista, foreign industry exploitation, and Capitalism itself.

In time Cuba would seek to do what it had always done, rebel against the forces which oppressed it. While the structures had changed, the desire for liberation remained, and had now been clearly stated by José Martí, but a new method was required. The abolition of slavery and liberation from Colonialism functioned in the past, but a nation can not simply abolish capitalism, but overthrowing a government like Batista's was definitely a start. From this perspective the Cuban Revolution can be understood as the obvious course of action for a nation defined by its own history of liberation from oppressive structures and forces. To fight against a regime like Batista's should not be considered dramatically different from rebelling against the Spanish Crown during the Colonial era. However, this answer does not obviously address why Socialism was the political system which followed. The answer to that question lies in the nature of the structures of oppression under Batista and Capitalism. Capitalism and U.S. influence was far more insidious in the way it maintained control over Cuba. Once the Revolution succeeded, it became clear that liberation required a system which would be able to combat the institutional and productive restrictions that held Cuba back from financial independence, and the system built to do that was Socialism. The political ideology of Socialism called for the creation of extensive protections of workers from exploitation, and the creation of national programs and infrastructure. Socialism allowed for Cuba to fight foreign industrial exploitation via the nationalization of previously

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<sup>73</sup> LeoGrande, p. 9.

foreign controlled industry on the island. Were Cuba to have embraced a more liberal form of government, they would have essentially had to come to terms with accepting what they understood clearly as exploitative structures of industry, and the act of doing so would have been out of character for a nation which had developed its identity based on the act of liberation itself.

If the political trajectory of Cuba which led to Socialism is defined by the creation of a national identity of liberation, then the first two answers to the question, why Socialism, are not invalidated, but rather recontextualized. The first answer, which posits the Cold War and the geopolitical moment surrounding the Cuban Revolution as responsible for the Socialist trajectory, doesn't become false, but the conditions presented by the Cold War allowed for the continuation of Cuba on its path of self liberation, and Socialism is was simply the tool to do so, instead of the conditions themselves changing the nations path as a whole and forcing Cuba into Socialism. While there is some reason to believe that the revolutionary government might have been open to less interventional policy with the United States, an analysis of the development of Cuba since the turn of the 15th century makes it clear that the least likely outcome was cooperative action between Cuba and the U.S., because at that specific moment, rebellion against the U.S. was the necessary step from the Cuban perspective required to push closer to independent nationhood. Cuba was able to continue to build its national identity by defining their morals and infrastructure as a response to the exploitation which was occurring under Batista and U.S. interests. As to why Cuba was open to working with the Soviet Union, in a scenario in which some sort



of industrial partnership was required, allying with a power which publicly stood against the U.S. as well as the coercive force of Capitalism, was the obvious choice. There are obvious disparities in the way that the Soviet Union sought to oppose these forces which sacrificed various civil liberties, however, from an ideological perspective, a Cuban Soviet partnership made perfect sense.

As for reconception of the Castro answer, if we accept the development of national identity over the course of time revolving around liberation, the shift is fairly simple. The Castro answer pinpoints Castro himself and his own personal beliefs as the factors responsible for leading Cuba to Socialism. Similar to the Cold War answer, these assertions on a more detail oriented level are not invalidated, but the origin of authority and power is. It's clear that Castro was key in leading the Revolution itself, but the shift here moves the origins of this movement and its ability to succeed in Cuba away from Castro himself, to the people of Cuba and the island's history. Castro himself should be understood as the individual responsible for organizing the Revolution, but the underlying desire to do so in some form existed long before Castro. Castro himself did not invent these notions among the people of Cuba, he simply recognized them and found a way to organize them into a cohesive movement. Castro was simply a facilitator of the Revolution, if there is anyone who is really responsible for the political origins of the Revolution, it was Martí. Martí's imprint on the culture of Cuba as an island destined for liberation via conflict is an easily traceable factor in the success of the Revolution. It has often even been claimed that Castro was a political heir of sorts to Martí<sup>74</sup> If Martí

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<sup>74</sup> Lecuona, p. 59.

hadn't helped to form a common Cuban identity which centered itself around liberation from oppression, it's hard to imagine whether Castro would have ever become the man he was, or whether the people of Cuba would have been as receptive as they were.

## **Conclusion:**

The case of the Cuban Revolution is somewhat of an outlier in the modern world. Very few countries, especially those as small as Cuba, have succeeded at establishing and sustaining a Socialist state. Revolution itself is not an uncommon phenomenon, but the ability of a state to sustain after an initial victory is far less common. In an international climate where questions around protections for workers and Socialism itself are on the rise, cases like the Cuban Revolution deserve to be revisited and reconsidered. The academic perspectives on the Cuban Revolution and Socialism in Cuba have been reductive in the past on the grounds that they often are only interested in the investigation of Cuba in relation to the Cold War, rather than a case all it's own. The origins, the successes, and the failures of Socialism in Cuba have the potential to inform us of the capabilities of Socialist thought both theoretically and practically. Understanding how and why a small island like Cuba chose Socialism, rather than any other ideology, not only can help us understand Cuba's history better, but also the potential trajectories of Socialist thought and practice in the future. While the first two answers addressed in this essay seem to often function as a sort of common wisdom regarding the Cuban Revolution, they are limited and reductive. Neither the effect of the Cold War nor the hand of Fidel Castro can be credited with Cuba's journey towards Socialism. The elements of truth in these two answers hold but a part of the picture. Yes, Cuba's position between the Soviet Union and the United States both limited and expanded the developmental and revolutionary capabilities of the island, but they did not shift the larger trajectory which Cuba had been on since Colonialism. Castro was an

essential catalyst in organizing the people of Cuba and directing them to Socialism, but Cuba was fighting for liberation long before Castro. The introduction of Socialism in Cuba was more about a nation's desire for liberation from oppression, than political ideology or the interests of Cold War powers. The moment of the Revolution was circumstantial; the elements of the moment were essential in defining the details. Cuba was on a trajectory towards liberation, and that trajectory was created by Cuba's history of conflict and resistance, not Castro, or the Cold War. Cases like those of Cuba allow us to recognize the decontextualized potential of Socialism and other ideologies like it. While there is a tendency to define political ideology by the history of those who utilized it, Cuba proves that a separation can be created. Cuba's utilization of Socialism shows that while political ideology is often a tool utilized by the elite classes of our societies, it also has the potential to liberate those who are the most oppressed. Understanding Cuba's ability to adapt under oppressive structures also allows us to hypothesize about the future of the island. While the Revolutionary state still holds power today, there is a growing sense of disdain for the government as a result of their various failures since the Revolution. If Cuba's trajectory stays on track, perhaps conflict in some form lies in the future for the sake of achieving the ever elusive freedom which Cuba desires.

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