

World History Play

¡Viva la Revolución!

Fifty years ago, Cuban leader

Fidel Castro came to power

in a dramatic revolution

A time of euphoria:
Fidel Castro and his
army on their way to
liberate Havana in 1959.

PROLOGUE

Prologue narrator: The island country of Cuba lies only 90 miles from Florida. Cuba's **Communist** government has long troubled the U.S. This is largely due to the influence of Cuba's leader for most of the past 50 years, Fidel Castro.

In the mid-20th century, Cuba was controlled by dictator Fulgencio Batista. Batista had held power with the backing of the U.S. government. American business interests, notably the United Fruit Company, owned much of the land. Castro, trained as a lawyer, sought to overthrow Batista and expel the Americans. His revolution forever changed the face of Cuba.

SCENE 1

Narrator A: Fidel Castro is born in 1926. His father, a Spanish immigrant, grows wealthy selling sugarcane to the United Fruit Company. But Fidel is drawn to radical politics. In 1952, he discusses his plans with his younger brother Raúl. **Fidel Castro:** The government is corrupt. It sells the best farmland to the

→ Words to Know

- **absolve** (*v*): judge not guilty
- **charismatic** (*adj*): possessing a special charm or appeal.
- **Communist** (*adj*): having a type of government that controls all aspects of the economy.
- **confiscate** (*v*): to seize, as a government action.
- **imperialist** (*n*): one who practices imperialism, in which powerful countries dominate weaker ones, politically and economically.
- **yanqui** (*n*): Spanish for "Yankee"; used to refer to the United States.

CHARACTERS

Prologue narrator

Fidel Castro, leader of the Cuban Revolution

Raúl Castro, his brother
Ernesto "Che" Guevara, rebel

*Miguel, a *campesino*

Camilo Cienfuegos, a rebel

Informant

Chicho Osorio, a sugar plantation foreman

Fulgencio Batista, Cuban dictator

*Rafael, a Havana man, supporter of the revolution

*Tania, a Havana woman, supporter of the revolution

Crowd

Reporter

*Bernardo, a lawyer

*Teresa, a wealthy housewife

*Antonio, a businessman

Narrators A-E

Epilogue narrator

*Indicates a fictional character. All others were real people.

yanquis and grows fat on the profits.

Raúl Castro: The Americans drink and gamble in casinos run by their criminal gangs, while ordinary Cubans wallow in poverty.

Fidel: I'm going to run for the House of Representatives. The people must at last control their own destiny.

Narrator B: When Batista cancels the elections, Castro dedicates himself to revolution. On July 26, 1953, he leads more than 100 men in an attack on the Moncada Army Barracks in the city of Santiago. The revolt is a disaster. Half of the rebels are killed in the attack or murdered in prison. In court, Castro defends himself.

Fidel: Batista stays in power over a stack of corpses and a sea of blood. Liberty is not begged for but won with the blade of a machete. Go ahead and condemn me. It does not matter. History will **absolve** me.

Narrator C: After speaking for more than two hours, Castro is found guilty and sentenced to prison along with Raúl and other rebels.

SCENE 2

Narrator D: In 1955, the Castro brothers are released from prison and go to Mexico. There they meet a fellow revolutionary from Argentina, a young doctor named Ernesto "Che" Guevara. Together they form the July 26th Movement and return to Cuba with a band of rebels. But

Batista's army ambushes them. Only a dozen or so escape alive to the remote Sierra Maestra mountains.

Che Guevara: It is a miracle that we made it. Where do we go from here?

Fidel: We will organize in these mountains. Look, here is the home of a *campesino* [poor farmer]. We can depend on him for kindness.

Narrator E: The *campesino* feeds and shelters the ragtag band.

Miguel: The name Fidel Castro has become legend in these mountains. We heard how you stood up to the dictator Batista. For too long, greed and power have ruled Cuba.

Camilo Cienfuegos (*to his fellow rebels*): The saying is true: The people are the sea, and we revolutionaries are the fish who swim in it.

Narrator A: The rebels open a medical clinic. Che Guevara is the first doctor many of the peasants have seen. The rebels win the trust of the people and attract recruits. They also need arms, which they plan to steal from the army barracks at La Plata. On the way there, they are approached by a friendly informant.

Informant: The barracks has 10 guards. (*Turning around.*) Careful! Here comes Chicho Osorio, the brutal foreman of the sugar plantation.

Guevara: He is one of the worst exploiters of the *campesinos*.

Narrator B: Castro approaches him.

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World History Play

Fidel: Halt. We are the rural guard investigating security problems here.

Chicho Osorio: Well, we have plenty of troublemakers. That Fidel Castro is the worst.

Fidel: If I find him, I'll shoot him!

Osorio: Not if I get there first. And I can do it. Look at these boots. I took them off a good-for-nothing I killed.

By the way, the security at La Plata is very weak. I'll show you where.

Fidel: Excellent. Perhaps we can even tie you up and pretend you're a prisoner we're bringing in. *[Turning to one of his men.]* Manolo, you know what to do with the prisoner.

Narrator C: The attack on the barracks is the rebels' first big success. The legend of Fidel Castro grows.

SCENE 3

Narrator D: By 1958, the rebels number about 300 and control much of the Sierra Maestra. That summer, Batista sends 10,000 soldiers to get

rid of them. At a meeting of the rebel commanders . . .

Cienfuegos: Batista is desperate. The Americans have at last grown disgusted with his corruption and stopped giving him money.

Fidel: He can't defeat us here.

Narrator E: Indeed, Batista's army loses badly in the mountains. Many of Batista's soldiers do not even want to fight. Now, aided by supporters in the cities, the rebels push toward the capital, Havana. On New Year's Eve, Batista throws a party at the Presidential Palace. After dinner, he addresses the crowd . . .

Fulgencio Batista: Friends, I'm sorry to say that the rebels are closing in. We must leave immediately.

Narrator A: The dictator flees that night to the Dominican Republic. As word gets out, Cubans celebrate in the streets of Havana.

Rafael: We've finally got the boot of the dictator off our necks!

Tania: Now our beautiful beaches will be open to the people, not just to the rich. ¡Viva la revolución!

SCENE 4

Narrator B: News of Castro's victory electrifies the country. When he enters the capital on January 8, people clog the streets to see him.

Crowd: ¡Viva Fidel! ¡Viva Fidel!

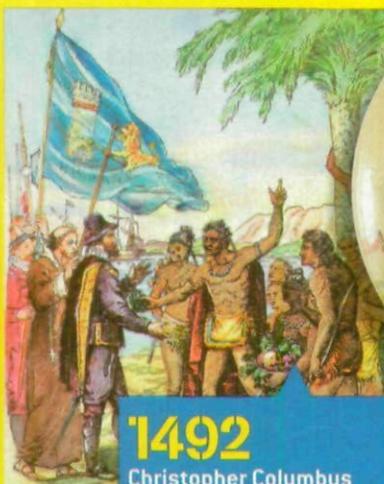
Narrator C: Reporters from all over the world race to Cuba to bear witness to the **charismatic** rebel leader.

Reporter: Mr. Castro, will you now return to civilian life?

Fidel: My obligation is to the people. I sincerely have no ambition for power, money, nothing—only to serve my country.

Narrator D: But soon Castro is wielding power with an iron fist. Within three months, many Batista officials are put on mass trials in stadiums. Some 500 of them are executed. For other Cubans, especially the wealthy

CHRONOLOGY: Road to Revolution



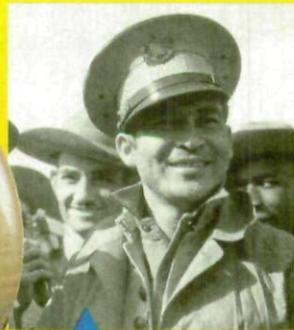
1492

Christopher Columbus *(above)* lands in Cuba. The Spanish take over the island. When natives die, Africans are brought to work as slaves harvesting sugar and other crops.



1898

The U.S. frees Cuba from Spain in the Spanish-American War. But the Platt Amendment of 1901 gives the U.S. the legal right to intervene in Cuba's government, limiting the country's independence.



1933

Fulgencio Batista *(above)* leads a group of Cuban military officers in an overthrow of the Cuban government. The Platt Amendment is dropped in 1934, but U.S. companies retain influence. Batista holds power periodically over the next 25 years, often behind the scenes.



1952

Batista *(above)* returns to power in another coup *(government overthrow)* and cancels elections. This frustrates the plans of young Fidel Castro, who hopes to run for the House of Representatives.

and educated, this is ominous.

Bernardo: It's good they got rid of Batista. But we need democracy. Castro is embracing Communism. Will he be a dictator like Batista?

Teresa: Today, soldiers came into our beach club and said, "Get out! This belongs to the revolution now."

Antonio: These bandits are going to rob us of everything we worked for. I'm going to Florida.

Narrator E: In the next few months, a steady stream of Cubans leave their country, most for the U.S.

SCENE 5

Narrator A: The new Cuban government orders rents reduced. It sends thousands of youths into the countryside to teach people how to read. It also **confiscates** sugar plantations owned by U.S. companies and gives the land to peasants. Defying the U.S., Castro makes an alliance with the Soviet Union, America's enemy.

A showdown with the U.S. is coming.

Fidel: President Eisenhower refuses to sell us oil. So what? The Soviets will trade us oil for sugar.

Raúl: The yanqui **imperialists** don't want Latin America to determine its own fate. Now, American oil companies refuse to process the oil at their refineries on our soil.

Fidel: Then we will seize their oil companies—and all other American property as well. Let them stop us!

Narrator B: Alarmed at these actions, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower instructs the Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] to begin secret actions against Castro. On April 17, 1961, under the direction of U.S. President John F. Kennedy, an army of Cuban exiles trained by the CIA tries to invade Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. The invasion is a disaster for the U.S. More than 1,000 men are taken prisoner.

Fidel: Let those who oppose us beware. Within the revolution,

everything is permitted. Outside the revolution, nothing.

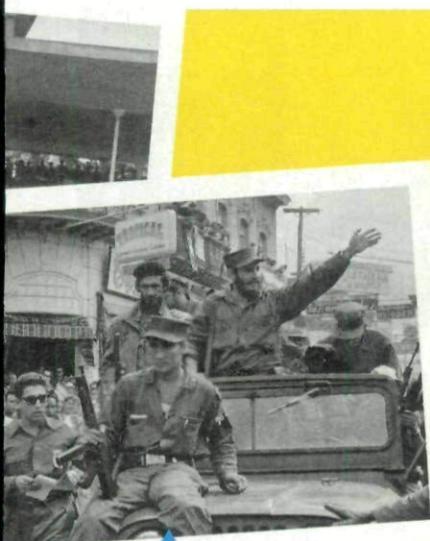
Narrator C: After the Bay of Pigs and a wave of U.S.-backed attacks, Castro orders a crackdown on opponents. More than 35,000 people are arrested. It is the start of what will become a dictatorial hold on power by Castro.

EPILOGUE

Epilogue narrator: The stage was set for a long stalemate between the U.S. and Cuba. After the U.S. imposed an economic embargo, Cuba relied on Soviet aid. Through the decades, tensions persisted. Seeking freedom and economic opportunity, more than 1 million people have fled Cuba for the U.S. The already suffering Cuban economy lost \$6 billion annually after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. But Castro survived. Only age and illness caused him finally to hand over power to his brother Raúl in 2008.

—Steven Wishnia and Bryan Brown

LEFT TO RIGHT: BURT CLINN/MAGNUM PHOTOS, AP IMAGES; BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES



1959

Castro and his army (above) seize control of the Cuban government. Batista flees the country.



1962

When the Soviet Union places nuclear missiles in Cuba, U.S. President John F. Kennedy (above) issues a stern warning. After a tense few weeks, the Cuban Missile Crisis ends with the Soviets dismantling the missiles.



1980

After repeated attempts by Cubans to leave their country, Castro allows open emigration from the Cuban port of Mariel for five months. About 125,000 Cubans make the trip to the U.S. in 1,700 boats. Castro releases some prisoners to join the movement before stopping the emigration.



2006

After falling ill, Fidel Castro (left) temporarily passes control of Cuba to his brother Raúl (right). The switch becomes permanent in 2008.