The Cuban Revolution
Background

Cuba was a Spanish Colony

One of the wealthiest in Latin America

Economy based on Sugar exports to US and Europe

Spanish controlled the nation politically, economically and socially

Large underclass of Blacks (descendants of Slaves) and poor mestizos
Spanish-American War

US occupies Cuba 1899-1902

US helped to write new Cuban Constitution modeled on US version

Platt Amendment was added—Gave US the right to intervene in Cuban Affairs, also Guantanamo Bay became US Naval base
Post War

US sent troops several times from 1902-1953

Huge US investment in Sugar ($200 Million by 1913

⇒ 1/5th of all US investment in Latin America at the time
Attempted Revolution of 1933

200,000 sugar workers led an uprising in 1933

In the chaos, a group of military leaders took control

Led by Fulgencio Batista

He continued to rule behind the scenes in Cuba until 1952
Batista
Took over in a coup in 1952
pro-US
Anti labor
Cuban Elites liked Batista
Most Cubans did not
Was a dictator
Maintained social system, economic dependence on Sugar, strong ties to US
This was the time that Havana was the “hot” spot for US tourists—night clubs, gambling
The Cuban Revolution
The Revolution itself

It began with the assault on the Moncada Barracks on July 26, 1953, and ended on January 1, 1959, when Batista was driven from the country and the cities Santa Clara and Santiago de Cuba were seized by rebels, led by Che Guevara and Fidel Castro's surrogates Raul Castro and Huber Matos, respectively.
Fidel Castro

He led the revolution and shortly after was sworn in as the Prime Minister of Cuba.

Castro became First Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba in 1965, and led the transformation of Cuba into a one-party socialist republic.

Castro became popular for his anti-US policies because Cubans saw US as imperialistic.
Long Term Causes #1: Sugar

The Cuban economy was based primarily on Sugar—not diversified

Economy rose and fell on Sugar

Most of the Sugar plantations were in the hands of Foreign (US mostly) investors or wealthy upper class Cubans

Seasonal unemployment high

Created structural inequalities in the Cuban population

Markets tied to the US
Long Term Causes #2: Anti-US resentment

Since the Spanish-American War and Cuban Independence, a great deal of resentment towards US control/effect on Cuban economy and politics
Long Term Causes #3: Political Instability

From Independence on Cuba had no real stable political experience

Some attempts at reform from time to time, but not much accomplished

Power in the hands of the elites

US essentially ran Cuba 3 different times from 1900s-1930s
Long Term Causes #4: Social / Economic Inequities

Large economic gap between rich and poor.
Rich elites were white, small % of the pop.
Rest of nation was mestizos, Afro-Cuban.
Land in the hands of elites or foreign interests.
Workers did try to unionize, but not particularly successful.
Short Term Causes #1: Batista’s Regime

1952-1959

Did not bring about reforms

Repression

At first the U.S. supported the Batista regime, but as conditions worsened in Cuba, US pulled support

Even middle class went against Batista
Short Term Cause #2: Rise of Castro

Attack on Mocada army barracks 1953 → failure → Castro arrested, but freed later → gives the revolutionaries some hope and momentum

Creation of 26th of July Movement

Defeats of Batista’s forces

Appeal, both in Cuba and US, of Castro’s movement → brought more support
The Cuban Revolution

Aims and Achievements
Implementing the revolution

- Historians do not agree as to whether Castro was communist from the beginning or not
- But beginning in 1959 Castro began to move Cuba towards a more socialist/communist state
- He had several goals:
Economic Goals:

Nationalization

- Nationalized US companies: Oil refineries, telephone, private companies
- By October of 1959 all US owned businesses were nationalized
- US under Eisenhower begins economic embargo as a retaliation
- John F Kennedy later cuts diplomatic ties with Cuba
Economic Aims:

Industrial Production

-- At first Castro attempted to increase Cuba's industrial production

-- Failed because of mismanagement, corruption
Economic Aims

Sugar Production

• In 1970 Castro called for Cuba to produce 10 Million tons of Sugar
• Mobilized resources across the nation
• Fell short—8.5 million tons produced—biggest sugar production ever in Cuba
• Took resources away from other sectors of the economy
• Pushed Cuba to have to embrace USSR in order to survive
Economic Aim
Soviet-style economic management

- After Sugar failure, Castro turned to USSR
- USSR agreed to help but wanted greater control in return
- Soviet-style economic management → with Soviet advisors making decisions
- State made policies and decisions
- Allowed some small private enterprises
- State run business could pay bonuses and fire employees
- Until about 1976 economy grew, but price of sugar fell to 8¢ pound in ’77 and economy dropped
Social Aims

- Free universal education
- Universal Health care
- Child care
- Government subsidized housing
- Social security programs
- Cuba had the most equal distribution of wealth in the Americas
- Borrowed heavily from Canada, Europe Japan--unable to pay back in the 1980s
Political Aims

Cuba as leader of revolutionary movements around the world

- Castro wanted to export the revolution around the globe
- Help other revolutions against imperialist/colonial powers
- Central America, Africa, Vietnam
- Cuba sent troops and support
- Helped to bring about a Marxist government in Angola in 1980s
- helped to bring a Socialist government to Nicaragua in 1979
Effects of these attempts?

- Successful in bringing about revolutions in a few places
- Failed in others (Bolivia for example)
- Castro support for Marxist rebel group MPLA in Angola hurt chances for an improvement in US-Cuban relations when the US was ready
- Support of USSR in their war in Afghanistan damaged Cuba’s position as the leader of the Non-Aligned Nations (Countries not tied to US or USSR during the Cold War)
- Created a large group of Cubans serving as aid workers and doctors around the world (by 1979 14,000 Cubans were working overseas)
Political Aims - Control Dissent within Cuba

- Thousands of Cubans were arrested and detained for speaking out against the Revolution or government policies
- Created anger and resentment among many Cubans and human rights groups
The Cuban Revolution

- In Cuba, social and economic trends led to a revolution. There, social inequality and heavy U.S. influence led to a revolt that brought communism to this large Caribbean island.

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<th>Reasons for Revolt</th>
<th>Rich and Poor</th>
<th>U.S. Support</th>
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<td>Cuba very dependent on U.S.</td>
<td>Valuable exports from plantations</td>
<td>Business interests encouraged U.S. government support of corrupt dictators</td>
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<td>1950s, hotels, casinos owned by wealthy Americans, Cuba’s elite</td>
<td>Little land for peasants to farm</td>
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Rich and Poor

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U.S. Support

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- Anticommunist Fulgencio Batista took power in 1952 military coup
The Cuban Revolution

• The coming of Castro

• Batista’s Cuba
  • “A rich country with too many poor people”
  • Batista’s coup stirred discontent, nationalism among poor

• Revolutionaries under Castro
  • Led unsuccessful attack, 1953; guerrilla war became full-scale revolution, 1955
  • Batista fled 1959; Castro took control
The Cuban Revolution

**Goals of the Revolution**
- Broad support for revolution to remove Batista
- Most did not know what kind of revolution Castro would lead
- Middle-class Cubans supported moderate democratic reforms
- Many Castro revolutionaries, including **Che Guevara**, wanted Marxist regime

**Castro’s Programs**
- Castro focused on ending U.S. dominance, redistributing wealth, reforming society
- Energies went to restructuring economy, society, government, foreign policy
- 1961, program virtually eliminated illiteracy in one year
- Created medical care system, raised life expectancy
The Cuban Revolution

- Changes under Castro
- Limited size of landholdings
- Nationalized private property, businesses
- To ensure he had power to make changes
  - Took full control of government
  - Took away freedom of press
- Result of radical actions
  - Led Cuba more toward communism
  - Led Cuba toward confrontation with U.S.
The Cuban Revolution

**U.S. Involvement**
- Cuba’s move toward communism troubled U.S. leaders
- Viewed Latin America as part of U.S. sphere of influence
- Wanted to keep communism out of region

**Organization of American States**
- Set up shortly after World War II to promote economic, military cooperation
- 1961, U.S.-trained invasion force of Cuban exiles landed at Bay of Pigs
- Mission to spark nationwide uprising against Castro; mission failed

**Cuban Missile Crisis**
- 1962, CIA learned Soviet Union building nuclear missile site in Cuba
- President John Kennedy ordered naval blockage to keep Soviet ships out
- World came close to nuclear war before compromise, missiles removed
### The Cuban Revolution

#### Results of the Revolution
- Mixed results since Cold War; good access to health care, education
- People’s civil liberties restricted under one-party system
- Government jails opponents, spies on citizens

#### Economic Effects of Revolution
- Mixed results as well; economy suffered from U.S. embargo
- Castro’s policies led many Cubans to leave country, many for U.S.; caused economy to struggle
- Castro relied on Soviet Union for economic support; Soviet collapse in 1991 hurt economy