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**The Cuban Revolution:
Would It Have Started Without Fidel Castro?**

Jacob Brown

**History 454
Professor Rector
March 7th 2013**

In June 1952 during Cuba's presidential election, Fulgencio Batista who was running for office staged a military coup and seized power. Batista staged this coup because he was losing and would not become president. "The orthodox candidate Roberto Agramonte was favored to win; the authentic Carlos Hevia might have upset him. Neither was particularly inspiring; both were competent and honest. Had those elections been held, reformism might have had another chance"¹ Batista when he wrongly seized power changed the course of Cuban history. Batista suspended the Constitution of 1940 and halted elections. At the time when elections were halted in Havana a lawyer was running for Congress. That lawyer was Fidel Castro and had that election had the chance to conclude chances are Castro would have most likely won. If Castro had become a member of the Cuban Congress the Cuban Revolution would not have happened. Because Castro never became a congressman he would go on to lead the Cuban Revolution.

Who was Fidel Castro?

Castro was born on August 13th, 1927 to Angel Castro and Lina Ruz. He started rebelling early in life. "At La Salle (school) Fidel was often in trouble with teachers. He organized protests about food, and was several times involved in fights with other boys. When a teacher slapped his face, he reacted violently, trying to punch and bite the teacher."² In 1945 Castro attended Havana University where he studied law. During which time little he spent little time on the actual study of law. Castro spent time wrapped up in the Federation of University Students (FEU) which was the group in charge of representing the student body and was where many started their national political career.²

¹ Marifeli Perez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, And Legacy*, (Oxford University Press 1993)

² Leicester Coltman, *The Real Fidel Castro*, (Yale University Press 2003)

In June 1947 there was a plan to overthrow the Dominican Republic's Dictator General Rafael Trujillo. Castro would join up with the cause. Plans to overthrow the dictator would fail. This experience would influence Castro's views and play into how he did things During the Cuban Revolution. "The experience confirmed his belief that military action by revolutionaries from different countries was both possible and desirable. He regarded it as self-evident that a ruthless dictatorship like that of Trujillo could not be overcome by fine words and diplomatic pressure. In Castro's view the mission had not failed. It had been betrayed. Castro concluded that a traditional professional army could never be trusted to support revolutionary action"²

The Start of the Cuban Revolution

After Batista obtained power through his military coup Castro put a group together called, "the movement." "It would be a twin-track organization, with a civil committee and a military committee, both tightly controlled by himself. The civil committee would conduct political agitation, through an underground newspaper and such political activities as were possible under the Batista regime. The military committee would prepare, train and eventually arm a secret force able to take violent action to destabilize and ultimately bring down the Batista government."² Castro recruited mostly uneducated poorer people to the movement and after he had somewhere close to 1200 members. He did this because the less uneducated someone the more likely they were to be easily controlled and do what he wanted. Money was always an issue throughout the entire revolution. Money influences what people do and Castro wanted things done his way so he didn't have much financial support.

Castro in 1953 put a plan together to attack the Moncada military barracks in Santiago to acquire firearms and maybe spark an uprising among the local people. Castro planned to attack

on July 26th 1953 because that was the day of the festival of St Santiago. He figured that most of the men that normally occupy the Barracks would be away celebrating. The plan was to dress in army uniforms get into the barracks take all the firearms they could get, then get out without being detected. The plan was well planned out but poorly executed.

When the day came to attack the barracks nothing went right for Castro and his men. A car broke down; another car got lost on its way to the barracks. When they finally arrived at the barracks Castro tried to disarm two soldiers and failed. A fire fight erupted and Castro's men were pinned down in the street. "Contrary to Castro's belief that the garrison would be undermanned, it was crowded with additional soldiers from outlying districts who had moved Moncada for the Santiago carnival."² Those that managed to get away fled to where ever they thought would be safe. Castro and some men fled to the Gran Piedra Mountains. Over the course of several days many men left Castro. On August 1st Castro and two of his men were captured as they headed towards the Sierra Maestra Range to rebuild. The failed attack on Moncada would set back Castro's revolution plans for several years. He never gave up though.

Aftermath of the Moncada Attack

While in jail awaiting trial Castro's accounts of the Moncada attack were published in the heard by the public that public opinion of him would become negative. That was not the case though public opinion became positive and favoring of Castro. When authorities figured out it was hurting their case they quit allowing Castro to be interviewed.

The rebels were tried separately from Castro. There were 122 being charged with "organizing an uprising of armed persons against the Constitutional Powers of the State"² in the rebel trial all though some were innocent. The army picked up some people and charged them

because they were potential rebels. The innocent were eventually let go and those that actually took part in the Moncada attack admitted guilt and took pride in their involvement. Those that admitted guilt were charged according their role in the attack. Castro went to trial on October 16th. Castro used the trial to voice his ideas about revolution. When the trial concluded he was found guilty and sentenced to fifteen years in prison.

While in prison the men of the movement spent time getting educated so that they could regroup after they got out of prison. Castro along with the other men improved his education. He was also trying to keep what was left of the movement intact and, “maintain his own tight control of the residual movement. He realized that with prison censorship, and the general state of repression in the country following Moncada, there was little he could do in the short term to restructure the movement outside the prison, or to attract new members.”² In 1955 the men of the movement were released from prison on the condition they would take no further part in any uprisings.

Mexico and the Return to Cuba

Castro when he got out of prison went back to reconstructing the movement. On July 7th 1955 Castro fled to Mexico. Castro fled to Mexico because, “the extent and depth of US influence in Cuba made it impossible to overthrow Batista without bringing a force of armed men from abroad. Castro’s task was to organize the expedition, which would land in Oriente and set off a national uprising.”² While in Mexico he did just that. Castro gathered support and guns while in Mexico. He met an Argentine doctor named Ernesto Guevara also known as Che Guevara. Guevara would join Castro and play an instrumental part in taking down the Batista Government. Castro’s activities in Mexico drew a lot of attention. On November 21st a flat of

one of Castro's accomplices was raided by the Mexican police and guns were confiscated. Castro was told he had three days to get out of Mexico or face persecution.

Castro and eighty-one men on November 25th crammed on to a tiny boat called the Granma and headed for Cuba. "The 1,200 mile voyage from Mexico to the east of Cuba was a nightmare. As soon as they reached the open sea, the boat started to roll in the waves and most of the men suffered severe seasickness."² The voyage was supposed to take 5 days it would up taking 7. Much like the Moncada attack things were not starting out or going well for Castro and this new attempt at over throwing the Batista Government.

Cuba and the Overthrow of Batista

When the Granma finally reached Cuba the revolutionaries did not receive the warm welcome they were expecting. The group was surprised by Batista's troops and scattered. Those that survived eventually met up in the Sierra Maestra. Once they regrouped things started to look up for Castro and his men. In January of 1957 Castro had his first victory at the battle of La Plata. The revolutionaries attacked a garrison of Batista's men. "The action at La Plata alerted the government and the national army to the fact that Castro was around and dangerous. But the Geography of the Sierra Maestra made it difficult to send in a strong force and eliminate him. A small guerrilla group could move faster through the mountains than a large, heavily loaded army unit unfamiliar with the terrain." Without the Sierra Maestra the Cuban Revolution would not have made it very far and Castro knew it. Castro and his small band of men continue having success against Batista's army. Batista even launches an all-out offensive on the Sierra Maestra to try and crush the Revolution.

End of the Revolution and Aftermath

The Battle of Santa Clara was the last in the Revolution. The battle took place in the end of December 1958. Castro's forces defeat Batista. Batista then flees Cuba to the Dominican Republic. Fighting continues for a few days but the revolutionaries take the city and the Cuban Revolution ends.

When Castro takes over the country he immediately starts implementing changes in Cuba. Castro eliminates the private economy; he also starts up land reforms and industrialization. Castro also makes some social changes. His main social changes were women's equality and anti-vice measures.³ Castro would rule Cuba for many years until he became too ill to take care of things. During this time relations with the United States would become very stand offish.

Conclusion

The Cuban revolution would not have succeeded without the leadership of Fidel Castro. Other groups had tried to oust Batista but none could ever come close to completing what Castro did. Even though he failed at times he never gave up. Granted he got lucky numerous times it still takes a lot of guts and persistence to accomplish what he did.

³ John Rector, History 454, Lecture on Cuba

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