

Cuba and Fidel Castro

After World War II rapid industrialization, population growth, and a lingering gap between the rich and the poor led Latin American nations to seek aid from both of the superpowers, USA and the Soviet Union.

During the 1950's the United States supported Cuba's unpopular dictator, **Fulgencio Batista**. In January 1959 Batista was overthrown by a revolution of the Cuban people. A young lawyer named **Fidel Castro** led this revolution. He was the son of a wealthy Spanish-Cuban farmer. He first attempted to overthrow the Batista government in 1953 but was captured and put in prison. Upon his release he created and won power on the island off the U.S. coast of Florida. Castro nationalized the Cuban economy. At first the people were behind him as he promised improving the economy, literacy, health care and a better environment for women. He took control of the U.S. sugar mills and refineries and put them under Cuban government control. This upset President Eisenhower who ordered an **embargo** on all trade with Cuba. Castro then turned to the Soviets for economic and military aid.

In 1960 the CIA planned an invasion of Cuba by recruiting anti-Castro Cuban exiles. In 1961 these exiles landed at the **Bay of Pigs** in Cuba. The invasion was approved by the new president **John F. Kennedy** but he did not send U.S. planes or equipment to support the invasion. The invasion badly failed, the Cubans quickly defeated the anti-Castro forces and the United States was humiliated.



Fidel Castro

The failed Bay of Pigs invasion convinced the Soviet leader, **Nikita Khrushchev**, that the United States would not resist Soviet expansion in Latin America. In June 1962, Khrushchev secretly began to build 42 missile sites on Cuba. What developed became to be known as **The Cuban Missile Crisis**. This incident nearly created World War III and a nuclear disaster.

The resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis left Castro completely dependent on Soviet support. Castro backed communist revolutions in Latin America and Africa (Nicaragua and Angola). Castro is still in power today but with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 Cuba is a struggling Third World nation in need of major reforms.



