

Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution of 1959

Born the son of a sugarcane farmer on the eastern region of the island of Cuba, Fidel Castro saw firsthand how the United States interfered with the economy of Cuba. Where he lived, most farms were owned by the **United Fruit Company**, a large American corporation.



In 1945, Castro studied law in the country's capital Havana and he also became involved in revolutionary activities. After graduation from law school he joined a reformist political party and ran for a seat in the Cuban House of Representatives. Just before the election there was a military coup (takeover) in Cuba. **Fulgencio Batista**, an army general overthrew the government and took power for himself. The new government was then recognized by the United States.

Almost immediately, Castro became a leader of the opposition to the new government. In 1953, Castro led an attack on an army barracks. The attack was crushed and Castro sentenced to 15 years in prison. After serving just two years, Castro was released. He fled to Mexico where he began planning another revolution to overthrow Batista.

In 1956, Castro led a small group of revolutionaries back to Cuba. Most of them were killed by government troops. However, the survivors including Castro, his brother Raúl, and a friend, **Ernesto "Che" Guevara** (image opposite) fled to the mountains and began waging guerilla warfare.



The movement started to gain more members, especially after several small victories over the government forces. By 1959, Castro's revolutionary forces had defeated the poorly led government military and Batista fled the country. Castro now ruled Cuba.

Castro had promised his supporters that he would adopt a liberal constitution with civil rights and liberties for the people. **He did not!** He turned Cuba into a **communist dictatorship** and made close ties with the Soviet Union. This upset the United States and for several decades; tensions between the two countries heightened including the failed **Bay of Pigs** invasion and the **Cuban Missile Crisis**.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989, Castro continued to rule but without their primary aid and support, Cuba's economy began to fail.

Fidel Castro died of natural causes in 2016 and his brother, Raúl took over. Castro's Cuba was the first communist state in the Western Hemisphere. Today, trade agreements between the United States and Cuba have taken place and some restrictions have been lifted but the economy of the island is still poor.