

Chapter 8: A Decade of Revolution in Cuba

This chapter is informed by a desire to press the reader to imagine the Cuban Revolution in concrete historical terms. Non-experts often speak of the Revolution as something that transcends time, as an unchanging phenomena that has survived for fifty years, and in doing so they tend to erase not only the great diversity of experiences that Cubans have had since 1959, but also make it more difficult to understand how the Castro brothers remained in power for so long. Here, we treat a very specific issue, the efforts to transform Cuban society in the years between the triumph of the rebels in 1959 and the 1970 sugar harvest.

This was in many ways the Castro regime's most idealistic period, and is fascinating for both the variety of utopian initiatives undertaken by the regime and their spectacular failures. More importantly, in studying this period, we have the opportunity to understand why millions of Cubans embraced the Castro regime during these years in spite of its missteps. This will allow readers to understand that Cubans were neither simply dupes nor victims, nor liberated from the oppressive chains of capitalism through the coming and process of the Cuban Revolution. Their experiences during this and later periods were infinitely more complex.

The Documents in this chapter aim to trace the trajectory of the concept of the Revolutionary Man, an ideal first espoused by Che Guevara in 1965. We first read Che's formulation from the magazine *Marcha*, and then move to later reflections on this concept, including Senel Paz' short story *the Wolf, the Forest, and the New Man*, along with several brief blog postings by one of today's most important critics of life in Cuba, Yoani Sánchez. The latter documents are meant to encourage students to think about change over time.

Questions to Consider when Reading the Documents

How can we successfully use different genres (letters, novels, blogs) to construct a history of Revolutionary Cuba?

Which of these texts produces the most compelling rendering the Cuban Revolution? Why?

How would you position the idealism of Che's letter in *La Marcha* vis a vis the changing attitudes of later decades? Is it worth considering the idealism of these years in trying to understand the Revolution?

Do we gain some understanding of what happened after 1970 by focusing so closely on the first decade of the Castro regime?

What is to be gained by locating the Cuban Revolution in time?

Can we insert the Cuban Revolution into more global narratives of the 1960s?