

This Week in History

The Cuban Revolution was an important moment in 20th century history.

It's hard to tell the story of the 20th century without talking about the Cuban Revolution. This revolution, which ended on January 1, 1959, had long-lasting effects on Cuba, the United States, and the whole world. **What do you know about the Cuban Revolution?**

The Cuban Revolution was led by Fidel Castro. **What do you know about him?** But the start of this revolution was not the first time he had tried to take power in Cuba. The first time was on July 26, 1953. On this day, Castro and some other revolutionaries tried to take over the Moncada Barracks. They thought if they could take over this barracks, they could eventually take over Cuba. But this attack failed, and Fidel Castro was put in jail. Even though this attack didn't work, Castro and his allies were inspired by it. During the Cuban Revolution, Castro named his group of fighters, "The 26th of July Movement" to commemorate this attack.

After he was let out of jail, Fidel Castro went to Mexico. Here, he met other Cubans who had been forced to leave Cuba. He also met an Argentine man named Ernesto "Che" Guevara. **Have you heard of him? Where?** All these people formed a group. They wanted to try again to take power in Cuba.

The reason why Castro and other Cubans in Mexico wanted to take power was because they didn't like the leader of Cuba. His name was Fulgencio Batista. Batista served as president of Cuba from 1940 to 1944. Then, in 1952, he ran for president again. But when he saw that he would probably lose that election, he staged a coup, or a takeover of power. He then led Cuba as a military dictator. **Have you heard of Fulgencio Batista? If so, what do you know about him?** Batista was a cruel leader. Many people in Cuba were very poor and didn't have much education. But Batista did nothing to help these people. Instead, he opened many casinos and befriended mafia leaders. He also sold a lot of Cuban land to American companies. By doing this, Batista became very rich even as his people continued to suffer.



At first, Castro and his allies only wanted to get rid of Batista.

Even though we think of the Cuban Revolution as a communist takeover, this is not how it started. Castro didn't want to bring communism to Cuba when he first started his campaign. He was a nationalist, or someone who wanted to fight for his home country, and he wanted Batista out of power. **Did you know this about Castro and the Cuban Revolution?**

On November 26, 1956, Castro, Guevara, and other revolutionaries, including Castro's brother Raúl, left Mexico and set sail for Cuba. They sailed in a yacht they called "Granma." Their plan was to arrive in Cuba and start a revolution to overthrow Batista. But this revolution almost ended before it began. 82 people were on board the "Granma" when it landed in Cuba. But when the Cuban military found out about these revolutionaries, they attacked them. 67 people died in this attack. This was bad for the revolutionaries, and it looked like they might not be able to succeed. But over time, they gained new followers in Cuba who also wanted Batista out of power. They became a strong force again and started to win battles even when they were outnumbered.

On December 31, 1958, after months of fighting, Batista's forces lost a crucial battle in the city of Santa Clara. This loss made Batista scared. The next morning, on January 1, 1959, he fled Cuba and went to the Dominican Republic. When Castro and the revolutionaries heard that Batista was gone, they declared victory. They then took over Havana, Cuba's capital.

Castro ruled Cuba from 1959 until 2008. His time in power was controversial. He eventually became a communist and spoke out against the United States. But this revolution was a historic moment that showed that dictators can be overthrown, no matter how powerful. **What do you think is the best way to fight against dictators?** END