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Fidel Castro's Cultural Armament of  
Cold War Cuba: Developing Education,  
1960 – 1969

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Fidel Castro's Cultural Armament of Cold War Cuba:  
Developing Education, 1960 – 1969

Maya Steinborn

History 400 – Research Seminar in Historical Method  
Professor Poppy Fry  
Fall 2013

*I dedicate my historical endeavors to  
Joseph Steinborn, 16 August 1933 – 8 November 2013,  
and Judy Gottesman Steinborn, 7 August 1930 – 26 November 2013.*

*Never forget.*  
תשכח לא לעולם

**Abstract**

Through Castro's speeches and secondary educational scholarship, this research explores the following question: In what ways was Cuban education constructed in the 1960s to promote a revolutionary cultural consciousness, and how did that education grow over time to support the Cuban position in the Cold War? This question rose from the educational policy studies of Rolland G. Paulston, whereby he declared post-revolutionary Cuba successful in its educational reform because Castro created "new social institutions and a basic social and cultural realignment [using a] 'societalcentric' [model] that morally rewards [the working masses]." <sup>1</sup> Grounded in seminal definitions of the revolution as an educative movement, this paper explores both institutional and ideological goals embedded in Fidel Castro's speeches on education.

**Key Words**

Social reform; educational reform; Cold War; Fidel Castro – rhetoric; communist revolution

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<sup>1</sup> Rolland G. Paulston, "Education," in *Revolutionary Change in Cuba*, ed. Carmelo Mesa-Lago (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971), 376.

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## Background and Introduction to Research

Speaking at the First National Congress of Municipal Education Councils in 1960, Prime Minister Fidel Castro declared a cultural war against the United States, positioning education as Cuba's ultimate weapon against its enemies. He expounded

[We] are defending... the humble peasant, the little child who does not have a school to go to, the worker, the person who has been discriminated against, the poor... the exploited and sorely-trying portion of Cuban society; these are the interests which will be defended by revolutionary government that is fully aware of its duty to defend the interests of the humble people of the fatherland against... foreign exploiters... I only want to know whether you think that we can win the great battle of culture in 1961... [for] you [the teachers] are the great army of education in our country.<sup>2</sup>

Castro marked education as a fundamental tool for constructing a national culture in the decade following the Cuban Revolution. His reforms included all Cubans in the process of national transformation towards a revolutionized, communist ideal. In the 1960s, Castro's proclamation signaled the beginning of a process that galvanized proletarian participation in the revolution by expanding access to knowledge. Castro saw this educationally enforced mass culture as necessary to the eventual success of the revolution; without giving everyone participatory abilities, Cuba would not succeed towards the communist ideal.

Castro's intense focus on re-educating Cubans to adopt a fundamentally revolutionary culture stemmed from his utilization of Guevarism.<sup>3</sup> Guevarism posits that social change must occur before the economic base of a nation can be revolutionized.<sup>4,5</sup> This is a significant and

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<sup>2</sup> Fidel Castro, "First National Congress of Municipal Education Councils" (speech, Havana, Cuba, 11 October 1960), paragraph 50.

<sup>3</sup> Guevarism is named after the Argentine communist revolutionary Che Guevara, a figure instrumental in the Cuban Revolution and Castro's success.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Carnoy, "Educational Reform and Social Transformation in Cuba, 1959 – 1989," in *Education and Social Transition in the Third World*, ed. Martin Carnoy and Joel Samoff (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 159.

<sup>5</sup> Julie Marie Bunck, *Fidel Castro and the Quest for a Revolutionary Culture* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 127. Historian Bunck noted generally, "Castro agreed with Che that Cuba could not progress smoothly toward socialism without first thoroughly imbuing the people with transformed attitudes towards

often overlooked characteristic of 1960s Cuban political theory; Guevarism directly opposes traditional Marxism, which necessitates a revolution of the economic system as the precursor to any social change.<sup>6</sup> This underlying political philosophy negates the anti-communist Americanized idea that education was simply a means for indoctrinating and subduing the work force; Castro's use of Guevarism implied that no constructive or lasting economic change could in fact take place without cultural reeducation. Schools thus provided a pragmatic and pervasive venue in which culture could be reformulated following the revolution. Cuba's intense commitment to long-term social change was pragmatically embedded in the school system and "enhance[d] the survival of the values implicit in the social system concerned,"<sup>7</sup> as noted by researcher of Cuban education and health Theodore MacDonald. Since Castro took a Guevarist approach to legislation in the 1960s,<sup>8</sup> national education was a necessary and primary part of reorganizing Cuba after the revolution.

Castro's radical educational stance fulfilled the need to unite the Cuban people in support of his general socialist policies. Education was an essential facet of the communalization and redistribution process in the post-revolutionary period. Considering the need to unify the masses towards actualizing revolutionary reform, the socialist education of Cubans can be conceptualized as a program at work towards cultural readjustment through the homogenization of experience and contingent ideology. So while education was motivated by labor productivity and politics in the long term, the mass socialist education of Cubans in the 1960s functionally and most immediately contributed to cultural change. Castro's 1960s education reforms

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labor." Her definition centralizes the economic aspects of Guevarism, while my definition focuses on the more cultural motives of a Guevarist system alluded to by Carnoy.

<sup>6</sup> The functionality of Guevarism in Cuban politics makes *social* a term interchangeable with *culture*. See footnote 2 for an elaboration on the specific connotations of *culture* used in this paper.

<sup>7</sup> Theodore MacDonald, *Making a New People: Education in Revolutionary Cuba* (Vancouver: New Star Books Ltd., 1985), 25, 28.

<sup>8</sup> Carnoy, 159 – 160.

fomented a culture<sup>9</sup> of revolutionary activism united against imperialism and towards Cuban autonomy. The revolutionized and communalized educational system marked a tangible departure from pre-revolutionary life that justified and fortified this distinctively Cuban revolutionary culture in the Cold War.

• *Global Context*

Castro's combative plans for education were globally significant in the 1960s due to his position in the Cold War as an ally of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.) and an enemy of the United States (U.S.). As the Cold War pitted communist ideology against capitalist ideology, Castro used the school system to set Cuban standards and forms of knowledge against those of the U.S. government. Describing the glacial political state of the 90-mile divide<sup>10</sup> between the U.S. and Cuba in 1960, Castro expounded

The revolution today confronts the offensive of imperialism and [its] reactionary forces... The battle against the Cuban revolution is today directed by imperialism itself; the battle against [us] is directed by the Yankee State Department... the Yankee C.I.A., and the Yankee warmongers in the Pentagon.<sup>11</sup>

With this statement, Cuba's actions were necessitated and galvanized by U.S. aggression, and "all the honest men and women... full of the revolutionary consciousness"<sup>12</sup> were positioned as the united forces standing against U.S. domination. Herein lies Castro's reasoning for centralizing education as a means to arm the masses against U.S. influence. By creating a

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<sup>9</sup> In this paper, *culture* refers to (1) daily behavioral practices, (2) an ideological framework, and (3) social structures. Inherent to post-revolutionary Cuban culture, embedded in a socialistic-communistic system, is the melding of all things social, political, and economic. All of those sectors are united by common ideological and behavioral goals. Thus, politics and economics should be understood as implicit in educational reform, but not central. The central goal of 1960s educational reform was a revolutionizing of the aforementioned behaviors, ideology, and structure of Cuban life, necessary precursors to participation in politics or increased productivity in economics.

<sup>10</sup> It is considered historically and contemporaneously significant that the island nation of Cuba lies only 90 miles off the U.S. shores of Florida.

<sup>11</sup> "First National Congress of Municipal Education Councils," paragraph 14, 22.

<sup>12</sup> "First National Congress of Municipal Education Councils," paragraph 17.

revolutionary culture, Castro sought to increase the longevity of autonomous rule for the newly independent Cuban nation.

The anticipation of combat was another motivating factor for educational reforms in both the U.S. and Cuba. The Cold War missile gap<sup>13</sup> and fears of mutually assured destruction (MAD)<sup>14</sup> increased technological competition between nations. Arms competition between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. gave increased significance to Cuba's geographic placement; the island nation represented the intense proximity of the combative communist front for Americans afraid of global communist revolution. The early 1960s saw the U.S. implementing programs that funded science, technology, math, and engineering programs in addition to foreign language classes, technical and vocational programs, and monetary aid to disadvantaged areas.<sup>15</sup> Simultaneously, Cuban reforms moved towards "adult education, expansion of the formal school system, development of skilled rural labor and social consciousness, and... [a] focus on technical proficiency and higher education," as identified by labor economist and preeminent education scholar Martin Carnoy.<sup>16</sup> Overall, educational reform made the U.S. and Cuba more competitive

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<sup>13</sup> Alexei Shevchenko, "Eisenhower Years" (lecture, University of California, Los Angeles, CA, 2 July 2013). When the U.S.S.R. launched Sputnik in October 1957, the U.S. became fearful that the communist nation had intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) technology that would destroy the U.S. This myth of Soviet superiority, fed by Khrushchev's wily speeches, contributed to the U.S. climate of paranoia – the Red Scare – and to fast-paced scientific research geared towards closing the gap in missile technology between the U.S. and U.S.S.R.

<sup>14</sup> Alexei Shevchenko, "Cuban Missile Crisis" (lecture, University of California, Los Angeles, CA, 9 July 2013). The idea of MAD resulted from the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, whereby the U.S.S.R. placed medium-range ballistic missiles in Cuba to (1) defend Cuba in wake of the U.S.-led Bay of Pigs invasion, (2) show Soviet nuclear armament strength, and (3) use U.S. safety as a bargaining chip in control over Berlin. President Kennedy and Soviet premier Khrushchev agreed to remove missiles in respectively threatening areas (Turkey and Cuba) in order to solve this crisis, forcing "nuclear learning" upon both countries. Thus, the crisis pushed the people and governments involved in the Cold War to move towards stable strategic deterrence and to understand how increased armament would lead to MAD. This became especially important in 1969 when the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. achieved strategic parity (equal amounts of nuclear weaponry).

<sup>15</sup> Yong Zhao, *Catching Up or Leading the Way: American Education in the Age of Globalization* (Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2009), 23. Those reforms include the 1958 National Defense Education Act (NDEA), the Vocational Education and Higher Education Acts of 1963, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1964.

<sup>16</sup> Carnoy, 174.

and more divided as those reforms further polarized their citizens ideologically and in terms of their vocational abilities. Education thus manifested as a front in the Cold War.

• *Domestic Context*

Education both contributed to Cuba's global legitimacy as an autonomous nation and crucially influenced domestic change regarding the transition from U.S.-controlled capitalism to socialism following the revolution. The implementation of education reform proved that Castro could materialize his ideal socialist structure of Cuba. As Carnoy wrote,

Education and educational change in revolutionary Cuba became a symbol for the revolution itself; mass education became a means to mass economic participation and mobilization. Both of these were the very essence of the revolution and were intimately connected to the educational reform.<sup>17</sup>

Education thus allowed Cubans to access and interact with Castro's revolutionary socialist policies, which would have been unintelligible without the pillars of communism and politics taught in schools as a result of 1960s reforms. The main components of Cuban education – educating the working population, building and increasing access to a greater number of schools, developing a culture of productivity, and achieving technological<sup>18</sup> proficiency – paralleled Castro's larger goals of equalizing access to resources and “incorporating the mass of the population into the revolutionary people-nation.”<sup>19</sup> These features support the claim that education had fundamentally cultural roots and intentions, and that Castro's 1960s educational rhetoric and reform were geared towards allying the Cuban people to his communist cause.

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<sup>17</sup> Carnoy, 171.

<sup>18</sup> Technological education encompassed the disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. In the 2000s, this type of knowledge was codified as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) education. During the Cold War, technology was particularly important in Soviet, American, and Cuban educational reforms because it prepared students to enter vocations geared towards wartime technology development. The race to space and the perceived missile gap between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S., for example, emphasized the importance of technological education.

<sup>19</sup> Carnoy, 189.

• *Historiographical Context*

Considering the competitive and propagandistic nature of Cold War politics, in addition to global educational norms, it is inaccurate to invalidate Castro's policies as simply repressive or coercive. The imposition of political ideals does not negate the effectiveness or validity of culturally focused educational reforms. From the pedagogical perspective of MacDonald, "[S]tate schooling systems throughout the world were all conceived out of pragmatic political necessity... No nation or state, whatever its political orientation, will put the bulk of its citizenry through a system which does not legitimize its own social and political ethics, and hence its very survival."<sup>20</sup> That understanding of education's purpose points to the gap in historical research on the topic of 1960s Cuban education.

A significant proportion of English sources on this topic focus on comparing Cuban education relative to Western ideals<sup>21</sup> of free expression, and take Castro out of his 1960s global and domestic context. Castro's coercion should not invalidate his reforms because all political leaders used coercion during the Cold War. Including political knowledge in education is actually a global educational norm. Historian Theodore Draper, writing *Castroism: Theory and Practice* in 1969, and political scientist Julie Marie Bunck who wrote *Fidel Castro and the Quest for a Revolutionary Culture* in 1994, both asserted that Castro failed to create cultural change because his policies were implemented with political coercion and repression of non-socialist ideas. Historian Hugh Thomas, in "A Summing Up at 10," similarly criticized what he perceived to be repression of free thought. In response to this kind of value-based claim, MacDonald noted,

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<sup>20</sup> MacDonald, 28.

<sup>21</sup> Within this paper, *Western ideals* refer to the United States and northern Europe's conceptions of republican democratic superiority as discussed by prominent politicians and political scientists. *Western* refers to countries with colonial or imperial powers, including the U.S., England, Spain, the Netherlands, France, Portugal, Germany, and few others. Many countries in the western hemisphere are significantly excluded from the ideologically charged term *Western* because they were subjects of colonialism or imperialism.

“When a country is engaged in the struggle against poverty and backwardness and is besieged at every turn by a mercilessly restricting economic blockade from the U.S., niceties like academic freedom appear to be of remote significance.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, the U.S. embargo against Cuba, the need to push Cuba towards modern development, and the need to survive the Cold War necessitated a move away from coercion as a qualifying factor in researching 1960s Cuban education, and a move towards contextualized analysis of the actual rhetoric and mandates of Castro’s new system.

Pedagogical ideas are crucial to a renewed analysis of this topic because they contextualize educational policies in educational norms and historical needs. Carnoy, a scholar of education outside of the historical discipline, effectively analyzed Castro’s policies as they logically functioned within their revolutionary context; he exemplifies the type of analysis needed in the historiography of this topic. In *Education and Social Transition in the Third World*, Carnoy outlined the process of social transformation Castro sought to bring about through education:

In societies in radical transition from one... system to another, education can act to condition people into the new system. Therefore, the schooling process intends to develop new attitudes and values to contribute to the development of a new system... rather than the reproduction of an existing system... In Cuba, the formal school system, including schools for workers and peasants, was reorganized to carry the day-to-day responsibilities for changing values in this manner.<sup>23</sup>

He thus validated Castro’s use of education as a revolutionary mechanism, and deduced that such reforms were necessary to move Cuban people into the post-revolutionary future by shifting their ideologically guided behaviors. Moreover, he conveyed how that transformation was made possible by re-structuring the underlying system according to cultural ideals, and then transforming curriculum to achieve those ideals. The organization of this essay follows the order

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<sup>22</sup> MacDonald, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Carnoy, 175.

of that process, and concludes by analyzing the functionality of that process in its Cold War context.

• *Research Structure*

This research moves away from political, economic, and relativist analysis to look at the functional significance of cultural education in 1960s Cuba, pivoting analysis on the ideas of *cubanía revolucionaria*,<sup>24</sup> the universalization of schooling,<sup>25</sup> and blending pragmatism and idealism in educational rhetoric and reform.<sup>26</sup> Those concepts will be explored through analysis of Castro's speeches<sup>27</sup> on education in the 1960s. Underlying theories will be discussed through secondary educational and historical scholarship.

The first section, *The Revolution is a Great Teacher*, shows how Castro framed the revolutionization of culture as an educative movement. *Sustainable Practices: Centralizing Pragmatism to the Revolution* discusses Castro's conceptualization of cultural reeducation as a long-term process. The next two sections of this paper deal with the two categories of educational goals – those explicitly scholastic and those explicitly cultural. The scholastic section, *Castro's Goals for Re-structuring Education*, discuss Castro's goals relating to Cuban teaching, school structure and quality, and particular emphases within schools such as literacy

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<sup>24</sup> Antoni Kapcia, *Cuba: Island of Dreams* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2008), 6, 127, 140.

*Cubanía revolucionaria* is the active, revolutionary cultural consciousness that arose in post-1959 Cuba. Kapcia, a scholar of Cuban history, argues that *cubanía revolucionaria* is a departure from earlier, westerner-imposed terms such as *cubanidad* because *cubanía* refers explicitly to a post-revolutionary ideology. This “hegemonic ideology of dissent... became fundamental in guiding the revolutionary process through the maelstrom of the first decade [into] the 1990s, where it became a vital element in guaranteeing survival.” Moreover, “the codes of collectivism, revolutionism, statism and culturalism were all enhanced” by the early formation and experience of *cubanía*, which “offered protection, security and stability.”

<sup>25</sup> Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada, “Education and Revolution,” in *Monthly Review* 63 (2011): 137.

<sup>26</sup> Par Kumaraswami, “Introduction: Towards an Integrated Understanding of the Cuban Revolution,” in *Rethinking the Cuban Revolution Nationally and Regionally: Politics, Culture, and Identity*, ed. Par Kumaraswami (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 1.

<sup>27</sup> These speeches were sourced from the online Latin American Network Information Center (LANIC), an academic Latin American Studies database connected to the University of Texas at Austin. LANIC obtained Castro's speeches in Spanish from the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) of the U.S. government and translated the speeches into English.

and technology. The cultural section, *Building Cuba's Revolutionary Education through Education*, addresses the revolutionary characteristics and communist goals that guided educational reform. The final section, *The Functionality of Revolutionary Education During the Cold War*, re-contextualizes reforms in the Cold War to discuss the pragmatism of nationalizing Cuban schools, embedding ideology in curriculum, and valorizing the teaching profession.

### **“The Revolution is a Great Teacher”**

Between 1960 and 1961, Castro emphatically declared the revolution to be an educative movement that would completely shift the daily lives of all Cubans through increasing knowledge and communalizing culture. This constituted the theoretical basis of the entire revolution in Castro's rhetoric, which he expressed by remarking, "The revolution is a great teacher... [revolution] will continue to take hold of all of our [minds] and will continue to develop a... series of ideas and... concepts which will enable us to continue discovering the truths that make up a revolution."<sup>28</sup> Teaching a certain ideology and morality (a certain culture) was thus posited as the purpose of the revolution, making schools and education completely necessary to achieving absolutely any degree of success. That dependency of the revolution upon education was articulated a year later when Castro proclaimed, "There can be no revolution without education because a revolution means profound changes in the life of a country."<sup>29</sup> Castro's reference to "changes in the life of a country" implies that education had the potential to change Cuban ideology, behavior, and societal structure, supporting my claim that educational reform functioned as cultural reform on a very straightforward level. Moreover, the aforementioned statements by Castro point to the significance of studying cultural-educational reform in developing an understanding of the revolutionized Cuban nation.

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<sup>28</sup> "First National Congress of Municipal Education Councils," paragraph 26.

<sup>29</sup> Fidel Castro, "'Education and Revolution' – Castro Attacks U.S. Reactions, U.S. Ignorance" (speech, Havana, Cuba 9 April 1961), paragraph 1.

### **Sustainable Practices: Centralizing Pragmatism to the Revolution**

Castro envisioned the goals of education as ideals, and did not believe that they would occur immediately just because of the institutionalization of reforms. He acknowledged that material hardships would slow the equalization process, saying, “Reality is imposing inevitable inequalities for many years – inequalities that exist within our society and will continue to exist for many years.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, the remarks and ideals expressed in the 1960s should be understood as the formation of a system geared towards quality teachers and schools, class equalization, technological progress, and the communist ideal. Castro did not proclaim that simple rhetoric or legislation would instantly perfect the system, nor did he claim that education would instantly create equality.

The underlying pragmatism in Castro’s speeches, which can superficially be read as very idealistic and overly visionary, is furthermore important to understanding the mood of the defensive and revolutionary culture he sought to create. He embedded practicality within each educational structure and corresponding cultural ideal – necessary due to the tense and restrictive climate of the Cold War, in which all politically led actions had to have a functional purpose both domestically and internationally. For that reason, Castro was “opposed to creating exaggerated optimism regarding any problem... [because] the spirit of the revolutionary should be a calm spirit under all circumstances, in the face of adversities and difficulties, as well as before successes,”<sup>31</sup> as he told the public at Havana University in 1968. He did not want the masses to act with alarm or anxiety; rather, level-headedness and composure were declared central to the successful actions of a revolutionary. This implies that acting judiciously and intelligently would strengthen the Cuban reputation.

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<sup>30</sup> Fidel Castro, “Role of Revolutionary Instructors in Cuba” (speech, Havana, Cuba, 30 June 1962), paragraph 86.

<sup>31</sup> Fidel Castro, “Havana University Speech” (speech, Havana, Cuba, 14 March 1968), paragraph 15 – 16.

Overall, Castro saw education as the way to overcome underdevelopment and sustain revolutionary Cuba in the long term. The educated populace would increase Cuba's reputation as intelligent and unified; people would possess the knowledge to debate politics and defend and participate in the revolutionary government. Eventually, education would prepare all citizens to work in diverse and revolutionarily productive fields in order to maintain a self-sufficient economy and arm the nation against its enemies through cultural and technological superiority. Education would generally contribute to revolutionary sovereignty and strength over time.

### **Castro's Goals for Re-structuring Education**

Castro institutionalized pragmatic systems in order to advance the cultural ideals of education and the revolution. The transformation of the school system began with his creation of schools of pedagogy with the metaphorical purpose of training teachers to become the soldiers of the cultural war against the U.S by educating the Cuban masses. Those teachers acted in a universal school system, whereby all citizens were given full access to schools of equally high caliber. Adults and children in urban and rural settings – people from all walks of life, many of whom previously faced restrictions in their ability to access high quality schools or anything past grammar school – were welcomed into this system. Students could self-select into specialized programs geared towards certain revolutionary vocations, a number of which were specifically technology-focused in the later 1960s. This system domestically marked Cuba as wholeheartedly different from pre-revolutionary times, when schools were privatized and hierarchical, privileging the upper classes and restricting proletarian education. Pre-revolutionary Cuba was rife with inequality, inequity, and exclusivity, while revolutionary Cuba pushed constantly towards complete equality, equity, and accessibility. This system made Cuban education

competitive on an international scale, since it provided a strong education to all students in all parts of Cuba, even the remote mountains and sugarcane fields.

• *The Cuban Teaching Profession*

In light of the structural need to recruit and train a mass teaching force, Castro identified teaching as one of the greatest vocations of the revolution, and thus posited teaching as a necessarily revolutionary act. Teachers were primarily needed for the 1961 Literacy Campaign, and grew in importance as more schools were constructed for an increased number of students. This trend manifested in Castro's speeches in 1962: an unnamed interviewer for the Cuban newspaper *Prensa Latina* opened their report on Castro's 1962 visit to Santiago with the statement, "Fidel Castro declared today that there is no socialism, no communism without education; there is no work more productive than teaching."<sup>32</sup> This statement shows how teaching was considered foundational to the entire revolutionary transformation of Cuban culture, which Castro rooted explicitly in education. Therein Castro also valorized the profession in order to draw more people into the teaching force. Teachers paralleled military generals in the way that they functioned in the cultural battle of communism against imperialism, because they directed the knowledge and resultant behaviors of the Cuban people, or troops.

As teachers went through training programs in Castro's new system, they came to embody the process and cultural functionality that Castro envisioned in the general educational system. At the 1964 Macareno Pedagogic Institute graduation ceremony, Castro noted how the teachers were paragons of his educational ideals: "These graduations [marking the certification of new teachers] have become something like a living example of a complete education program," he remarked, specifying that the teachers functioned in an ideal system wherein

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<sup>32</sup> Fidel Castro. Interview by *Prensa Latina*. 24 July 1962. Latin American Network Information Center. <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html>.

“everyone helps one another.”<sup>33</sup> This implied that Cuban schooling cyclically imparted revolutionary ideas onto students and reinforced the necessity of those ideas for the teachers. Castro wanted such a communal spirit to be taught to students in all school levels so that it would spread throughout Cuban society over time. Cooperation was a key competency for both teachers and their students; in order for Cubans to work together towards national goals, cooperation had to be promoted as a core value.

Castro saw great potential in the teaching force and continually emphasized that their high quality and intensive training would directly benefit the revolution. He drew attention to the “seven to eight years of study”<sup>34</sup> that enriched teachers’ experiential knowledge. Their training, he believed, would improve and stabilize schools in the tumultuous post-revolutionary period. At the 1968 graduation ceremony for Oriente University, he also emphasized that specialization by discipline would increase the functionality of teachers.<sup>35</sup> He further implied that good teachers were necessary to cohesively implement reforms for long-term, stable success, noting in 1968 to the graduates of Oriente University, “We cannot rest in our efforts to create the means and to provide the recourses to unceasingly improve the quality of teaching, until it becomes the quality that our country needs for the future.”<sup>36</sup> This implied that teachers would continually be re-trained to adapt to temporal changes, such as technological advancements. That flexibility and immediate functionality was necessary to promoting Cuban dominance in the cultural battles of the Cold War.

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<sup>33</sup> Fidel Castro, “Graduation – Macareno Pedagogic Institute” (speech, Mariano, Cuba, 6 December 1964), paragraph 36.

<sup>34</sup> “Graduation – Macareno Pedagogic Institute,” paragraph 33.

<sup>35</sup> “Graduates of Oriente University,” paragraph 5.

<sup>36</sup> Fidel Castro, “Graduates of Oriente University” (speech, Santiago de Cuba, Cuba, 9 December 1968), paragraph 6.

• *Universalizing Schooling*

Castro's ideal of universalizing began during the Cuban Revolution as guerilla fighters taught peasants in liberated zones. It heightened when he converted the Batista regime's bases into schools following the 1959 victory. Early revolutionary education then took place in *bohios* (peasant huts).<sup>37</sup> This shows that the foundation of the new Cuban education lay with the peasants and workers – Castro's idolized proletariat. These schools were staffed by well-trained teachers, catered to receptive students, and served their purpose of bringing literacy to remote areas.<sup>38</sup> This early system of dispersing knowledge to underprivileged Cubans in underdeveloped areas laid the groundwork for Castro's campaigns for universalizing schooling throughout revolutionized Cuba.

Legislating universal access to education for all citizens functioned both to equalize the classes and legitimize Cuba as a new socialist state. As Castro envisioned, universalization was one of the most pivotal factors in the cultural transformation and armament of Cuba – historians Alfred Padula and Lois M. Smith even note that universality remains “*the* most striking characteristic of Cuban education.”<sup>39</sup> As Carnoy noted in his pedagogical analysis of Cuban education following the revolution, universalizing participation proved to the Cuban masses, the rest of Latin America, and international powers that Castro's state could and would actualize its socialist goals. The equalization that came out of universalization also referenced Castro's "attempts to develop new ideals and new relationships in Cuban society," which manifested in the 1961 Literacy Campaign and the development of schools in rural areas.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Alfred Padula and Lois M. Smith, “The Revolutionary Transformation of Cuban Education, 1959 – 1987,” in *Making the Future: Politics and Educational Reform in the United States, England, the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba*, ed. Edgar B. Gumbert (Atlanta: Georgia State University, 1988), 120.

<sup>38</sup> Padula and Smith, 121.

<sup>39</sup> Padula and Smith, 117. Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>40</sup> Carnoy, 174 – 175.

The 1961 Literacy Campaign was one of the first (and is historically the most widely discussed) moves towards universalizing education. Castro mobilized revolutionary troops to provide the illiterate with reading and writing skills so that the revolution could take root in the minds of all Cubans. Speaking to “leaders of the union branches of Havana province,” Castro noted this as significant both domestically and in the greater Cold War context: “It is a great lesson on what a revolution is,” he remarked, going on to say, “It is a lesson to the enemies of our revolution.”<sup>41</sup> He proclaimed it as a “moral victory” for Cuba against imperialism because the campaign made education accessible to those who would otherwise be excluded from education due to their socioeconomic status.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the campaign’s students and teachers would “give [Cuba] a formidable generation to carry on the work of the revolution;” students would be able to advance their educations and constructively participate in the revolutionary system, and teachers would further the scholastic involvement necessary for that system to function. From historian Richard R. Fagen’s perspective, the campaign quickly proved useful for curing one of the outstanding failures of the old regime’s education system.<sup>43</sup>

The advent of workplace schools and rural schools furthered the trend of universalizing the location of education so that it would pervade Cuban social spaces. In Castro's words, “In the future, practically every plant, agricultural zone, hospital, and school will become a university.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, constructing schools so that all had equal physical access to education was deemed crucial to social betterment.<sup>45</sup> Constructing schools out of markers of the old regime,

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<sup>41</sup> Fidel Castro, “Literacy Campaign” (speech, Havana, Cuba, 17 August 1961), paragraph 6.

<sup>42</sup> “Literacy Campaign” (speech, Havana, Cuba, 17 August 1961), paragraph 8.

<sup>43</sup> Richard R. Fagen, “The Campaign Against Illiteracy,” in *The Transformation of Political Culture in Cuba* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), 36.

<sup>44</sup> Fidel Castro, quoted in Gerald Read, “The Revolutionary Offensive in Education,” in *Fidel Castro’s Personal Revolution in Cuba: 1959 – 1973*, ed. James Nelson Goodsell (New York: Random House, 1975), 217.

<sup>45</sup> This is especially significant in comparison to the U.S. educational policies of *separate but equal* that pervaded the mid-twentieth century, where African Americans were segregated from white Americans’ school facilities under the guise of equality but were given poor school supplies and generally little governmental funding.

such as occurred with the transformation of Batista's military barracks, was also metaphorically and functionally important. For example, plantation mansions – referred to as fortresses by Castro – spotted the rural areas of Cuba, and were seized by the state to become schools. At the celebration of such a transformation in Holguin, which created the 'Oscar Lucero' School City, Castro connected the construction of revolutionary schools to "creat[ing] for the future."<sup>46</sup> Since fortresses were used to keep commoners away from wealthy estate owners prior to the revolution, leading to violence and increased class tensions, the conversion of those estates into schools for rural workers and their children marked the departure away from imperialism and towards communism.

• *Scholastic Quality*

Focusing on quality education was a means of differentiating the revolutionary government from the pre-revolutionary government, which lacked teachers, books, and basic materials according to Castro.<sup>47</sup> Public schooling received little governmental support prior to Castro's reign, so he saw a great need to give it extra attention during the formative nation-building years in post-revolutionary Cuba. As he expressed at the national meeting of school monitors in 1966, he strove to "give every youth and every child in the country the necessary means to study under the best possible conditions."<sup>48</sup> No private schools existed under this system, and schooling was universalized and localized, so all students would receive both equal and equitable school experiences.

Political scientist Peter Schwab observed the streamlined and egalitarian nature of Castro's system in his 1999 monograph *Cuba: Confronting the U.S. Embargo*:

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<sup>46</sup> Fidel Castro, "Inaugurating the 'Oscar Lucero' School City in Holguin" (speech, Holguin, Cuba, 24 February 1960), paragraph 19.

<sup>47</sup> Fidel Castro, "National Meeting of School Monitors," paragraph 7.

<sup>48</sup> "National Meeting of School Monitors," paragraph 9.

At the age of 45 days infants are enrolled in preschool nurseries, and at the age of four they are transferred to one of more than 1,000 preschool centers organized by the Federation of Cuban Women. Six years of primary school, three of high school, and three more at the intermediate school level follow. Continuing education courses for working people are also conducted throughout the nation. The extraordinary emphasis on education has given Cuba a literacy rate above 96 percent, by far the highest in Latin America.<sup>49</sup>

Within this system, the production of high quality school work was stringently regulated. Again at the 1964 Macarenco Pedagogic Institute graduation ceremony, he identified general requirements needed for a student to advance to the next grade level: “first, attitude to study and work; second, discipline in the housing area and the school; and third, the desire to improve.”<sup>50</sup> These qualities can be traced to parallel cultural ideals – respectively, engaging in the revolutionary system of intelligent work, partaking in the communal society, and putting in the greatest possible effort to reap rewards that would reflect well upon the society and the nation. Primarily, universalized quality instruction engaged all students in intellectually strenuous learning, and brought students together from diverse backgrounds to work in school communities. Scholastic difficulty and communality was a microcosm of the larger revolution – engaging in demanding system over a long period of time in order to produce beneficial circumstances for the national common good.

Overall, Castro’s rhetoric suggested that specialized, dedicated, and revolutionarily guided students were the ideal products of the education system. At L.A. Stadium in 1964, he remarked, “the quality of those who graduate is much more important than their number... So we shall be increasingly demanding [in schools at all levels].”<sup>51</sup> This demand for visible, qualitative commitment to the revolution through education was geared towards making Cuba more

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<sup>49</sup> Peter Schwab, “The Stifling of Political Dissent in Cuba” in *Cuba: Confronting the U.S. Embargo* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 158 – 159.

<sup>50</sup> “Graduation – Macarenco Pedagogic Institute,” paragraph 10.

<sup>51</sup> Fidel Castro, “20<sup>th</sup> November Speech at L.A. Stadium” (speech, Havana, Cuba, 20 November 1964), paragraph 69.

competitive in the global system, which was especially significant considering the technological advances made by superpowers in the mid-twentieth century – especially in the United States.

• *Technological Progress*

The institutionalization of technological education programs in Cuban schools reflected the need to defend Cuba against imperialist aggressions through physical armament and, in Castro's eyes, would eventually increase domestic productivity through the partial mechanization of labor. He discussed the importance of technological education as early as 1960, remarking, “[W]e are going to create numerous technological schools – that is something!”<sup>52</sup> In 1966, his Ministry of Education sought to “organize a school which would have several levels of various scientific [and] technological... disciplines, where new teaching methods would be applied and where the drive for research would be encouraged – a school that can serve as a model of what our schools of the future should be like.”<sup>53</sup> The contributions that could be wrought from that technological research would reward Cubans for participating in the Guevarist process,<sup>54</sup> and would bring Cuba developmentally closer to the technological level of other world powers. Progress wrought by technology experts was thus necessitated by the Cold War push to engineer new technology, and by the domestic need for more efficient production.

Technological advancement was central to Cold War educational policies for communist and capitalist-imperialist powers – the U.S.S.R., U.S., and Cuba all emphasized it in their educational policies. Studies of Soviet education depict a militant focus on technology, showing that the U.S.S.R., like Cuba, placed its teachers and students at war with those of the U.S. In the 1958 book *This Is the Challenge: The Benton Reports of 1956 – 1958 on the Nature of the Soviet Threat*, U.S. politician and author William Benton noted that the rigorous Soviet education

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<sup>52</sup> “First National Congress of Municipal Education Councils,” 16.

<sup>53</sup> Fidel Castro, “National Meeting of School Monitors” (speech, Havana, Cuba, 18 September 1966), paragraph 55.

<sup>54</sup> “20<sup>th</sup> November Speech at L.A. Stadium,” paragraph 20 – 38.

culminated in “every youngster in the Soviet Union [getting] a better scientific grounding than any youngster in the United States.”<sup>55</sup> Alexander Karp, historian of education, noted, “hostility toward influences from abroad (particularly the West) permeated... the propaganda and ideology in Soviet schools.”<sup>56</sup> Similarly to Cuba, this Soviet education emphasized competition and distaste towards the U.S., and is a notable example of how technology was considered a crucial weapon for communism against U.S. capitalism. Both the U.S.S.R. and Cuba, leaders in twentieth century communism, saw technological advancement as a way to overcome capitalist pressures and sustain communism into the future.

Castro emphatically pointed to the space race<sup>57</sup> as a global signifier that Cuba had to focus on developing technological education in order to compete with capitalist powers. He referred to Western technology as “revolutionized in an unbelievable way,” implying a desire to achieve technological modernization.<sup>58,59</sup> He noted that it would be dangerous for Cuba to neglect this area, asking the graduates of Oriente University in 1968, “What then shall be the future of a people who do not dominate science [or technology or] the most modern production processes?”<sup>60</sup> His general vision reflected the disparity between countries preeminent in technology and those without advanced systems, and the general gulf between highly developed and underdeveloped nations.

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<sup>55</sup> William Benton, *This Is the Challenge: The Benton Reports of 1956 – 1958 on the Nature of the Soviet Threat* (New York: Associated College Press, 1958), quoted in Alexander Karp, “The Cold War in the Soviet School: A Case Study of Mathematics Education,” *European Education*, vol. 38, no. 4 (2006): 24, doi:10.2753.

<sup>56</sup> Alexander Karp, “The Cold War in the Soviet School: A Case Study of Mathematics Education,” *European Education*, vol. 38, no. 4 (2006): 24, doi:10.2753.

<sup>57</sup> The major world powers involved in the Cold War competed to send people into space; historically, this competition is referred to as the space race.

<sup>58</sup> By the late 1960s, the U.S. successfully launched satellites into space and planned a moon landing. Castro considered this revolutionary and wanted to strive towards achieving similar feats in engineering.

<sup>59</sup> “Graduates of Oriente University,” paragraph 42.

<sup>60</sup> “Graduates of Oriente University,” paragraph 46. This remark is historically significant because Apollo 19 would take Americans to the moon the next year, in July 1969.

Technological education is historically significant because it geared the revolution towards industrial development, and towards making Cubans competitive on an international scale. The colonial powers of Spain and the U.S. diminished the productive capacity of Cuba by maintaining a stratified labor force until the mid-twentieth century; most people were peasants engaged in manual labor, and the small elite pursued intellectual and bureaucratic careers. The revolution signified the termination of those hierarchical structures and the beginning of a time where manual labor would be aided by technology so that people could simultaneously engage in multiple aspects of the labor force.

In 1964, Castro named the price of technological underdevelopment as “stagnation, poverty, scarcity, and misery.”<sup>61</sup> As the disparity between U.S. and Cuban development grew into 1968, and Cuba faced shortages in food products and refined goods as a result of the U.S. embargo, he turned to education as a solution: “I believe that these things should lead us... to grasp the importance of a university, a technological institute, a school, a teacher, and a technician.”<sup>62</sup> While it would take a longer time for Cuba, an underdeveloped country restricted by the U.S. trade embargo, to meet the level of the first industrial nations,<sup>63</sup> he maintained that work in technological fields would help Cuba locally and globally in the long-term. In his words, technology would aid Cuba in progressing out of underdevelopment: “We see technology and the machine as the great resource, the great instrument for the progress of the country, for raising the standard of living.”<sup>64</sup> Providing people with the products of technology advancement would decrease the need for menial labor and open up opportunities for more complex, modern work.

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<sup>61</sup> “20 November Speech at L.A. Stadium,” paragraph 18.

<sup>62</sup> “Graduates of Oriente University,” paragraph 48.

<sup>63</sup> “Havana University Speech,” paragraph 130.

<sup>64</sup> “20 November Speech at L.A. Stadium,” paragraph 37.

Technology served as the modernizing capstone to Cuban education by focusing students on the study of international development rather than Cuban development. In Castro's words, "Our education, within our socialist revolution, must become a vanguard institution, because its tasks... will be precisely that of molding the citizen, preparing the citizen, training the citizen to adapt mentally and physically to live in this world – a world different from the one we have known up to now. This is the revolution."<sup>65</sup> Thus, technological instruction and the high quality, universal educational structures championed by Castro in the 1960s served to prepare Cubans to interact with the global system that the U.S. embargo restricted them from joining.

### **Building Cuba's Revolutionary through Education**

The previous two sections, *The Revolution is a Great Teacher* and *Castro's Goals for Restructuring Education*, show how idealism and pragmatism were functionally blended to garner support for the cultural aims of 1960s educational reform. This section focuses on Castro's ideals for education and the overarching cultural goals expressed in speeches throughout the 1960s. Each cultural goal is tied to one or more of the institutional mechanisms in Cuban education. Castro proclaimed the overarching cultural mechanism of education in Cuba to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1963:

The aims of education in the new Cuba include instilling in our children and young people an unbounded love of the Fatherland and a feeling of solidarity with the workers and peoples of all lands in their noble struggle for a free and happy life, and teaching them to abhor imperialist wars of plunder and to work steadfastly for peace... The teaching programs must help to develop a love of country and a love for the workers and peasants – for the people as creators of labor and the source of all social wealth. They have to indicate what is represented by the struggle against exploitation and misery... They must encourage a moral sense founded on the struggle against social inequality.<sup>66</sup>

Therein, *cuba's revolutionary* is broken down into specific goals within education, most notable solidarity, national pride, and equality. Overall, these goals portray the reformed

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<sup>65</sup> "National Meeting of School Monitors," paragraph 49.

<sup>66</sup> Fagen, 37.

educational institution as a place to learn and partake in the uniquely Cuban, revolutionary, and communistic culture developed by Castro in the decade following the revolution. By working towards those goals, Cubans would be defending their revolutionized country from foreign monopolization while working towards fulfilling the Marxist-Leninist ideal of a perfect communist society.

- *Equalizing the Classes*

The goal of equalization was tightly connected to the institutional process of universalizing schools; as Castro extended the opportunity to learn to all Cubans, he rhetorically equalized them as members of the proletariat, the ideal revolutionary class. Cubans worked in order to produce enough for all to have an equal share of wealth; as a result, Cubans lived on equal material means as proletarians. Castro marked this as necessary from the beginning of his educational reforms in 1960. He connected education to productivity and equality, saying, “each and every one of the children of our fatherland [would have] an opportunity to learn, regardless of class.”<sup>67</sup> Reiterating that message to university graduates in 1968, Castro emphasized that the students’ educations were made possible “only as the consequence of the development of the revolution, of the disappearance of privileges [and] class progressively.”<sup>68</sup> Everyone entered school as equals, and was required to work in order to earn their place and their degrees.

Socioeconomic status did not play into their success – had class been a factor in education, the revolution would have been corrupted. Had students unfairly advanced for selfish reasons rather than for the good of the whole, they would have broken the system in which “work in [Cuba benefited everyone].”<sup>69</sup> This mindset equated self-promotion with an unfair accumulation of

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<sup>67</sup> “First National Congress of Municipal Education Councils,” paragraph 4.

<sup>68</sup> “Graduates of Oriente University,” paragraph 3.

<sup>69</sup> “Graduates of Oriente University,” paragraph 7.

wealth. Removing class divides represented a tangible way of avoiding such an imbalance, and signified a shift towards unity through equality.

The process of equalization through education was wholeheartedly rooted in teaching to the proletariat. In 1962, Castro referred to this process directly as the development of a proletarian spirit by which all Cubans partook in the responsibilities of workers and essentially became the working class – “We shall develop proletarian spirit by developing [and educating] the proletariat,”<sup>70</sup> he proclaimed, “[and] there is no room for doubt that the only correct thing at this time is for the schools to be turned into schools fundamentally of the working class.”<sup>71</sup>

Marking Cuban schools as proletarian in nature and geared towards fostering a proletarian culture marked a definite turn away from the pre-revolutionary system of exclusion and elitism that restricted knowledge as a privilege of the wealthier classes. Castro explicitly noted that privileges would be given to none in the new education system so that all would be challenged to gain the most knowledge possible in defense of the revolution.

• *Defending the Revolution*

Castro emphasized throughout his 1960s speeches that the promotion and adoption of the revolutionary culture would effectively defend revolutionized Cuba from outside subversion and from engaging in armed conflict.<sup>72</sup> According to Castro, the process of defensively arming Cubans with that culture would occur through education, and sought to transform everyone into a

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<sup>70</sup> “Role of Revolutionary Instructors in Cuba,” paragraph 43.

<sup>71</sup> “Role of Revolutionary Instructors in Cuba,” paragraph 48.

<sup>72</sup> “First National Congress of Advanced Teachers,” paragraph 3 – 4. The defensive nature of this project must be highlighted because Castro explicitly stated that he did not want to engage in any kind of physical war with the U.S. In 1963, speaking at the First National Congress of Advanced Teachers during a teacher graduation ceremony, he specifically clarified how his battle was a defensive one, and not offensive: “Because a policy of aggression and hostility has been imposed on us, we found it necessary... to defend ourselves and to prepare for self-defense... Every measure... taken by this country has been for the purpose of preventing aggression.” This qualification does not mean that Castro’s stance was not combative; his rhetoric was obviously harsh, and was aggressively intolerant to imperialist and counterrevolutionary ideas. It does show that the war of culture was one he felt pushed into by necessity, especially following the Bay of Pigs invasion and the trade embargo. Thus, it is useful to conceptualize the war of culture as a defensive one that would strengthen Cuba’s skills need they be called upon in a *hot* war.

revolutionary and to grow the revolutionary vanguard and party. Castro explicitly outlined the specific abilities of such revolutionaries in 1962:

What the Revolution is interested in is having in every place of work prepared workers... with high political education... capable of orienting their comrades... capable of explaining socialism, or arguing with defeatists, of arguing with the ignorant, of taking issue with the arguments of enemies; of explaining the reasons for every difficulty; and of explaining the past, the present, and the future... the more revolutionary militants with a high level of political education... the more force and solidity the Revolution will have.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, being a revolutionary or becoming part of the vanguard party required political awareness, and ultimately fed into the successful political organization of all of Cuba. However, as historian Richard R. Fagen noted in his 1969 monograph *The Transformation of Political Culture in Cuba*, “the primary aim [was] to produce a participating citizen, not just one who [could] recite the revolutionary catechism perfectly.”<sup>74</sup> So overall, education provided an understanding of Marxist-Leninist ideology and a general skill set for Cubans to understand and utilize politics, thus defending the revolution by participating in government or by simply embodying the revolutionized (and automatically political) culture of post-1959 Cuba.

This extensive focus on the underlying political structure of revolutionized Cuba rooted Castro’s 1960s educational ideals in populist<sup>75</sup> ideals; mass participation was both inherent and necessary to the success of the revolution, and education defended the revolution by making that mass participation possible. Castro referred to this as the “mass method” in 1962, saying, “Either one has faith in the masses or one does not have faith in them... And the [mass method] with which errors have been corrected has been a truly revolutionary and truly Marxist [one...] leading to the strengthening of all revolutionary fronts... All of us shall understand it, absolutely

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<sup>73</sup> “Role of Revolutionary Instructors,” paragraph 65 – 66.

<sup>74</sup> Fagen, 7.

<sup>75</sup> Within this paper, *populism* refers to politics of the masses and the working class, and does not refer to the nineteenth century U.S. Populist labor party.

all of us.”<sup>76</sup> Castro’s reference to having faith in the “mass method” was significant because it divided those who stayed in Cuba after the revolution from those who emigrated to the U.S.<sup>77</sup> This marked the method as revolutionary and separate from the old system which was rife with hierarchy endorsed by those who left Castroist Cuba during the Cuban Diaspora. Noting the corrective power of the mass method, Castro further empowered the new Cuba and castigated the old system by asserting communism as the solution to Cuban social problems. He asserted that this method must be understood by the public; a politically informed education would not let citizens follow the method blindly. In the same speech, he went on to remark, “the task of revolutionary education has to go closely linked with the task of the organization of the revolutionary vanguard... the formation of the revolutionary party of the working class, because they are [inseparable...] And if there is no revolutionary education, there will be no revolutionary party.”<sup>78</sup> Thus, education would make communism legible to the masses; teachers would construct and provide the defensive weapons of revolutionary activism, national unity, and social solidarity.

Castro also reiterated how education was to function combatively when referring to knowledge as a defensive weapon for the revolution. He tied the “mass method” to the revolutionary culture that would win the battle against imperialism, noting that class struggle must be institutionalized in proletarian schools so that imperialism would be avoided and distinguished at all levels. He idealized proletarian knowledge as an immediately accessible tool in battle, remarking, “the conscience of a true revolutionary, a combative revolutionary,

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<sup>76</sup> “Role of Revolutionary Instructors in Cuba,” paragraph 26 – 29.

<sup>77</sup> The period during which Cubans emigrated to the U.S. following the revolution is historically known as the Cuban Diaspora. Those expatriates are generally associated with anti-revolutionary, anti-communist sentiment, which implicates them as enemies of Castro’s revolution and reforms. Castro commonly referred to them in his speeches as counterrevolutionaries or counterrevolutionary forces, and he equated them with general imperialist powers because Cuban expatriates in Miami (most notably) rapidly assimilated into the U.S. political system.

<sup>78</sup> “Role of Revolutionary Instructors in Cuba,” paragraph 33 – 34.

individuals prepared to give battle at any time, must be created in everyone of the students who finishes the schools.”<sup>79</sup> They would need to “give battle” both within their communities and in the face of international rhetoric diminishing the legitimacy of Cuban communism, internalizing the need for a cohesive domestic community and the push towards a peaceable international system.

• *Towards the Communist Ideal*

Equalizing the classes and fostering a spirit defensive of the revolution ultimately served to push Cuba towards the Marxist-Leninist ideal of a communist state with a communal economic and political base, equal participation by all, and equal opportunities for all. He expressed this directly to teachers in training to emphasize the inclusion of Marxist-Leninism and communist ideology in school curricula in 1962, stating simply, “To study Marxism and to teach Marxism are vital and decisive for the Revolution.”<sup>80</sup> This was the ultimate goal of Castro’s cultural-educational reforms: to create a utopian communist system, in which all students would attend the new Cuban schools, and “Clothing, shoes, food – everything – will be free.”<sup>81</sup> Moreover, because of the equalization of classes aided by the universalization of education, everyone would have the abilities to participate equally in the production of those free goods and the re-production of the overarching communist system – “menial and intellectual work will be done by virtually everyone.”<sup>82</sup> The erasure of class boundaries and the ascension of mass power would result in and depend upon shared responsibility, shared labor, and shared opportunity. This represented the fulfillment of the Marxist-Leninist ideal.

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<sup>79</sup> “Role of Revolutionary Instructors in Cuba,” paragraph 121.

<sup>80</sup> “Role of Revolutionary Instructors in Cuba,” paragraph 13.

<sup>81</sup> “National Meeting of School Monitors,” paragraph 34.

<sup>82</sup> “National Meeting of School Monitors,” paragraph 46.

In regards to fighting the cultural battle against the United States, Castro viewed working towards this communist ideal as essentially a means of suppressing dissent amongst his soldiers – his people. In Santiago de Cuba in 1968, he described this process of uniting the Cuban troops: “A socialist revolution... means the suppression of all antagonism and interests, and suppression of all those factors which make men differ, and the uniting of all the strength of men and women in a society.”<sup>83</sup> Thus, the uniform characteristics that he sought to build through education, and the equality institutionalized in the educational system, created a stronger cultural front, and a more cohesive Cuban stance against the U.S.

### **The Conclusive Functionality of Revolutionary Education During the Cold War**

The domestic progress and international relations that post-revolutionary Cuban education was designed to serve intersected so completely that the revolutionary culture taught in schools gave students tools to survive locally and fight globally. This two-fold purpose was functional for both unifying the nation and defending it against U.S. aggressions.

Throughout Castro’s 1960s speeches on education, knowledge is depicted as a weapon that would win the war against U.S. aggression. When Castro publically estimated the strength of U.S. aggressions against Cuba in 1960, he declared the necessity of a knowledge base to train, strategize, and carry out defensive actions against *yanqui* soldiers.<sup>84</sup> In 1962, he reiterated that goal while speaking to school instructors in Havana. Centralizing the truth and strength of the Cuban Revolution in comparison to other lesser communist revolutions, he exclaimed,

[In] the mist of... a true Revolution such as this... engaged [in conflict] with the most powerful reactionary force in the world – it is [necessary, vital, and decisive] to [truly] study... With the weapons of truth, reason, and revolutionary passion, we must teach the masses and carry them victoriously forward.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> “Graduates of Oriente University,” paragraph 11.

<sup>84</sup> “Role of Revolutionary Instructors in Cuba,” paragraph 30 – 31.

<sup>85</sup> “Role of Revolutionary Instructors in Cuba,” paragraph 14.

Therein Castro expands upon the two-fold purpose of education: (1) to sustain the revolution by effectively teaching and training Cuban students to be revolutionaries, and (2) to overcome and defeat the U.S. restrictions imposed upon the Cuban nation. Not only does this language show that functionality was the goal of education, but it shows that functionality was a necessary product of education should the Cuban state survive.

In 1968, he reiterated the global functionality of Cuban education in preparing students to interact with and posit solutions for the “tremendous problems of today’s humanity.”<sup>86</sup> Those problems would include ignorance, poverty and social stratification, poor health care, and corrupt government. By providing education for all, removing class divisions, emphasizing technological education, and providing the masses with the literacy to engage in politics, Castro’s 1960s speeches and actions largely addressed those issues, functionally engaging those “tremendous problems” by universalizing and making knowledge accessible to the Cuban people. Writing in 1999 after the U.S.S.R. disintegrated while Cuba survived the Cold War, Schwab<sup>87</sup> praised Castro as a global example of achieving developmental success:

He has freed Cuba from America's economic domination and political repression [...] shared [goods] equally among Cuba's people [and] destroyed the [terrorizing] structure of the Cuban elite... In international affairs Cuba has a standing and reputation far beyond what a nation its size should expect – and that remains the case despite Cuba's relative isolation from the world community due to America's embargo policy... Cuba has not only provided a model for the delivery of health care but has shown emerging countries how to stand up to the United States. And of course Fidel is perhaps the charismatic leader of our time.<sup>88</sup>

Schwab’s synthesis of Castro’s role points to a focal aspect of revolutionary, combative education’s functionality: it helped Cuba survive the Cold War. While communism failed in the U.S.S.R., Castro’s plans formulated in the 1960s kept communist Cuba safe from U.S.

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<sup>86</sup> “Havana University Speech,” paragraph 20.

<sup>87</sup> Schwab was very critical of Castro’s methodology and considered him to have utilized too much political coercion. Considering that evaluation, it is significant that Schwab still framed Castro’s revolution as successful.

<sup>88</sup> Schwab, 162.

intervention, and brought Cuba to a degree of development unimaginable considering the harsh restrictions imposed upon it by the U.S. embargo.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The long-term significance of Castro's 1960s educational speeches and the revolutionary plans therein detailed can be reduced to (1) revolutionary Cuba's survival of the Cold War, (2) Cuba's growing presence on an international stage, (3) the longevity of Castroist politics, and (4) Cuban education's comparative superiority to U.S. education considering the relative size and resources of each country. In reference to the first point of significance, research could also compare Cuban and Soviet educational systems to analyze the significance of Guevarist versus purely Marxist-Leninist techniques and rhetoric. Regarding Cuba's increasing global presence, more modern sources could illuminate the significance of education in bringing Cuba international applause, especially in the area of medical schooling. The longevity of Castroist politics is perhaps the most anomalous of all points of significance, and is explored the least in this paper. Research into the more recent structure or re-structuring of Cuban politics, such as the shift of power from Fidel to his brother Raul or the shift in international allies following the death of Venezuelan ally Hugo Chavez, could shed light on how Castro's ideals have survived or changed from the first decade of the revolution until today. The last point of significance is perhaps most contemporaneously notable because historians and pedagogues generally agree that the U.S. education system has been deteriorating since the comprehensive high school movement of the mid-twentieth century. Future research could compare Cuban education (as discussed in this paper) directly to American policies, critiquing the effectiveness of different educational strategies, structures, and goals.

## **Glossary**

**Cold War.** Ideological, economic, and technological struggle between communist and capitalist world powers. Involved the United States and its allies against the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Took place between the end of World War II and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

**Cuban Diaspora.** Mass exodus of mostly bourgeois Cubans into the United States. Occurred following Castro's rise to power. Increased as nationalization policies were implemented, taking away privately owned land. Placed a largely wealthy and politically powerful Cuban-American population in Florida.

**Cuban Missile Crisis.** Standoff between United States, Soviet Union, and Cuba from October 26 – 28, 1962. U.S. discovered ballistic missile launch sites set up in Cuba by the Soviet Union. President Kennedy quarantined the island. Soviet premier Khrushchev wagered removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba for removal of American missiles from Turkey. Angered Castro, who felt like a pawn in the situation.

**cubanía revolucionaria.** Post-revolutionary Cuban national ideology. Organized Cubans around the philosophy of dissent and revolution. Helped re-structure Cuban identity in the decade following the revolution. Necessarily flexible and constantly changing with political and social innovations in the Cuban state.

**Literacy Campaign.** Began in 1961 in order to increase national literacy and motivate social change through education. Volunteer teachers taught reading and writing to mostly rural Cubans. Involved more than 200,000 citizens overall. Worked towards goals related to development in Castro's new state.

**MAD.** Abbreviation for *mutually assured destruction*. U.S. and Soviet Union were equally armed by 1969, meaning they could assure the total destruction of each other's nations.

**pedagogy.** Specialized teaching strategy/methodology. Cuban pedagogy was designed to inspire revolutionary and anti-imperialist spirit, unity, nationalism, and diligence.

**Red Scare.** Anti-communist campaign sparked by the U.S. government. Red Scare propaganda inspired fear of radicalism, global communist revolution, and infiltration of the U.S. government. Occurred in two waves – primarily in the 1920s, following the Bolshevik Revolution, and most significantly following World War II in the 1950s. Investigations and blacklisting led by Senator Joseph McCarthy are most associated with the second Red Scare. Contributed to anti-Cuban sentiment in the U.S.

**reform.** Institute changes that overhaul a pre-existing system in order to create a more productive system. Castro's reforms were specifically revolutionary and associated with radical changes in the political, economic, and social life of Cuba. He often referred to his reforms as revolutions (e.g., the revolution of Cuban education).

**universalization.** Process of expanding access so that something is completely widespread. Accessible to all people in all areas, regardless of social status, wealth, or any other factor. Castro's universalization of Cuban schools resulted in all people being able to access school. Relevant qualification: universalization granted all convenient access, but did not grant free choice of area of study. Within the universalized school system, everyone studied the same material and took the same tests. Specialized areas of study were largely contingent upon funding related to workforce needs.

**Western.** Related to United States or western European countries, governments, peoples, and ideas. Specifically non-communist. Associated with colonial or imperial powers,

including the U.S., England, Spain, the Netherlands, France, Portugal, Germany, and others. Excludes many countries actually situated in the western hemisphere that were subjects of colonial or imperial powers.

**yankee.** Colloquial and derogatory term for Americans. Used by Castro in reference to American government and its aggressive actions.

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