

For what reasons did Che Guevara become involved in the Cuban Revolution between
1953 and 1959?

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Section 1: Identification and Evaluation of Sources

This investigation will explore the question: For what reasons did Che Guevara become involved in the Cuban Revolution 1953 and 1959?

The first source that will be analyzed is the book “Man and Socialism in Cuba” by Che Guevara in 1965 and re-published in 1988. This book is essential to the investigation because it provides Guevara’s explanation and personal outlook over the importance of the individual within the building of socialism in a nation. The origin of this source is vital because it is the product of Guevara himself. The year this source was written, 1965, is also a crucial factor in that its creation took place in the midst of the Cuban Revolution, indicating that Guevara was able to give insight into the political atmosphere in Cuba during the years being investigated. However, the origin of the source can also be limiting in that it was re-published into English in 1988, which could be potentially problematic in that there could be misinterpretations due to it being translated. The content of this source displays the ideologies of Guevara through his own words which is valuable because it allows one to delve thoroughly into the thoughts of Che Guevara, specifically his thoughts over the events in Cuba. This could also be limiting in that the content may not provide insight into to perspectives of others within Cuban society during the years being investigated. The purpose of this source can be identified in that Guevara sought to educate those in countries such as Cuba over the structure and benefits of socialism as a whole. This is valuable in that it can provide an overall outline of how Che Guevara interpreted socialism and how it should be put into practice in society. Limitations in this can be identified through the fact that it once again only provides Guevara’s perspective of how socialism should be practiced.

The second evaluated source was the book “The Marxism of Che Guevara: Philosophy, Economics, Revolutionary Warfare” by Michael Löwy. This source is important to my investigation in that it explores Che Guevara's relationship with Marxist beliefs. The purpose of this source is valuable because it explains how Che Guevara developed a very Marxist way of thinking in terms of politics and government structure. This could be limiting however in that it focuses heavily on politics and does not take into account possible influences within his life experiences. The origin of this source is important in that the author is a Marxist sociologist and philosopher. This is valuable because it implies that he is very familiar with Marxist values as well as leaders or individuals who followed these ideals. This could also be a limitation in that as a Marxist sociologist, Löwy may lack perspective of those who did not share the same ideologies such as the opposition. Another limitation in this source is that it was created in 2007. Due to it having been created much later than the Cuban Revolution, it is possible that there is missing information that would be vital in a historic context. The value of the content of this source can be found in that it goes deep into what makes up Marxist ideals and how these same ideals played into the philosophy of Guevara. This source therefore allows one to have a better understanding of Che Guevara’s beliefs. There can be limitations within the content of the source through the fact that it only analyzes Guevara’s idea of Marxism rather than provide the ideas of other followers of Marxism.

Section 2: Investigation

When analyzing the events of the Cuban Revolution, there is no denying the vital role that Ernesto “Che” Guevara held during this era of rebellion in Latin American history. Dating back to the years he spent in Mexico, Guevara has been described by many historians as an individual that transformed into an “international agent of Communism” who desired to spread his Marxist values (Löwy). When he first noticed the revolution that was occurring in Cuba against the Batista government, “El Che” automatically perceived the Cuban Revolution in relation to Marxist beliefs. It is said that Guevara was the first individual to understand the historico-social significance of the Cuban Revolution (Löwy). From here, historians often argue over the main reasoning behind Che Guevara’s involvement in Cuba. Some historians have found that the underlying reasoning behind Guevara’s decision to partake in the Cuban Revolution was to essentially end Batista rule and spread Communist ideology. However, it can also be identified that Guevara’s actions were the result of his desire to create a more unified Cuban community. Overall, it can be argued that the primary reason for Che Guevara’s involvement in the Cuban Revolution was through his strong beliefs towards protecting human rights influenced through his ideologies in humanism and the importance of human unity.

A key reason that explains Che Guevara’s participation in the Cuban Revolution lies in that he sought to construct a sense of unity within the Cuban public through the use of humanism. In terms of the issues that the Cuban community faced under the Batista government, Guevara considered these struggles to be a force that could transform into a unifying power. However, before one analyzes Guevara’s perception over the unification of Cubans, one must understand his relationship with the humanist tradition of revolutionary thought. Humanism can

be defined as “ a system of thought and feelings centered upon human beings, their development, integrity, self esteem, autonomy, their ability to be dynamic not only as individuals but as the makers of history" (Kronenberg). Guevara had Marxist beliefs that also were integrated with these humanistic ideologies. To Guevara, humanism and communism were concepts that encompassed a similar standard of unity that enabled people to rise up and make change in order to promote morality and fair treatment. Through this, it can be seen that Guevara had a great devotion towards human values as well as moral standards. Professor Peter McLaren explains how Guevara was a person that had a great love for humanity and a willingness to sacrifice himself for the common good of people. As an individual, Guevara had very passionate feelings towards defeating human alienation, oppression, exploitation, and inequality as a result of injustices that he had witnessed prior to the Cuban Revolution (Kronenberg). This meant that Guevara perceived alienation and oppression as weapons that jeopardized the prosperity and rights of the people. Therefore, it is evident that Che Guevara’s involvement in Cuba was highly motivated by his devotion to protecting helpless citizens from the unjust abuse from the corrupt central government through the promotion of humanistic ideals.

With this in mind, Che Guevara thought that in order for there to be an effective revolution against the Batista government, the Cuban people must establish a sense of unity under a common cause. To Guevara, this common cause would be heavily influenced again by the oppression and injustice that the Cuban public faced during that era. This determination to create a unified Cuban public can be identified through Guevara’s urgency towards the Cuban people to create a common education (Guevara and Castro). In his book, *Man and Socialism in Cuba*, Guevara proclaims that society in Cuba must be a large school due his idea that

“explanations are convenient because they are genuine” (Guevara and Castro). Guevara therefore describes how a common explanation over what is occurring and what must be accomplished during the revolution can aid towards solidifying the sense of unification among the masses. Guevara saw the peasant class as "a class that has been kept in ignorance and isolation" and argued that real social change called for "very profound changes in the mentality of people" (Kronenberg). This change in the mentality of the people can translate into the establishment of unity in that it entails once again this idea of a common education or belief within a group of people. Through the content of this text, it is therefore made evident that Guevara desired to aid in establishing this idea of a common cause or unity in Cuba through common thought. Therefore, through his persistence towards establishing a shared mentality to abolish injustices against the Cuban people, it can be determined that Che Guevara promoted a common education in the hopes of establishing unity within the Cuban public during the Cuban Revolution.

Due to his strong beliefs and support of Marxist practices, Che Guevara is perceived by a some historians as an individual that chose to participate in the Cuban Revolution to spread these ideals. When Guevara first discovered the events that were taking place within Cuba in 1959, one of his revolutionary goals transitioned towards separating the Cuban nation from neocolonial oppression by the United States (Western and Wilkinson). This was a result of the United States backing the Batista government that existed in Cuba against Communist revolutionaries. Che Guevara criticized the Batista government by stating, “Fulgencio Batista never thought of calling himself Fulgencio I...he had the support and obedience of those with the physical power, with the material forces, with implements of destruction” (Guevara). Here, Guevara harshly compared the leadership of Batista to that of a monarch who has complete control over the land. Guevara also

describes how Batista is essentially supported by those who only serve to bring harm to the public. With this, it can be clearly seen that Guevara perceived the Batista government in Cuba as one that only exercised its negative control over the Cuban community and took advantage of them. Seeing the complicated situation in Cuba arising, Guevara concluded that the emergence of Marxist or Communist groups and ideology in Cuba could not be done in vain and therefore believed that the duty of vanguard forces was to establish the conditions towards seizing power (Löwy). Through this conclusion, it can be noted that Che Guevara experienced a shift in his actions that influenced him in becoming a part of the vanguard forces he described. Regardless of this, Che Guevara's passion for promoting human rights is what truly motivated all of his actions.

Overall, it can be noted that Guevara's humanistic approach towards Marxism and his valuing of establishing unity influenced his participation within Cuba. Nevertheless, it has also been noted by some historians that one of the reasons that Ernesto "Che" Guevara became involved in the Cuban Revolution was to spread communist practices and take Batista out of power. Through analysis, one can see that the desire to protect the rights of the common people and establish unity both greatly influenced Guevara's motives in Cuba. Through his role in the Cuban Revolution, Che Guevara became a grand revolutionary figure not only within Cuban society, but also throughout Latin America.

Section 3: Reflection

As a whole, this investigation allowed me to understand some of the common methods that are utilized by historians and the issues they may face while collecting research. Through my process of collecting research, I was able to develop skills over how to distinguish a reliable source from one that may not be as credible. I was also able to develop skills over how to choose sources that were rich in information that would aid me within my investigation. In addition to these skills, I gained the ability to deeply analyze the content of my sources in order to understand the argument or information presented within their text. In order to complete this investigation, I used sources created by accredited professors and authors who specify within Cuban studies and primary sources. Overall, I learned how to analyze Marxist sources with a more open and comprehensive mind.

Some of the challenges that I faced in my investigation was finding primary sources. Although I found texts that were made by Che Guevara himself such as *Man and Socialism in Cuba*, they were often translated from Spanish into English by another editor. Translations of primary sources such as these can cause issues for historians in that certain phrases in certain languages may not have a direct or accurate translation in others or in this case English. This can therefore lead to possible misinterpretations in the message being given. Another limitation that I faced was finding sources that were created during the time span of my investigation, 1953 to 1967. To historians, this can also lead to limitations in that more modern sources may omit or miss vital information for the subject that is being investigated. This can also be a limitation that could lead to the same misinterpretations of messages or history that can occur with translations.

I overcame these two issues primarily by gaining the skill of finding sources from historians and authors who specialize within the subject that I am investigating. For example, I used sources that were created by professors of International Relations as well as specialists in Cuban culture and studies. By using sources from individuals specializing in the subject I am investigating, it is more likely that I will collect reliable information that will be useful for my investigation.

My investigation allowed me to understand that a historian's role is to make sure they access sources that provide accurate and reliable information in order to ensure that their own investigation is reliable as well.

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