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90 miles off the Florida coast is the island of Cuba. Long a source of sugar and fine cigars the island was ruled with an iron fist by dictator Fulgencio Batista. Batista was alleged to have ties with organized crime in the U.S. and whose policies meant great wealth for a few, but abject poverty and repression for most of the Cuban population.

Revolutionary leader Fidel Castro fought against Batista and his policies from 1956 to 1959 with a guerilla force that included Ernest “Che” Guevara, another famous Latin American revolutionary who went on to spur other movements in South America.

Castro fought for the end of Batista’s rule with the promise of democracy and equality for all. Americans supported Castro’s movement believing he would free Cuba and establish a government similar to their own. When Castro seized American and British oil refineries, and broke up commercial farms into communes worked by formerly landless peasants the tide of public opinion in the US began to turn against Castro. American sugar companies lost control over their lands amounting to 75% of the cropland in Cuba, and appealed to the US government to intercede – and trade barriers were leveled against Cuban sugar.

Castro turned to the USSR for aid to support his programs, and began to actively repress those who disagreed with him in Cuba. Some Cubans supported the charismatic Castro, and liked his way of standing up to outside powers, powers that tried to tell him what to do. Others felt they had traded one dictator for another and fled the country – about 10% of the population left the island. A large number of these ended up in the US and a counterrevolutionary community was formed based in Miami Florida.

Ultimately the Cubans government allied with the Soviets making Cuba the first openly and actively communist nation in the western hemisphere. This was something that greatly disturbed the US government, and the people of the United States as well.