

*Playa Girón: Bay of Pigs: Washington's First Military Defeat in the Americas.*

By FIDEL CASTRO and JOSÉ RAMÓN FERNÁNDEZ. Edited by STEVE CLARK and MARY-ALICE WATERS. Foreword by JACK BARNES. New York: Pathfinder Press, 2001. Photographs. Illustration. Maps. Figures. Appendixes. Glossary. Index. 278 pp. Cloth, \$55.00. Paper, \$20.00.

*The Missile Crisis in Cuba.* By KEITH EUBANK. Anvil. Malabar, Fla.: Krieger, 2000. Bibliography. Index. viii, 235 pp. Paper, \$19.50.

In the early 1960s, the conflict between Cuba and the United States had repercussions reaching far beyond the Caribbean. Two recent books present primary source documents on the April 1961 invasion at Playa Girón and the October 1962 missile crisis. Neither book reveals significant new information, but each provides a handy collection of texts appropriate for classroom use.

Pathfinder Press published *Playa Girón* simultaneously in English and Spanish. Jack Barnes, national secretary of the (U.S.) Socialist Workers Party, introduces the volume with a long reflection on his experiences as a student and organizer of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee in 1961 at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota. The English language edition then includes translations of a dozen Cuban primary source documents on the U.S.-backed invasion at the Bay of Pigs: excerpts of six important speeches from 15 April–1 May (four by Fidel Castro and one each by Ernesto Guevara and Raúl Castro); and, six short Cuban government communiqués from 17 to 19 April. The book also contains a 48-page transcript of José Ramón Fernández Álvarez's 1999 testimony about his role leading Cuban troops against the invaders at Playa Girón. Photographs, maps, and charts throughout the book provide a useful supplement to the text. The volume concludes with a detailed chronology of events, a "glossary" (brief biographies of major figures), and a short list of suggested readings.

The documents in *Playa Girón* tell a familiar story, but they tell it well. Cuba expected a major attack in April 1961, although the nature, location, and timing of the assault remained unclear. As the invasion began, Fidel Castro scoffed at Washington's denial of its involvement: "Hollywood would never have come up with something like this, ladies and gentlemen!" (4/16/61, quoted p. 53). Even without Hollywood's help, however, Fidel was the star of this story. Fernández's recollection of the invasion's initial hour vividly captured Castro's leadership style:

After Fidel gave me my orders [via telephone around 2:00 a.m. on April 17], I began to get dressed, ordered the driver to fill up my jeep and check it over, and called a group of four officers to accompany.

Before I had finished dressing, Fidel called me again. 'What are you doing?'

'I'm just finishing getting dressed, Commander.' I continued dressing and, with the greatest urgency, doing everything else I had to do.

Ten minutes later: 'Why are you still there?'

I went downstairs—my room was on the second floor of the School of Cadets—and began looking for the maps. The officers weren't there yet, but the jeep was waiting.

Fidel called again: 'Why haven't you left yet?' . . . As soon as I arrived in Matanzas, Fidel was on the phone: 'Has the school been assembled? What are you doing? How is the morale?' (p. 107).

Near the end of his testimony, Fernández credited "the example set by Fidel—his presence, his orders, his leadership" with being decisive in Cuba's victory (p. 122). Fidel never claimed such stature for himself; instead, he stressed the righteousness of the Cuban and Socialist cause as the reason for the quick triumph. With sacrifice and struggle, Castro concluded, the revolution inevitably would succeed.

On 23 April 1961, Castro declared victory over the invasion and made a telling observation about his foes in Washington: "If they were capable of making this mistake, why not an even bigger one? We should believe that they are capable of making another mistake . . . that will cost them not only their prestige, but their very existence and . . . no one knows what it would cost humanity" (pp. 178–79). Eighteen months later, the Cuban Missile Crisis came close to fulfilling Castro's prediction.

*The Missile Crisis in Cuba*, like other volumes in Krieger Publishing's Anvil Series, is intended for use in college history courses. The book includes a 104-page overview of events, an up-to-date bibliography of English-language scholarship, and a collection of 25 primary source documents that illuminate the actions of leaders in Washington and Moscow during October 1962. Keith Eubank, in his summary of the crisis, emphasizes misunderstandings and misjudgments made by John Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev. Eubank describes the two leaders as "very human and very lucky" (p. 97). Significant concessions by both superpowers, not savvy crisis management, averted a nuclear exchange. Eubank also squeezes colorful details into his brief overview, giving the reader a clear sense of the men making decisions in Washington, Moscow, and Havana.

Although Fidel Castro plays a major role in Eubank's summary of the crisis, Cuba is nearly absent from the 110 pages of primary sources that follow. Instead, these documents focus on Washington's actions and policy debates. Eubank makes extensive use of the recently declassified transcripts of Kennedy's "Ex-Comm" meetings; these transcripts alone comprise almost half of the pages in this section of the book. Memos and public statements from U.S. government officials take up a quarter of the documents in the collection. Materials from a Soviet perspective

(including five internal Soviet government documents released since 1995 by the Cold War International History Project) make up the remaining quarter of the collection. Every document in *The Missile Crisis in Cuba* is available elsewhere, but this collection includes portions of nearly all of the crucial sources now available.

While *Playa Girón* and *The Missile Crisis in Cuba* are helpful compilations of sources, these books highlight the difficulty of giving Cuba its rightful place in the documentary history of the early 1960s. College students analyzing the documents from *The Missile Crisis in Cuba* reasonably might conclude that only Moscow and Washington mattered during October 1962. In *Playa Girón*, Fernández admitted that he based his testimony largely on “books and articles that have been published on the subject, especially in the United States” (p. 86). Cuban speeches and recollections, like those in *Playa Girón*, are important, but a more complex analysis of historical events requires a range of different sources.

Recent declassifications by Havana are beginning to transform the documentary record. In March 2001, for instance, a conference on the Bay of Pigs analyzed some 480 pages of Cuban government records declassified in Havana (for information and some excerpts, see the National Security Archive's web site (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/bayofpigs/>)). The newly available sources, including a twenty-five-page communiqué written by Fernández on 18–19 April 1961, will permit a more complete understanding of the Cuban response to the Bay of Pigs invasion. Until these documents—and others like them on October 1962—are available for classroom use, *Playa Girón* and *The Missile Crisis in Cuba* will be valuable resources for teaching about the early 1960s.

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