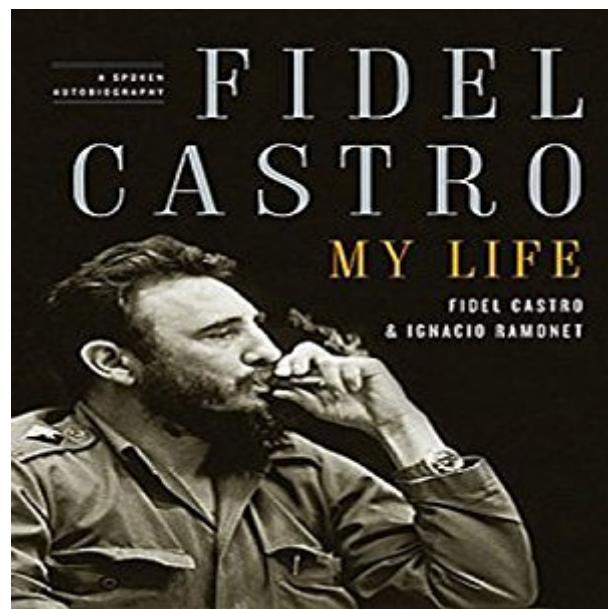


The book was found

Fidel Castro: A Spoken Autobiography



Synopsis

Now in paperback, the intimate and highly revealing life story of the world's longest-serving, most charismatic, and controversial head of state in modern times. Numerous attempts have been made to get Fidel Castro to tell his own story. But it was only as he stepped down after five decades in power, that the Cuban leader finally decided to set out the detail of his life for the world to read. In these pages, he presents a compelling chronicle that spans the harshness of his school teachers; the early failures of the revolution; his comradeship with Che Guevara and their astonishing, against-all-odds victory over the dictator Batista; the Cuban perspective on the Bay of Pigs and the ensuing missile crisis; the active role of Cuba in African independence movements; his dealings with no fewer than ten successive American presidents, from Eisenhower to George W. Bush; and a number of thorny issues, including human rights, the treatment of homosexuals, and the use of the death penalty in Cuba. Along the way he shares intimacies about more personal matters: the benevolent strictness of his father, his successful attempt to give up cigars, his love of Ernest Hemingway's novels, and his calculation that by not shaving he saves up to ten working days each year. Drawing on more than one hundred hours of interviews, this spoken autobiography will stand as the definitive record of an extraordinary life lived in turbulent times.

--This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The First Section of this review is an introduction to Chapters 1 through 9 of Fidel Castro's spoken autobiography by Ignacio Ramonet. Following the First Section, the Second Section consists of four

questions which Ignacio Ramonet asks Castro, and Fidel's answers to them. These questions and answers concern occurrences within Cuba after the triumph of the Revolutionary War on December 31, 1959, and prior to April 17, 1961.

First Section. The most impressive thing to me about the first nine chapters of Ramonet's book is how understandably Castro conveys the fact that the Cuban Revolutionary War eschewed terrorism (defined as executing captured, non-uniformed combatants or using random violence against civilians.) Fidel considered such terrorism immoral, but more to the point, he considered it immoral because unnecessary. Terrorism would have been highly counter-productive where the soil for revolution vis-Ã -vis the imperialistic United States was seeded more widely and far earlier than in Vietnam, for example -- where the Vietcong did employ terrorism in a war against an invasion by America essentially indistinguishable from its unprovoked attack on Iraq in 2003. Similarly, Fidel invoked Che Guevara's medical skills (and those of other revolutionary soldiers as the revolution gained momentum) to treat wounded Batista soldiers on the battlefield, once the non-fatally wounded revolutionary soldiers were evacuated or cared for. And not infrequently, these cared-for Batista forces, after returning to health, joined the revolutionary forces in the war against Batista.

Chapter 1 is an introduction by the book's author, and it should be read first and carefully by anyone largely ignorant of the facts regarding Cuba since 1953, which is to say by 99.9% of all living Americans. Chapters 2 through 4 concern Fidel's childhood and growing political awareness, before 1953. Then after a brief philosophical diversion in Chapter 5, The Backdrop of the Revolution, Chapters 6 through 9 mainly describe the revolutionary war in Cuba from July 26, 1953, to December 31, 1959. These four chapters are simply riveting, and no one can read them without astonishment at how close, twice, Fidel and his inner core of revolutionaries came to being wiped out. But finally and most important for non-Cubans interested in understanding the Cuban Revolution, Chapters 6 through 9 hammer home the fact that the revolutionary war was just that: A War. And as such, it was an exercise in military, to repeat military, genius and leadership on Fidel's part and on the part of his soldiers.

Second Section. THE DEMONSTRATION EXECUTIONS. Q. When the war ended, you and your followers had promised to bring to trial and eventually put to death members of Batista's repressive forces, and you created 'revolutionary tribunals' that carried out a purge that many observers characterized as excessive. Do you think that was a mistake? (p 220.) A. I think the error (was) in ... allowing the proceedings to be attended by a great number of our countrymen....But I'd been in Venezuela (in 1952) ... and (I knew that) ... (w)hen Machado fell, (his) people were dragged through the streets; there were lynchings, houses were invaded and attacked, people sought vengeance, revenge....(W)e ... did not want to see ... personal vengeance (in 1960 in Cuba)....

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST HOMOSEXUALS. Q. One of

(the) criticisms...against the Revolution was that...there ... were internment camps that homosexuals were sent to, locked up and repressed. What can you tell me about that subject? (p 222.)A. There was no persecution of homosexuals, or internment camps for homosexuals (However) ... (o)bligatory military service was instituted... (Reviewer's note: with three exceptions: educational deferments, conscientious objectors, and homosexuals.) ... Homosexuals were not called up (because) ... machismo was ... very much present in our society, and ... rejection of the idea of homosexuals ... in the military (was widespread). (We created) Military Units to Aid Production ... we tried to raise the morale of people ... sent to the camps, (to) present them with an opportunity to work, to help the country in those difficult times" ... (But) I can't deny that there were prejudices ... (that) homosexuals were most certainly the victims of discrimination ... Today a much more civilized, more educated population is gradually overcoming those prejudices.

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST THE BLACK POPULATION. Q. Did you have to fight, too, against discrimination against the black population (p227)?A. For us revolutionaries, fighting racial discrimination has been a sacred principle.

THE MIAMI CUBANS. Q. ... against Cuba, Washington was able to tap anti-revolutionary Cubans for help? (p256)A. That's right. Listen, I'm going to tell you something: ... many of those who were involved in terrorist activities were not actually planning to ... bring ... down the Revolution....(Many of the rich and privileged who left Cuba and abandoned their homes and ... everything - it's not that we expelled them and took their homes away - they said: "This will last four or five months, how long can a revolution last in this country?")But the counter-revolutionaries also had the conviction ... that their despicable cause would win out in the end ... (because their fight was joined with that of the United States) ... They expected the United States to step in and bring the Revolution down.

(This review will be continued)

Just arrived by mail, just translated and available, I am reading the preface of Fidel's autobiography by co-author/interviewer, Ignacio Ramonet. The preface is titled "A Hundred Hours with Fidel." You know how some movies can allow you to talk at low moments to yourself or a companion, or some TV shows can, too. Yet, other movies demand your attention to the extent the world must be silent to savor every word, every observation. Baldwin does this for me. James Baldwin is to me, I see now, what Jose Marti is to Fidel, the embodiment of a spiritual value, transcending political dogma, left or right. Opening this book, I had to shut off the radio and the world and let my savory honey-sweetened espresso get cold ... Fidel's selection of Ramonet, a Spanish journalist and editor of *Le Monde*, is reportedly smart and political. He wanted someone who had heaped both praise and criticism on Fidel and Cuba, someone on the outside who wouldn't be easily accused of being a

Cuban agent. Ramonet is beginning this autobiography/interview [over 700 pages] with his first meeting Fidel and the unrecorded long hours they spent in Cuba and on foreign official visits. The book was completed a few months before Fidel's "sudden" illness, as if Fidel knew ...What can I say? You get an inspiring picture/impression of the man writer Alice Walker calls A PRIEST. Ramonet writes:"What I discovered during this time was a private, almost shy Fidel, a polite, affable man who pays attention to each person he talks to and speaks without affectation, yet with the manners and gestures of a somewhat old-fashioned courtesy that has earned him the title of the last Spanish gentleman. He is always attentive to others, aware of them as persons - and he never raised his voice. I never heard him give an order. But still wherever he is he exercises absolute authority - it is the force of his overwhelming personality ..."He is a leader who lives, so far as I could see, modestly, austere, in almost spartan conditions: there is no luxury; his furniture is sober; his food is frugal, healthy, macrobiotic. His are the habits of a soldier-monk ..."He sleeps about four hours a night, and sometimes one or two more during the day, when he has a chance. His workday, all seven days a week, usually ends at five or six in the morning, as the sun is rising ..."Hopefully, to promote the book, the author[s] may consent to have this preface printed alone as an article/essay in itself. It stands alone beautifully. A passerby, who felt he had the right, saw me with the book, freshly unboxed sitting at the beach, and asked me how could I buy THAT and put money in a dictator's hands. I no longer pity Americans or their country, which is going to a fate worse than Hell. I quoted Fidel to this passerby "What's wrong with being a dictator? The US has many friends who are dictators."

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