Panel: “Cold War Politics”

Andrew Hakes

Title: “The Deterioration of US-Cuban Relations: Eisenhower, Batista, Castro, and JFK”
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Christine Erickson
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Andrew Hakes is a history major. His area of interest within history is Latin America, specifically during the Cold War, and the revolutionary movements that occurred during that time. He was recently awarded the Judie and Ralph Violette scholarship for history students.

Abstract

My research was on the downfall of relations between the United States and Cuba. Since the discovery of Cuba by Christopher Columbus, the tiny Caribbean island had been exploited by more powerful nations. The first overlords of Cuba had been the Spaniards, enticed by the commercial opportunity the island possessed. Spanish domination lasted for a few hundred years, until Cuba’s northern neighbor decided to get involved in the island’s politics. Citing the Monroe Doctrine amongst other things, the US kicked Spain out of Cuba and became heavily involved in the country. Cuban relations with the US began to escalate after the Spanish-American War. Soon, the US came to view Cuba virtually as a client-state of the US.

Up until the 1950’s the relations between the two nations had been bipolar, with some Cubans approving North American intervention and others viciously against it. The young, charismatic rebel leader Fidel Castro would soon change this and harness the feverish nationalism Cubans inherited from years of US exploitation and aim it at the US and Fulgencio Batista’s corrupt, brutal regime. The same leader would then wage a three-year war against the government that resulted in his victory, control over the island, Cuban independence from United States, and bitter clashes with the former oppressors.

Relations between the United States and Cuba changed drastically during the four year period of 1959 to 1963. US unwillingness to compromise or accept a US-independent Cuba and Cuban hatred towards the US (and oppression in general) caused relations to deteriorate after Castro’s overthrow of Batista in 1959, during the years of 1959 to 1961, and implode during the period of 1961 to 1963. The events and behaviors of both nations led to the absolute destruction of relations in the 1960’s that has carried over into the 21st century as both are unwilling to learn from the mistakes of the past. As Eisenhower once said during a news conference, “Here is a country that you would believe, on the basis of our history, would be one of our real friends… (it’s) a puzzling matter to figure out just exactly the Cubans and the Cuban [Castro] government would be so unhappy when, after all, their principal market is right here, their best market. You would think they would want good relationships.” US ignorance and Cuban nationalistic pride proved to be a volatile mix that hindered many chances of a peaceful coexistence.

My research is important because of the everlasting implications of US intervention in foreign countries and because of what has transpired recently with the US and Cuba reopening relations.
My argument is important because it should remind the public that not everyone wants the US to be a part of their country or the ideals the US promotes to be the basis of their country. It is also important on the Cuban side to recall the benefits of US-Cuban relations.

**Bibliographical Note**

For my research I used primary sources from databases, such as Wilson Center Digital Archive and the National Security Archive, secondary sources over the period, and bibliographies on Fidel Castro and Fulgencio Batista. I used bibliographies over Batista and Castro because most of the prominent events of their careers related to my research topic. For the primary sources I used declassified CIA documents to understand the US position on Cuba and the way they approached relations. The secondary sources I used were focused on the Cuban revolution, the causes of the revolution, and Castro’s reign in power.