
Propaganda in the Cuban revolution - Short description

Propaganda; A tool of strategic influence. Throughout history political parties, sports teams and pretty much anyone who wanted to bring down an opposition or competitor has used propaganda of some sort. It is a powerful weapon used to create dislike and degrade an enemy. This could be through the exaggeration of a certain event or the falsifying of evidence to generate a public distaste towards the rival. Particularly common in war and politics, propaganda has been used to great extent in both world wars, the Russian revolution and the American civil war. However, it is the propaganda of the Cuban revolution that is most intriguing to me. A small U.S controlled island overthrown by a petty communist party. A classic example of the underdog versus the Favourite. This investigation will examine how both sides of the revolution used propaganda to influence the public and to what degree they worked. The investigation will be specifically looking at how propaganda was used in the period of 1966-1980. During this time sovietisation was occurring and April October Mariel Exodus. It also covers Fidel Castro's election into president of Cuba.

What was the Cuban Revolution?

Before delving into how propaganda was used in the Cuban Revolution, it is important to understand what the Cuban revolution actually was and the context in which these posters were released. The Cuban revolution was an armed uprising which overthrew Fulgencio Batista on the 1st of January in 1959. It was from 1959 that the infamous Fidel Castro led Cuba until 2008. Under Fidel's rule; Cuba successfully reduced illiteracy, racism and improved its public health care system. However, it was not all good. Fidel was criticised over the repressive economic and political freedoms. Fidel was also slated over his relationship with the U.S which resulted in costly clashes such as the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Bay of Pigs invasion.

Whilst propaganda was an effective tool utilised by Castro's party, the U.S also implemented propaganda posters of their own warning the public of Castro's intentions and swaying the public into picturing Castro as an anger filled and power-hungry monster. Titled: The Bogeyman, artist Lincoln Cushing depicts Castro in a devil like way playing to the public's fear and uncertainty for their home country. It was around this time that sovietisation was occurring, where Cuba was adopting a political system built off the soviets. This was bringing unwanted heat down on Fidel's party, the public were under the impression that Cuba's political and economic relationship with the Soviet alliance had become similar to Cuba's pre-revolutionary dependence on the United States. Figure 1 highlights this point in the text "Castro's Cuba is an arsenal of Soviet weaponry and ground troops". This highlights the reliance Cuba has on the soviet army building on the already uncertain Cuban demographic. By emphasising the distress and ambiguity the Cuban public have, the American political party effectively portray Castro as dangerous to the future of Cuba and also suggests that the alliance Castro has with the soviet army is also potentially damaging to the Cuban people and country. Propaganda is an extremely effective weapon of war, this effectiveness can either be achieved through the exaggeration of just one aspect of a situation or through blatant lies. In the case of the Cuban revolution the U.S exploit the situation of the soviet's involvement in the Cuban political system and exaggerate Cuba's new dependency on the soviets.

At the same time as the U.S were trying to bring down and de-throne Fidel, Castro's Party were attempting to ignite hope and confidence in the Cuban public. It was almost as important if not just as important to inspire the people to believe in the Cuban communist party as the public's love and appreciation for Castro was fading. As the Cuban political system took some enormous changes through the form of sovietisation taking over the country, Fidel needed to ensure that the radical changes are beneficial and for the best. Fidel achieved this through successful campaigning and propaganda. Cuban artist Felix René Mederos Pazo illustrates a poster in 1973 commemorating twenty years since Fidel Castro led his "crazy attempt against the armed forces", where a young Fidel led his "ragtag group of guerrillas" to overthrow military dictator, Fulgencio Batista, at the Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba. Many of Castro's men were killed and even Fidel and his brother were captured. What followed was Fidel's celebrated "history will absolve me" speech. The poster designed in the classic colourful Cuban style, is designed to depict Fidel in the light of the hero he was back in 1953. This image of "a young Castro" sparks the faith and certainty the Cuban public needed at the time. Celebrating this time brings the Cubans joy as it represents the start of their freedom. Castro's powerful stance and ever forward gazing eyes evokes a sense of hope and certainty about the future of Cuba. Whereas propaganda may be seen as an instrument used to bring others down in this case propaganda has been used to reassure the public in a time of distress. It has been employed to enforce a sense of solidity in Cuban politics and counter the fear caused by sovietisation.

Propaganda is a weapon, a tool, a utensil. Used to put your opposition down or lift your team up. In the Cuban Revolution reassuring the public in a time of uncertainty and a fragility was the main objective of Cuban propaganda however, it was the American propaganda which toyed and exploited this fragility in order to express their concern and flaws with the Cuban government. By examining both sides, you are able to examine the connection and relationship each side has with one another. At this period Castro and the United States occasionally appeared to become consumed with each other's downfalls and this was especially evident in the American propaganda with the depiction of Castro as the "Bogeyman". "All news is lies and all propaganda is disguised as news" Willi Munzenberg.