The Cuban Revolution, 1956-1971: A Self-Debate

Enrollment is open only to Harvard College undergraduates. There are no prerequisites. The professor cares deeply about the study of Cuba, but this course is mainly about an approach to thinking and learning. Syllabus shows readings, course calendar, and requirements. No pass/fail.

Purposes of the course: Do we understand someone else’s point of view so well that we can express it clearly and eloquently as if it were our own, even if we disagree strongly with it? Each lecture presents a self-contained interpretation about a set of facts. The argument of each lecture will be contradicted by at least one other lecture (sometimes by several, each presenting a different argument). The set of facts will not change much but the interpretations will. You will hear the professor’s voice in lectures but you will rarely hear what he thinks. You will need to learn to discern what you think in the face of comparably persuasive but contradictory arguments. One purpose of the course is to teach you to think more effectively about arguments and evidence and to better understand those with whom you disagree.

The course seeks to acquaint you with values, customs, institutions, and experiences that differ from ours and to help you to understand how different beliefs, behaviors, and ways of organizing society come into being. We study years of revolutionary war and then a decade when a revolutionary regime attempted to change the polity, the economy, the society, and even the nature of human beings. The course also assesses how the United States responded to this revolution. Many topics we study will likely shape some circumstances of the world in which you will live. We consider how revolutionaries and their opponents thought about the nature of civic virtue, and how did they handle its breakdown and reconstruction during the revolutionary years of the 1950s and 1960s. We explore the building of a revolutionary nationalist identity, which invented new revolutionary traditions in Cuban society. In so doing, we ponder the ethical dimensions of the experiences of those who supported and those who opposed the revolution.

Nature of readings: There are several kinds of readings. The items first listed for week 1 are textbooks. The following present primary documents; read them as they were written or said by participants: Franqui (private correspondence), Guevara (essays, some private letters), Lockwood (long interview), Silverman (primary essays, except first chapter), Fidel Castro’s speeches, and his correspondence with Khrushchev. U.S. and Soviet ambassadors Smith, Bonsal, and Alexeev, plus President Batista, former political prisoner Jorge Valls, and Cuban business executive J. J. Domínguez wrote memoirs. All others are secondary literature — authors’ interpretation of the evidence along with their evidence. The authors disagree among themselves.

Purpose of readings: To acquaint you with important disagreements among participants and among scholars. Some disagreements in the readings parallel those presented in lectures; others
add new dimensions. Work across the several kinds of readings. The readings are at times deliberately repetitive (enabling you to read them quickly) to help you to understand that thoughtful people can come to different conclusions on the basis of “the same facts.”

*Where are the readings? There are five sources. All readings are available for free at Lamont Library Reserve. There are four other sources: the coursepack, the website, clicking from the syllabus, or the Coop:*

**A. To purchase the SW 15 coursepack, please follow the instructions below:**

The store has both the English and the Spanish readers. Purchase your own copy as soon as possible to stay on top of your assignments. Also, please keep in mind that our institution adheres to copyright law — copyrighted material should not be copied or duplicated in any manner.

**Step 1:** Log on to [https://students.universityreaders.com/store/](https://students.universityreaders.com/store/).

**Step 2:** Choose the correct course pack, select a format, and proceed with the checkout process.

**Step 3:** After purchasing, you can access a digital copy of the first few chapters (if you selected a print format) or all chapters (if you selected a digital format*) by logging into your account and clicking “My Digital Materials” to get started on your reading right away.

**Print Price:** $146.57  
**Digital Price:** $131.91

Print orders are typically processed within 24 hours; the shipping time and price depends on the selected shipping method and day it is shipped (orders are not shipped on Sundays or holidays).

*Digital access: To access digital materials, you will need an Adobe ID and the free Adobe Digital Editions (ADE) software installed on your computer. Visit [https://students.universityreaders.com/store/digital_adobe](https://students.universityreaders.com/store/digital_adobe) for easy instructions and a video walkthrough of the process. Once you download the digital pack you can access it online or offline at any time on your computer, tablet, or smart phone. You can also annotate, highlight, and search the content. Please note that the digital rental expires after six months.

If you experience any difficulties, please email [orders@universityreaders.com](mailto:orders@universityreaders.com) or call 800.200.3908 ext. 503.

**B. To purchase the Suchlicki and one of the Domínguez books, go to the Coop.**

**C. For readings not available through the coursepack or the Coop, go to the course’s website where these other readings are available under fair-use policies. You may access these readings as PDFs, read them as PDFs, or print them, just as you would with Harvard Library materials.**
Each syllabus also indicates items that may be available directly by clicking on the link in the syllabus.

*Purpose of films:* To see and hear about the same matters that we will read and discuss. The PBS documentary is an overview of the entire period. “Memories of Underdevelopment” and “One Way or Another” are feature films made in Cuba. They affirm the revolution’s worth but explore the public and private ambiguities faced by ordinary people. “Nobody Listened” is a documentary made outside Cuba; it focuses on political imprisonment in Cuba.

*Purpose of discussions in lecture hall:* To get you to engage with the professor. Some sessions will ask you to use your imagination for analytical purposes. These sessions draw on the readings but also on your ability to “play the role” of being someone else.

*Purpose of sections with Teaching Fellows:* The Teaching Fellows will work with you to sort out the arguments presented in readings and in lectures and will help you connect the secondary literature to the primary documents, the films, and the memoirs.

*Other sections with Domínguez:* Domínguez will teach each section once during the semester.

*Purpose of the papers:* To get you to work with primary materials, formulate alternative arguments about the same set of facts, and induce you to use your imagination for analytical purposes. For the first paper, you will work with declassified U.S. government documents and the once-private correspondence exchanged between Cuban rebels. For the second paper, you will have wider choice; in one option, you will work mainly with “raw” or “primary” numbers to assess whether the Soviet Union provided a subsidy to Cuba’s economy.

*Purpose of the exams:* The exams ask you to draw from all of the materials in the course and formulate alternative arguments. You will never be asked to give “the right answer;” you will always be asked to give at least two different and equally persuasive answers.

*Special arrangements:* Any student needing academic adjustments or accommodations should present a letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak with the professor by Friday, September 9. Failure to do so may result in our inability to respond in a timely manner. Discussions will remain confidential, although the AEO may be consulted to discuss appropriate implementation.

*Language of instruction:* The professor will lecture in English. Some sections will be conducted in Spanish, others in English. Students are free to enroll in either English- or Spanish-language sections. Formal course requirements are identical for all sections.

*Spanish language option:* Students may enroll in a section taught in Spanish. Students in Spanish Sections should get the list that identifies several readings in Spanish (mainly primary
documents and letters) and use the readings in Spanish from the Coursepack and the course’s website. In the Spanish Sections, the instructor will speak in Spanish. The questions on the instructions for papers and on the hour test and final exam will be available in Spanish. You may write papers and exam answers in English or in Spanish. You will be encouraged (but not required) to speak Spanish in these sections. If you are in doubt about whether to enroll in a Spanish Section, turn to the description of course requirements in Spanish at the end of the Spanish Section reading list. The professor will say a few words in Spanish in lecture. If you cannot read or understand him with ease, do not enroll in the Spanish Section.

POLICY ON COLLABORATION: Students are encouraged to engage in conversations with the Teaching Fellows and the professor as well as with each other about their work in this course. This course values the exploration of intellectual differences through respectful dialogue. However, it is also expected that all paper assignments and examinations represent the student’s own work. Students should always take care to distinguish their own ideas and knowledge from information derived from other people or sources. **Collaboration in the completion of paper assignments and examinations is always prohibited.**

**General Education requirements:** The course meets two General Education requirements. It meets the requirement for Societies of the World. It also fulfills the requirement that one of the eight General Education courses should engage substantially with the Study of the Past.

**Government concentration:** The course counts as a Government course for concentrators in Government while it also meets General Education requirements for such concentrators.

**History concentration:** The course counts as a History course for concentrators in History while it also meets General Education requirements for such concentrators.

**Ethnicity, Migration, Rights (EMR) secondary field.** This course counts toward the fulfillment of the EMR secondary field requirements while it also meets other General Education or Departmental primary-field requirements.

**Language Citation:** If enrolled in a Spanish language section, the course counts toward the requirements for those who choose to earn a Language Citation while it also meets other General Education or Departmental primary-field requirements or secondary-field requirements.

This course will be omitted during 2017-2018.