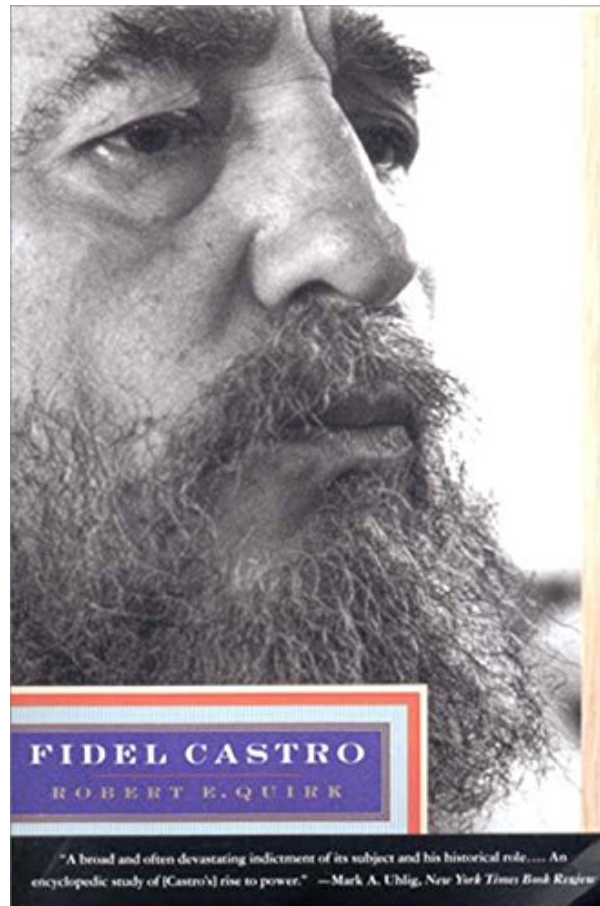
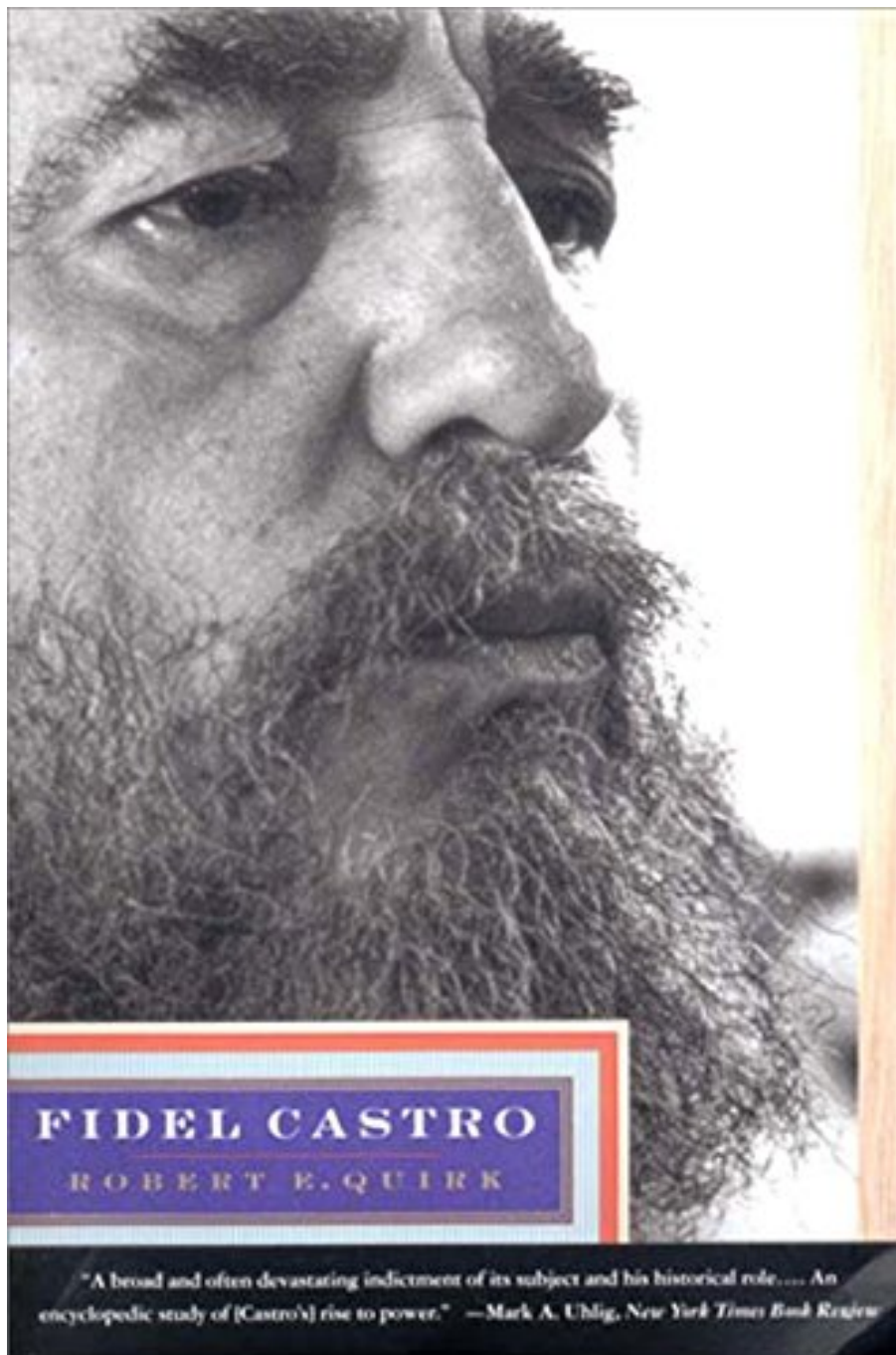


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From Publishers Weekly

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FIDEL CASTRO BY ROBERT E. QUIRK PDF

In this masterly biography, the prize-winning historian Robert E. Quirk paints a portrait of the charismatic leader who for more than three decades—and over eight American presidencies—managed to sustain a communist regime in the western hemisphere.

Fidel Castro emerges as an ambitious rebel, from his earliest years into his student years and adulthood.

In gripping detail, Quirk follows Castro as his first, failed attempt to bring down the regime of Fulgencio Batista is followed by the small-scale attacks from the Sierra Maestra mountains that culminate in the dictator's flight from Cuba in 1959 and Castro's sweep into power. The story provides a new account of Castro's relations with the United States and the Soviet Union, including the Bay of Pigs invasion and the 1962 Missile Crisis, and an analysis of the successes and failures of his regime to the present day.

In its breadth and drama, Fidel Castro is more than the story of one ambitious man steering his nation on a dangerous and doomed course. It is also a parable of a small country caught up in the throes of international rivalries and world revolution.

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From Publishers Weekly

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15 of 19 people found the following review helpful.

On Fidel and Fidelismo

By A Customer

I have read this book recently as well as all of the reviews by customers. There's some amazing stuff in these reviews, by the way, ranging from "I like Cubans and they are cool people" to "I hate Texans and patriotism."

Whatever. Quirk's book is an excellent treatment of Castro and of the troubled history of a small nation often caught between two struggling superpowers, whether it was Spain and the US or Russia and the US. I think he captures the essence of Castro's adventurer friend Ernesto Guevara (a murdering dilettante who has, amazingly, become a cult hero in death mainly because of his looks and a good press agent named Herbert Matthews)and of his effeminate brother Raul as well. I have spoken with Jose Pardo Llada, who was an early supporter of Castro and knew him intimately for many years. Pardo is also one of the main references used by Quirk (he uses Pardo's "Fidel" and "El Che" extensively, for example, in the early chapters) and Pardo feels that Quirk has captured the leadership styles of Castro quite well. Yes, the man is charismatic but also highly erratic and given to extreme highs and extreme lows. He is also very, very clever and knows how to use the stage to his benefit. These are Castro's qualities and behaviors, and Quirk does a solid job in capturing and describing them.

I particularly like the analysis of Castro's youth and of the environment from which he emerged. Three rather clear elements seem to define his personality and Quirk highlighted them indirectly: the anti-americanism that he witnessed in his home as a child (his father came from Spain as a raw recruit to fight the Americans); his Galician ancestry, which subjected him to the ridicule that all "gallegos" in Cuba have had to endure; and

his rural (guajiro) upbringing, which again pitted him against the more cosmopolitan young people he would meet in Havana's Belen School and who were sure to let him know he was not one of them.

On the charge that Quirk is biased (presumably against Castro and pro USA), I am not sure where that evidence is. The segments about the CIA and their role in trying to dislodge Castro are brutally honest and unbiased, in my opinion. It certainly makes the CIA look very human, if not downright bumbling and dogmatically arrogant. It is not very complimentary of US presidents either. And some parts of the book seem too formulaic, going day by day in rather tedious form and analyzing Castro's ten-hour speeches in way too much detail for my tastes.

But, undoubtedly, if you detest "patriotism" and Texan accents, and if you believe Communists and the European Left are the cat's whiskers, then you may not like the well-researched and documented facts in Quirk's book. Otherwise, it is excellent.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Quirk on Fidel Castro

By Gus Venegas

Though a bit long and tedious 900 pages, this is an excellent comprehensive and well-organized biography of Fidel Castro: from the days of his childhood to his rise to power in Cuba and the world stage. Quirk's first chapter is probably the best 30-page narration of Castro's pre-revolutionary days, from his childhood in his father's affluent plantation, thru his Havana University days and initial affiliation with Eduardo Chibas' liberal flavored Orthodox Party. Quirk tells us more about life at the Castro estates that by the 1920's, Castro's father had become wealthy, with close to 25,000 acres, one of the largest estates in Cuba. We learn that from childhood Fidel Castro respected and admired his father's strong macho and much feared persona and counted weapons as his most prized possessions- including rifles, pistols and shotguns. His life, as a child and as a revolutionary, was one long love affair with firearms and his speeches would have many references to blood and to the prospects of violence and death.

I was highly impressed with Quirk's narration of the early days of the Cuban Revolution (1959-60), a period when Fidel Castro deceived his liberal and moderate allies in the struggle against Batista back from the Moncada days in 1953, was able to form an alliance with the Communists starting in 1959, consolidating his power as defense minister and eventually having a strong enough power base by mid-1960 when he cancelled elections, suppressed freedom of the press, and started a campaign of property confiscation. Castro's interaction with high level cabinet members is covered, showing his micromanagement style and tendency to provide direction in capricious whims on anything from the agrarian reform to housing projects. Events in 1959-60, such as the cancellation of elections and the confiscation of private property, set up confrontations with the U.S., which resulted in the Bays of Pigs in 1961 and the Missile Crises in 1962. However, little mention is made of Castro's interventionism in Latin America starting in 1959. Quirk goes on to end with Castro's heady days of adventurism in Africa and to his authoritarian control of a country that he has wrecked politically and economically. As a matter of fact, Quirk's biography of Castro is one of the top recommendations in my book *Memories from the Land of the Intolerant Tyrant* (available from Blue Note Books).

8 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

Welcome addition

By A Customer

This book is a welcome addition and sheds much needed light on the phenomenon of Castro. It is thoroughly researched and quite lengthy-perhaps too much so however. After completing a masters degree in Latin American studies and pouring over the vast literature on Cuba, I definitely recommend this book but suggest reading others on the topic as well. Cuban studies is such a politicized field and it is remarkably difficult to find academics, pundits, and others writing in this area who aren't completely biased in one way or the other. In addition to this book, I recommend books and articles by Jorge Dominguez, who is probably

the most noted scholar writing on Cuba today.

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