

Marie L. Mallet. Bay of Pigs Invasion. In C. E. Cortes & G. J. Geoffrey (Eds.), *Multicultural America: A Multimedia Encyclopedia*. Sage Publications, 2013. ISBN 9781452216836

Bay of Pigs Invasion

The Bay of Pigs Invasion was a failed military invasion of Cuba at the Bahía de Cochinos (Bay of Pigs) in April 1961 carried out by a group of counterrevolutionary Cubans. The invasion, planned by the Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A.) and funded by the United States Government, trained about 1,500 Cuban exiles to overthrow the newly established Cuban Government. The invasion was launched on the night of April 16 1961 and was defeated within three days by the Cuban army, led by Fidel Castro. By April 19 1961 most of the members of the invading force, organized in the paramilitary group 'Brigade 2506' had been captured. This unsuccessful invasion challenged U.S. hegemony in the region and strengthened Castro's hold on power. It took place amidst an already strained relationship between the two countries, which would later culminate in the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962. The aftermath of the Bay of Pigs Invasion greatly affected the development of the Cuban-American community in the United States.

Historical Context, the Invasion and its failure

The Bay of Pigs Invasion was motivated by the Cuban Revolution, as a result of which Fidel Castro ousted U.S. ally Fulgencio Batista on January 1 1959. Cuba's relationship with the United States began to deteriorate soon afterwards. The Cuban government initiated a wave of nationalization of private land, including U.S.-owned properties and assets on the island, and the United States responded by placing an economic embargo on Cuba in October 1960. In the meantime, President Dwight D. Eisenhower tasked the C.I.A. to prepare the overthrow of the Castro government.

After President John F. Kennedy took office on January 20 1961, he approved the operation initiated by his predecessor. In an attempt to keep U.S. involvement secret, preparations were conducted abroad and the Cuban exiles that had been recruited by the C.I.A. were trained in Guatemala and Nicaragua. The first attack was launched on April 15 1961, when eight B-26 bombers left Nicaragua to bomb Cuban airfields. The U.S. planes used for the attack had been repainted to be mistaken for Cuban Air Force planes and to simulate defection from the Cuban military. During the night of April 16, a diversionary force approached the northeastern shore of Cuba, while the members of the Brigade, escorted by C.I.A. agents and U.S. ships, landed on the Bay of Pigs. Within two days, most of the members of the Brigade had been captured and about one hundred had been killed. Those captured were imprisoned, but they were released in December 1962, in exchange for \$53 million in food and medicine raised by private donations in the United States.

Many reasons have been evoked to explain the great failure of the invasion. First, plans for the attack were poorly hidden from the Cuban government, which, once aware of an imminent invasion, trained and armed soldiers. Second, because President Kennedy wanted to conceal plans for the invasion from the public, he was not able to provide adequate air, naval, or land support. Finally, and most importantly, the plan relied on the false assumption that the invasion would be popularly supported in Cuba. Contrary to U.S. expectations, however, there was no uprising, no mass defection nor insurrection against Castro within Cuba.

Marie L. Mallet. Bay of Pigs Invasion. In C. E. Cortes & G. J. Geoffrey (Eds.), *Multicultural America: A Multimedia Encyclopedia*. Sage Publications, 2013. ISBN 9781452216836

Consequences of the Invasion

The failed invasion had a significant impact internationally, on American foreign policy, but also domestically, on the trajectory of multicultural America. Over fifty years after the Cuban Revolution and the subsequent Bay of Pigs Invasion, consequences of U.S. action in the region can still be perceived within the United States.

Most evidently, these events led to an exodus of Cubans to the United States, particularly in South Florida. The large influx of Cubans prompted the United States Government to initiate a public relations campaign aimed at portraying Cuban refugees as valuable immigrants both ideologically and socially - indeed, these first waves of migration were largely educated, upper-class, white Cubans who had lost their possessions during the Revolution. These immigrants were presented by the media as being universally anti-communist and therefore compatible with American principles, thus illustrating the case of the Cubans as a vindication of American identity and values.

Successive waves of immigration, due to the Revolution and U.S. policy towards Cuba during the Bay of Pigs, crafted distinctions within the Cuban-American population. The continued embargo on Cuba and the subsequent hardening of living conditions on the island led to several successive waves of Cuban immigration bringing a very different type of Cubans to Miami: economic migrants of darker skin who had, on average, a lower level of education. The distinction within the Cuban community, which continues to exist today, based on skin-color and wealth can be traced back to this period of U.S. and Cuban history.

Although the economic assimilation of Cubans into the United States, facilitated by the U.S. Government, led them to successfully form a powerful exile community in Miami, they largely resisted cultural assimilation. These exiles hoped to return to Cuba and so maintained a strong sense of identity. The Cuban community acquired tremendous political power, through campaign donations and lobbying by groups such as the Cuban American National Foundation, in the key electoral state of Florida.

The trauma of the Revolution and the failed Bay of Pigs Invasion contributed to the identity and the political cohesion of Cuban Americans. The Bay of Pigs led to the creation of a strong Cuban exile community in South Florida. The community first formed for temporary exile, but it strengthened due to U.S. domestic policy towards these Cubans, the role of the media at the time of the Bay of Pigs, a shared anti-Castro sentiment, and the modified character of a United States shying away from criticisms of hegemony. From this strengthening, it developed a distinct Cuban American culture. The Cuban experience, its challenges and successes, differentiates this group from other Hispanics and contributes to the multi-cultural character and heritage of the United States.

Marie L. Mallet
Harvard University

See Also: Cuban American Foundation; Cuban Americans; Cuban Refugee Adjustment Act (1966).

Further Readings

Blight, James. *Politics of Illusion: The Bay of Pigs Invasion Reexamined*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998.

Marie L. Mallet. Bay of Pigs Invasion. In C. E. Cortes & G. J. Geoffrey (Eds.), *Multicultural America: A Multimedia Encyclopedia*. Sage Publications, 2013. ISBN 9781452216836

Jones, Howard. *The Bay of Pigs Pivotal: Moments in American History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Rasenberger, Jim. *The Brilliant Disaster: JFK, Castro and America's Doomed Invasion of Cuba's Bay of Pigs*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011.