

History of the Bay of Pigs Invasion



On January 1, 1959, military dictator Fulgencio Batista fled Cuba, his regime overthrown by a Revolution composed of an array of democratic organizations. Fidel Castro, leader of the 26 of July Movement, the largest of these organizations, assumed power days later. Although Castro had promised the people of Cuba a return to democracy and constitutional government, he began instead to establish a Communist dictatorship. With no outlet for ideological dissent or peaceful opposition, pro-democracy Cubans, including many who had previously battled Batista, were left with no choice but to organize an armed resistance to Castro's emerging totalitarian state. In 1960, Cubans who had sought exile abroad created a liberation army, eventually christened Brigade 2506, to save their homeland from disappearing into the dark Stalinist cloud into which Castro was leading it. Trained and supplied by its ally, the U.S. government, Brigade 2506 was set to invade Cuba on April 17, 1961.

Only a few weeks before D-Day, the Kennedy administration, prioritizing "plausible deniability" of U.S. involvement over military viability, crippled the invasion plan by imposing last-minute revisions that, in the end, ensured its failure. First, it hastily changed the invasion site to a more remote and far inferior location. Then, just as the operation was underway, the administration canceled the critical air missions upon which the invasion's success hinged. Nevertheless, driven by profound patriotism, a commitment to human freedom, and the belief that their American ally would never abandon them, the men of Brigade 2506 battled for three days against impossible odds. They ceased fighting only after running out of ammunition. Brigade 2506, though betrayed by its ally, never surrendered to Fidel Castro.

Upon capture, most of the Brigade was transported to Havana's Sports Palace, where it was detained for more than three weeks. When Castro held out the possibility of handing the Brigade over to the U.S. in exchange for agricultural tractors, the men were transferred to the semi-constructed Naval Hospital in eastern Havana. In July, when the tractor deal collapsed, the Brigade was imprisoned at the *Castillo del Príncipe*, a dreary 18th century Spanish fortification. More than eight months later, in late March and early April 1962, the Brigade prisoners were put on trial in the *Príncipe's* courtyard and sentenced to thirty years of hard labor and stripped of Cuban citizenship. Weeks after the trial, more than two-hundred of the Brigade prisoners, including the three leaders, were transferred to the notorious *Presidio Modelo* on the Isle of Pines. The rest remained at the *Castillo del Príncipe*.

In June 1962, the Cuban Families Committee for the Liberation of the Prisoners of War, an organization composed of the Brigade members' relatives who had steadfastly labored since the summer of 1961 to win their loved ones' release, sought help from prominent New York attorney James B. Donovan. With support from the U.S. Department of Justice and numerous American corporations, Donovan successfully brokered a deal to exchange the Brigade for \$53 million worth of food products and medical supplies. Most of the Brigade was released shortly before Christmas 1962. In a public ceremony at the Miami Orange Bowl on December 29, President Kennedy and First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy formally welcomed the Brigade.

This Document Based Question is intended to include multiple skills such as thesis writing, information text literacy, and critical thinking skills. These include both primary and secondary sources.

Prompt: EVALUATE under what circumstances armed conflict is justified.

Use all documents to formulate a thesis

- Look at Point of View- Who wrote the document, why was it written, and for what audience it was intended?

RUBRIC

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Response to the Prompt and thesis	A strong response is provided as well as an introduction and conclusion.	A qualified response is provided but introduction or conclusion is missing.	The prompt question is only partially answered.	Prompt response question is answered but evidently inaccurate.	Prompt question is not answered.
Context	Incorporates relevant contextual information outside the topic.	Includes some relevant outside context information.	Attempt at including relevant outside context is weak.	Only one piece of context information is included.	No context information is included.
Use of Documents	Uses all of the documents.	Uses nearly all of the documents	Uses some of the documents.	Uses two of the documents or less.	Uses no documents.
Analysis and Understanding	Shows analysis of complex issues and	Shows analysis of complex issues.	Shows attempt at analysis of documents.	Shows no analysis of documents,	No use of document analysis.

	draws accurate conclusions.			only restates text.	
Evaluates	Recognizes Point of View (POV) and makes accurate conclusions.	Recognizes POV but does not make conclusions.	Has basic organization and recognizes POV.	Has weak organization of ideas and no POV.	Prompt response is not organized and does not acknowledge POV.

DOCUMENTS

Document 1

Victor A. Triay, Bay of Pigs: An Oral History of Brigade 2506

By 1960, it became clear the Castro regime was not going to fulfill the promises of the revolution. Instead it launched what amounted to a second revolution: the establishment of a totalitarian Communist police state personified by Fidel Castro. In the months to come, freedom of the press was destroyed, non-Castro political movements were brutally suppressed, and the right to a writ of habeas corpus (reinstated at one point by the revolution) was withdrawn. Also shut down or revolutionized were Cuba's universities, professional organizations, and labor unions. By mid-1960, all of the liberal ministers had been purged from the cabinet, and a number of foreign and domestic businesses had been seized. The promised elections were replaced by an “¿Elecciones para qué?” [Elections, what for?] campaign. The regime's takeover of Cuba's entire institutional structure would make the imposition of a totalitarian state all the easier in the years to come. Neither Batista nor any other dictator in the region had ever established such complete control. Meanwhile, political prisons were being packed with thousands of real and imagined opponents, and executions had become part of the daily political landscape . . .

In Cuba, life had become impossible for Castro opponents. The very act of organizing a dissenting political organization was unlawful, and being caught meant facing a very real threat of imprisonment or execution. Because there were no legal, constitutional outlets for the opposition, any group pitting itself against Castro had to do so clandestinely and at great risk. As the regime increased its control over the population and launched effective counterintelligence efforts, any likelihood that such groups would succeed diminished. As a result, many Castro opponents went overseas to continue the fight from abroad. The majority found themselves in neighboring Miami, Florida.

Document 2

Eduardo Zayas-Bazán, one of the frogmen in the Bay of Pigs Invasion.

“I finally left Cuba for Miami with a tourist visa on September 26, 1960. I took with me one suitcase, \$25, and two H. Upmann No.4 cigar boxes which I eventually sold for \$25 each. The first thing I did was go to the FRD (Frente Revolucionario Democrático), Democratic Revolutionary Front office to enlist . . .”



Source: "My Life" by *Eduardo Zayas-Bazán* Loret de Mola, Alexandra Library Publishing House, 2021.

Document 3

Following the attack on Cuban airfields on 15 April 1961 to prepare the way for the Bay of Pigs invasion two days later, Fidel Castro gave a speech on 16 April to honor the seven Cubans killed during the attack. During the speech he talked publicly for the first time of the socialist character of the Cuban Revolution. (Although he had previously denied any loyalty to Marxism, he followed up this declaration of devotion to Socialism by declaring himself a "Marxist-Leninist" later that year.)

"Compañero workers and peasants: This is a socialist and democratic revolution of the humble, by the humble, and for the humble. And for this revolution of the humble, by the humble, and for the humble, we are ready to give our lives.

Workers and peasants, humble men and women of our country: Do you swear to defend this revolution of the humble, by the humble, and for the humble, to the last drop of your blood?

Compañero workers and peasants of our country: Yesterday's attack was a prelude to a mercenary aggression. Yesterday's attack, which cost seven heroic lives, aimed to destroy our planes on the ground. But it failed. They only destroyed two planes while most of the enemy planes were damaged or shot down. Here, before the tomb of our fallen compañeros; here next to the remains of the heroic young people, children of workers, children of the humble, we reaffirm our resolve that just as they exposed themselves to the bullets, just as they gave their lives, we too, all of us, proud of our revolution, proud of defending this revolution of the humble, by the humble and for the humbler shall not hesitate, whenever the mercenaries come, no matter who is against us, to defend it to our last drop of blood.

Long live the working class! Long the peasants! Long live the humble! Long live the martyrs of our

country! May the martyrs of our country live forever! Long live the socialist revolution! Long live a free Cuba! Patria o muerte! Venceremos!”

Source: Speech by Fidel Castro

Document 4

President John F. Kennedy's address to the nation after the Bay of Pigs Invasion, Statler Hilton Hotel, Washington, D.C. April 20, 1961.

“On that unhappy island, as in so many other areas of the contest for freedom, the news has grown worse instead of better. I have emphasized before that this was a struggle of Cuban patriots against a Cuban dictator. While we could not be expected to lend our sympathies, we made it repeatedly clear that the armed forces of this country would not intervene in any way.

It is not the first time that Communist tanks have rolled over gallant men and women fighting to redeem the independence of their homeland. Nor is it by any means the final episode in the eternal struggle of liberty against tyranny, anywhere on the face of the globe, including Cuba itself.

Mr. Castro has said that these were mercenaries. According to press reports, the final message to be relayed from the refugee forces on the beach came from the rebel commander when asked if he wished to be evacuated. His answer was: “I will never leave this country. “That is not the reply of a mercenary...

Meanwhile we will not accept Mr. Castro's attempts to blame this nation for the hatred with which his onetime supporters now regard his repression. But there are from this sobering episode useful lessons for all to learn. Some may be still obscure and await further information. Some are clear today.”

Source: John F. Kennedy Library and Museum.

Document 5

Myrna Pardo, widow of José “Pepe” Millán (died aboard the Rastra)

“Pepe was playing jai alai in West Palm Beach during the season, but he never stopped talking and thinking about Cuba and all that was happening there. He started to attend meetings with friends, and there was the hope that something could be done. But, most of all, my husband

was very religious, very Catholic. I am also very Catholic. At the time, the Church gave us a feeling that we had to do something to fight Communism and not just stand by with our arms crossed. That feeling of duty to defend our faith was what motivated my husband to involve himself in something to remedy the situation. What made me give my blessing to his activities were my own feelings of duty: God asked it of me, the Church was indicating it was the correct path. Nowadays I question that a little, but that's how it was, and I let him go to the camps. He left on January 6, 1961, and we were both convinced it was our duty. Our children were one, three, and four years of age. I was twenty-three years old.”

Source: *Victor A. Triay, Bay of Pigs: An Oral History of Brigade 2506*

Document 6

Juan Clark, 1st Battalion, Paratrooper, Brigade 2506

“When Castro came to power we were, like most people, sympathetic toward the revolution. But I was never really pro-Castro, because I had doubts about the person himself. I had heard about his gangster-like activities at the University of Havana years earlier and about his murder of a University police sergeant. Despite my strong reservations, I nevertheless admired his actions to an extent. Pretty soon, though, I realized things were not going as they had promised. The trials of the aviators in March 1959 opened my eyes, as did President Urrutia’s overthrow and the Huber Matos incident. Castro then practically began saying that the promises of the revolution would be betrayed—such as his “¿Elecciones para qué?” campaign. It became obvious that we were definitely moving in the direction of another dictatorship and most likely a Communist one . . .

We began organizing with the students at the university, and I also had some contact with the MRR and the Christian Democrats. My activities got me to the point where I was what was called “burned.” In June of 1960, I left Cuba with the idea of joining something militarily, along with my brother who had left earlier, because it was obvious Castro was not going to allow any sort of political process to occur. Unfortunately, force was the only way to get rid of him. By the time I left Cuba, my brother had already left for the training camps. ”

Source: Historian Victor Triay, *Bay Of Pigs: An Oral History of Brigade 2506*

Document 7

Chester Bowles, Under Secretary of State, April 4, 1961, Memo to Secretary of State Dean Rusk

“In considerable degree, my concern [about the Bay of Pigs invasion] stems from a deep personal conviction that our national interests are poorly served by a covert operation of this

kind at a time when our new President is effectively appealing to world opinion on the basis of high principle.”

“Even in our imperfect world, the differences which distinguish us from the Russians are of vital importance. This is true not only in a moral sense but in the practical effect of these differences on our capacity to rally the non-Communist world on behalf of our traditional democratic objectives.

In saying this, I do not overlook the ruthless nature of the struggle in which we are involved, nor do I ignore the need on occasion for action which is expedient and distasteful. Yet I cannot persuade myself that means can be wholly divorced from ends—even within the context of the Cold War.”

Document 8

“In the following excerpt from Castro’s speech, Castro describes with great passion the events leading up to the invasion. He condemns the United States for taking away most of Cuba’s economic support, including its oil, sugar, and molasses markets, and then sending “terrorists” and “saboteurs” to destroy its factories and stores... Castro encourages the people of Cuba to continue fighting attempts by the U.S. government to overtake their country and its resources. He cites the Bay of Pigs victory as proof that it can be done.”

Source: Opposing Viewpoints Series: “The Bay of Pigs” Chapter 2, U.S. Economic and Terrorist Acts Against Cuba are Unwarranted. Written by Fidel Castro.

Document 9

In August, 1961, just 4 months after the Bay of Pigs invasion, presidential aide Richard Goodwin traveled to Uruguay for the Punta del Este Conference. Here, a meeting between him and Che Guevara was set up.

“He then went on to say that he wanted to thank us for the invasion—that it has been a great political victory for them—enabled them to consolidate—and transformed them from an aggrieved little country to an equal.”

Source: Richard Goodwin, “Memorandum on Conversation between Richard Goodwin and Che Guevara,” *The American Century* accessed January 20, 2023, <https://americancentury.omeka.wlu.edu/items/show/268>.

Bonus Document


“True religion looks upon as peaceful those wars that are waged not for motives of aggrandizement, or cruelty, but with the object of securing peace, punishing those who do evil, and of supporting the good.” (Saint Augustine).”

BEST USE OF RESOURCES: TEACHER TOOL KIT

The Bay of Pigs Museum and Library acknowledges that outstanding work educators forge forward every single day, yet recognize the logistical challenges they face within and in relation to the classroom. Sound pedagogy provides options so that educators may modify lessons, skills, and content to be most effective through engagement.

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO USE OUR WORKSHOP TO BENEFIT YOUR CURRICULUM AND YOUR STUDENTS?

BEST USE OF MATERIALS	TOOLS AND SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Full Day Lesson <input type="checkbox"/> Full day lesson aimed at using Bay of Pigs Invasion as a case study for the Cold War and or writing lesson (DBQ). 	<p>Teach Bay of Pigs Invasion to highlight Cause and Effect skills through its link to the Cuban Missile Crisis.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Culturally Responsive Educator <input type="checkbox"/> Being a culturally responsive teacher that teaches Bay of Pigs Invasion to represent Latin American students that delves into the topic through brief content and brief homework, acknowledging this student body. 	<p>Use the Bay of Pigs Invasion as a way to have students connect with family members about events that their parents or grandparents lived through and acknowledge their history and cultures, specifically Latin America.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Home Learning Assignment <input type="checkbox"/> Assigning a 20 minute testimonial of a veteran to create empathy and engagement while pressed for time to teach the Cold War and the full Bay of Pigs Invasion story. 	<p>Teach the Cold War and assign the Bay of Pigs mini-documentaries as a way to humanize what we teach and create empathy. The “habits of mind” are part of our curriculum and can benefit students greatly.</p>

 <p>1. Persisting <i>Stick to it!</i> Persevering in task through to completion; remaining focused. Looking for ways to reach your goal when stuck. Not giving up.</p>	 <p>2. Managing Impulsivity <i>Take your time!</i> Thinking before acting; remaining calm, thoughtful and deliberative.</p>	 <p>3. Listening with understanding and empathy <i>Understand others!</i> Devoting mental energy to another person's thoughts and ideas; Make an effort to perceive another's point of view and emotions.</p>	 <p>4. Thinking flexibly <i>Look at it another way!</i> Being able to change perspectives, generate alternatives, consider options.</p>
 <p>5. Thinking about your thinking <i>(Metacognition)</i> <i>Know your knowing!</i> Being aware of your own thoughts, strategies, feelings and actions and their effects on others.</p>	 <p>6. Striving for accuracy <i>Check it again!</i> Always doing your best. Setting high standards. Checking and finding ways to improve constantly.</p>	 <p>7. Questioning and problem posing <i>How do you know?</i> Having a questioning attitude; knowing what data are needed & developing questioning strategies to produce those data. Finding problems to solve.</p>	 <p>8. Applying past knowledge to new situations <i>Use what you learn!</i> Accessing prior knowledge; transferring knowledge beyond the situation in which it was learned.</p>
 <p>9. Thinking & communicating with clarity and precision <i>Be clear!</i> Strive for accurate communication in both written and oral form; avoiding over-generalizations, distortions, deletions and exaggerations.</p>	 <p>10. Gather data through all senses <i>Use your natural pathways!</i> Pay attention to the world around you. Gather data through all the senses. taste, touch, smell, hearing and sight.</p>	 <p>11. Creating, imagining, and innovating <i>Try a different way!</i> Generating new and novel ideas, fluency, originality</p>	 <p>12. Responding with wonderment and awe <i>Have fun figuring it out!</i> Finding the world awesome, mysterious and being intrigued with phenomena and beauty.</p>
 <p>13. Taking responsible risks <i>Venture out!</i> Being adventuresome; living on the edge of one's competence. Try new things constantly.</p>	 <p>14. Finding humor <i>Laugh a little!</i> Finding the whimsical, incongruous and unexpected. Being able to laugh at one's self.</p>	 <p>15. Thinking interdependently <i>Work together!</i> Being able to work in and learn from others in reciprocal situations. Team work.</p>	 <p>16. Remaining open to continuous learning <i>Learn from experiences!</i> Having humility and pride when admitting we don't know; resisting complacency.</p>