

[Fidel, his people and new, indispensable learnings](#)



Few other public figures in history have, during their lives, faced an organized demonization machine like that wielded against Fidel. Perhaps in no other case has so much money been spent - not only to eliminate him physically, but to annihilate his moral stature as well. Everything from powders meant to make his legendary beard fall out, to substances that would allegedly cause him fits of uncontrollable laughter in public, were fabricated in CIA laboratories. And certainly unprecedented are the financial resources directed toward propaganda campaigns full of lies and slander against the Cuban Revolution, focused on its principal leader as the favorite target, even after his death.

How then can we explain the contradiction between this reality and the fact that, wherever he traveled, even where diatribes attacking him were daily occurrences, he was fervently welcomed by large crowds and respectfully greeted by his political and ideological adversaries?

There is a mediocre explanation referring to his "charismatic leadership" that some writers present as unconscious allegiance created by demagoguery. But Fidel was an ethical leader, with unquestionable charisma, which, as opposed to others, was accompanied by facts and concrete action. He never told a lie and awoke everyday thinking about what he could do for others, constantly giving the personal example of always being on the front lines of any effort, showing his face, just as the Cuban people have demanded of those recognized as their genuine leaders, from the days of Céspedes to date. Fidel is distinguished in international geopolitics by his moral stature, as a person who takes action making clear that, whatever the cause being defended, the ends do not justify the means.

Nor is Fidel one of those leaders who keeps his followers in the dark, to take advantage of their ignorance and easily manipulate them. He asserted very early on, "We do not tell the people to believe, we say: read;" in his speeches he presented facts and sophisticated arguments, carefully researched and expressed with impeccable logic and principled political pedagogy. The educational transformation he led allowed a people - among whom total and functional illiteracy was common - to become the protagonists of scientific, cultural and military accomplishments, that could only emerge from the

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massive development of intelligence that capitalism had made invisible with class exclusion during a republic idealized by his enemies, which he and his companions exposed to reveal its most painful inequalities.

Fidel was the leader who, at a time when the guerillas faced the most taxing hardship, when the only thing not in short supply was conviction and dedication, requested uniforms and armbands with the first reinforcements; the leader who recognized the strategic importance of Radio Rebelde and established its protection as one of the Rebel Army's three principal objectives during the dictatorship's 1958 summer offensive.

Fidel was the person who, just as the Revolution was being born and seeing the vicious campaigns launched against it, organized Operation Truth and promoted the founding of the Casa de las Americas to facilitate dialogue with Latin American intellectuals, the Prensa Latina news agency and Radio Habana Cuba to disseminate Cuba's true reality, and the Cuban Institute of Friendship with Peoples to cultivate mutual, two-way solidarity; and during the tense moments of the Revolution's first days, found time to devote to important intellectuals visiting the country like Graham Greene, Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. His sense of the symbolic, not as something empty but as living testimony to what a Revolution means, can be seen in the military installations that were transformed to become schools, a process that continued into the 21st century with the creation of the University of Computer Sciences on the site of a former military radar monitoring station.

His dialogue with French-Spanish journalist Ignacio Ramonet is a master class on the pitfalls of the freedom of the press touted by capitalism; on the value of criticism within socialism; and the importance of culture and education in confronting the challenges imposed by corporate imperialist control of communications:

"We have become convinced that it is necessary to develop the critical spirit much more fully. I have encouraged it to no end, as a fundamental factor in perfecting our system..."

"We know inconveniences may arise, but we want responsible criticism..."

"Despite the possible consequences, nothing is worse than an absence of criticism..."

"If you call freedom of the press the right of the counterrevolution and Cuba's enemies to talk and write freely against socialism, against the Revolution, to slander, lie, and create conditioned responses, I would say we are not in favor of this 'freedom.'"

"As long as Cuba is a country blockaded by imperialism, the victim of hostile laws like the Helms-Burton and the Cuban Adjustment Act, a country threatened by the very President of the United States, we cannot give this 'freedom' to the allies of our enemies, whose objective is to struggle against socialism's very existence..."

"In these 'free' media, who is speaking? What is being discussed? Who is writing? What is discussed is what the owners of the papers or the television broadcasters want. And whoever they choose is writing. You know this very well. 'Freedom of expression' is talked about, but in reality what is fundamentally defended is the right to own the mass communications media as private property..."

"We dream of another freedom of the press, in an educated and informed country, in a country that has comprehensive general culture and can communicate with the world on its own."

This is why he created spaces like the "Mesa Redonda" news talk show and "Universidad para todos" television courses. When the U.S. Interests Section began offering English classes, as part of its subversive plans, he made sure an English course was offered on television, and when he was asked what Cubans would do on the Internet, he responded without missing a beat, "Talk with the U.S. people in English."

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His confidence in the people, who he organized and educated, was infinite, precisely on the basis of this education and organization, but he never underestimated the need to offer comprehensive explanations on complex subjects, as he did during his long television appearance to prepare Cubans to successfully receive Pope John Paul II, when the international press was proclaiming in unison that this visit would be the end of Cuban socialism.

These days, as fake news is disseminated at lightning speed, and exploitation of conditioned reflexes has become common practice, to manipulate people to react emotionally to an image or headline without a minimum of analysis of sources or contexts, Fidel, the defender of the truth, is once again targeted. At a time when technology and money can turn a professional liar into an “opinion leader” to repeat recipes that have led the world to disaster; when gurus propose novel formulas for salvation, precisely where capitalism and representative democracy are being definitively discredited and have nothing to say, Fidel’s approach to making the people the protagonists of their own defense, by offering the highest levels of knowledge, transforming and empowering revolutionary institutionality toward this end, is a treasure we must make use of in a creative, principled manner.

The realization of the objective of developing, at the grassroots level of Cuban society, critical consumers and citizens capable of making creative, emancipatory use of telecommunications and information technology, cannot be limited to promoting computer literacy. Urgently needed is a dynamic, mobilizing process to, as President Díaz-Canel said, “take advantage of all our potential,” because “we cannot continue our attachment to ways of communicating from periods prior to the digital era, and we cannot bureaucratize ideological processes.”

More than building skills, what is needed is the development of a solid culture of communication, not only among leaders, but within the entire people, using schools, communications media, local branches of institutions and mass social and political organizations, to give every citizen the opportunity to become an active defender of the truth and a responsible critic of anything poorly done, armed with the knowledge that allows them to use the most effective, rapid means to convert criticism into participation and the resolution of problems.

The country with the most teachers per inhabitant in the world, in which illiteracy was eliminated in less than a year and universities opened to “Blacks, mulatos, workers and campesinos,” the country that with effective political communication freed Elián and won the return of the Five, cannot aspire to less, nor will the memory of the person who led his people to win all these battles allow anything else.

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