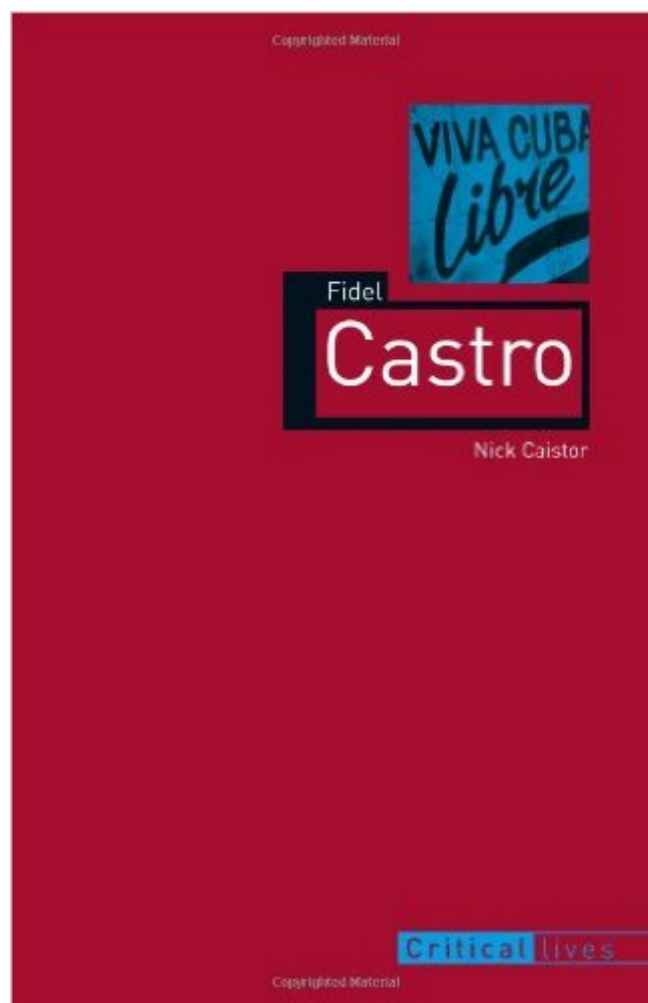


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Fidel Castro (Reaktion Books - Critical Lives)



Synopsis

Fidel Castro had ruled the island of Cuba for fifty-two years when ill health forced him to step down in 2008. Over the course of that time, he changed Cuba from a republic to a communist state and became one of the most divisive leaders in the second half of the twentieth century. For some, he is a champion of humanitarianism, socialism, and environmentalism. For others, he is a monster and dictator who perpetuated human rights abuses at home and abroad. Providing a rare, evenhanded account of Castro's life, journalist Nick Caistor brings together interviews with people who have known Castro with discussion of the ideas that drove him. Caistor follows Castro's life from his birth as the illegitimate son of a wealthy farmer in 1926 to the developing of his leftist, anti-imperialist ideas at the University of Havana and his primary role in the Cuban Revolution in the 1950s. He explores Castro's economic and military alliance with the Soviet Union and his hostile relationship with the United States while also looking at how he simultaneously introduced free health care and education while squelching freedom of the press and suppressing dissidents. As Caistor shows, Castro's numerous writings on politics, capitalism, and other topics have influenced leaders from Nelson Mandela to Hugo Chávez, but allegations of corruption, human rights abuses, and dictatorship never ceased during his long career. Using stories and opinions to enliven the debate about Castro's choices, strengths, and weaknesses, this concise biography gives readers the opportunity to judge for themselves how they feel about the former Cuban president.

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Customer Reviews

Over the past 50+ years, Cuba and Fidel Castro have excited both passion and vitriol in the United States, Latin America, and the world. But who is Fidel Castro? Is he a true believer in communism, a liberator or an opportunistic dictator? While unable to answer those questions definitively, this book is definitely a good place to start. It goes back to his father, who probably was a soldier in the Spanish colonial army during the revolution of 1895-1898, all the way to the present era, where Fidel has handed over power to his younger brother and is in his twilight years. It is a good thumbnail sketch of the man, but what is also interesting is how this short biography talks a lot about his relationships with other Cubans and revolutionaries, particularly his relationship with Che Guevara. Thus, this little book avoids the trap that so many other short biographies fall into and places its subject firmly in the middle of the times he lived through and not treating him like an animal in a glass case, separated from everything and everyone. Like I said before, though, this book won't answer all of your questions about Fidel, and after the Cuban Missile Crisis hard facts about Fidel start to become a little sparser. But for those who are interested in getting to know the man a little bit more, this is a great place to start.

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