

## THE PLAY

Meet the Playwright

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Cuba-U.S. Relations

Asylum-Seekers at the Peruvian Embassy and the Mariel Boatlift

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## THE PLAY

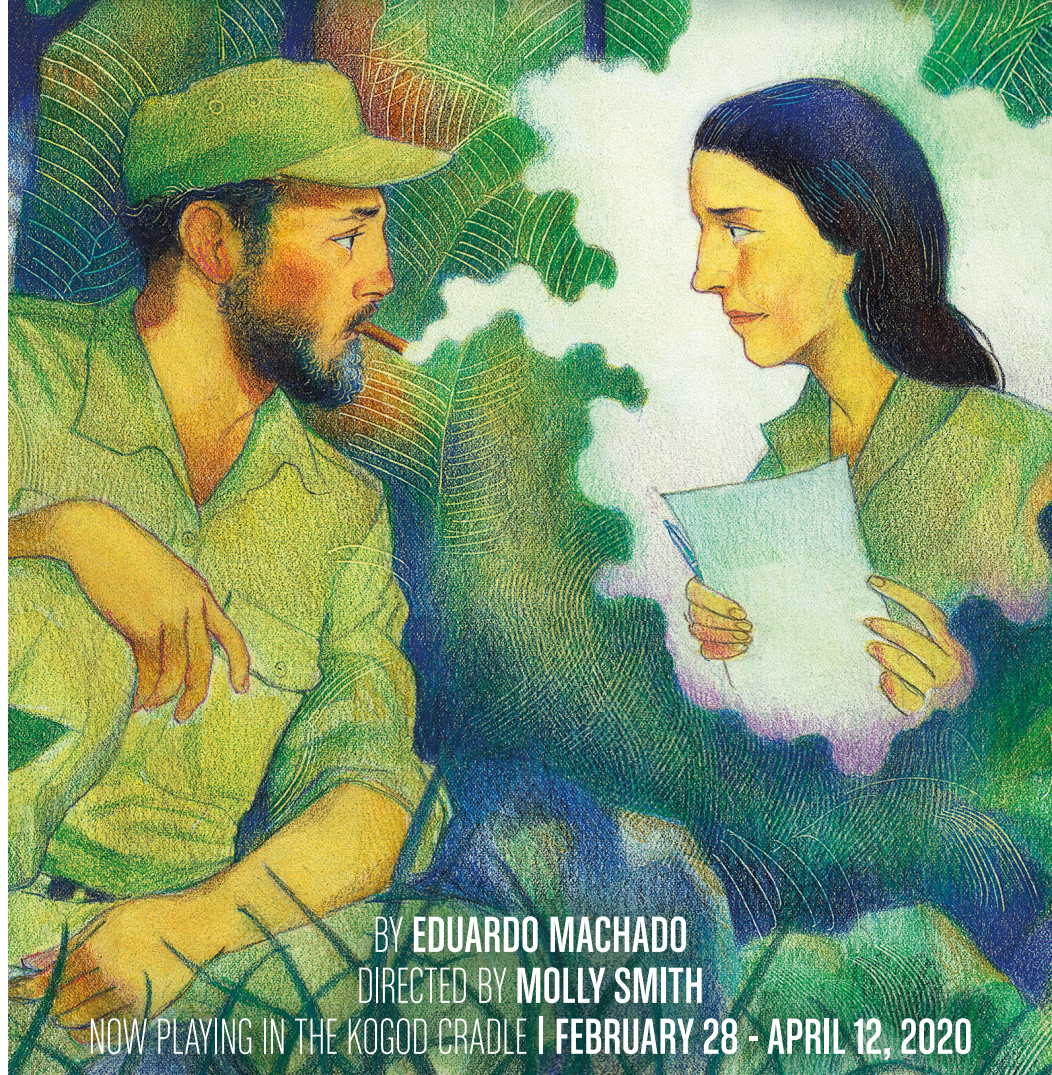
**Fidel Castro**, the political leader of Cuba and its revolution, is celebrating. Cuba's support of the socialists in Angola (see article) is succeeding and, to him, it represents Cuba's growing influence and power in the world.

**Celia Sánchez**, his fellow revolutionary and most trusted political advisor, wants him to focus on his upcoming speech to the United Nations. She also urges him to face the realities in Cuba, where the people are clamoring for change and freedom. Fidel refuses.

**Consuelo**, a spy and Fidel's protégée, arrives. She tells Fidel that **Manolo**, a former revolutionary, is in Havana to meet with him. Manolo now works for the U.S. government and is in Cuba on behalf of President Carter to discuss ending the trade embargo.

Their meeting is interrupted with startling news: hundreds of Cubans have stormed the Peruvian embassy in Havana, asking the Peruvian government to help them leave Cuba. Will Fidel be able to cooperate with Celia, Manolo and Consuelo to find a solution? What will be the fate of the thousands of Cubans who want to leave? And what will be the legacy of the revolution?

# CELIA AND FIDEL



BY EDUARDO MACHADO

DIRECTED BY MOLLY SMITH

NOW PLAYING IN THE KOGOD CRADLE | FEBRUARY 28 - APRIL 12, 2020

**“But, things are changing. People that grew up under our revolution are unhappy. I think we have not given them enough things to dream and work for. They know about the world. And they want their own voice.”**

— Celia Sánchez, *Celia and Fidel*

*Celia and Fidel* was generously commissioned by **Drs. Elliot and Lily Gardner Feldman** and **BakerHostetler LLP** as part of Arena Stage's Insider Voices Power Play Cycle.

The D.C. Ticket Partnership is generously sponsored by the Paul M. Angell Family Foundation. Additional support is provided by the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, The Bay & Paul Foundations., Collins Aerospace, the Albert and Lillian Small Foundation, AT&T and Exelon.

# MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT



EDUARDO MACHADO

“I’ve been at the mercy of politics my entire life and there has to be a way to step beyond it, to have human interaction.”

– Eduardo Machado

In 1959, when Eduardo Machado was six, the Cuban Revolution overthrew the existing dictator and Fidel Castro took power. Machado says that, at first, his parents approved of Castro, “but six months in, things got pretty harsh.” When Machado was eight, his parents sent him and his younger brother to the U.S. in Operation Peter Pan (see “Cuba-U.S. Relations”).

The brothers lived with their aunt and uncle in Florida, with no knowledge of English, trying to adjust to a new culture and poverty after living upper middle-class lives in Cuba. His parents arrived one year later, and the family moved to California. Being uprooted from Cuba when he was a child has deeply affected Machado and his work.

He has worked as an actor, director and filmmaker, but is primarily known as a playwright and teacher of playwriting. Machado says, “I never wasn’t in the theater — since I was a very little kid. The house I grew up in in Cuba had a round tank of water that looked like a stage to me, so I started acting out plays when I was like two. I never ever thought of doing anything else.” He has written 53 plays. In *Celia and Fidel*, Machado explores the characters behind the politics that have shaped his life. He considers Castro to be his most difficult character yet, but he takes on the challenge of digging into the human interactions of the man behind the political turmoil of his childhood.

## KEY TERMS

### SOCIALISM

A social theory and system of organization in which all property, land and resources belong to the community as a whole.

### COMMUNISM

A political and economic system that aims to eliminate social classes through government ownership of industry and resources. Communism is a type of socialism. Communist countries are often run by a single political party or leader. In the 20th century, nearly 40 percent of the world’s population lived under communism, but now there are only five communist countries: Cuba, China, Laos, North Korea and Vietnam accounting for 19 percent of the population.

### CAPITALISM

A range of economic systems based on private control of property and resources, competition and individual choice. The United States is one of many capitalist countries.

### ASYLUM

Protection, especially given by a nation or embassy to political refugees. The Cubans who entered the Peruvian embassy in 1980 asked the government of Peru to protect them from the Cuban government.

### EMBARGO

A government order banning certain types of trade. An embargo is a tactic to isolate a country in an attempt to force that country to make a social, political or economic change.

### GUERRILLA WARFARE

A type of irregular warfare, often using hit-and-run tactics, in which small groups of combatants fight a larger, more traditional military.

## CUBA

The country of Cuba is made up of about 1,600 islands, most of which are very small. The main island is also called Cuba and it is the largest island in the West Indies, with a coastline of about 3,570 miles. It is 90 miles from Florida.

- The largest city is the capital and commercial hub, Havana.
- Cuba has a population of 11,194,000, of which 77% lives in cities.
- About a quarter of the island is covered in mountains and hills. The Sierra Maestra mountain range runs along the southeastern coast for about 150 miles and has the highest peaks.
- The official language is Spanish.
- Cuban culture is a mix of indigenous, African and European cultures, which is reflected in its music. Genres include son, salsa, jazz, nueva trova and timba.
- Cuba is also known for its beaches, architecture, rum, rum cocktails and cigars.



Revolution leaders (from left to right) Vilma Espin, Fidel Castro, Raul Castro and Celia Sánchez in 1957.

## THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

In 1952, Fulgencio Batista, a former president of Cuba, overthrew the Cuban government and canceled elections. With the support of the United States, he began a military dictatorship. Many Cubans, including Celia Sánchez, were eager to overthrow Batista. Fidel Castro, who had been planning to run for Cuba’s congress, began raising a guerrilla army and emerged as a revolutionary leader.

On July 26, 1953 — a date that would become synonymous with the revolution — Castro, his brother (Raúl), and more than 100 others attacked the Moncada military barracks in Cuba’s second largest city, Santiago. According to Jack A. Goldstone in *Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction*, nearly half the rebels were killed and the rest were captured and sentenced to 15 years in prison. At his trial, Castro announced, “History will absolve me.”

A year and a half later, Batista released the rebels in an attempt to improve his image. The Castro brothers fled to Mexico, where they met Che Guevara, a Marxist revolutionary from Argentina. Celia Sánchez and other revolutionaries still in Cuba planned and prepared for the Castros’ return. On December 2, 1956, 82 revolutionaries arrived from Mexico in a yacht called the *Granma*. They arrived later than planned and were immediately ambushed by Batista’s army. The few survivors escaped into the Sierra Maestra mountains and started recruiting peasants as guerrilla fighters, enticing them with promises of land reform, education and healthcare.

From 1957 to 1958, Batista became increasingly brutal, torturing and executing hundreds of activists who opposed him. In 1958, U.S. President Eisenhower stopped sending weapons to Batista. When the guerrilla army attacked, Batista’s troops refused to fight and Batista fled.

Castro became Cuba’s leader with widespread support, Goldstone writes. Once in power, Castro started nationalizing foreign business operations, meaning that he took them away from private owners and made them the property of the Cuban government. He also made land reforms and started programs to improve literacy and healthcare. Almost two years after he took power, Castro began using the word “communist” to describe the new Cuba.

## FIDEL CASTRO

Fidel Castro Ruz was the leader of the Cuban Revolution and a divisive figure in international politics. He established a one-party, socialist government in Cuba, which he led from 1959 to 2011. Some revered him as a charismatic freedom fighter. Others saw him as the dictator of a totalitarian regime. He was known for giving speeches that lasted hours.

Born in 1926, Castro was the third of his mother’s seven children. He excelled in the Catholic schools he attended, and he studied law at the University of Havana. After graduating, he intended to run for congress in 1952, but was thwarted when former President Fulgencio Batista seized power and canceled the elections.

On July 26, 1953, Castro led an attack on a military base and, although he and his collaborators were arrested, he became the leader of a new revolutionary movement. After his release from prison, he led a successful revolution to overthrow Batista and established himself as commander in chief of the armed forces and prime minister of Cuba. He was not elected. Supporters of Batista’s government were imprisoned and, according to an article in *The Independent*, at least 580 were shot by firing squads.

Castro based the new Cuban government on Marxist ideologies, believing that the only way to free Cuba from foreign economic interests was to build a strictly socialist economic system. He took over people’s privately-owned businesses and made them the property of the Cuban government. He redistributed land by limiting the amount a person could own, made private schools public, brought electricity to the countryside and started literacy programs. He formed an alliance with the Soviet Union and influenced communist and socialist revolutions throughout the world.

Castro also punished Cuban citizens who spread counterrevolutionary ideas. He jailed thousands of political opponents, put gay people in “re-education camps,” censored journalists and free speech, and refused to hold elections. In 1964 he acknowledged holding 15,000 political prisoners. His control over all aspects of Cuba isolated the nation and curtailed economic freedoms, causing poverty, deprivation and fear. Over 1 million Cubans left the country, some risking their lives on rafts.

Castro also trained spies within communities and created a Cuban intelligence agency that was able to infiltrate the U.S. government and Cuban communities in the U.S. Castro personally managed the spy operations. According to the head of his secret police, Castro avoided an estimated 638 assassination attempts.

In 2008, Castro announced that he would not serve another term as president, and in 2011, he stepped down as secretary-general of the Communist Party of Cuba. He was succeeded by his brother, Raúl. Castro died in 2016.



### READ MORE

Read more about Fidel Castro in his obituary in the New York Times: <https://tinyurl.com/ya47zf3m>

## CELIA SÁNCHEZ

In Cuba, Celia Sánchez Manduley is the famous, even mythic maternal figure of the revolution. In the rest of the world, she is virtually unknown. Born in Media Luna, Cuba in 1920, she was the fourth of eight children. Her mother died when Sanchez was six. Her father was the only doctor in town and he was known for treating anyone who came to him even if they could not pay him.

As a young adult, Sánchez began volunteering with the charity organization, the Servants of Mary, where she started a project to bring toys and clothes to underprivileged, rural children. Sánchez's charity work led her to search for greater political purpose. In 1948, Sánchez helped her father organize a rally for presidential candidate Eduardo Chibas. She invited her neighbors by the hundreds to listen to Chibas' weekly radio show in her

garden. After Chibas' death and the start of Batista's dictatorship, Sánchez looked for a political movement that could overthrow Batista and ended up joining forces with Fidel Castro.

Sánchez became a major player in the Cuban Revolution. She organized rebellions against Batista, recruited revolutionaries and participated in planning the landing of the Granma, the raft that brought Castro and other rebels back to Cuba from Mexico in 1956. In the following years, she was responsible for getting food, weapons and supplies to the rebels hiding in the mountains. Sánchez trained and led guerrilla troops and was the first woman to fire a gun in the revolution.

After Castro claimed power, Sánchez became his advisor and contributed to

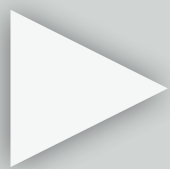


Celia Sánchez with a flower in her hair. Sánchez loved wildflowers and is often associated with orchids and mariposas.

the new government and culture in many ways. She worked with architects to plan parks and design government buildings and led the movement for a new Cuban aesthetic. She helped develop the Cohiba cigar brand. She started literacy programs and collected documents to create the official archives of the revolution. She did not like to be the center of attention, which allowed her to gather information for Castro. When she died, her funeral was one of the biggest in Cuban history.

## THE ANGOLAN CIVIL WAR AND CUBA'S GLOBAL POLITICS

Although small and economically isolated from capitalist global powers like the United States, Cuba had a wide-reaching foreign policy in the 1980s. Cuba supported socialist and communist revolutionary movements around the world and sent military, educational and medical aid abroad that often equaled or even surpassed the foreign aid offered by the United States. In the 1980s, Cuba's largest foreign project was in Angola, a country in Southern Africa. Cuba supported the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). This socialist party won Angola's independence from Portugal in 1975 before fighting a civil war against the U.S.-backed anti-communist UNITA party. By 1988, Cuba had sent 52,000 troops to Angola.



### WATCH

Fidel and Manolo speak about the Cuban exiles in Miami. Learn more in this PBS American Experience feature:

<https://tinyurl.com/cubanexiles>

Fidel Castro with his signature bushy beard, cigar and army fatigues.

## CUBA - U.S. RELATIONS

For decades, the relationship between the United States and Cuba has been tense and changeable. From the time Fidel Castro took power in 1959 until his retirement in 2011, the U.S. was led by 10 different presidents, each of whom navigated this complex relationship in different ways. In the play, Castro describes several major events involving the two countries, but his accounts are heavily influenced by his own perspective and personality.

### ECONOMICS AND EMBARGO

Before Castro's rise to power, the U.S. government and American businesses had significant power in the Cuban economy. Sugar was Cuba's main export and almost half of Cuban sugar production was owned by Americans. After Castro took power in 1959, he established a communist government. He claimed private businesses in Cuba as government property. In 1960, the U.S. imposed an economic embargo, or blockade, against Cuba, banning all U.S. exports to Cuba except for food and medicine. In 1962, the embargo began also limiting travel between the U.S. and Cuba. The specific rules of the embargo have fluctuated under different U.S. administrations, but it remains in effect today. The embargo undermined the Cuban economy and in 1980 there was an economic downturn.

### COLD WAR

The U.S. thought that the spread of communism was a threat to freedom and engaged in a Cold War against the communist Soviet Union from 1947 to 1991. This means, although they did not deploy their militaries directly against one another, the two competed on every front for the greatest global influence. Cuba formed an alliance with the Soviet Union, creating tension with the U.S.

### BAY OF PIGS

In 1960, President Dwight D. Eisenhower approved a plan to train anti-Castro Cuban-Americans to invade Cuba and replace the communist government with a capitalist one. When President John F. Kennedy took office in 1961, he agreed to carry out the plan and chose the Bay of Pigs in southern Cuba as the site of the attack. The invasion was supposed to be kept secret as was the U.S. government's involvement, but Castro learned about the plan and launched a successful counterattack, causing the invasion to fail dramatically.

### MISSILE CRISIS

In 1962, an American spy plane found nuclear missile sites that the Soviet Union was building in Cuba. Castro had offered Cuba to the Soviet Union as a site for the missiles. Kennedy responded by surrounding Cuba with naval ships to prevent the delivery of more military supplies and demanded the removal of the missiles. Many feared the incident, known as the Cuban Missile Crisis, would lead to nuclear war, but an agreement was reached between the U.S. and the Soviet Union and the missile sites were removed.

### OPERATION PETER PAN

Between 1960 and 1962, around 14,000 Cuban children were flown to Miami by the U.S. government in a secret program known as "Operation Peter Pan." The CIA spread rumors in Cuba that the Cuban government was planning to take children away from their parents for communist indoctrination, and thousands of Cuban parents decided that their children would have better lives in the U.S. Some of the children lived with family members already in the U.S., while many went to orphanages and foster families and were not reunited with their parents for many years.

## MAGICAL REALISM IN LATIN AMERICA

"Magical realism" is a term used to describe art, especially literature, that incorporates elements of fantasy or mythology in otherwise realistic narratives in a matter-of-fact way. It is strongly associated with postcolonial Latin American fiction and was coined in the 1940s by the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier.

# THREE BIG QUESTIONS

1

How do you measure the success of a revolution?

2

What are the responsibilities of a government to its citizens?

3

How does power affect leaders?

# ASYLUM-SEEKERS AT THE PERUVIAN EMBASSY AND THE MARIEL BOATLIFT



Cuban asylum-seekers at the Peruvian embassy in Havana.

On April 1, 1980, six Cubans crashed a bus through the gates of the Peruvian embassy in Havana and claimed asylum. Five days later, 10,000 people had poured into the embassy, all seeking to leave Cuba with the protection of the Peruvian government. On April 20, Fidel Castro announced that anyone could leave Cuba, but only by boat through the Port of Mariel. Thousands of Cubans flooded to the port and many Cuban exiles in Miami traveled to Cuba to pick up their relatives. Most of them wanted to escape economic hardships, but the U.S. government considered them political refugees and, therefore, allowed more immigrants from Cuba than from other Latin American countries. By May 6, over 15,000 Cubans had arrived in Florida.

The refugees faced many challenges, including dangerous travel conditions, detainment and deportation, riots, and discrimination. Castro also used this as an opportunity to send inmates from prisons and patients from mental asylums to the U.S.



Cuban refugees traveling to Florida in a fishing boat, 1980.

# HELPFUL HINTS FOR THEATER AUDIENCES

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive at least 15 minutes early.
- Visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Sit in the exact seat on your ticket. Ask the usher for help finding it.
- Before the show begins, turn off your phone, watch alarms and any other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, turn it off immediately.
- Do not use your phone for texts, calls, games or pictures.
- You cannot take pictures or make recordings in the theater, even before or after the play.
- There is no food allowed in the theater.
- Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum, unless invited by the performers to do so.
- Keep your feet on the floor and off the seat in front of you.
- Avoid getting up during a show. If you must leave, wait for a scene change and exit quietly and quickly.
- Respond to the show; you can laugh, cry and gasp. However, don't repeat lines out loud or talk to the performers on stage.
- Be sure to applaud at the end!

## RESOURCES

*Dramaturgy* by Naysan Mojgani, Dante Flores, Soyica Diggs Colbert, MacKenzie Foy, Fabiola Castro Jimenez, and Taurijhai Purdie

*One Day in December: Celia Sanchez and the Cuban Revolution* by Nancy Stout

*A History of the Cuban Revolution* by Aviva Chomsky

*Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction* by Jack A. Goldstone

*Encyclopedia Britannica*, Britannica.com

John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, [jfklibrary.org](http://jfklibrary.org)

BBC Radio 3, "In Search of Celia Sanchez," <https://tinyurl.com/w89eyb3>

NPR, "Fidel Castro: From Rebel to El Presidente," <https://tinyurl.com/sojgmp8>

*New York Times*, "Theater; A Return to Cuba, A Search for Himself," <https://tinyurl.com/u5xj5jx>

*Conversations with Anne* by Anne Bogart



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