

Letter to Fidel, from an acquaintance of long standing

By Armando de la Torre

Now that the curtain has come down on your long-running play, it's time for some parting thoughts. You've already let me know, in countless different ways, what you think of me. My answer to you has been in process for nearly 60 years.

Fidel, your career has been one more example of great personal gifts and opportunities that you completely misapplied in a drive to dominate others.

Your goals never justified the means you used.

For me, Fidel, you have always embodied a demon's ingratitude, as have other highly talented men whom we recall with sadness: Caligula, Robespierre, Beria, Hitler, Mao, Pol Pot, and others of your stamp.

In fiction, your precise equivalent is Dracula. In history's eye, regretfully, you are not unique.

It was given to you to be born brilliant, healthy and strong. You had the best education your millionaire father could buy. But you used all your advantages to mislead, destroy and embitter the lives of others.

You were a genius of mass manipulation, as were Goebbels, Lenin and Stalin before you. You became the author of criminal depredation on a society-wide scale.

Never—not in the 500 years since Columbus's discovery; not in the 50 centuries of humans inhabiting Cuba—had the country seen such a tragedy as when millions of people fled from your regime; and at the further price of thousands who perished in the Florida Straits.

Never had the happy island of Cuba seen so heartbreaking or shameful a spectacle as when you spilled the blood of thousands with firing squads—and without granting those murdered persons the trials they had a right to expect.

Through your actions, a “continent of hope” that had welcomed millions of immigrants abruptly became a continent of despair, backwardness, and hatred between social classes.

You lied, you lied again, and you came back to lie once more—until the truth ran out from between the lines. You abused your captive audiences with a surfeit of words, and showed your nature.

You used the discontent of a hardworking, ingenious, progressive people who loathed your predecessor Fulgencio Batista, a leader as unscrupulous as yourself. The universal hatred of Batista was a boon to your fortunes.

While you spoke of your devotion to Abraham Lincoln and his republican principles, you courted the Cuban communist party and its leaders—Juan Marinello, Blas Roca, Aníbal Escalante.

Those communist leaders supported you, and you repaid them by silencing their voices forever.

You entered politics in the bloody Bogotá uprising of 1948. Five years later, you gained fame through the deaths of nearly 100 of your comrades in a suicidal assault on the Moncada barracks—even as you stayed safe in the rear, watching the action from behind a metal curtain in a grocery store.

When you were sentenced to 15 years in jail and set free after only 22 months, you accepted an amnesty from Batista which had really been a gift from your wife, whose father was Batista’s interior minister.

On leaving prison, you used your freedom—which you did not deserve—to betray your wife with at least two other women.

You unfairly sent into exile the Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba, Monseñor Pérez Serantes, who on one occasion had saved you from execution by a military firing squad.

Less than six years later, when you yourself seized power, you expelled the archbishop and several other clerics from Cuba—for no other reason than to show your feelings against the Church.

You didn't even allow your personal chief of security, as he stood before a firing squad of your paid assassins, to say goodbye to his family on the telephone. Did you forget that another leader, once upon a time, had given *you* an amnesty?

You sent into exile the man who had risked everything to become your most crucial, most impassioned advocate—Miguel Ángel Quevedo, the editor of Havana's *Bohemia*, a magazine read everywhere in Latin America.

In Venezuela, Quevedo killed himself out of bitterness and disillusionment; but not before writing you a letter in which he bore witness to your lack of moral principles and your utter ingratitude.

You took a generation of Cubans who were the most prosperous, dynamic, modern and entrepreneurial in all of Latin America—and you reduced them to being equals in poverty.

Under a different name, you restored the slave trade abolished in the 19th century when you sold thousands of your countrymen to foreign countries at very high dollar figures; prices which you could command because the people you sold were doctors and teachers.

Two-thirds of the proceeds went to fatten your coffers, while you left a measly portion to keep the sold persons in conditions of bare survival. You held their families in Cuba as hostages, against the likelihood that some of your slaves might try to escape.

You kidnapped many thousands of young Cubans and sent them to die in Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Grenada and other places, where you forced them to don uniforms and fight for causes that had no possible relevance to their lives.

In 1980 you founded the so-called «Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity» and worked with those terrorists to make them expert at robbing, kidnapping and murdering innocent Guatemalans, be they soldiers or civilians.

You debased the names of those heroes who had fought for Cuba's independence—above all, the exalted name of José Martí—when you redefined those honored leaders as supporters of an ideology—the program of your regime—which none of them knew, and none would have approved.

Even if you didn't quite finish the job, you tried to eradicate the Catholic faith that had been a balm to unfortunate, suffering people in Cuba, in the Americas, and indeed throughout the world.

And you robbed me; you robbed my widowed mother; you robbed my sister who had three small children *and* a husband in jail because your henchmen had found a pistol in his kitchen cabinet after you—the ultimate Judas—had gone before the masses and spoken your hypocritical question: “Why should anyone in Cuba have arms?”

You did the same to my extended family, to my closest friends, to many men and women whom I had known for their honor and their hard work. They too suffered from the sting of your abuse from which no one was exempt, not even your immediate family—which is why two of your sisters, and two of your children, had to flee from Cuba. You were that much of an ingrate.

Your extremely self-centered nature led you to abandon and betray your closest comrades: Camilo Cienfuegos, Huber Matos, Arnaldo Ochoa, even Ché Guevara—the last of whom left an

aftertaste almost as bitter as yours.

The betrayed ones, for their parts, had to swallow your sickening treachery, even as you boasted of your exquisite meals with «Gabo»—the Nobel laureate who became your lackey—or that other ignoramus, the drug-addicted soccer star Diego Armando Maradona.

You applied your false charms to three supreme leaders of the Catholic Church, only succeeding with the last one: Pope Francis the compassionate.

Perhaps the pope will intercede with God on your behalf. As a devout Catholic, I even considered doing so myself. But my advice is, don't wait by the phone. History is not coming to your rescue, and neither am I.

Armando de la Torre was acquainted with Fidel Castro when the two were law-school classmates in Havana. Since 1976 Professor de la Torre —an American citizen— has served on the faculty of the Francisco Marroquín University in Guatemala, where today he is the dean of graduate social sciences. David Landau translated this essay from Spanish.