

Ernesto "Che" Guevara: An Analysis of What the Argentine Revolutionary Truly

Personified and the Accuracy of Representation in American Culture

by

Grace I. Judd

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Abstract Body

It is no doubt that the face of Ernesto "Che" Guevara is recognized globally as it appears on currency, merchandise, at protest marches, and in art. However, there is little agreement on what this handsome face represents or what the Argentine revolutionary fought for. Some view Guevara as a humanitarian who dreamed of liberating the oppressed and eliminating the disparity between the wealthy and poor. Conversely, others believed he was a killing monster who went to extreme measures to ensure his ideals were followed. Through primary sources including diaries, memoirs, and first-hand accounts, the personal identity of the Argentine native is explored. Following his death, a myth of the man emerged and a dichotomy formed in how to remember the revolutionist. Ultimately, it can be reasonably concluded that Che was not a superb military leader, theorist, or successful revolutionary. However, he embodied the true spirit of dedication as he devoted his life to eliminate poverty and oppression throughout the continent in a humane and moral manner. This is what the handsome man in the beret should be recognized for.

Key Words: Che, Ernesto Guevara, Latin America, Revolution
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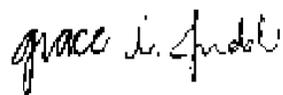
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Ernesto "Che" Guevara: An Analysis of What the Argentine Revolutionary Truly Personified and the Accuracy of Representation in American Culture

INTRODUCTION

The infamous image of Ernesto "Che" Guevara taken by Cuban photographer Alberto Korda is well recognized around the world (Figure 1). The handsome yet stoic face is depicted in art, printed on merchandise, and seen on posters at protests and rallies. Depending on who is being asked and their country of origin, some firmly believe this face is one of a great revolutionary.

Others vehemently argue the face it is one of a terrorist's that needs to be forgotten, and still others simply sport his face on clothing to follow popular culture fashion trends. Clearly, there is little agreement on what this man represents or what the Argentine revolutionary fought for. At the age of 23, the young medical student from a middle-class family put his studies on hold to embark on a 14,000 kilometer motorcycle trip through South America with a friend. The experience greatly impacted the young student whose world perspective changed after viewing the poverty, disease, and working conditions - not only in his homeland, but throughout the entire continent. After



Figure 1: Che Guevara at the memorial service of La Coubre explosion, March 5, 1960.

returning home, Guevara finished medical school but had established an appetite to make an impact on the injustices he had seen (Gerassi 12).

Over the course of several years he continued to travel and became immersed in revolutionary groups in Guatemala before meeting Fidel Castro, an exile whose aim was to overthrow Cuba's government. The young men connected over their Marxist ideals and Guevara signed on to invade Cuba as a doctor for the Army. Young Guevara proved to be a brave, daring and exemplary leader. Following the success of the Cuban revolution, Guevara split from Castro and continued to travel to oppressed countries to share his knowledge and expertise of guerilla warfare and to inspire revolt. After traveling to Africa to spread revolution in other parts of the developing world, Guevara made his way to Bolivia to lead a movement against the government under René Barrientos Ortuño. Here, Guevara's life ended in 1967 at the age of 39 after being captured by the CIA during the Bolivian rebellion (Gerassi 17). Following his death, a myth of the man emerged and a dichotomy formed on how to remember the revolutionist. Some view Guevara as a humanitarian who dreamed of liberating the oppressed and eliminating the disparity between the wealthy and the poor. Conversely, others believed he was a killing monster who went to extreme measures to ensure his ideals were followed. The dispute still continues today - who was this man and how, or even should, he be remembered? Through use of primary sources, it becomes clear that Guevara should be revered for nothing more than his spirit of rebellion in a moral manner to create a United Latin America.

BACKGROUND

RELEVANCE

Often times as a member of the United States, it is difficult to obtain an unbiased understanding of foreign events and individuals, as the media often writes in favor of U.S. policy and actions. This is especially true in terms of Guevara and the Cuban Revolution. The United States holds countless ties with Latin America, as it conducts trade with many countries for fruit, oil, and minerals. Naturally, the U.S. has historically backed certain governments and regimes for a continued economic relationship, however, this is sometimes at the expense of Latin America's citizens (El Che: Investigating a Legend). A distorted view of these foreign countries and their governments emerge in the eyes of the U.S. citizen, as Latin American countries are valued for either accepting or refusing to partake in trade. This is reflected in the media, as well as history texts. As a result, most United States citizens do not understand the issues, daily lifestyle, or standard of living of the masses in these countries. The aim of this project was to avoid these nationally created biases and understand Guevara on a personal level, so it was crucial that this analysis of the revolutionary is done through the use of primary sources. Guevara's journals chronicling his journey through South America, the Cuban Revolution, the Bolivian Revolution, as well as his book on guerrilla warfare, and transcriptions of speeches are used to understand the individual. Books written by his first and second wives, as well as testimonies and journals from members of his army are referenced to understand

how those who knew him intimately felt about him. This method has limitations as well since it still contains bias, however, it allows for the understanding of Guevara on a personal level.

DEFINITIONS

Before discussing the history of Che Guevara and his aspirations as a revolutionary, it is important to clarify the vocabulary surrounding his writings and ideology. Some terms used in the United States to describe political ideologies have negative connotations depending on which countries historically practiced them. As a result, they lose their original definition and the views of individuals like Guevara who reference them are distorted. The first term, “Marxist”, is one that Guevara self-identified as. To be Marxist is to simply agree with the political, economic, and social theories of Karl Marx who ultimately believed in a classless society (Marxist). Another term used commonly during the Cuban Revolution is “communist” and is often associated with Russia. The basis of communism is developing a free society without division or alienation, where the people are free from oppression and scarcity. This concept, developed originally by Karl Marx, was an attempt to level the playing field per se and ensure that every citizen is provided for. However, modern usage of the word refers to self-declared socialist governments consisting of one-party states. Prior

to the Russian Revolution in 1917, socialism was synonymous for communism (Marxism). Although there are many sub-categories of socialism, generally it is defined as the economic system characterized by social ownership of the means of production and cooperative management of the economy (Socialism). Again, the ideal version of this system provides for all members of the community and decreases the concentration of wealth and power, which emerges from free-market capitalism. When used in Guevara's writings, it is important to note that these are the definitions that he is referring to.

RESULTS

EARLY YEARS

Ernesto Guevara was born on June 14, 1928 in Rosario Argentina, the first of five children to Ernesto Guevara Sr. and Celia de la Serna. Although Ernesto was born prematurely and quickly toughened up, it became apparent that he had a serious case of asthma. Chronic fits of wheezing and coughing brought the middle class family to move to the less humid climate of Córdoba in hopes that Ernestito would fare better. His father took pride in teaching his son how to swim and play rugby and soccer, in addition to helping him relax his chest muscles so he could breathe well. Although the climate was better for the young boy, he still battled the asthma attacks, but developed a strong willpower and coping ability (Gerassi 15) .

The atmosphere that Ernesto's parents provided him and his siblings also contributed to his character. Ernesto Sr. and Celia never argued over petty subjects, such as money or status, but rather of the value of man and his endeavors - something all of their children admired. Living in the upper class residential section, Ernesto's parents stressed that their friends' parents' occupations were inconsequential. Rich or poor, they were all welcome in the Guevara household. In addition, they firmly believed that their children should follow their individual inclinations and were encouraged to be free thinkers. For Ernesto, this was built upon by the fact that the days his asthma became too difficult to push through, he would lie in bed and read the works of philosophers,

poets, and intellectuals. As a result, he was a strong student and described by teacher Diaz Vidal as "a young man who took every opportunity to oppose the Catholic Church, had Marxist ideas, was never distinguished, and was a leftist ring-leader among his classmates". This liberal, yet open-minded environment his parents provided molded Ernesto into a young adult who questioned the world around him and never settled on the hopes of becoming a wealthy elite (Gerassi 25).

In 1947, at the age of 19, Ernesto began his studies at the University of Buenos Aires as a premedical student. In three years he finished six of the seven-year course before deciding to embark on a trip with friend and biochemist, Alberto Granados (Gerassi 33). In December of 1951 the two left their home country to tour the rest of the continent on an old motorbike named "La Poderosa II" or The Mighty One. Ernesto kept a journal during this adventure, later to be published and named *The Motorcycle Diaries*. His writings vividly depict the imbalance of power and wealth throughout Latin America as seen by the indigenous, the poor, the uneducated and the isolated communities. Ernesto returned to Argentina deeply moved. This journal is the primary source that introduces the disposition and thought processes of the young man. It shows how Ernesto developed his personal understanding of his vocation and ultimately why he leaves his life of privilege to be a revolutionary.

Within the first two months of Alberto and Ernesto's journey, the motorcycle was abandoned in Chile, as it was dilapidated and irreparable. The two men were not deterred and continue their journey by hitchhiking. While still

in Chile, they met a married Chilean couple, who fled their home since they were communists. The four share an evening of drinking mate (a traditional Argentine drink) and the couple recounted their three months in prison while their friends mysteriously disappeared, assumed to be at the bottom of the sea. Starving, the husband and wife left their children in the care of a neighbor in order to find work. Che felt inclined to be brotherly towards the "strange human species" (Guevara, "The Motorcycle Diaries" 57). This is one of the many interactions with oppression that Ernesto experienced during the trip. It is evident that he was moved, yet troubled by seeing people expelled from their home due to their political beliefs.

The encounters with injustice intensified as Ernesto and Alberto began moving through indigenous communities. While in Perú, the men witnessed a Civil Guard harassing an Indian woman who had brought food to her imprisoned husband. Alberto reacted violently but was met with hostility by onlookers as Ernesto realized they were mingling with those who considered the Indians no more than objects who "deserve to live, but only just" (Guevara, "The Motorcycle Diaries" 107). Poverty and lack of resources were evident when the duo moved through Cuzco and stay at a hospital where they meet a girl from the Amazon region who had received the news she needed surgery. Ernesto writes, "I believe her expression, the word calvary, was the only just expression for the girl's situation. The only acceptable thing in this hospital was the drug treatment, the rest could have been borne only by the suffering, fatalistic spirit of the Peruvian mountain Indians" (Guevara, "The Motorcycle Diaries" 133). The lack of

resources was heightened when patients and medical staff told of the head surgeon needing an area, other than the kitchen table, to perform an operation. He asked for help from nearby towns, only to be told there was no facility available and the patient died without treatment.

As a medical student, Guevara became cognizant of the inadequacies of basic medical treatment throughout the continent. A great disparity existed between the medicine offered in Buenos Aires and the villages and towns scattered throughout the mountains and Amazon. However, it is clear that he does not see these people as inferior and shows them great compassion. In a letter he wrote to his father, he describes how he and Alberto worked at a leprosy colony in Iquitos, Perú. The patients were not contagious, but the staff all insisted on wearing gloves and masks to create a physical barrier and acted as though eye contact could magically spread the disease. However, Alberto and Ernesto refused to follow this practice and shook hands with the patients, played football with them, and simply sat and talked with these people who had been ostracized. Ernesto writes that the reason they did this was not for bravado, but for the psychological lift it gave these people who were treated as animals instead of normal human beings. Their actions left an impression on the patients, who cried upon the men's departure (Guevara, "The Motorcycle Diaries" 202).

These passages in which Ernesto writes about the sick are moving. In few words, he conveys his compassion for those who suffer, and expresses his desire for equality for the impoverished. He does not write poorly of those with low monetary means or lack of education, and only criticizes those who show cruelty

or believe themselves to be of a higher status. These passages also explained why Ernesto continued his journey. To the reader, the conditions Alberto and Ernesto faced appear miserable. They had no money, were often hungry, had no means of transportation, and had to beg for food and shelter - this was not a vacation. But when reading about Guevara's interactions he has with patients and native people, one begins to understand his desire to gain an understanding of the world, even the ugly parts. In a toast he gave at the San Pablo leper colony in June 1952, he sums up how the trip thus far had changed him and his beliefs, proclaiming,

"Although our insignificance means we can't be spokespeople for [the leper colony], we believe, and after this journey more firmly than ever, that the division of Latin America into unstable and illusory nations is completely fictional. We constitute a single mestizo race, which from Mexico to the Magellan Straits bears notable ethnographical similarities. And so, in an attempt to rid myself of the weight of small-minded provincialism, I propose a toast to Perú and to a United Latin America" (198).

This statement in some ways is an early manifesto for the reason Guevara chose to be part of revolutions throughout the continent.

By the end of the nine-month journey, Ernesto began to mention the need for change and his observations of tensions between the people and governments escalating. While in Bogotá Colombia, he describes that "the atmosphere is tense and it seems a revolution may be brewing. The countryside is in open revolt and the Army is powerless to suppress it" (175). However, he did not merely accept the injustices occurring nor did he expect to forget about them after returning to Argentina. Guevara ends his journal expressing his passion and his desire to be a part of this revolution. He writes,

"I knew that when the great guiding spirit cleaves humanity into two antagonistic halves, I would be with the people. I know this, I see it printed in the

night sky that I, eclectic dissembler of doctrine and psychoanalyst of dogma, howling like one possessed, will assault the barricades of the trenches, will take my bloodstained weapon and, consumed with fury, slaughter any enemy who falls into my hands... I see myself, immolated in the genuine revolution, the great equalizer of individual will. I steel my body, ready to do battle and prepare myself to be a sacred space within which the bestial howl of the triumphant proletariat can resound with new energy and hope" (214).

In later writings Guevara elaborated on the motorcycle journey and how it changed him. He stated that when he initially went on the trip, it was as a student, but after seeing the hunger, poverty, disease, and the inability to cure a child due to lack of resources, he knew his mission was to travel primarily as a doctor. Guevara explains how the numbness from hunger and continued punishment within some communities of Latin America left parents in a state where losing a child was an unimportant incident. Realizing that forced him to conclude that becoming a famous researcher or making a substantial contribution to the medical community was no longer of great importance as he once believed. This epiphany led him to redefine his role as a doctor, stating doctors should not be "pampered professionals, taking care of only the privileged classes, inventing remedies, prescribing useless medicines, performing unnecessary operations for imaginary diseases, or for curing illnesses resulting from an idle life or from the frivolous or exaggerated satisfaction of vital needs" (Guevara, "The Motorcycle Diaries" 216). Guevara had no desire to embark on a path of high income and successful life as a doctor of the bourgeoisie, which "should not be the goal of any young professional aware of the needs of the nations" (Guevara, "The Motorcycle Diaries" 218). Ultimately, *The Motorcycle Diaries* defines Guevara as a humanitarian, someone who accurately describes the poverty and oppression

occurring in South America and that his need to engage in a revolution stemmed from compassion for the people and not around power and fame. His beliefs were still idealistic, if not naive though, and he was merely an amateur anarchist as opposed to a political activist.

Upon returning from the trip, Guevara quickly finished his studies and in 1953 he graduated as a doctor and returned to touring South America with the intention of being gone for ten years (Gadea 8). He found himself in Guatemala where he met Hilda Geadea, a Peruvian exile. She too shared a passion for changing the unjust actions within Latin America and the two quickly bonded on an intellectual level discussing poetry, philosophers, and political ideals.

Sometimes heated, their debates left Hilda with a great respect for the young man, whom she felt shared her outlook on life and dedication to revolution. In the beginning of her book, *My Life With Che: The Making of a Revolutionary* she writes that when she initially met Ernesto, he was in a theoretical stage of revolution and still processing what he had observed during his travels and what information he had gathered about revolutions outside of the American continent. Although he greatly admired the Chinese people who took power in order to work towards socialism, he understood that this was somewhat different than what was happening with the Indians and peasants in South America (Gadea 48).

Comments like these throughout her book make clear that Guevara had the ability to synthesize information and that he understood that each revolution must be tailored to the situation. This man was not eager to hop behind any cause that included the world revolution in the title - he was particular in what he

represented, supported, and who he worked for, even turning down jobs from employers who did not share the same party affiliation (Gadea 66).

At that particular time in Guatemala, a revolt occurred between Guatemalan leader Jacobo Árbenz and the citizens who were backed by the United States. Guevara and Hilda chose to support the citizens, but as foreigners. They spent time alternating between jail and refuge at the embassies. Ultimately, Árbenz came out as the victor while the people were defeated. Guevara's exposure to a revolution gave him a clearer understanding of his political ideals and what was necessary for a successful revolution.

Guevara and Hilda fled for Mexico where he began collaborating with Fidel Castro and other Cubans. After the failed July 26th movement, Fidel regrouped and planned an invasion of the island. Hilda remained a supporter of revolutionary movements but amidst marrying Guevara and giving birth to their daughter, Hildita, she was restricted to a more domestic sphere. This means she could not join her husband on the boat named "The Granma" to sail to Cuba. Ultimately, Guevara, or "Che" as dubbed by the Cubans, left his wife and daughter behind to fight in the guerilla war signed on as the doctor for Castro's troops. Hilda supported this decision and dedication to the revolution but it is no doubt that she experienced great pain wondering if her husband would return alive.

What Hilda provides in her book is the identity of the man who left for the Cuban Revolution. She verifies that Che agreed with the Communist ideology when he left, but disagreed with the method employed in the Soviet Union. He

sensed that the communist countries of the world at that time had their theoretical approach correct but that they did not work for the solidarity with the people as they drifted away from the working masses. In addition, Guevara was strongly against "Yankee imperialism" after he witnessed the United States support Árbenz's party in order to continue operations of United Fruit Company. Hilda also writes that Che had little value for material possessions, believing in only having the essentials. She describes him as "unconcerned about his clothes; his personality made such details inconsequential" (Gadea 115). (In this sense, it is ironic that his face is screen printed on millions of shirts in a capitalist country.) Ultimately, when Che set foot on "The Granma" he had developed strong and morally sound theories about improving the continent through changes in the government but had no practice in putting these thoughts to work after the fighting ceased.

THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

The journal Che kept while serving in the guerilla army notes many of the day-to-day activities, the identity of who joined the group, and what ground had been covered. Several entries do stand out that depict his character while in war. First, Guevara states in late January of 1957 that he wished the commanding leader had used a more severe punishment in disciplining a soldier who did not

follow orders (50). Che does not elaborate on this statement but does highlight his desire for strict operations and faithful men. This is later supported when a deserter is shot in July. Che did not wield the gun but he was in support of the decision, which showed some of his tendencies that may be considered cruel. Conversely, while the guerilla army detained many peasants during the hike through the Sierra Maestras, torture was not used to obtain information and the peasants were eventually released. One loyal member of his troop, Dariel Alarcón Ramírez, described Che as respected but feared (El Che: Investigating a Legend). The charismatic leader was often hot-headed and used frightening language, but there is a lack of evidence in the texts that any of the actions or directions given by Che were outside of the basic cruelty and ugliness of any war.

One of the most valuable insights the diary provides is the mentality of the general population. The peasants the guerilla armies encountered living in the mountains of the Sierra Maestras often had personal experiences with Batista's men. The citizens not only felt that the governmental regime did not provide them support, but many of them could tell first-hand of their dictator's cruelty. Dariel Alarcón Ramírez explains that when he was 17, he witnessed Batista's army shoot his fiancé and burn down his family's farm (El Che: Investigating a Legend). It was then that he joined the rebel army and followed Che in his future rebellions around the world.

After the Cuban revolution, Che wrote a manual titled "Guerrilla Warfare". This one hundred-page book is a step-by-step guide on leading an effective and strong revolutionary campaign. Published only two years after the

Cuban revolution, Che's how-to systematically covers every aspect from weapons, to strategy, to boosting the troop's morale. It is clear that this doctor-turned-commander was an excellent strategist and gunman, and he had a natural talent for leading his troops. The more important question is whether humane and civil methods were used during this rebellion in order to determine the magnitude of praise Che should receive in helping lead a successful rebellion.

Within the first few pages, Guevara makes clear his "all or nothing" mode of operation as a guerrilla leader and acknowledges that in addition to his army's cooperation, it was also crucial to obtain cooperation from the civilians. He explains that the guerilla army must demonstrate moral superiority over the enemy soldier by showing respect for all rules and traditions of people in the zone. The peasants in these zones must be helped technically, economically, morally, and culturally, as the guerilla fighter would be "a sort of guiding angel who had fallen into the zone, helping the poor always and bothering the rich as little as possible" (29). These statements demonstrate Guevara's respect and value of individual lives and that he did not view the contributions of civilians as petty.

Che held a similar level of respect for the human life regarding not only his, but the enemy's soldiers as well. In his writings he states, "a wounded enemy should be treated with care and respect unless his former life has made him liable to a death penalty, in which he will be treated in accordance with his deserts" (37). Guevara goes on to explain that it is disadvantageous to keep prisoners of war in a guerrilla setting, but is clear that unless the prisoner is a "notorious criminal, he should be set free after receiving a lecture" (55). Once again, this

suggests that Che valued human life and did not kill for the sake of it nor found pleasure in the act. He expressed only in special circumstances and after careful analysis, assaults on a person would be used only for the purpose of eliminating a figure who was a "noted leader of the oppressing forces well known for his cruelty, his efficiency in repression, or other quality that makes his elimination useful" (60). To kill a man who does not hold these traits is an act of terrorism, which Guevara explicitly states is not moral or effective. He writes that acts of sabotage in guerrilla warfare are very important, but it is crucial to distinguish between this and terrorism, which is indiscriminate in its results and makes victims of innocent people (74).

In his attitude towards his own troops, Guevara makes clear the importance of regiment. He explains that comradeship is crucial and that the guerrilla fighter must never leave a wounded companion at the mercy of the enemy troops. They must follow orders, as well as contain self-discipline. Above all, his men must believe that victory of the enemy is impossible, otherwise they cannot be a guerrilla fighter (48). In the case that a member of his army did not follow these rules, Guevara did not believe in using cruel punishments to reprimand him. Instead, he believed retracting privileges was a more effective means of discipline. For example, in the case of light offenses, Che would deprive the individual of cigarettes and sweets. For more serious offenses, total food rations would be withheld. Guevara firmly believed that methods of inflicting physical pain or exhaustion only lead to a tired and hurting army that did not have the energy to fight (62).

Although the majority of these pages are filled with descriptions of ideal weaponry, exercises in stealth maneuvers, and explanations for living off of the land, Guevara's manuscript offers some sense to his morals in relation to war. The reader can conclude that Che gave the impression that he respected the human life, not only of his men, but of his enemies too. It is certain that Guevara understood the mechanics of guerrilla warfare, which affirms his position as an effective theoretical revolutionary, but more importantly it appears that he was not a terrible, cruel or inhumane leader who casually sacrificed the lives of others in order to obtain his objective.

As soon as the guerilla army reached victory after the seizure of Santa Clara on December 29, 1958 Hilda and their daughter fly to Cuba to meet Che. Sadly, he immediately asked for a divorce, as he had met another woman. When Che told Hilda the news, he added that it would have been better if he had died in combat to save her from the pain. Surprisingly, Hilda disagreed and says she is happy that he is alive - he still had so many more tasks to do in order to build a new society. He had worked hard to understand the errors of Guatemala and it was vital that he brought these lessons to Cuba. Hilda did not doubt that he had given his whole effort to the struggle for the liberation of Latin America (Gadea 203).

This ability of Che to give full dedication is not only described by Hilda but also by his second wife, Aleida. This man, not once but twice, left a woman whom he sees as an intellectual equal, a partner, and life companion to fight for a cause. He left his family knowing that he would not be in contact with them for

many months; he would miss seeing his children grow, and he could die while in combat. Although this does not make for a great romance story, it does show the intensity of Che's personal drive. He sacrificed his relationships with his partners for what he believed was right and just, and ultimately committed his entire life to improve the freedom of Latin America.

Che's dedication did not end after Batista fled the country. The book written by Aleida March, "Remembering Che", describes what Guevara was like after the fighting ceased and whether his purpose for rebellion had remained the same. Aleida, a Cuban native who grew up in poverty in a small farming village, joined the youth revolt in her country as a young woman, carrying messages and organizing rallies throughout the province. She firmly believed that under the leadership of Castro, an end would be put to all shame, suffering, and moral degradation of Cubans (March 13). After several years of working underground in the city, it became unsafe for Aleida to be seen within the community so she left to the Sierra Maestra and joined Guevara's unit. She writes of initially meeting the guerrilla leader, whom she harbored great respect and admiration for. Their relationship did not begin as a romantic one, as Aleida simply saw Che as an older man. Eventually, he expressed his feelings for this woman who worked not only as his secretary but fought next to him in combat. Aleida admitted to feeling the same way but this did not alter the fact that the two continued working together well after the guerrilla warfare had ended. As a result, Aleida provides details not only of Che in the fields, but also of his personality and character as a husband and family man.

In the first few chapters, March corroborates many of Guevara's writings about the ethics of guerrilla warfare. She states, "Che always treated the prisoners with absolute respect, according to the norms of the Rebel Army, despite the fact that many of [the prisoners from Santa Clara] were part of the bloodthirsty unit responsible for the murder of a large number of campesinos (fellow soldiers) in the Sierra Maestra" (54). She gradually became less in awe of his "reputation" and continued to admire his intelligence and ability to lead others. She writes that "he exuded a sense of security and confidence that made the troops he led feel supported at all times, even in difficult circumstances. He had no qualms in facing an enemy with vastly superior strength, and besides his incredible courage, the guerrillas could count on a leader with an extraordinary sense of tactics and strategy" (80). Like many others, Aleida reaffirms Guevara's leadership and military abilities that so many spoke of.

March discusses the questionable event in 1959 in which the trials of henchmen of Batista's dictatorship occurred. She acknowledges the controversy that surrounded the execution of these prisoners, yet claims that the "facts surrounding [the trials] have been distorted by enemies" (99). She describes the trials as a "legitimate form of justice for Cuba as they were not without mercy nor spontaneous" (100). She goes on to explain that the proper procedures were followed and that her soon-to-be husband participated in some of the appeals and adopted a humanitarian approach respectful of the prisoners. In the last paragraph concerning the subject, she states that the process of the tribunals were still

painful and distasteful and that Che did not attend the trials, nor was he present at any of the executions (101).

In Aleida's memoir the most important aspect gleaned is her husband's view of other socialist countries during that time. He visited China in 1960 and came back to Cuba enthusiastic about what he had seen. He valued the way the people worked and how they met the challenge of development, attributing it to their dedication and construction of socialism. Che remarked that China was like "a living museum of humanity, where you could see the most ancient work tools and the most modern ones, all used with great efficacy" (131). As a result of this enthusiasm, Che was publicly viewed as being pro-China and having Maoist tendencies. At first Aleida attempts to defend these remarks and attributes his enthusiasm to his interest in evaluating what lessons could be applied to Cuba in its path to socialism. However, merely five more pages into her book, Aleida recalls her own visit to China in 1961, excited to see the great country her husband spoke of. She admits that she did not have the same reaction as Che, but she agreed that it was astounding to see how the Chinese constructed socialism in such a different way. She was ultimately shocked to see the deprivation and restrictions though - everyone dressed in identical uniforms (136). This is one of several strong implications that Guevara was no longer connected to the people and their well being as he so passionately expressed in the *Motorcycle Diaries*. Che seems to have lost sight of the original purpose of the revolution - to raise literacy levels, improve working conditions, and create a nation where a citizen could support himself. Instead, he showed signs of becoming wrapped up in the

political world of producing a country where freedom is lacking and the citizens were viewed as machines. He even admitted this himself, once quoted saying,

"I can tell you that I haven't set foot in a nightclub or movie house, haven't been to the beach. I've hardly gone into any home in Havana don't know the Cuban people live. I only know numbers, statistics, plans. I only see people as soldiers and a fierce war that must be won" (El Che: Investigating a Legend).

Although he had lost his connection with the people, Guevara remained a humble man. Aleida mentions several times in her book that although Che's face was recognized on a national level and he had great governmental impact, he held fast to his belief that he and his family would live like the rest of the Cuban families. This meant no extra ration cards and, more importantly, no extravagant gifts or belongings. As his salary came directly from the government, he firmly believed bringing back gifts to Aleida from his foreign travels was corrupt. His foreign hosts presented him with lavish and valuable gifts intended for Guevara and his wife, but he never accepted them or he would give them away to others (March 1964). Aleida appears to accept this and found pleasure in less material pleasures, but she is clear in stating that her husband adhered to strong revolutionary ethics. He did not stand for any privileges and remained steadfast in the belief that privileges of leaders are what lead to the disparity between classes. This fact is important to recognize that although Guevara took a political position after fighting ceased, he remained a proletariat and lived by the standards of the people.

Others besides his wife made note of this behavior, as well. Jeannette Habel, a member of the French youth movement who spent time with Guevara,

also noted his distaste for the slightest privilege . She was struck by the fact that this legendary figure was incredibly self-critical and quite different from other leaders. He refused to eat special food and requested only illiterate peasants as body guards so he could teach them to read. Once they learned, he would ask for others (El Che: Investigating a Legend).

After the rebel's victory, Che was declared a Cuban citizen and appointed head of the Industrial Department of the Institute of Agrarian Reform in October of 1959. The next month he became the President of the National Bank of Cuba (Gerassi 29). Two years later he was appointed head of the Ministry of Industry - clearly he was eager to throw himself into rebuilding the nation. In the wake of this though, it seemed as though Che had not thought far enough in advance to consider how his theories would be implemented. One of the assumptions he incorrectly made was that every person had the high work ethic and self-discipline as he did. He also assumed that while the country was ready for change and a new leader, they were also ready for the entire system to be revolutionized at once. As a result, many of Che's projects failed. Castro began to distance himself from Guevara and sent him to travel around the world as a representative of revolution (Gerassi 54).

In an analysis of the Cuban Revolution it appears that Che failed to recognize the uniqueness of the situation. Contrary to what Guevara would have liked to believe, the revolution was a nation-wide movement. From his accounts, he believed that victory was obtained only through the work of the guerrilla forces in the mountains. Although Cuba is divided into mountainous rural regions and

as well as urban cities, the populations from both regions organized revolutionary activity in order to aid one another. While Che's troops fought in the Sierra Maestras, people in the cities smuggled food and ammunition to the rebel army in the mountains. The cities provided hubs of organization and attacks to diminish resources for Batista, such as cutting telephone wires and bombing offices (March 67). Although Che refuses to acknowledge the urban support in his diaries and later writings, it is apparent that the Cuban revolution was unified and its success was not due to an individual group. In his book, "Guerilla Warfare", Che only highlights his role and fails to carefully read the overall situation.

Another key aspect Guevara was blind to was how to determine the needs of the people. He entered Cuba believing the poor would leave their farms and fight in a revolt to combat oppression and poverty, but it was only by coincidence that this actually occurred. Guevara did not realize that not every poverty-stricken person who is taken advantage of by a capitalist country is willing to make the same sacrifice. The idea that people who live in these conditions can be happy or have no need to be revolutionists is not one Che could fathom. In failing to recognize these aspects of the Cuban Revolution, he created a flawed model on leading a successful revolution, which he attempted to extrapolate upon.

POST-CUBAN REVOLUTION

In 1965 Guevara rallied his faithful troops from Cuba to support the closing revolutionary movement in the Congo as a way to assert independence nationally. However, without great support from the citizens, his attempt failed and he returned to Cuba (March 209). In 1966 Guevara attempted to begin another revolution in Latin America against Bolivian leader René Barrientos Ortuño. Using falsified documents to sneak into Bolivia, Guevara organized seventeen members of his devoted Cuban guerrilla army to meet him there (Guevara, "The Complete Bolivian Diaries" 74). Like in Cuba, they began to seek the support of the peasants as Che and the troops roamed the jungle. He intended to gain enough popular support so that the revolution could spread not only through Bolivia, but through all of Latin America, as well. However, Bolivia proved to be the last of Guevara's travels. He writes of his 12-month experience in a journal briefly outlining daily activities, which was published with the diaries of three of his soldiers titled, "The Bolivian Diaries". Guevara's tone of writing does not reflect the defeat of the actual situation. In the first pages it is evident that immediate support from the peasants could not be obtained like in Cuba, and the few Bolivians that choose to join the rebel army followed orders poorly (Guevara, "The Complete Bolivian Diaries" 16). Guevara often comments that rations were running short and that it was always wet, but he still wrote optimistically. Overall, little information can be gleaned from this document about the ethics of Guevara, as many of the entries are short and fact based.

Reading the journals of his troops fill in the missing gaps as to what occurred in the Bolivian jungle. In general, Che still followed the ethics of revolutionary warfare as outlined in his book, but he held much higher expectations of his men. Rolando writes of Che demoting a soldier, as well as suggesting the leave of another, as a result of poorly following orders. In one entry he writes,

"[Che] reports that 20 cans of milk are missing and explains this is not the case of a comrade picking up a can and drinking it, which is blameworthy but not as bad as this, which is premeditated action; that the man who is capable of doing this does not deserve to be one of us and should be shot" (234).

This description indicates that Che was a harsher leader and more extreme in his actions. This behavior had also been noticed by his comrades in Congo (El Che: Investigating a Legend). Soon, without popular support and the Bolivian communist party retracting aid, Guevara encountered less enthusiasm and devotion from his army. He refused to accept the failure when a 23-day reconnaissance mission turned into a grueling 48-day hike, and simply writes in his journal "the march went fairly well" (112). On top of this, Che's asthma was so bad that it limited his ability to walk, forcing him to ride a mule. At this point, 12 months into the mission, a victory like the one in Cuba would not be recreated. It was clear that Che had lost touch with reality. He became so focused on the rebellion that he could no longer accept that momentum was lost and, regardless of the expectations he imposed on his men, this would not change.

On October 7, 1967 Che Guevara was captured by CIA-assisted Bolivian forces (Gerassi 15). In an interview with Gary Prado, one of the guards who

captured Guevara, Prado recounts asking Guevara why he chose to attempt to revolutionize Bolivia since the conditions of the country did not fit the ideal conditions described in Guevara's book. Che responded that it was not his decision alone and that "other levels" had been in effect but would not elaborate (El Che: Investigating a Legend). The day after this conversation Che was shot and his body was transported to the nearest town, Vallegrande, to be put on public view, in effect solidifying his new title of "martyr". His body was secretly buried with several other guerillas in an unmarked grave, which was not discovered until 1997 (Gerassi 15).

CONCLUSION

Comparing the accounts of the Cuban Revolution to those described in the Bolivian revolt, it appeared that Guevara held similar morals and was a strict and driven leader. He did not kill for a sport and was not cruel, so the notion that he was an inhumane leader can be laid to rest. However, it is evident in later sources that Che became isolated as he was too idealistic and arrogant to change his ways. He reached a point where he could not see that the success in Cuba would not translate to other parts of the world. The victory in Cuba was mainly due to the fact that the country and its citizens were prime for change - not because Che was an excellent leader. Even though Guevara held a presence that gave the impression of confidence and authority, he did not have the ability to properly assess the situation in either the Congo or Bolivia. As a result, he could not conclude that he needed to surrender since these countries did not meet the requirements for revolution. For this reason, there is no evidence that supports Che Guevara being accredited with the title of superb guerilla leader, military theorist, or successful revolutionary.

The only aspect that Guevara should be acknowledged for was his spirit of change. There is no doubt, through reading these primary documents, that Che was a well-intentioned and strong-willed man who had a vision for Latin America he truly believed in. Unfortunately he was unable stray from the idealism he developed in his youth but he full heartedly acknowledged the suffering that was occurring and held sympathy for the poor and oppressed. Instead of allowing

these acts of injustice to continue, this intellectual dedicated his life to synthesize what he believed to be a successful plan of action. Only for this, Che Guevara should be recognized.

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