POSTWAR FACE OFF IN CUBA

After World War II, rapid industrialization, population growth, and a lingering gap between the rich and the poor led Latin American nations to seek aid from both superpowers. During this period, many Latin American countries alternated between short lived democracy and harsh military rule.

US involvement in Latin America began long before World War II. American businesses backed leaders who often oppressed their people, but who protected US interests. After the war, communism and nationalistic feelings inspired a wave of revolutionary movements. These found enthusiastic Soviet support. In response, the United States provided military support and economic assistance to anti-Communist dictators.

1. What group of people did the Americans support in Latin America? _______________________

THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

Throughout the 1950’s, U.S. support maintained Cuba’s unpopular dictator, Fulgencio Batista. Cuban resentment led to a popular revolution, which overthrew Batista in January 1950. A young lawyer named Fidel Castro led that revolution.

2. What did Castro do for Cuba? __________________________

At first, many people praised Castro for bringing reforms to Cuba and improving the economy, literacy, health care, and conditions for women. Yet Castro was a harsh dictator. He suspended elections, jailed or executed his opponents, and strangled the press with tight government controls.

When Castro nationalized the Cuban economy, he took over US owned sugar mills and refineries. In response, President Eisenhower ordered an embargo on all trade with Cuba. As relations with the United States deteriorated, Castro turned to the Soviets for the economic and military aid he needed.

3. What type of leader is Castro? ________________________________

THE BAY OF PIGS

In April 1961, the United States offered support to a group of anti-Castro Cuban exiles living in Florida. These CIA-exiles attempted to retake Cuba by invading at a remote beach called the Bay of Pigs. Despite US support, Castro easily turned back the invaders. This victory embarrassed the United States.

4. What happened at the Bay of Pigs? ________________________________
THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

The failed Bay of Pigs invasion convinced the Soviets leader, Nikita Khrushchev, that the United States would not resist Soviet expansion in Latin America. Consequently, in July 1962, Khrushchev secretly began to build 42 missile sites in Cuba. In October, an American spy plan discovered the sites. The US President, John F. Kennedy, declared that missiles so close to the U.S. mainland were a threat. He demanded that the Soviets remove the missiles. Kennedy also announced a quarantine, or blockade, of Cuba to prevent the Soviets from installing more missiles. Castro protested his country’s being used as a tool in the Cold War.

5. What did Americans find in Cuba that upset them so much? __________________________

6. What actions did President Kennedy take to keep the Soviet from bringing in more weapons? ______________________________________________________

Nevertheless, Cuba was deeply involved. Kennedy’s demand for the removal of Soviet missiles put the United States and the Soviet Union on a collision course. U.S. troops assembled in Florida, ready to invade Cuba. People around the world began to fear that this standoff would lead to World War III and a nuclear disaster. Fortunately, Khrushchev agreed to remove the missiles in return for a U.S. promise to not invade Cuba.

7. How was the Cuban Missile Crisis resolved? _________________________________________

CUBA AND THE END OF THE SOVIET UNION

The resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis left Castro completely dependent on Soviet support. In exchange for this support, Castro backed Communist revolution in Latin America and Africa. Approximately 36,000 Cubans fought in Angola’s war against colonialism in the 1970’s. Soviet aid to Cuba, however, ended abruptly with the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991. This loss dealt a crippling blow to the Cuban economy. The country still suffers a scarcity of vital supplies. But the aging Castro refuses to adopt economic reforms or to give up power. An equally stubborn United States refuses to lift its trade embargo.

8. What happened to Cuban/Soviet relations after the Cuban Missile Crisis? ________________

9. What happened to Cuba after the Soviet Union collapsed? ________________________________

10. Is the Cuban economy in good or bad shape right now? _________________________________
11. Who are the men in this cartoon? _____________________________________________

12. What is the cartoon saying about Castro? ___________________________________________