

= Early life of Fidel Castro =

The early life of Cuban revolutionary and politician Fidel Castro , born Lina Castro , spans the first 26 years of his life , from 1926 to 1952 . Born in Birán , Oriente Province , Castro was the illegitimate son of Ángel Castro y Argiz , a wealthy farmer and landowner , and his mistress Lina Ruz González . First educated by a tutor in Santiago de Cuba , Fidel Castro then attended two boarding schools before being sent to El Colegio de Belén , a school run by Jesuits in Havana . In 1945 he began studying law at the University of Havana , where he first became politically conscious , becoming a staunch anti - imperialist and critic of United States involvement in the Caribbean . Involved in student politics , he was affiliated to Eduardo Chibás and his Partido Ortodoxo , achieving publicity as a vocal critic of the pro - U.S. administration of President Ramón Grau and his Partido Auténtico .

Immersed in the university 's violent gang culture , in 1947 he took part in a quashed attempt to invade the Dominican Republic and overthrow the military junta of Rafael Trujillo . Returning to student politics , Castro was involved with violent demonstrations in which protesters clashed with riot police , at which he became increasingly left - wing in his views . Traveling to Bogotá , Colombia , he fought for the Liberals in the Bogotazo before returning to Havana , where he embraced Marxism . In 1948 he married the wealthy Mirta Díaz Balart , and in September 1949 their son Fidelito was born . Obtaining his Doctorate of Law in September 1950 , he co - opened an unsuccessful law firm before entering parliamentary politics as a Partido Ortodoxo candidate . When General Fulgencio Batista launched a coup and overthrew the elected presidency , Castro brought legal challenges against him , but as this proved ineffective , he began to think of other ways to oust Batista .

= = Childhood and education : 1926 ? 1945 = =

Castro 's father , Ángel Castro y Argiz (1875 ? 1956) , was born to a poor peasant family in Galicia , a province in northwest Spain . A farm laborer , in 1895 he was conscripted into the Spanish Army to fight in the Cuban War of Independence and the ensuing Spanish ? American War of 1898 , in which the U.S. seized control of Cuba . In 1902 , the Republic of Cuba was proclaimed ; however it remained economically and politically dominated by the U.S. For a time , Cuba enjoyed economic growth , and Ángel migrated there in search of employment . After various jobs , he set up a business growing sugar cane at Las Manacas farm in Birán , near Mayarí , Oriente Province . Ángel took a wife in 1911 , María Luisa Argota Reyes , with whom he had five children before separating . He then began a relationship with Lina Ruz González (1903 ? 1963) , a household servant of Canarian descent who was twenty - seven years his junior ; she bore him three sons and four daughters , legally marrying in 1943 .

Castro was Lina 's third child , born out of wedlock at Ángel 's farm on August 13 , 1926 . Because of the stigma of illegitimacy , he was given his mother 's surname of Ruz rather than his father 's name . Although Ángel 's business ventures prospered , he ensured that Fidel grew up alongside the children of the farm 's workforce , many of whom were Haitian economic migrants of African descent . This experience , Castro later related , prevented him from absorbing " bourgeois culture " at an early age .

Aged six , Castro , along with his elder siblings Ramón and Angela , was sent to live with their teacher in Santiago de Cuba , dwelling in cramped conditions and relative poverty , often failing to have enough to eat because of their tutor 's poor economic situation . Aged eight , Castro was baptized into the Roman Catholic Church , although later became an atheist . Being baptized enabled Castro to attend the La Salle boarding school in Santiago , where he regularly misbehaved , and so was sent to the privately funded , Jesuit - run Dolores School in Santiago . In 1945 he transferred to the more prestigious Jesuit - run El Colegio de Belén in Havana . Although Castro took an interest in history , geography and debating at Belén , he did not excel academically , instead devoting much of his time to playing sport .

= = University and early political activism : 1945 ? 1947 = =

In late 1945 , Castro began studying law at the University of Havana . Admitting he was " politically illiterate " , he became embroiled in the student protest movement : under the regimes of Cuban Presidents Gerardo Machado , Fulgencio Batista and Ramón Grau there had been a crackdown on protest , with student leaders being killed or terrorized by gangs . This led to a form of gangsterismo culture within the university , dominated by armed student groups who spent much of their time fighting and running criminal enterprises . Passionate about anti @-@ imperialism and opposed to U.S. intervention in the Caribbean , Castro joined the University Committee for the Independence of Puerto Rico and the Committee for Democracy in the Dominican Republic . During an unsuccessful campaign for the presidency of the Federation of University Students (Federación Estudiantil Universitaria - FEU) , he put forward a platform of " honesty , decency and justice " and emphasized his opposition to corruption , which he associated with U.S. involvement in Cuba .

Castro became critical of the corruption and violence of Grau 's regime , delivering a public speech on the subject in November 1946 that earned him a place on the front page of several newspapers . In contact with members of student leftist groups ? including the Popular Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Popular ? PSP) , the Socialist Revolutionary Movement (Movimiento Socialista Revolucionaria ? MSR) and the Insurreccional Revolutionary Union (Unión Insurreccional Revolucionaria ? UIR) ? he grew close to the UIR , although biographers are unsure whether he became a member . In 1947 , Castro joined a new socialist group , the Party of the Cuban People (Partido Ortodoxo) , founded by veteran politician Eduardo Chibás (1907 ? 1951) . A charismatic figure , Chibás advocated social justice , honest government , and political freedom , while his party exposed corruption and demanded reform . Though Chibás lost the election , Castro remained committed to working on his behalf . Student violence escalated after Grau employed gang leaders as police officers , and Castro soon received a death threat urging him to leave the university ; he refused and began carrying a gun and surrounding himself with armed friends . In later years Castro was accused of attempting gang @-@ related assassinations during this period , including that of UIR member Lionel Gómez , MSR leader Manolo Castro and university policeman Oscar Fernandez , but these charges remain unproven .

= = Latin American rebellions : 1947 ? 1948 = =

In June 1947 , Castro learned of a planned international expedition to invade the Dominican Republic and overthrow its right @-@ wing president , Rafael Trujillo , a military general and U.S. ally . Widely seen as a dictator , Trujillo utilized a violent secret police which routinely murdered and tortured opponents . Becoming president of the University Committee for Democracy in the Dominican Republic , Castro decided to join the expedition , led by Dominican exile General Juan Rodríguez . Launched from Cuba , the invasion began on July 29 , 1947 ; it consisted of around 1 @, @ 200 men , most of whom were exiled Dominicans or Cubans . However , the Dominican and U.S. governments were prepared , and soon quashed the rebellion . Grau ? s government arrested many of those involved before they set sail , but Castro escaped arrest by jumping off of his naval frigate and swimming to shore at night .

The botched mission furthered Castro ? s opposition to the Grau administration , and returning to Havana , he took a leading role in the student protests against the killing of a high school pupil by government bodyguards . The protests , accompanied by a U.S.-imposed crackdown on those considered communists , led to violent clashes between protesters and police in February 1948 , in which Castro was badly beaten . At this point his public speeches took on a distinctively leftist slant , condemning the social and economic inequalities of Cuba , something in contrast to his former public criticisms , which had centered on condemning corruption and U.S. imperialism .

After a quick visit to Venezuela and Panama , in April 1948 Castro traveled to the city of Bogotá , Colombia , with a Cuban student group sponsored by the government of Argentine President Juan Perón , whose anti @-@ imperialist politics impressed Castro . There , the assassination of popular leftist leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán Ayala led to widespread rioting that came to be known as the

Bogotazo . Leaving 3000 dead , the riots revolved around clashes between the governing Conservatives ? backed by the army ? and leftist Liberals with support from socialists . Along with his fellow Cuban visitors , Castro joined the Liberal cause by stealing guns from a police station , but subsequent police investigations concluded that neither Castro nor any of the other Cubans had been involved in the killings .

= = Marriage and Marxism : 1948 ? 1950 = =

Returning to Cuba , Castro became a prominent figure in protests against the government ? s attempts to raise bus fares , a mode of transport used mostly by students and workers . That year , Castro married Mirta Díaz Balart , a student from a wealthy family through whom he was exposed to the lifestyle of the Cuban elite . The relationship was a love match , disapproved of by both families . Mirta ? s father gave them tens of thousands of dollars to spend in a three @-@ month honeymoon in New York City , and the couple also received a U.S. \$ 1 @,@ 000 wedding gift from the military general and former president Fulgencio Batista , a friend of Mirta ? s family . That same year , Grau decided not to stand for re @-@ election , which was instead won by his Partido Auténtico 's new candidate , Carlos Prío Socarrás . Prío faced widespread protests when members of the MSR , now allied to the police force , assassinated Justo Fuentes , a self @-@ educated black Cuban who was a prominent UIR member and friend of Castro 's . In response , Prío agreed to quell the gangs , but found them too powerful to control .

Castro had moved further left in his politics , influenced by the writings of Marxist communists like Karl Marx , Friedrich Engels and Vladimir Lenin . He came to interpret Cuba 's problems as an integral part of capitalist society , or the " dictatorship of the bourgeoisie " , rather than the failings of corrupt politicians . Adopting the Marxist idea that meaningful political change could only be brought about by a proletariat revolution , Castro visited Havana ? s poorest neighborhoods , witnessing the nation ? s social and racial inequalities , and became active in the University Committee for the Struggle against Racial Discrimination .

In September 1949 , Mirta gave birth to a son , Fidelito , so the couple moved to a larger Havana flat . Castro continued to put himself at risk , staying active in the city 's politics and joining the September 30 Movement , which contained within it both communists and members of the Partido Ortodoxo . The group 's purpose was to oppose the influence of the violent gangs within the university ; despite his promises , Prío had failed to control the situation , instead offering many of their senior members jobs in government ministries . Castro volunteered to deliver a speech for the Movement on November 13 , exposing the government 's secret deals with the gangs and identifying key members . Attracting the attention of the national press , the speech angered the gangs , and Castro fled into hiding , first in the countryside and then in the U.S. Returning to Havana several weeks later , Castro lay low and focused on his university studies , graduating as a Doctor of Law in September 1950 .

= = Career in law and politics : 1950 ? 1952 = =

Castro founded a legal partnership with two fellow leftists , Jorge Azpiazu and Rafael Resende , focusing on helping poor Cubans assert their rights . A financial failure , its main client was a timber merchant who paid them in timber to furnish their office . Caring little for money or material goods , Castro failed to pay his bills ; his furniture was repossessed and electricity cut off , distressing his wife . He took part in a high @-@ school protest in Cienfuegos in November 1950 , fighting a four @-@ hour battle with police in protest at the Education Ministry ? s ban on the founding of student associations . Arrested and charged for violent conduct , the magistrate dismissed the charges . He also became an active member of the Cuban Peace Committee , campaigning against western involvement in the Korean War . His hopes for Cuba still centered on Eduardo Chibás and the Partido Ortodoxo ; however Chibás had made a mistake when he accused Education Minister Aureliano Sánchez of purchasing a Guatemalan ranch with misappropriated funds , but was unable to substantiate his allegations . The government accused Chibás of being a liar , and in 1951 he

shot himself during a radio broadcast , issuing a " last wake @-@ up call " to the Cuban people . Castro was present and accompanied him to the hospital where he died .

Seeing himself as the heir to Chibás , Castro wanted to run for Congress in the June 1952 elections . Senior Ortodoxo members feared his radical reputation and refused to nominate him ; instead he was nominated as a candidate for the House of Representatives by party members in Havana 's poorest districts , and began campaigning . The Ortodoxo gained a considerable level of support and was predicted to do well in the election .

During his campaign , Castro met with General Fulgencio Batista , the former president who had returned to politics with the Unitary Action Party ; although both opposed Prío 's administration , their meeting never got beyond " polite generalities " . In March 1952 , Batista seized power in a military coup , with Prío fleeing to Mexico . Declaring himself president , Batista cancelled the planned presidential elections , describing his new system as " disciplined democracy " ; Castro , like many others , considered it a one @-@ man dictatorship . Batista moved to the right , solidifying ties with both the wealthy elite and the United States , severing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union , suppressing trade unions and persecuting Cuban socialist groups . Intent on opposing Batista 's administration , Castro brought several legal cases against them , arguing that Batista had committed sufficient criminal acts to warrant imprisonment and accusing various ministers of breaching labor laws . His lawsuits coming to nothing , Castro began thinking of alternate ways to oust the new government .