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## UCLA Historical Journal

### Title

Tad Szulc. Fidel: A Critical Portrait. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1986. 660 pp. Bibliography, and index. \$19.95.

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/34h6g93w>

### Journal

UCLA Historical Journal, 8(2)

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### Publication Date

1987

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Peer reviewed

Western Europe. The book suggests that the simultaneous existence of highly efficient commercial-agricultural production and tremendous difficulties of distribution of basic food-stuffs among people is not unique to Latin America, nor to "under"- or "un"-developed areas, but is a global problem and must necessarily become a global concern.

The editors should be given credit for a fine job of binding together the diverse themes of the book with their introductory essays. As well as supplying a context for the work of the other scholars, these essays stand on their own as interesting and useful syntheses.

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Tad Szulc. Fidel: A Critical Portrait. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1986. 660 pp. Bibliography, and index. \$19.95.

Since the outbreak of Revolution in Cuba there has been a myriad of articles and books written about Fidel Castro Ruz and his role in the Revolution. Much of the literature has been political in nature: either siding with, or vociferously opposing, the Castro Revolution. The majority of the works barely discuss Castro's life, and those that do focus on it beginning in 1952. In Fidel: A Critical Portrait, Tad Szulc, the New York Times reporter who broke the Bay of Pigs story, is one of the first to write a biography of Fidel that delves into his early years.

Szulc's work strays from the recent work on Revolutionary Cuba's History. Instead of attempting to analyze the effects of the Revolutionary government on Cuban society, as the recent Cubanologists have done, he instead chooses to follow the narrative-biographical approach of many of the writers of Cuba during the 1960's. The result is a useful synthesis of Castro's life that makes no attempt to analyze or portray contemporary Cuba.

Szulc does an excellent job of integrating the numerous but fragmented accounts of Fidel's early life and the Revolutionary movement to provide a

fairly comprehensive biography. Szulc supplements his use of secondary accounts and memoirs of participants in the Cuban Revolution with interviews of Castro, his brother Raul, and other Castro associates still active in Cuban government. He also interviews Fidel's friends and political acquaintances from his university days, many of whom now reside in Miami.

Szulc organizes Fidel: A Critical Portrait into five sections: The Man, The Younger Years (1926-1952), The War (1952-1958), The Revolution (1959-1963), and The Maturity (1964-1986). The majority of the work, 459 pages, is devoted to Fidel's life prior to the 1959 triumph of the Revolution. In each section he narrates the course of events, and when appropriate he mentions discrepancies in the various accounts. He is especially effective when he discusses areas of Castro's life that Castro himself selectively omits from discussion.

Szulc supplies a well-balanced portrait of Fidel's character. He portrays him as both an idealist and as a calculating pragmatist, always aware of public opinion and how best to manipulate it for his own ends. He narrates how Fidel took advantage of Herbert Matthews, the New York Times editorial writer, during Matthew's 1957 interview of Castro in the Sierra Maestra. Szulc explains how Castro had his army put on a show for Matthews to make him think that the rebel army was more numerous and more organized than it actually was. Matthews returned to New York to write a series of editorial articles that were favorable to Castro and his movement. These articles were also reprinted in the Cuban press as Batista had eased censorship. Fidel's strategy was successful in winning him support both in the United States and in Cuba.

By characterizing Fidel as a calculating manipulator, Szulc attempts to address the long debated issue of whether Fidel was a Marxist-Leninist prior to his declaration of December 2, 1961. He shows Fidel to be aware of and influenced by Marxist-Leninist teachings during the 1950's yet not espousing such rhetoric for fear of alienating the more progressive yet anti-communist sectors of the Batista opposition. In his belabored analysis, Szulc is not successful in shedding any new light on this worn issue.

A shortcoming of Fidel: A Critical Portrait is Szulc's minimal discussion of contemporary Cuba.

Although he does address Castro's role in directing Cuban policy since 1959, he adheres to only publicized subjects, such as The Bay of Pigs Incident and the Missile Crisis, providing nothing new to our knowledge of contemporary Cuba or Castro's role in it. However, this can be attributed to Szulc's sources which do not allow for an in-depth examination of Cuban society.

Overall, Szulc provides a coherent biography of Fidel, using secondary sources and oral interviews with people who were close to the Revolutionary leader at one time. The strength of Szulc's work lies in its synthesis of existing work on Castro and the Revolution, and in its thorough coverage of Fidel's early life. Szulc provides a biography of Fidel which portrays the revolutionary leader as the determining factor in Cuban society. Although Szulc's work adds little to the knowledge of contemporary Cuba and would be seemingly of little interest to both students of Latin America as well as Cubanologists, it does provide a reference volume of Fidel's life. Szulc's work would also be of interest to the non-specialist since it does provide a basis for understanding Fidel Castro.

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