Discussion Guide

Directions: Discuss the following questions with your partner(s).

1. Why did Che Guevara turn to Marxist ideology? What solutions did it seem to offer for the inequality and repression he found traveling around Latin America?

2. In the twentieth century, Communist revolutions were led by intellectuals in largely agricultural countries such as Russia, China, Cuba, Vietnam, and Cambodia, rather than in advanced industrial society as Marx predicted. Why do you think this is the case? Was Marx wrong in his scientific predictions? Have Communist revolutions been imposed upon an unwilling people by professional revolutionaries?

3. What was the attraction to political violence to Guevara and Castro when the peasantry they encountered was not attracted to their Marxist ideology?

4. How did Guevara justify the rebels’ violence against the Batista government? How did he justify their violence against the peasants they meant to help? How did Guevara justify his violence against members of his own revolutionary group?

5. What were some examples of the brutal violence carried out immediately by the Communist revolutionaries against the Batista regime? Cite specific evidence for your answer.

6. One of the main goals of followers of Marxism is to end inequality between social classes and create a more equal and just society. To what extent did the new Communist government institute economic justice for all citizens, rich, poor, and middle class? Provide evidence for your answer.

7. Guevara criticized the Batista government as maintaining a “social system that keeps all [the] unarmed brothers in ignominy and misery.” Did Guevara and Castro create a freer, more open society where political expression and dissenting ideas were permitted? Why or why not? Provide evidence for your answer.

8. What was Guevara’s dream for Latin America, Asia, and Africa? Based upon the experience of the victorious Communist revolutions that were imposed from above, do you think that spreading the revolution elsewhere would have promoted justice throughout the world?

9. Why do you think that Che Guevara was a cultural icon for young people during the 1960s? Why are young people still attracted to his image today? Should Communist revolutionaries Che Guevara (Cuba), Mao Zedong (China), Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin (Russia), and the Khmer Rouge (Cambodia) be celebrated as heroes or villains? Was the character of their regimes just or unjust?