Activity: “Just or Unjust?”

**Directions:** Break the students up into groups of four or five. Have them fill out the following continuum of justice or injustice. They will mark a spot on the continuum where they strongly agree or strongly disagree or somewhere in between.

| “It is just for a teacher to allow a student who spent time in the hospital from a sports injury extra days to study for a test.” | Strongly Agree | Strongly Disagree |
| “It is just for a teacher to give higher grades to students they like.” | Strongly Agree | Strongly Disagree |
| “It is just for a referee or umpire in a sport to help a losing team catch up with favorable, but wrong, calls.” | Strongly Agree | Strongly Disagree |
| “It is just for a parent to assign different chores to different children based upon their age and strength even if some chores are more difficult or take longer.” | Strongly Agree | Strongly Disagree |
| “It is just for a teacher to allow a student who is struggling in a class to cheat on tests.” | Strongly Agree | Strongly Disagree |
| “It is just for a coach to allow a member of a sports team not to do sprints because the athlete is a little tired that day.” | Strongly Agree | Strongly Disagree |
Ernesto "Che" Guevara (1928 – 1967) was an Argentine former medical student and often unemployed wanderer who traveled around Latin America as a young man. He witnessed dismal poverty and great inequality of wealth in repressive regimes and blamed the troubles on American imperialism. He believed he found the solutions to these social ills in the writings of Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin, and became a committed Communist. Karl Marx, a nineteenth-century German economist, saw history as the continuing struggle of class warfare in which oppressors exploited the lower classes. According to Marx, the working underclass would one day rise to overthrow the oppressive capitalists. They would usher in a classless society in which everyone worked and the community would meet everyone's needs—communism. Therefore, communists such as Che believed that capitalism, private property, and the profit motive are evil. They saw the United States as the best example of capitalism run amok—cruelly creating great disparities of wealth as the few built on the backs of the beleaguered many. Che did not even like democratic regimes in Latin America because of his embrace of communism. He also had great admiration for Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin. In 1955, Guevara was living in Mexico City, where he joined Cuban revolutionaries Fidel and Raul Castro in plotting to overthrow the corrupt dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista in Cuba. Ironically, Guevara sought to implement his Marxist vision for a just society, but helped impose a regime on the Cuban people characterized by great injustice and that was much more oppressive than the Bautista government.

In May, 1957, Guevara had been traveling through the mountains of the Sierra Maestra of Cuba for six months with Fidel Castro and a handful of Communist rebels. They tried to turn the poverty of the peasants into discontent and revolution against the regime of President Batista. When the people showed little revolutionary ardor, Che and Castro turned to violence. The rebels received a cache of weapons, and Guevara gleefully wielded a machine-gun. He was delighted by the "marvelous spectacle" of the instruments of death and knew he had "entered a new stage" in his life as "a full-time combatant."

Over the next few years, Che and a few dozen Marxist revolutionaries helped lead attacks on army barracks to disrupt the Batista government and seize more weapons for the revolution. In several raids, they killed scores and routinely executed prisoners without trials. Che even personally ordered the summary execution of several rebels in his own band whom he deemed as insufficiently loyal. In addition, he killed several peasants accused of supporting the government. Later explaining his principles of guerilla warfare as he sought to follow the teachings of Marx and Lenin, Guevara wrote, "We must come to the inevitable conclusion that the guerrilla fighter is a social
reformer, that he takes up arms responding to the angry protest of the people against their oppressors, and that he fights in order to change the social system that keeps all his unarmed brothers in ignominy and misery." The murderous "justice" of Castro and Guevara was carried out for the good of the revolution.

Che and Castro discovered that there was no strong revolutionary fervor among Cuba's peasantry or among the urban workers. Far from being opposed to capitalism, these people aspired to earn the advantages of free enterprise themselves. They saw private property as the solution to their problems, not the evil backbone of a corrupt system. Ignoring the fact that most Cubans were opposed to a Communist revolution, they believed that they must serve as a leaders of a revolutionary vanguard of intellectuals who liberated a people who had not yet developed a "class consciousness." They would impose the Marxist revolution from above.

On January 1, 1959, Batista fled to the Dominican Republic while the rebels marched on the outskirts of the capital of Havana. There were those who rejoiced at the end of the corrupt Batista dictatorship; though it was not as brutal as Communist propaganda would portray it. Unfortunately, the incoming regime did not usher in freedom and prosperity, but rather remarkable injustice that belied its seemingly noble aims. Che immediately started signing death warrants for a dozen policemen of the regime because "they had committed crimes against the people." A few days later, Castro and Che rode triumphantly in a tank and seized power in Cuba. Their communist regime would be more repressive and destructive of a just government and civil society than Batista's government.

The communist government quickly imposed its form of revolutionary justice that destroyed the rule of law. Che presided over "show trials" that mocked real justice and executed at least 550 members of the old regime. The Communists lined up many "enemies" and machine-fired them to death. They also held a public spectacle in the sports stadium in which many high-ranking officials were summarily found guilty and executed before cheering crowds. Untold hundreds of "war criminals" associated with the Batista government were killed across Cuba over the next few months. "Counter-revolution" was declared a crime punishable by death and "enemies of the state," very broadly defined, were hunted down.

In the coming year, Che and Castro established a communist state that destroyed individual liberties, and economic and political justice. Che headed an agency for agrarian reform, which would confiscate all sugar plantations and cattle ranches for the "nation" and result in the wholesale government violation of property rights. The government also seized all rental properties and banned ownership of more than one house. Though Che had little economic or business knowledge, Castro appointed him to head an industrial agency and the national bank. However, Che and Castro focused on nationalizing U.S. oil installations (and canceling $50 million of debt owed to those oil companies), American sugar properties, all banks, industrial and transport businesses, and 166 other American companies. All unions, which had been active under the Bautista government, were outlawed except the government-sponsored Communist one.

From his position in the Castro government, Che helped enforce Communist control over Cuban civil society and destroy freedom of thought. The government shut down all newspapers as it cracked down on freedom of the press and imposed absolute control over the media. The government also took over universities, and Che informed students and professors at the universities in Santiago that the government would impose the Marxist curriculum and determine the career choices of students for the good of the society. Che also created a Marxist political indoctrination program for the army which would now be a "people's army" to defend itself against all "counter-revolution." Che contributed to the systematic destruction of any civic association that could promote a healthy society. The communist regime persecuted the
Catholic Church, nationalizing Catholic schools, banning Catholic publications, and deporting hundreds of priests. The supposed “justice” of revolutionary Marxist ideology became nothing more than brainwashing and thought-control.

Whereas Fidel Castro was content to be the dictator of the Cuban Communist government, Che devoted his life to spreading Marxist revolutions throughout Latin America. He praised Marxist revolutions in Africa and Asia, and dreamed of “two, three…many Vietnams.” In 1967, he was killed by the U.S. Special Forces-trained Bolivian Army while supporting the revolutionary movement in that country.

Since the 1960s, Che has remained a fashionable icon as a radical hero. Young people wear shirts adorned with his image, which they have purchased from the great symbols of capitalism, suburban shopping malls. These people think that Che is a hero because they are ignorant of the history of his murderous regime and the dangers of the Marxist ideology he espoused.

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**Defining Civic Virtues: Injustice**

To harm others by applying unequal rules and damaging another’s inalienable rights and dignity.
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?
CHE GUEVARA, “THE SOCIAL IDEAS OF THE REBEL ARMY,”
JANUARY 27, 1959

Analyzing Primary Source Documents

What tools do we have to carry out a program such as I have presented? We have the Rebel Army, and this must be our first instrument of struggle, the most positive and most vigorous one. All remnants of the Batista army will be destroyed. Let it be clearly understood that we are not doing so out of vengeance, or solely out of a spirit of justice. Rather, we do so out of necessity, to assure that all these conquests by the people can be achieved in the shortest period of time.

We defeated an army vastly superior in numbers through popular support, through correct tactics, and through revolutionary morale…We have to rapidly restructure the Rebel Army, because along the way we built an armed body of peasants and workers, many of them illiterate, uneducated, and without technical training. We must train this army for the great tasks its members have to face, and train them both technically and culturally.

The Rebel Army is the vanguard of the Cuban people, and in referring to its technical and cultural progress we have to know the meaning of these things in a modern sense…

Taking back the nation involves the destruction of many privileges. We therefore must be prepared to defend the nation from its avowed or disguised enemies…

Now, in the face of the experiences we have had, the question is raised of what our future will be, a future intimately linked to all the underdeveloped countries of Latin America. The revolution is not limited to the Cuban nation, since it has touched the conscience of the Americas and has given a serious wake-up call to the enemies of our peoples.”
Primary Source Discussion Questions

1. Guevara speaks of carrying out “justice” and “necessity” against members of the Batista regime. Was this true justice?

2. What parts of society does Guevara want to compose the Rebel Army? Did those groups support the Communist revolution? What was the army’s task (or objective) just?

3. What is the danger of searching for “enemies of the state or revolution?” Who can be deemed an “enemy.” What possible outcomes could result from a search for “enemies?” Who gets to decide who an “enemy” is?

4. What “enemies” exist in other places outside of Cuba? What plans did Guevara have for those “enemies”?
Some young people wear t-shirts with famous images of Communists such as Che Guevara and Mao Zedong. They are probably ignorant of the mass murders of the Communist regimes and unknowingly celebrate villains of history.

Educate yourself about the character of Communism by investigating the injustice perpetrated against its one hundred million victims. The Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation was established by a unanimous bipartisan congressional bill that President Bill Clinton signed into law in 1993. The purpose of the VCMF was to honor the memory of the victims and educate the public about the crimes against humanity perpetrated by Communist regimes.

Investigate the many on-line resources that the VCMF offers at http://victimsofcommunism.org/ and follow them on social media. Keep yourself educated about the latest research findings and learn more about the stories of the victims of Communism.

Suggestions for Further Reading


Guevara, Ernesto Che. _Guerrilla Warfare_.

Guevara, Ernesto Che. _The Motorcycle Diaries_.

Guevara, Ernesto Che. _Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War_.


Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. _The Communist Manifesto_.


Injustice

Directions  Think about your favorite dystopian book or movie in which the government has total control over people’s lives. Describe the political, economic, and cultural means that the government uses to control the people and rule unjustly. Is there a hero who values individual freedom and fights against the oppressive government? What means does the hero use to fight for freedom from oppression and justice?

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“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”
–MARTIN LUTHER KING