

Michelle Getchell. *The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Cold War: A Short History with Documents.*

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Michelle Getchell's *The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Cold War: A Short History with Documents* is a concise introduction to the crisis and a useful volume for those teaching the Cuban Missile Crisis. The book is a relatively brief 123 pages, with an additional 64-page appendix of documents. It provides a narrative history of the crisis with a heavy emphasis on the historical background. Getchell wrote the book with an undergraduate audience in mind. As an instructor for a course on the Cuban Missile Crisis, I evaluate the book from that perspective.

The book is strongest in its treatment of the background of the crisis. Getchell begins with the origins of the Cold War, then progressively narrows the focus onto Latin America, the Cuban Revolution, and the events immediately preceding the crisis, allowing her to place the crisis within the context of the Cold War in the region. Her descriptions of the Cold War in Latin American and Cuban-Soviet relations are particularly useful and fill a gap in the literature for readable summaries on these topics. The author takes a fair-minded but critical view of US policies toward Latin America, with a valuable exploration of the attitudes of the region's governments and people and of the backlash to American intervention. Soviet-Cuban relations emerge as one of the major

themes of the book and the area in which it contributes original research. Getchell uncovers records from the Soviet embassies in the United States and Mexico that highlight Cuba's eagerness for relations with the Soviet Union early in the revolution and Soviet beliefs about American intentions toward Cuba. Her description of Fidel Castro's substantial efforts to court the Soviet government and gain economic and military support is illuminating, and the discussion of Nikita Khrushchev's reasons for moving Soviet missiles to Cuba is comprehensive. Many of the documents in the appendix also focus on Soviet-Cuban relations. She returns to these topics in discussing the aftermath of the crisis, again filling a gap in the literature for readable summaries on how the crisis influenced the subsequent course of the Cold War in the Western Hemisphere.

The book is also strong in its coverage of the crisis itself, but only useful in the classroom for instructors seeking a brief overview. It covers the major events of the thirteen days of the crisis in less than twenty pages. It does a good job of moving between both the American and Soviet sides and gives notable prominence to the diplomatic efforts of UN Secretary General U Thant. However, some important episodes of the crisis are not included, such as Ambassador Adlai Stevenson's

televised presentation at the United Nations. Topics typically addressed in discussions of the Cuban Missile Crisis, such as the logic of the decision to choose a quarantine over an airstrike or the question of whether US nuclear or conventional superiority contributed to a favorable outcome, are also given only brief attention. Perhaps Getchell felt that it was unnecessary to dive deeply into these topics in this short volume because good readings on them already exist, but instructors should expect to go elsewhere if they wish to address them. The book ends with a twenty-three-page discussion of the aftermath and an evaluation of the leaders' performance during the crisis, in which Getchell addresses issues of diplomacy and crisis management.

As a narrative history and a source of assignable readings, this volume is very good. Getchell has a deep knowledge of the subject and draws on the best and latest scholarship to construct her narrative. However, one thing I would have liked to see more of is an explicit acknowledgment of different interpretations of events. The author is explicit in a few places where there is consensus among historians. However, she is less explicit in highlighting disagreements or topics for discussion. For example, while she shows that the Bay of Pigs invasion drove Cuba into the arms of the Soviet Union, her description of the early Cuban outreach to the Soviet Union suggests that this alliance may have been inevitable. This raises interesting questions about how to interpret US policy: Were the events of the Cuban Missile Crisis evidence that the United States provoked a backlash by being too interventionist? Or were they evidence that the United States allowed a dangerous situation to get out of hand by not being interventionist enough? Being more explicit about questions like these could have been useful for instructors seeking to frame discussions for their students and for students seeking to evaluate the meaning of the crisis. Nevertheless, this volume provides no shortage of material for instructors to use to explore these implications themselves. The

chapters "The Cold War in Latin America" and "The Cuban Revolution and the Soviet Union" in particular fill a gap in the literature for readable summaries of these topics, and they will definitely end up on my course syllabus.

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