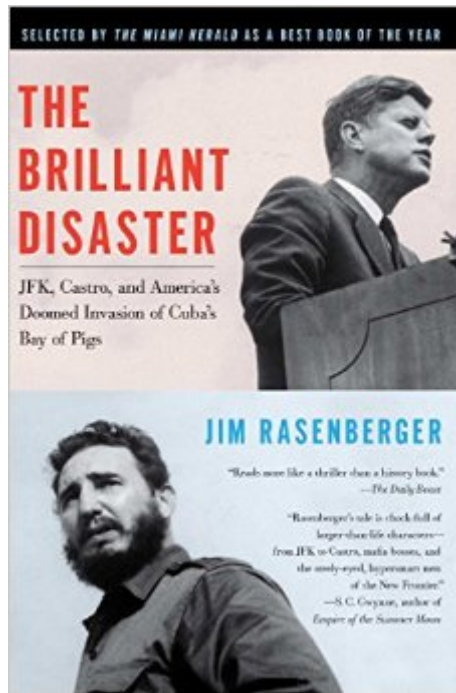


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The Brilliant Disaster: JFK, Castro, And America's Doomed Invasion Of Cuba's Bay Of Pigs



Synopsis

Now in paperback, a "balanced, engrossing account" (Kirkus Reviews, starred review) of the Bay of Pigs Crisis drawing on long-hidden CIA documents and delivering the vivid truth of five pivotal days in April 1961. THE BRILLIANT DISASTER is a remarkably gripping account of America's Bay of Pigs crisis, drawing on long-hidden CIA documents and delivering, as never before, the vivid truth "and consequences" of five pivotal days in April 1961. At the heart of the Bay of Pigs crisis stood President John F. Kennedy, and journalist Jim Rasenberger traces what Kennedy knew, thought, and said as events unfolded. He examines whether Kennedy was manipulated by the CIA into approving a plan that would ultimately involve the American military. He also draws compelling portraits of the other figures who played key roles in the drama: Fidel Castro, who shortly after achieving power visited New York City and was cheered by thousands (just months before the United States began plotting his demise); Dwight Eisenhower, who originally ordered the secret program, then later disavowed it; Allen Dulles, the CIA director who may have told Kennedy about the plan before he was elected president (or so Richard Nixon suspected); and Richard Bissell, the famously brilliant "deus ex machina" who ran the operation for the CIA "and took the blame when it failed. Beyond the short-term fallout, Rasenberger demonstrates, the Bay of Pigs gave rise to further and greater woes, including the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War, and even, possibly, the assassination of John Kennedy. Written with elegant clarity and narrative verve, The Brilliant Disaster is the most complete account of this event to date, providing not only a fast-paced chronicle of the disaster but an analysis of how it occurred "a question as relevant today as then" and how it profoundly altered the course of modern American history.

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Customer Reviews

It is very strange that a story as important as this one has simply not received either the historical attention or public attention that it deserves. Very simply, President Kennedy's people will tell you that prior to entering office, JFK was briefed in a meeting with Eisenhower about plans for CIA trained Cuban exiles (some 1400 in number) to invade Cuba and foment a revolution against Castro. Eisenhower's people deny that this ever happened. Since JFK entered office on January 20th, 1961, and the Bay of Pigs occurred in early April, just a shade over two months later, it is highly likely that the invasion was planned during the previous administration. Seventy days is far too short a period to plan, train for, and execute such an operation. Nevertheless, President Kennedy must take and did take full responsibility for the mission and its failure. The embarrassment was extensive, and as the President said to then CIA Director Allen Dulles and Richard Bissell who was Deputy Director for Plans, if this were a Parliamentary form of government, it would be me leaving office, but it is a democracy and therefore you and Dulles will suffer. Dulles and Bissell over a period of months were quietly forced into retirement. Strangely, there have been only two real books written on the Bag of Pigs invasion in the last 50 years. One was by Haynes Johnson in 1964 while the other by Peter Wyden was done in 1979. The author of this book had access to two new sources of information. The first is the national Security Archives which are kept at George Washington University, and the second is the CIA Inspector General's report on the invasion which was written right after the failed invasion, but remained classified until recently.

In constructing this history of the Bay of Pigs invasion, the author draws on previous books by Haynes Johnson (1964) and Peter Weyden (1977) as well as upon thousands of pages of documents declassified during the last 15 years. The book begins with a description of the "nearly hysterical" fear about the spread of communism in the fifties. Castro's visit to the United States in 1959 is reviewed as is the planning for effecting regime change in Cuba by the Eisenhower administration in the summer and fall of 1959. Finally, on 3/17/60, the author shows how Ike approved the CIA produced "Program of Covert Action" which "made the overthrow of Fidel Castro official US policy" just months before his administration was set to expire. Rasenberger argues that planned regime change in Cuba resulted from our inability to live with a socialist government 90 miles from Florida rather than from any imminent danger to national security. He points to the

"irrational forces and fears in the broad American public" combined with an attitude within American government that results were all that mattered. (CIA Bay of Pigs planner Richard Bissell is quoted in his memoirs saying, "My philosophy during my last 2 or 3 years in the agency was very definitely that the ends justified the means, and I was not going to be held back.") Castro's takeover in Cuba dominated the first televised Presidential debates between Nixon and Kennedy. The strong positions taken by JFK in the debate and on the campaign trail served to limit his later flexibility in decision-making. In his first 90 days in office, the new president slowly and reluctantly moved forward with the invasion plan inherited from the prior administration while trying to learn upon whom he should depend for reliable information.

Rasenberger does a good job of pulling together all the various info sources, including newly released "secret" documents. All of which embellishes the story that is reasonably well known, that the anti-Castro program created by Eisenhower was a clusterflub from the get go. Ike and the CIA has successfully brought down a few Latin leaders and they presumed they were good at that sort of thing. But, as Rasenberger shows, the American backed invasion was an unrealistic goal depending two unrealistic assumptions, haphazardly organized by bright, even brilliant men who together behaved pretty much like idiots. Rasenberger does a good job of showing how brilliant people could commit such folly and there appears to be plenty of blame to go around and no virtually no one involved failed to make very bad decisions and the more involved they were the more more then tended to lie about their bad judgement. For example, after the fiasco, Eisenhower denied ordering that the plan to remove Castor be instigated -- saying he only "ordered a program" "not a plan" is rather like saying I didn't spill the coffee I dropped it. It is not only dishonest but embarrassingly so. Undoubtedly, many will find that one or another of the involved parties doesn't receive enough condemnation in Rasenberger's account. But his aim appears to be to show how wise men commit folly not to find which head can be mounted on the highest pike. Despite the generally well written text, one line by the writer brought a laugh. Talking about the Cuban Missile Crisis, Rasenberger wrote: "For several days that October, Americans went to bed at night unsure that the world would still be there when they woke up."

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