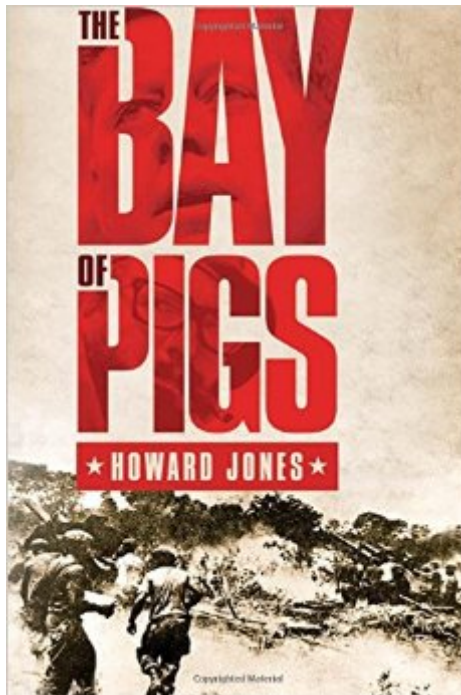


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# The Bay Of Pigs (Pivotal Moments In American History)



## Synopsis

In *The Bay of Pigs*, Howard Jones provides a concise, incisive, and dramatic account of the disastrous attempt to overthrow Castro in April 1961. Drawing on recently declassified CIA documents, Jones deftly examines the train of missteps and self-deceptions that led to the invasion of U.S.-trained exiles at the Bay of Pigs. Ignoring warnings from the ambassador to Cuba, the Eisenhower administration put in motion an operation that proved nearly unstoppable even after the inauguration of John F. Kennedy. The CIA and Pentagon, meanwhile, both voiced confidence in the outcome of the invasion, especially after coordinating previous successful coups in Guatemala and Iran. And so the Kennedy administration launched the exile force toward its doom in Cochin Bay on April 17, 1961. Jones gives a riveting account of the battle--and the confusion in the White House--before moving on to explore its implications. *The Bay of Pigs*, he writes, set the course of Kennedy's foreign policy. It was a humiliation for the administration that fueled fears of Communist domination and pushed Kennedy toward a hardline "cold warrior" stance. But at the same time, the failed attack left him deeply skeptical of CIA and military advisers and influenced his later actions during the Cuban missile crisis.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

On April 17, 1961, approximately 1500 Cuban exiles trained and supported by the United States launched an ill-fated invasion against Fidel Castro at the Bay of Pigs in southwest Cuba. The Bay of Pigs invasion occurred early in the presidency of John F. Kennedy and constituted one of the great

foreign policy missteps of the United States during the Cold War. In his new book in the "Pivotal Moments in American History" series of Oxford University Press, Howard Jones offers a succinct and sobering account of the Bay of Pigs and its aftermath. Written with quiet restraint, Jones's book has much to teach about American interventionist tendencies in Cuba and elsewhere. Howard Jones is University Research Professor of History at the University of Alabama. He has written extensively on American history. Jones shows the many tangled threads in the Bay of Pigs story. Following Castro's ascension to power in Cuba and his increasing hostility to the United States, the Eisenhower Administration authorized the Central Intelligence Agency to plan and conduct what became the Bay of Pigs invasion. With the momentum the plan had gathered, the new president, Kennedy, allowed the proposed overthrow of Castro to continue. Kennedy was indeed an active participant and changed the original plan in several respects. In addition to the invasion by the Cuban exiles, the plan had several components that Jones documents well in his study. The CIA engaged in dealings with the Mafia in a plan to assassinate Castro before the invasion. The invasion also relied popular insurrection in Cuba to displace the Castro regime after the exile force had established a beachhead.

John F. Kennedy inherited the Bay of Pigs plan from Dwight Eisenhower, who, in one of his last official acts, had ordered the CIA to rub out the Cuban revolution. Tiny Cuba was no threat to the U.S., but Castro had nationalized American property and Washington feared that Castro-ism could spread to other parts of Latin America. The CIA's plan involved landing a brigade of 1,500 anti-communist Cubans on a beach in Cuba and then waiting for the population to rise up against Castro. The plan looked straightforward on paper. In reality, the CIA had bad intelligence on Cuba and no experience with amphibious invasions. Within days, the invaders were overwhelmed by Castro's vastly superior forces. The fiasco exposed an amazing level of dysfunction in the U.S. government. Incredibly, Kennedy was adamant that U.S. fingerprints be kept off the operation, yet he didn't ask hard questions of the CIA and he went along with the plan because the "experts" told him it would succeed. Grown ups in the State Department and the military who should have been deeply involved were instead marginalized by the CIA on spurious security grounds. It is likely the CIA itself suspected that the plan was unworkable but went ahead anyway in the expectation that Kennedy would send in the Marines rather than accept a humiliating defeat. Few officials cared about international law or gave a hoot about lying to the American public. Duplicity, scheming, and miscommunication are rife in DC. Ordinarily they are a source of low comedy, but not when they are part of aggression against a small country. The U.S. defeat at the Bay of Pigs solidified Castro's

hold on power. The U.S. got what it deserved.

University of Alabama historian Dr. Howard Jones has written an excellent one volume history of the U.S. government's attempts to eliminate Cuban leader Fidel Castro in the 1960s. The book is titled *The Bay of Pigs* and Jones does a great job of writing a compelling and accurate portrayal of the disaster that was the Bay of Pigs operation but this book is so much more than that. Jones places the Bay of Pigs in the context of the Eisenhower and then Kennedy administration's overall anti-Castro policies. He discusses at length the various options debated by American policymakers in the White House. The details of what happened at the Bay of Pigs are well known and have been told elsewhere but Jones makes great use of the CIA's release of documents collectively known as the "family jewels" to revise the picture on the depth of CIA involvement in what culminated at the Bay of Pigs. Another thing that I found particularly helpful is that Jones doesn't stop the story after the defeat of the Cuban exiles. In discussing the subsequent policies advocated by both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations until 1965 Jones makes it quite clear that hardly anybody in the White House seemed to learn the proper lessons of the disaster at the Bay of Pigs. Jones, I think makes it clear that absent the escalating war in Vietnam and problems elsewhere on the globe the United States may have blundered in to a second Bay of Pigs, except this one would have been backed up by the U.S. military. Jones gets a little conspiratorial when he discusses the potential connection between the Kennedy administration's Cuba policy and the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963. Although even there he makes use of new evidence released by the CIA in the 1990s.

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