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Che Guevara: You Win Or You Die by Stuart A. Kallen

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Author: Kallen, Stuart A.

Title: *Che Guevara: You Win Or You Die*

Year of Publication: 2012

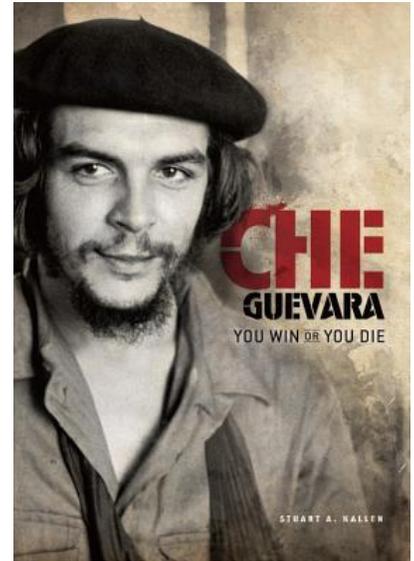
Publisher: Twenty-First Century Books

ISBN: 978-0822590354

Number of Pages: 88

Rating: Dependable

Reading/Interest Level: Intermediate



Keywords: Biography; Nonfiction; Argentina; Cuba; Che Guevara; Fidel Castro; Communism

Stuart A. Kallen takes on the life of one of history's more controversial figures in *Che Guevara: You Win Or You Die*. Ernesto "Che" Guevara, though born to a well-off family, grew up "keenly aware of the gap between rich and poor." During his asthma-plagued youth, Che read voraciously and eclectically. In his early twenties, Guevara undertook a transcontinental journey which more deeply engrained in him a fierce indignation at the oppression of the poor. Guevara left his home country of Argentina to join Fidel Castro's Communist revolution in Cuba, and devoted the remainder of his life to the ideals of the revolution, fighting in the Congo and later in Bolivia, where he was eventually tracked down and killed.

Kallen is more balanced than many in his treatment of the famed revolutionary – perhaps too much so for the tastes of America apologists and Guevara apologists alike. He writes of Che's compassion as well as his cruelty, his successes as well as his failures. He makes the effort to appreciate Che's perspective and motivations. However, Kallen does not ignore the viewpoints of Che's detractors. If Kallen errs, it is on the side of sympathy for the guerrilla leader, but he does better than most in understanding both sides of Guevara's divided legacy.

One of the more touching moments of the book is Che's encounter, shortly after his capture, with Felix Rodríguez, the CIA agent who had advised the Bolivian army in their pursuit of Guevara. Upon Che's request that Rodríguez convey a final message of comfort to Che's soon-to-be widow, Rodríguez was "overcome with emotion, [and] stepped forward and hugged his adversary." He later wrote, "It was a tremendous emotional moment for me. I no longer hated [Che]. His moment of truth had come, and he was conducting himself like a man, He [*sic*] was facing his death with courage and grace."

Kallen's historical accuracy is generally reliable. He offers a good, succinct account of the compromises involved in resolving the Cuban Missile Crisis, which pundits and others often

trivialize or ignore. His characterization of American attitudes during the Cold War, though jaded, is honest.

Kallen's lexical precision, on the other hand, is more mixed. Good definitions are supplied for such terms as capitalism, Communism, and nationalization. There are several less precise definitions: While Kallen provides the etymology of banana republics, he neglects to properly define the term. His description of socialism, though not incorrect, fails to clearly and accurately demarcate the differences between socialism and capitalism. Several of Kallen's bracketed words, used to clarify meaning, are less than perfect. For example, "killed" is employed as a synonym for "annihilated," when "destroyed" or "wiped out" would have been just as understandable and more accurate.

Two oversights merit mentioning: (1) In a quote from a book written by Hilda Gadea, the adjective "populous" is used in place of the noun "populace." The error is not in the original. (2) Córdoba is characterized as being 350 miles north of Buenos Aires, when it is in fact about 400 miles west-northwest of the Argentine capital. The failure to properly transcribe a quote and to verify the easily-verifiable position of Córdoba relative to Buenos Aires may be isolated oversights, or they may speak to a lack of sufficient rigor in Kallen's research.

The book is visually appealing. It benefits from well-selected (and well-described) photographs and has a good layout.

I would generally recommend *Che Guevara: You Win or You Die*. For readers who are seeking to learn about Che, it is better than many accounts in being engaging, balanced, and accurate.

Reviewer: Lee Crowther

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