

Viewing guide handout



I am Cuba, Directed by Mikhail Kalatozov

Description: The film is cut into 4 different storylines and each person showcases their own different experiences while living in Cuba. The film explores several themes of oppression, resistance, liberation, and poverty. The film also showcases the struggles that the Cuban people have with American capitalism & imperialism.

About The Director: Mikhail Kalatozov was a Soviet filmmaker who was born in Georgia in 1903. He started his career as a journalist and then slowly moved into the film industry by working as a cameraman and then as an assistant director. His films were known for being very innovative for the time (innovative in the sense of visual style and the use of unconventional camera techniques). “I am Cuba” is known as his most famous film and it was made in collaboration with Cuban filmmakers and it was widely known as a cinematic masterpiece. Kalatozov has had an impact on Soviet cinema and his legacy made a contribution to the future artistic/unique films that were made by Soviet filmmakers.

Why this Movie was Important:

The film *I am Cuba* came out in 1964 and is important for several reasons; it was intended to showcase the revolutionary spirit of the Cuban people, it portrays the struggle for equality/social justice, and it shows why being hopeful and determined to create change is important. The movie also has real-life significance because, during the time this movie was released, the Soviet Union, Cuba, and the U.S. were involved in the cold war. Since at the time, the U.S. government was trying to overthrow Cuba, the filmmakers/director were trying to inspire the Cuban people to be revolutionary.

Characters:

- Maria/Betty, a poor woman who lives in the slums & lives a double life as Betty
- Pedro, a poor sugarcane farmer
- Enrique, a college student
- Mariano, A peasant tobacco farmer
- Teresa, a poor woman who is a prostitute to help her mother

Questions:

Regarding the scene where the landowner tells the 'campesino': "Your land isn't yours anymore I sold it to the United Fruit". This phrase is repeated in the head of the campesino and later he sets fire to the sugar cane plantation and to his home.

1. What do you think this scene is a representation of?
2. What historical events are made reference to here?

Cuba has a large population of afro-latinos,

3. Do you think they are well represented in this movie considering most of the characters are not afro-latino? What do you think this means regarding the directors and producers of the film?

The film is made as a Russian propaganda,

4. What parts of the film demonstrate this?
5. What parts of the film do you think depict the US in the right way?
6. Overall how do Russians portray the revolution as?
7. How do you think this differs from the true revolution?

One of the few instances, when they show women on the film, is when Americans are trying to abuse them or as prostitutes

8. What connotations does this have?
9. What does it tell you about the role of women during the revolution?
10. What impact has the film had on Cinema & Popculture?
11. How does Maria's/Betty's story reflect the experiences of women in Cuba?
12. How do you think Betty's relationship will change with her boyfriend?
13. How does Betty's character contribute to the film's overall message about revolution?

Works Cited

“Prominent Russians: Mikhail Kalatozov.” Mikhail Kalatozov – Russiapedia Cinema and theater Prominent Russians. Accessed March 1, 2023. <https://russiapedia.rt.com/prominent-russians/cinema-and-theater/mikhail-kalatozov/index.html>.