

How Jesse Ventura Fell Under Castro's Powers of Fascination – And Never Recovered

I have always felt a great admiration and respect for former Governor Jesse Ventura. I consider him a person of honesty and integrity and a straight shooter. I admired him as an actor in *Predator*, one of my favorite Sci-Fi films. Nevertheless, I found difficult to understand why in his TV programs and books about conspiracy theories he has never mentioned the mother of them all: the fact that Fidel Castro was for close to 60 years a key CIA agent.

I also found it strange that Ventura never mentioned Castro – the only one among the possible suspects who publicly threatened Kennedy with assassination – in any of the books and articles he has written about the assassination of President Kennedy. Just recently, however, I think I found an explanation for it.

In September 2002, Governor Ventura visited Cuba and met Fidel Castro. It was not until recently, however that I found on the Web Ventura's first impression of the Cuban tyrant: "And I'll tell you what he first said to me. Fidel Castro looked into my eyes and told me I was a man of great courage because I defied my President to come to Cuba." "Maybe he (Castro) saw a little of him in me," he added. [\[1\]](#)

Well, if Jesse Ventura actually said this, there is no doubt whatsoever that he is another victim of Castro's mesmerizing powers of fascination.

Castro's Powers of Fascination

The original meaning of the word “fascination” is a reference to the power of casting a spell through looking. It is a usage that has survived to our times in relation to the ability of snakes to immobilize their prey through their gaze. The subject of fascination has interested writers and thinkers for centuries. In his insightful essay “Of Envy,” published in 1625, Sir Francis Bacon wrote his reflections on the subject of fascination:

“There be none of the affections which have been noted to fascinate and to bewitch, but love and envy; they both have vehement witches, they frame themselves readily into imaginations and suggestions and they come easily into the eye, especially upon the presence of the objects which are the points that conduce to fascination, if any such be. We see likewise the Scripture calleth envy and evil eye . . .”[\[iii\]](#)

So, for lack of a better term, I am using the term “fascination” in an effort to describe as accurately as possible the strange phenomenon by which Castro has exerted an extraordinary control over both individuals and masses of people, though other terms have been used as well. Most of Castro’s biographers have noticed the phenomenon, but there is no agreement among them about what to call it. For example, in her biography of Fidel Castro, Georgie Anne Geyer, mentions the word “spell” 10 times (pp. 38, 103, 108, 140, 212, 224, 240, 287, 241), and the word “magical” 5 times (pp. 207, 208, 279, 286, 329). Other terms she also uses are “personal hallucinatory power,” (p. 254); “mystical,” (p. 208); “sorcerer,” (pp. 176, 297); “master illusionist,” (p. 331); and “master political alchemist,” (p. 332). She also mentions Castro’s “mesmerizing techniques,” (p. 337); “intuitive feelings,” (pp. 226, 271); and “hyper-psychic level of intensity,” (p. 159).[\[iiii\]](#)

Philip Bonsal, the last American Ambassador to Cuba before the two countries broke diplomatic relations in 1960, was also

witness to Castro's strange powers. In a book he wrote about Cuba, he tells about the "mysterious force" that drives Castro (p. 56); about the way he weaves "his spells" (p. 57). He also tells how, when Castro spoke in private to a CIA officer for over an hour, the man "emerged in a state of ecstasy" about Castro's receptivity (p. 64); and how Castro exerts his form of personal, "hypnotic rule" over the Cuban people (p. 190).[\[iv\]](#) In his report, the CIA officer described Castro as "a new spiritual leader of Latin American democratic and anti-dictator forces."[\[v\]](#)

In a book about Castro, Juan Arcocha, a writer and former official in the Castro government who met Castro during his university days, says that Fidel always exerted a great "fascination" on him (pp. 17, 19), and mentions the "almost hypnotic" current emanating from the TV screens when Fidel was giving one of his speeches (p. 33).[\[vi\]](#) Similarly, author Edwin Tetlow mentions Fidel's "Hypnotic powers of persuasion."[\[vii\]](#)

The above terms used by Geyer, Bonsal and other authors and journalists who met Castro are no exception. They are mentioned over and over to describe Castro's unexplainable powers and are repeatedly used by his biographers. No serious effort, however, has been made to clarify the use of those terms or to analyze the true source of Castro's power, but many mentioned it.

For example, in 1961 Herbert Mathews mentioned that Castro had a "magnetic personality," and his speech is "hypnotic in its repetitive rhythm."[\[viii\]](#) Writing about Castro in 1964, Matthews also said, "He has enormous personal magnetism, so that he wins blind loyalty."[\[ix\]](#) Matthews also observed, "One must listen to him; hear the hoarse, impassioned voice, feel the magnetism of his extraordinary personality. He is a spellbinder."[\[x\]](#)

Cuban writer Guillermo Cabrera Infante once told a revealing

anecdote about his Argentinean colleague Julio Cortázar. According to Cabrera Infante, Cortázar told him his vivid recollection of the moment when he was granted an audience with Fidel Castro. Cortázar said that during the meeting Castro looked him in the eye and put his hand on Julio's knee. "I felt the vibes," said Cortázar, "that told me that I was in the presence of a revolutionary."[\[xi\]](#)

Notable among the people who fell under Castro's spell are ex-Soviet ambassador and KGB officer Aleksandr Alekseev, Colombian Nobel Prize-winner Gabriel García Márquez,[\[xii\]](#) former Head of U.S. Interests Office in Havana Wayne S. Smith, Italian publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli,[\[xiii\]](#) French philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre and Régis Debray, Senator George McGovern, UNESCO's director Federico Mayor, media mogul Ted Turner, Robert S. McNamara, and a large group of the American liberal press and Hollywood stars who met him.

Other additions to the long list of Americans who fell under Castro's spell are historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Oakland former Mayor, now California Governor Jerry Brown,[\[xiv\]](#) and Robert Reynolds, former CIA station chief in Miami in 1961. Schlesinger and Reynolds visited Cuba in early 2001 to attend a conference on the Bay of Pigs organized by the Castro government and were instantly fascinated by Castro.[\[xv\]](#)

Ruby Hart Phillips, an American journalist in Havana, described the first time Castro addressed the Cuban masses from the Presidential Palace in Havana. "As he stood there with his rifle hung over his shoulder, his big voice rolling out over the crowd through a microphone, the magic of his personality was apparent."[\[xvi\]](#) Another journalist, describing the same event, tells how the crowd gazed up at the bearded figure on a balcony of the Presidential Palace "in hypnotized fascination."[\[xvii\]](#)

Castro's powers of fascination were not limited to the Cuban

people. He has used them on foreign masses as well, as in Venezuela in 1959. Matthews observed that, "When he went to Caracas, Venezuela, a few weeks after his triumph, the tremendous popular emotions aroused frightened the Venezuelan Government."[\[xviii\]](#) Tad Szulc wrote about the uneasiness of President Betancourt during Castro's visit, mentioning Betancourt's confession that, if elections were held that day in Venezuela, Castro would win.[\[xix\]](#) The phenomenon was repeated again when he visited the Soviet Union in 1963. Some Soviet officers privately commented that, since the death of Lenin, they had not seen any other person having such control over the Russian crowds like Castro.[\[xx\]](#) It happened again when Castro traveled to Chile in 1971 to pay a visit to President Allende.

Soon after Castro approached the Soviets for the first time, Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev had the opportunity to experience first hand Fidel's powers of fascination. Khrushchev met Castro for the first time in New York in September, 1960, when both leaders were visiting the United Nations. The Soviet Premier had invited Fidel to a dinner at the Soviet U.N. mission in New York. Castro, as usual, was a half hour late and kept Khrushchev waiting.[\[xxi\]](#) Witnesses to the incident report that Khrushchev was furious. But, as soon as Castro arrived, Khrushchev's mood changed and was all smiles. Apparently the Soviet leader was another victim of Fidel's powers of fascination.[\[xxii\]](#)

Authors Frank Mankiewicz and Kirby Jones visited Cuba in 1975 to conduct an in-depth interview with Fidel Castro. Like many others, they were unable to resist Castro's spell. According to them, Castro is "one of the most charming and entertaining men either of us had ever met," adding that, "from the moment he looked you straight in the eye and spoke directly to every question, from the moment he first leaned eagerly forward to stress a point, his beard no more than six inches away, each of us knew we were in for a fascinating interview and an

exciting experience.”[\[xxiii\]](#)

So, one should not criticize Jesse Ventura for having fallen under Castro’s powers of fascination. He was not the first and, unfortunately, not the last. Nevertheless, I don’t think that, as Ventura believes, “Maybe he (Castro) saw a little of him in me.” This simply can’t be.

Why I think it was impossible for Castro to see even a little of him in Ventura? Because Jesse Ventura never asked Premier Khrushchev to launch a pre-emptive nuclear attack on the U.S. Ventura didn’t destroy Minnesota’s economy and turned it into the poorest state of the Union. Ventura never shot hundreds of his opponents at a wall and didn’t intern Minnesota’s homosexuals in concentration camps. Also, Minnesotans didn’t massively risk their lives sailing on makeshift rafts through Lake Superior in a desperate effort to escape from Ventura’s iron fist. So, I doubt that Castro did actually see anything in Jesse Ventura that reminded him of his own madness and cruelty.

The information about Castro’s powers of fascination I have mentioned above is just a small part of what I wrote about the subject in my 2001 book *The Secret Fidel Castro: Deconstructing the Symbol*. When I heard in mid-2002 that Governor Ventura was planning to visit Cuba I sent him a complimentary copy of my book hoping that reading it would act like a sort of vaccine immunizing Ventura from Castro’s mesmerizing powers of fascination.

Unfortunately, even though I got a note from Ventura thanking me for the book, I don’t think he ever read it. So, Ventura traveled to Cuba mentally unprotected, met Castro, and was instantly contaminated by the Castroist virus. Since then, Ventura has been an unwitting carrier of this malignant virus.

Anyway, I only wish well to Jesse Ventura. My hope is that some of his friends read this article, pass it to Ventura, he

verifies that the information I have provided is factual, and reconsiders his opinion about Castro. It is never too late to recover from a malignant, highly contagious disease.

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Footnotes:

[i] Humberto Fontova, "[Oliver Stone & Jesse Ventura Tag-Team For Hugo Chavez To Smack Down America](#)," *Breibart*, 14 June 2010,

[ii] Francis Bacon, "Of Envy," in *The Essays of Counsels, Civil and Moral* (Oxford: 1890).

[iii] *Guerrilla Prince* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1991).

[iv] *Cuba, Castro, and the United States* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971).

[v] CIA memorandum, 8 May 1959, declassified June 1998.

[vi] *Fidel Castro en rompecabezas* (Madrid: Ediciones R, 1973).

[vii] *Eye on Cuba* (New York: Hartcourt, Brace & World, 1966), p. 103.

[viii] *The Cuban Story* (New York: George Brazillier, 1961), pp. 167-168.

[ix] *Cuba* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), p. 105.

[x] *Revolution in Cuba* (New York: Scribner's, 1975), p. 127.

[xi] Andrew Graham -Yool, *After the Despots* (London:

Bloomsbury, 1991), p. 194.

[\[xii\]](#) In a study about García Márquez' literary work, Cuban writer in exile César Leante offers some interesting insights about García Márquez' irrational relationship with Castro, see *Gabriel García Márquez, el hechicero* (Madrid: Pliegos, 1996).

[\[xiii\]](#) It seems, however, that eventually Feltrinelli was put off by Castro's intolerance and virulent homophobia. The fact is revealed in Feltrinelli's biography written by his son Carlo. See, Gina Montaner, "El millonario que quería revolución," *El Nuevo Herald*, May 29, 2001.

[\[xiv\]](#) Carl Limbacher, "Jerry Brown: Castro Grooming Elián as Successor," *NewsMax.com*, July 2, 2001.

[\[xv\]](#) Ronald Radosh, "Human Rights and Foreign Policy: How to Deal with the Totalitarian Remnant," *FrontPageMagazine.com*, March 27, 2001. Radosh described the reunion as "a love fest between Castro and a group of Americans," where "As usual, the American guests quickly fell under the dictator's spell."

[\[xvi\]](#) *The Cuban Dilemma* (New York: Ivan Obolensky, 1962), p. 15.

[\[xvii\]](#) Paul D. Bethel, *The Losers* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1969), p. 124.

[\[xviii\]](#) Matthews, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

[\[xix\]](#) Betancourt's statement in Tad Szulc, "Exporting the Cuban Revolution," in John Plank, ed., *Cuba and the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1967), p. 78.

[\[xx\]](#) Castro does not speak Russian, therefore, his power of fascination had nothing to do with language.

[\[xxi\]](#) Carlos Franqui, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

[\[xxii\]](#) Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 207.

[\[xxiii\]](#) *With Fidel* (New York: Ballantine, 1975), p. 9.