

# AN INTERVIEW WITH

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**Todd Buchholz, author of *The Castro Gene***

**How would you describe *The Castro Gene*?**

The *Castro Gene* is a fast-paced political and financial thriller that sweeps the reader into the secret and dangerous worlds of Wall Street, Cuba and Washington, DC politics. A young man named Luke Braden quits boxing and thinks he's headed for the white-collar world of hedge funds. Instead he finds himself fighting for his life.

**Why did you, as a best-selling author of non-fiction, decide to write fiction?**

My nonfiction is often praised for its wit and readability. In a book I wrote a few years ago, I included some fictitious vignettes that *BusinessWeek* called "oddly riveting." I think that was a compliment. I've always been a fan of fiction and the theater, and thought I could weave my knowledge of money and politics into a gripping tale that could really touch people.

**How did your experiences shape the book?**

I've been very lucky in my career to have worked in some pretty good places: the White House, Harvard, the legendary Tiger hedge fund, etc. In each of those places, people tend to talk differently. The kind of dialogue you hear at a White House strategy session sounds nothing like the language of the Harvard faculty club, or the stressed-out trading floor at Goldman Sachs. In *The Castro Gene* I tried to accurately portray the patter and the motivations that push people forward in these various settings.

**What does *The Castro Gene* tell us about US politics today?**

Politics today is, to adjust a famous quote, "nasty, brutish and long-winded." In *The Castro Gene*, Senator Harold Leopard is torn between his daughter and the politics of Cuban immigrants from Miami, who want to topple Fidel Castro. Likewise, he must continuously raise money to win re-election, which forces him to deal with the fascinating and mysterious character Oriana. Luke Braden's boss, Paul Tremont, is constantly trying to get himself positive coverage in the media and among charitable groups, even as he makes money in dastardly ways.

**Is it possible for a young man to suddenly get into the power corridors of Wall Street as Luke Braden, the novel's protagonist, does?**

Luke Braden could very well exist today. He is smart and gutsy. Wall Street hot shots like to rub elbows with athletes. It makes them forget that their money comes from staring at the blinking lights on computer screens. It's quite possible that a fiercely competitive young man like Luke, who brims with a combination of intelligence and testosterone, could climb up to the top ranks.

**One of the characters in *The Castro Gene* seems to live in the past, in the Rat Pack days of Vegas. Why?**

Oriana frequently reminisces about the Rat Pack days of Vegas. She lives in Palm Springs, close to where Sinatra lived. Her dalliances with the mob, Meyer Lansky and John F. Kennedy take the reader back to the days of Fidel Castro as a young man and give the story a historical sweep. Further, she has learned the manipulative ways of the Mob and old Joe Kennedy.

**What do you think is most controversial about *The Castro Gene*?**

*The Castro Gene* presents the most explosive and controversial theory of the JFK assassination in forty years. The theory helps explain the many dimensions of the character Oriana. It is so stunning an idea that we have asked reviewers not to reveal that part of the storyline.

**How does *The Castro Gene* address Cuba's future after Castro?**

The *Castro Gene* helps us understand the upcoming battles about Cuba in the streets of Havana and in the U.S. Capitol. Fidel Castro, as the book reveals, has played the role of romantic revolutionary and brutal despot. His bearded face is a twentieth-century icon, along with Gandhi's and Mao's. He is simultaneously loved, hated and feared. The *Castro Gene* shows us the power struggles to come and the bitter disagreements between the Cubans who fled and those who stayed. It also exposes the scars of the Kennedy administration and the miserable failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion.

**You have been active in investing, often appearing on CNBC, and yet you are involved in entertainment, too. How did you get involved in the Tony Award-winning *Jersey Boys*?**

I've been a big fan of theater since I was a kid and saw Kevin Kline on Broadway before anyone had ever heard of him (in a show called *On the Twentieth Century*.) *Jersey Boys* was "incubated" in La Jolla, not far from my home, and my wife is the General Manager of the La Jolla Playhouse, which first produced the work. As the script and actors were coming together, we became so impressed that we decided to get involved at that very early stage as producers. Like *Jersey Boys*, *The Castro Gene* recalls the late 1950s/early 1960s, an era when no-nonsense mobsters wielded power from the back seats of their big-finned Cadillacs.

**Who is going to win the presidential election in 2008, and does it matter for Cuba?**

I'll leave the dice-tossing to my Vegas friends. After the debacle of Iraq, the U.S. will have to be very careful about Cuba. I believe that Cubans want closer ties with the U.S. and to shed Castro's economic policies, which leaves them with paltry monthly rations. And yet the liberation must come from within, not from warships. If the Russians, East Germans and Czechs could peacefully toss off communism, Cubans ought to be able to do it without the U.S. sending even a Coast Guard dinghy.

**What advice would you offer for aspiring writers?**

Most important, do not disdain successful mass market writers. I've been to too many cocktail parties where high-IQ snobs sneer at mega-successful novelists like Stephen King, Dan Brown, John Grisham or Danielle Steele. I have enormous respect for any writer who can hold a reader's interest. How do they do it? Try to figure that out by outlining their plots. Once you think you have identified their methods, then you can branch out into more adventuresome techniques and try to become the next Philip Roth or William Faulkner.