

Summary: Cuba Today

Independence and Revolution

In 1895, José Martí led Cubans in a fight for independence from Spain. With aid from the United States, Cuba gained its freedom. After the war, U.S. Army forces remained in Cuba. Most Cubans wanted to rule themselves. In 1902, the U.S. Army withdrew from Cuba, but the Navy kept a large base there.

For many years, dictators ruled Cuba. In the 1950s, Fidel Castro began a revolutionary movement. He became the head of the Cuban government in 1959. He promised that Cuba would have no more dictators.

Castro took power during the Cold War, when the United States and the Soviet Union struggled for worldwide power. The Soviet Union provided Cuba with weapons. The Soviet Union practiced Communism. Castro soon adopted Communist policies, too. The Cuban government took over many businesses that had been owned by United States companies.

Although many poor people supported Castro, many wealthy Cubans did not. Castro imprisoned those who spoke out against him. Although he was never elected, Castro has ruled as a dictator for more than 40 years. His government controls all newspapers and radio and television stations. Criticism of the government is forbidden.

Living in Cuba

Aid from the Soviet Union helped to keep Cuba's economy strong. Cuba traded its sugar to the Soviet Union in return for supplies. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Cuba has struggled to survive without Soviet aid.

After Castro took power, Cuba's government set up many new schools. Today, all Cuban children can attend free public school, including college. The government also pays for health care. Every small village has a clinic. However, the worsening economy in the 1990s caused health problems, including malnutrition.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

Communism *noun*, an economic and political system in which the government plans and controls a country's economy

malnutrition *noun*, poor health caused by a lack of nourishing food

After You Read

REVIEW What actions did Castro take that went against his 1959 promise? Circle Castro's promise. Then draw a box around the sentences that describe Castro's control of Cuba.

REVIEW In what ways did Cubans benefit under the Communist system? Highlight the sentences that describe the advances that Castro's government has brought to the Cuban people.