



## Timeline

**1492** - Christopher Columbus claims Cuba for Spain.

**1493** - Spanish Pope Alexander VI affirms Spanish claims to territory "discovered" in the Western Ocean.

**1511** - Spanish subjugation of Cuba begins with the establishment of Baracoa and other settlements.

**1513** - Diego de Velazquez, Governor of Cuba, apportions land and indigenous people throughout the island; yet many indigenous either die from European diseases or desert into the mountains, leading to the importation of slaves from neighboring islands and the mainland. First four African slaves are brought to Cuba from Hispaniola.

**1514** - Havana is established.

**1519** - Havana becomes the main port for Spanish ships after Conquistador Hernan Cortes conquers Mexico.

**1520** - 300 slaves arrive in Spain to work in gold mines.

**1526** - Large scale importation of African slaves begins.

**1762** - British forces capture Havana.

**1763** - The Treaty of Paris returns Havana to Spain.

**1867** - Final slave ships arrive in Cuba.

**1895-98** - Cuba fights a second war of independence from Spain as the U.S. declares war on Spain.

**1898** - Spain is defeated and U.S. gains control of Cuba.

**1902** - Cuba gains independence. Tomas Estrada Palma becomes president. Under the Platt Amendment, the U.S. retains the right to intervene in Cuban affairs.

**1906-1909** - Estrada resigns. Cuba is occupied by the U.S. after Jose Miguel Gomez leads a rebellion.

**1909** - Gomez is elected president.

**1925** - Socialist Party founded in Cuba.

**1933** - Sergeant Fulgencio Batista takes over Cuba after a successful coup against Gerardo Machado.

**1940** - Cuba establishes a constitution and elects Batista President as a self-proclaimed "progressive socialist".

**1944** - Batista is voted out of office.

**1948** - The Organization of America States, comprised of 21 states and Cuba, adopts the charter of the OAS.

**1952** - Batista regains power in a *coup d'état*.

**1959** - Castro takes over Havana and ousts Batista. The new Cuban government annexes U.S. properties and redistributes land.

**1960-61** - U.S. imposes an embargo on Cuba and breaks diplomatic relations.

**1961** - U.S. bombs Cuban air force bases. Castro proclaims Cuba a socialist state. U.S. unsuccessfully attempts to start an uprising at the Bay of Pigs.

**1962** - OAS suspends Cuba's membership. U.S. makes travel and financial transactions with Cuba illegal. U.S. sets up a blockade of Cuba and forces the USSR to remove missiles in exchange for a U.S. promise not to invade.

**1972** - Cuba gains full membership in Soviet-run Council for Mutual Economic Assistance.

**1980** - About 125,000 Cubans flee to the U.S.

**1994** - U.S. and Cuba sign an agreement allowing 20,000 Cubans into the U.S. each year in exchange for Cuba curbing the exodus of Cuban refugees.

**1996** - Cuba shoots down two U.S. aircrafts piloted by Cuban exiles resulting in the permanence of the U.S. trade embargo.

**1998** - U.S. allows Cuban Americans to send money to their relatives in Cuba.

**2000** - U.S. Congress allows the sale of food and medicine to Cuba.

**2002** - U.S. flies prisoners into Guantanamo Bay for interrogation. UN Human Rights Commission criticizes Cuba's human rights record. Criticisms of Cuba lead to an amendment of the Cuban

constitution, which makes the socialist system permanent. **2003** - 75 dissidents are given excessive prison sentences and three people attempting to reach the U.S. are executed. Cuba's crackdown leads the EU to cancel an official visit and freeze diplomatic relations.

**2004** - UN Human Rights Commission condemns Cuba's human rights record.

**2005** - Diplomacy is renewed with the EU.

**2008** - Raul Castro, Fidel's brother, is appointed President after Fidel's retirement. Private ownership bans are lifted and plans for salary equality are abandoned.

**2009** - U.S. lifts Bush Administration restrictions on Cuban-Americans sending money and visiting Cuba. OAS votes to lift ban on Cuban membership, but Cuba claims no desire to rejoin OAS. Reporters Without Borders ranks Cuba 170 out of 175 in the Press Freedom Index. At least 22 journalists remain in prison.

**2010** - Cuba ratifies the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. Political prisoner Orlando Zapata Tamayo dies after a hunger strike. After a visit by Archbishop Ortega, wives and mothers of political prisoners are allowed to demonstrate.

**2011** - U.S. relaxes travel restriction to Cuba. Cuba releases remaining political prisoners from 2003 crackdown. Cuba considers allowing Cubans to travel as tourists. Economic reforms promoting entrepreneurship and minimizing bureaucracy are approved. Cubans are allowed to buy and sell property. In anticipation of the Pope's visit, amnesty is granted to 2,500 prisoners.

**2012** - Pope Benedict criticizes U.S. trade embargo and calls for greater rights. Cubans celebrate Good Friday for the first time since 1959. Customs duty, lifted in 2008 after hurricane induced shortages, re-imposed on food imports in order to limit the sale of food aid. Expensive exit permits for those seeking to travel abroad are abolished. Permission to travel is still required for the highly skilled.

**2013** - Raul Castro reelected as president. Despite positive reforms, arbitrary detentions persist, and citizens continue to be denied civil liberties, including freedom of speech and freedom of movement.

**2014** - Cuba and the EU agree to begin talks to restore diplomatic and economic relations. Russian President Putin calls for the cancelation of billions of dollars of Russian aid from Soviet era. Cuba sends medical personnel to fight Ebola in West Africa. Obama and Raul Castro announce normalization of diplomatic relations.

**2015** - Political prisoners continue to be released as a result of 'normalization' of relations between the US and Cuba. Cuba releases 53 political prisoners. Cuba is taken off the U.S. terrorist list. Trade and travel restrictions continue to be relaxed as the Obama Administration seeks to normalize relations. Cuban embassy in the U.S. and U.S. embassy in Cuba are opened.



## Torture Methods

**ARBITRARY DETENTION** continues to be used to harass, intimidate, threaten, and beat Cubans for exercising their rights and as warnings to discourage criticism of the government. For example, on May 4, 2014, 80 members of Damas de Blanco (Ladies in White), formed by mothers, wives, and daughters of political prisoners and outlawed by the government, were detained prior to attending a mass. On July 13, 2014, 129 members were detained prior to attending a ceremony for those who lost their lives in attempts to leave Cuba in 1994.

**PRISONS CONDITIONS** lead to disease and malnutrition where most are overcrowded and unsanitary. Prisoners are forced to meet production quotas and work 12 hour days. Redress for complaints or mistreatment are nonexistent. Solitary confinement, beatings, restrictions of familial visits and denial of medical care are routinely used to punish prisoners who are critical of the government or protest current conditions.

**FORCED INTERROGATIONS** in inhumane and dangerous conditions have occurred in which access is denied to legal counsel and family.

**CELL ISOLATION** subjects political prisoners to solitary confinement in either total darkness or permanent bright lights. In addition, near to complete isolation of detainees from their communities, friends, and families occurs.

**GAVETAS** (drawers) is a punishment used in prisons where prisoners are left kneeling in four by six foot cells.

**INADEQUATE MEDICAL CARE** and routine denial of treatment for serious medical problems as punishment for previous "counter-revolutionary" activities and other dissent results in the exacerbation of existing medical conditions and the creation of new medical conditions.

**BEATINGS** including physical abuse, harassment, and humiliation of dissidents have included twisting arms, hitting on the backs of legs, and throwing people down stairs. The use of wooden bats, stones, and metal rods wrapped in newspaper by "Rapid Response Brigades" (state agents) have been used to coerce and intimidate.

**RESTRICTION OF FOOD AND WATER** has been used as torture by giving prisoners insufficient and contaminated food and water which leads to parasites, malnutrition and other medical conditions.

**SEXUAL HUMILIATION** has included forcing prisoners to commit degrading acts, stripping prisoners of clothing and forcing them to parade around in front of other prisoners.

**THREATS AND HUMILIATION** have been used as a tool of violent verbal coercion by security officials and groups of civilians tied to the state. Threats of assault, rape, and death have been used against dissidents and their family members, including minor children. Dissidents have been told by state agents that they were to face a firing squad in order to solicit confessions.

**REPUDIATION** has occurred with public protests in front of homes of dissidents and often results in physical violence toward the inhabitants. Public protests are often facilitated by the state.

## Current Situation

**Language:** Spanish (official)

**Population:** 11,031,433 (July 2015 est.)

**Religion:** Roman Catholic 85%, Protestant, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jewish, Santeria

**Ethnic Groups:** white 64.1%, mestizo 26.6%, black 9.3% (2012 est.)

**GOVERNMENT CONTROL** has eased, but still is oppressive. Since Fidel Castro passed control to Raul Castro in 2006, Cuba has continued to enforce political conformity using criminal prosecutions, long and short-term detention, harassment, denial of employment and travel restrictions. Raul Castro has kept the legal and institutional structures firmly in place that criminalize and deny the right to dissent or strike and restrict freedom of movement.

**FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION** is severely lacking in Cuba where media is controlled by the government and outside information is strictly limited. While the government has started to expand internet access, the internet cannot be used for activities that might harm Cuban public security, integrity, economy, independence, or national security.

**HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVERS** have been denied the right to check the human rights record of Cuba. Human Rights groups are denied legal status and the government employs harassment, beatings, and imprisonment to punish groups who attempt to document abuses. The government relies on arbitrary detention to harass and intimidate individuals exercising their fundamental rights. The detentions are often used to prevent individuals from participating in anything viewed as critical of the government. No charges justify the detentions, but security officials warn detainees of longer arrests if they continue to participate in activities deemed critical of the government.

**JOURNALISTS** working for independent and alternative news agencies continue to face harassment and intimidation in the form of short-term detention and monitoring by security officers. A small number of independent journalists manage to write articles for foreign websites or maintain independent blogs, but they must publish their work from home computers, save information on memory sticks, and upload articles and posts through illegal internet connections because of the government maintained media monopoly. Yet, recently Cubans have been allowed to buy mobile phones and computers for personal use.

**THE CONVENTION AGAINST TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT** was ratified by Cuba in 1995. However, Cuba has not taken enough steps to assure compliance with it. Furthermore, Cuba has failed to ratify the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

**POLITICAL PRISONERS** have been released, yet local human rights groups confirm that dozens more remain locked in Cuban prisons. Criticism of the government often results in the denial of due process by an impartial court.