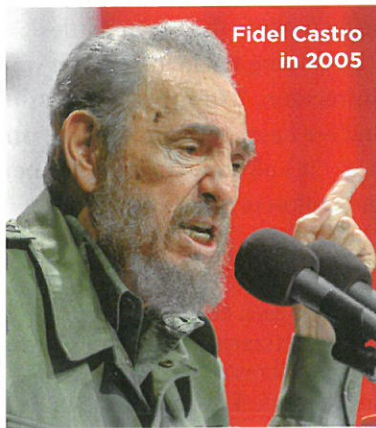


Cuba After Fidel

The death of Fidel Castro, Cuba's former dictator, comes at a time of uncertainty for the Communist country. Will it be a turning point for U.S.-Cuba relations? **BY REBECCA ZISSOU**

WHEN FIDEL CASTRO died this past November at the age of 90, many Cubans were shocked and saddened. Huge crowds gathered in the capital of Havana to pay their respects to the country's former leader, who had ruled the island nation with an iron hand for nearly 50 years.

Just a few hundred miles away in Miami, Florida, the reaction was very different. Thousands of Cuban-Americans—including many who had fled Cuba to escape Castro's rule—took to the streets in celebration, waving Cuban flags and beating drums. To them, Castro was a brutal dictator who had stolen their families' land, jailed political opponents, and wrecked Cuba's economy.



Castro's death "represents the end of something awful that happened to us," says Isabel De Lara. She was 12 years old in 1961 when her parents sent her to the United States, fearful of what was to come after Castro took control of Cuba. "It's because of him that we lost our opportunity to have a life in our country."

Although Castro was no longer Cuba's leader—he officially transferred power to his younger brother Raúl in 2008—he remained influential behind the scenes. Now, many people are hopeful that his influence will fade and that a new era will begin in Cuba.

Indeed, Fidel Castro's death comes during a time of historic change for the island nation. In 2015, the →

DERMOT TATLOW/PANOS (FIDEL CASTRO); CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES (WOMAN CRYING); RHONA WISE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES (CUBAN-AMERICANS CELEBRATING)



**MANY CUBANS
WERE DEVASTATED
BY THE DEATH
OF FIDEL CASTRO ...**

**... WHILE THOUSANDS
OF CUBAN-AMERICANS
IN MIAMI CELEBRATED.**

TIMELINE: The U.S. & Cuba



1959

REVOLUTION

Fidel Castro and his rebel group overthrow Cuba's dictatorship. Soon, he begins to seize U.S. businesses on the island without compensation.

1960

EMBARGO

U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower imposes an economic embargo on Cuba. The following year, he officially cuts off diplomatic relations.

1961

BAY OF PIGS

The U.S. supports an invasion by Cuban exiles that fails to overthrow Castro. He aligns Cuba with the Communist Soviet Union and begins cracking down on political opponents.

1962

MISSILE CRISIS

U.S. President John F. Kennedy learns that Soviet missiles are being installed in Cuba, bringing the U.S. and the Soviet Union to the brink of nuclear war. After 13 tense days, the missiles are removed.

U.S. and Cuba formally re-established **diplomatic** relations after more than 50 years of hostility. (The U.S. cut off all ties with Cuba in the 1960s because of Castro's undemocratic policies. It also imposed an economic **embargo**, forbidding both trade and most travel between the two countries.)

In the past two years, however, Presidents Barack Obama and Raúl Castro have taken steps to improve relations. They've reopened embassies in each other's capitals and relaxed trade and travel restrictions.

But whether the thaw between the U.S. and Cuba will continue is uncertain. Donald Trump, who will become U.S. president on January 20, has pledged to undo many of Obama's policy changes. He says the Cuban government doesn't deserve to have closer ties with the U.S. until Cubans are granted more rights.

It's also unclear whether Raúl—who spent much of his life in his brother's shadow—will steer Cuba in a different direction. Castro's death may give Raúl the independence to pursue further economic and political reforms.

But many Cuban-Americans, including Senator Marco Rubio of Florida, don't expect the regime Castro built to change anytime soon. "Sadly, Fidel Castro's death does not mean freedom for the Cuban people or justice for the democratic activists, religious leaders, and political opponents he and his brother have jailed and persecuted," says Rubio, the son of Cuban immigrants. "The dictator has died, but the dictatorship has not."

Still, the next few years are sure to be a time of

transition. Raúl, now 85, has said he will step down from the presidency in 2018. His vice president is expected to take over. But how, or if, a new leader will improve conditions for the Cuban people—and relations with the U.S.—remains to be seen.

Decades of Hostility

The complicated relationship between the U.S. and Cuba goes back more than a century. In 1898, the U.S. gained control over the island after defeating Spain in the Spanish-American War. Four years later, Washington helped Cuba form its first government. But for decades after that, the U.S. continued to intervene in Cuba's affairs, which fueled resentment among many Cubans.

In 1959, the relationship between the two countries began to deteriorate after Fidel Castro led a revolution that overthrew Cuba's dictatorship. (See "Timeline: The U.S. & Cuba," above.) At the time,

many Cubans hailed Castro as a liberator and a champion of the working class.

Shortly after seizing power, however, Castro formed an alliance with the Soviet Union, America's Cold War rival, and set up a Communist government. (Under Communism, the government owns all land and businesses, and individual freedom is severely limited.)

Soon, Castro began to crack down on free speech by jailing or executing political opponents. He also confiscated thousands of acres of privately owned property and U.S. businesses worth millions of dollars.

Fidel's death brings new uncertainty to U.S.-Cuba relations.



1980 MARIEL BOATLIFT

Unrest prompts Castro to allow people to leave from Cuba's port of Mariel. About 125,000 Cubans head to Florida.



2008 A NEW PRESIDENT

Fidel officially hands power to his brother Raúl, who begins to loosen restrictions on the economy and reduce tensions with the U.S.



2015 RESTORING TIES

Presidents Raúl Castro and Barack Obama re-establish diplomatic relations for the first time in more than 50 years.

2016 A TURNING POINT?

Fidel Castro passes away in November. His death—and the election of Donald Trump—brings new uncertainty over the fate of U.S.-Cuba relations.

In response, the U.S. cut off diplomatic ties with Cuba and imposed the embargo, which remains partially in effect today. Massive aid from the Soviet Union and other Communist countries helped keep Cuba afloat for decades after that. But when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, so did Cuba's economy.

Cuba Under the Castros

Today, shortages of food and other essentials are common in Cuba. Although education and health care are free, most Cubans struggle to get by on government salaries that average about \$20 a month. They often depend on money sent by relatives living overseas, most in the U.S. Many things that Americans take for granted, including internet access, microwaves, and air-conditioning, are luxuries in Cuba. Unable to afford new cars, many Cubans drive old American models from the 1950s. And anyone who speaks out against the government can be beaten or arrested.

Fed up with the lack of freedom and economic opportunities, thousands of Cubans risk their lives to escape to the U.S. every year. Many cross the Straits of Florida in rickety boats made from old car parts, inner tubes, or Styrofoam. (See map, p. 18.) Hundreds of Cubans have died attempting the dangerous 94-mile journey.

But in the past few years, there have been small glimmers of hope. Since taking power in 2008, Raúl Castro has loosened restrictions on the economy and tried to reduce tensions with the U.S. Cubans can now own businesses and buy cell phones and computers—if they're among the few who can afford such things.

More Travel and Trade

Obama's policy shifts have started to provide additional relief for some Cubans. In the past few years, he's chipped away at the embargo, making it easier for people to send money and goods to relatives on the island. (While the president can re-establish relations with Cuba, only Congress can completely end the embargo.)

In 2015, more than 160,000 Americans took advantage of relaxed travel rules to visit Cuba, up 77 percent from 2014. Cuban officials estimate that as many as 1.5 million Americans would visit the island every year if all restrictions were lifted, injecting \$2 billion into the island's struggling economy.

Obama has also eased some business restrictions, and U.S. companies have started to operate in Cuba. Carnival's cruise ships began sailing from Miami to Havana last spring. JetBlue and other airlines began offering regular flights to the island last year. And Netflix launched streaming services there in 2015.

A New Phase?

Now, Fidel Castro's death—and Trump's victory in November—has ushered in a new era of uncertainty for Cuba. Last fall, Trump pledged to reverse Obama's policies "unless the Castro regime meets our demands," including releasing political prisoners and restoring religious and political freedoms.

Robert L. Muse, a lawyer in Washington, D.C., who specializes in U.S.-Cuba trade law, says Trump can undo Obama's efforts. But some changes may be hard to roll back: U.S. companies have already spent billions →

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of dollars to set up shop in Cuba. Trump would likely face opposition if he were to stop them from doing business there.

In taking a stronger stance against Cuba, Trump is siding with the influential Cuban-American community in South Florida that helped him win the state—and the presidency—in November. Many Cuban-Americans oppose lifting the U.S. embargo. They believe that any money that goes into the island from American tourists or businesses benefits the regime more than ordinary Cubans. Some U.S. lawmakers also oppose ending the embargo, and the Republican-controlled Congress is unlikely to do so anytime soon.

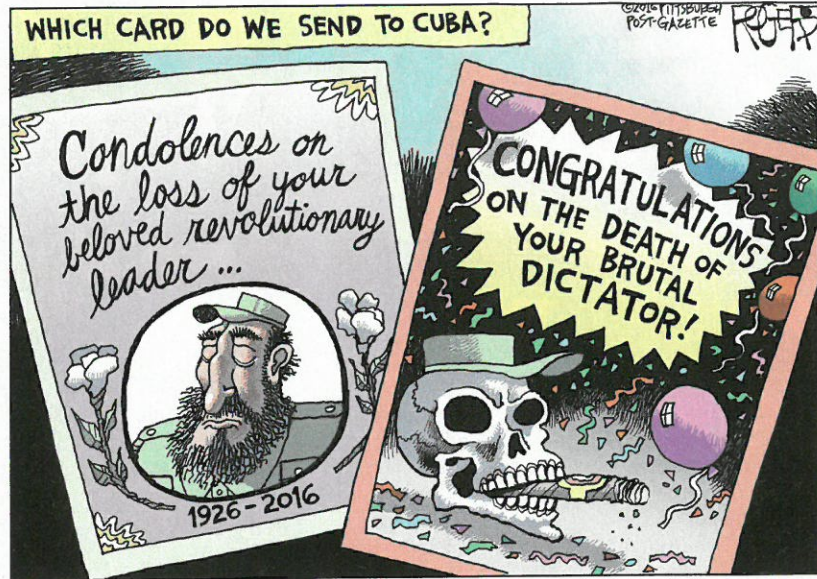
While it remains to be seen how leaders in the U.S. and Cuba will proceed, many people in both countries say they're excited for what lies ahead. Enrique López Oliva, a retired historian in Cuba, sees Castro's death as a turning point for the nation.

"It's the end of one era and the beginning of another," he said. "The death itself, we were waiting for

that to happen at any moment. But now it feels like a new phase is about to begin." ♦

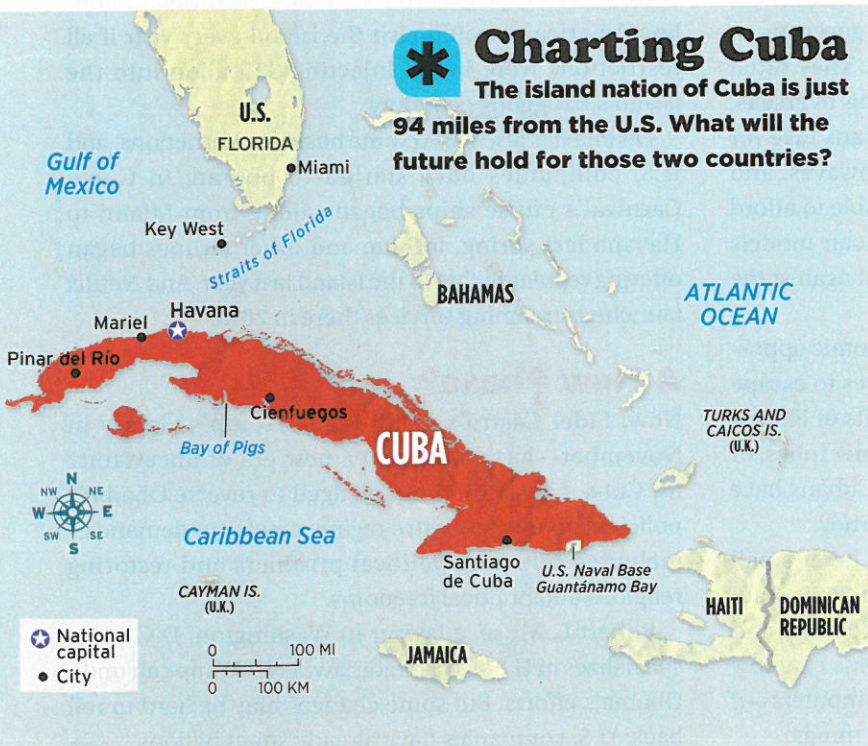
With reporting by *The New York Times*

CORE QUESTION What are some pros and cons of improving U.S. relations with Cuba?



Many Cubans see Fidel Castro as a hero and a champion of the working class; others view him as a brutal dictator who took away people's freedoms.

*** Charting Cuba**
The island nation of Cuba is just 94 miles from the U.S. What will the future hold for those two countries?



Map Skills

1. What is the capital of Cuba?
2. That city is about how many miles from Miami?
3. In which direction would you travel to get from Cuba to Haiti?
4. What is the westernmost city on this map?
5. Which waterway separates Florida and Cuba?
6. Which body of water is located off Cuba's southern shore?
7. About how many miles separate Key West and the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay?
8. The Cayman Islands are located in which body of water?
9. Turks and Caicos is governed by which country?
10. Which major body of water is north of Haiti and east of Miami?

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