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History of Cuba for Kids: From Island Roots to Today

Cuba is a beautiful island in the Caribbean Sea with a long, complicated history.

In this book, you'll learn how Cuba changed over time—from its first peoples, to Spanish rule, to independence, to life under a communist government today.

UNITED
STATES



MEXICO

Cuba is the largest island in the Caribbean.

It sits just south of the United States and close to Mexico and other islands.

Warm weather, sunny beaches, and bright cities make it look like paradise—but history shows life there has not always been easy.



Long before any Europeans arrived, Indigenous peoples like the Taíno and Guanahatabey lived in Cuba.

They fished, farmed, and built small villages.

They respected nature and used the land carefully, taking only what they needed.



These early Cubans grew crops like cassava and maize, paddled canoes along rivers, and made pottery and tools.

They told stories, played music, and raised families on the island for hundreds of years without outside rule.



In 1492, explorer Christopher Columbus reached Cuba while sailing for Spain.

Soon more Spanish ships followed.

At first, some Indigenous people welcomed them, but the Spanish wanted land, gold, and power, not just friendship.



Spain claimed Cuba as its colony.

Spanish leaders took control of the land and forced many Indigenous people to work for them.

New diseases brought by Europeans killed large numbers of the original inhabitants, and their way of life was nearly destroyed.





Over time, Cuba's people became a mix of Indigenous, African, and European roots.

They created rich music, food, and traditions.

But society was unfair: a small group of wealthy families and Spanish-born colonists had most of the power and money.



By the 1800s, many Cubans were tired of Spanish control and slavery.

Some leaders began to talk about freedom and independence for all Cubans, no matter their race.

They wanted Cuba to belong to its own people, not to a faraway king.



In 1868, Cuban leaders like Carlos Manuel de Céspedes started the Ten Years' War against Spain.

They fought for independence and the end of slavery.

The war was long and bloody, and although slavery was finally abolished, Cuba still was not free.



A writer and leader named José Martí helped organize a new fight for independence in the 1890s.

He believed Cuba should be free from Spain and also from control by any other powerful country.

Martí died in battle, but he is remembered as a hero.

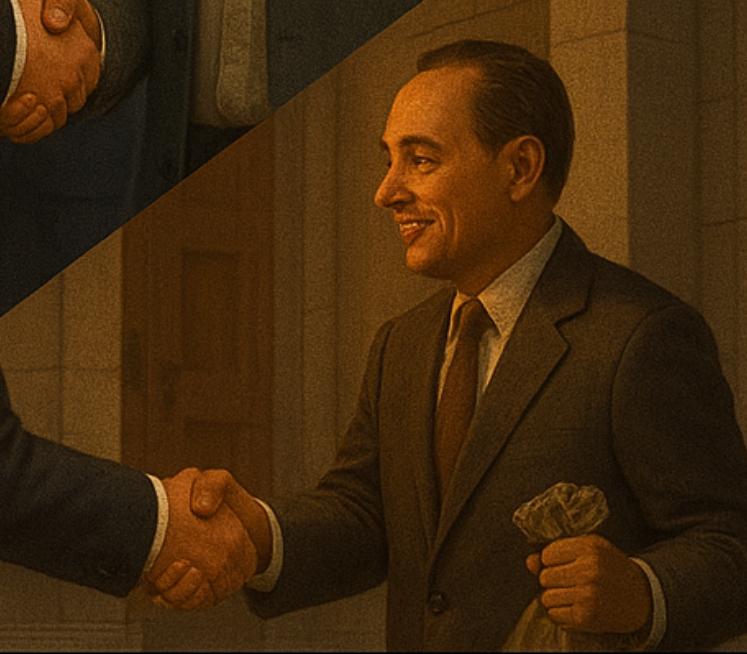


In 1898, the United States joined Cuba's war against Spain.

Spain lost the war and gave up control of Cuba.

However, the U.S.

government kept strong influence over the island for years, limiting Cuba's full independence.



In 1902, Cuba became a republic with its own flag and president.

Havana grew with tall buildings, busy streets, and a lively nightlife.

Some Cubans became wealthy, and foreign companies invested money in sugar, tobacco, and tourism.



Behind the bright lights, many problems remained.

In the countryside, farmers were poor and often worked land they did not own.

Corruption—leaders using power for themselves—was common in politics.

Some governments ignored the needs of ordinary people.



Throughout the early 1900s, Cuba had unstable governments, coups, and strongmen.

In the 1950s, Fulgencio Batista ruled as a dictator.

He promised order but allowed corruption and harsh policing.

Many Cubans wanted change and felt they had no real voice.



Around the world, some leaders followed communism, an idea where the government owns most property and plans the economy.

In communist systems, there is usually only one political party.

Supporters say it can make things equal, but it often takes away important freedoms, like free elections and free speech.



BICERÍA

A group of rebels led by Fidel Castro fought against Batista.

After years of fighting, Batista fled in 1959, and the rebels took power.

Many people celebrated at first, hoping this new government would bring fairness and end corruption.



Soon after taking power, Castro and his allies turned Cuba into a communist state.

The government took over businesses, banks, and large farms.

There would be only one legal party: the Communist Party of Cuba.

People could no longer choose between different parties in elections.



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The government opened more schools and sent doctors to rural areas.

Literacy rates rose, and basic health care reached many poor families.

But at the same time, the state controlled newspapers, TV, and radio.

Speaking against the government could lead to punishment.

Important freedoms were limited.



Food, clothing, and many goods were rationed.

Families used ration books to get limited amounts of rice, beans, and other basics.

Stores often had long lines and empty shelves.

People had jobs, but salaries were low, and it was hard to improve their lives through their own effort or business.



Neighborhood groups called Committees for the Defense of the Revolution watched over communities.

They reported suspicious behavior to the government.

Many people felt nervous about speaking openly, even at home, because they feared someone might tell on them.



**UNITED
STATES**

CUBA



Cuba formed a close partnership with the Soviet Union, another communist country.

In 1962, the world came close to nuclear war when Soviet missiles were placed in Cuba.

After this crisis, the United States kept a trade embargo, making it harder for Cuba to buy and sell goods with its giant neighbor.



When the Soviet Union collapsed around 1991, Cuba lost a major source of money, oil, and support.

The 1990s became known as the Special Period.

There were frequent blackouts, very little fuel, and serious food shortages.

Many Cubans rode bicycles instead of cars and struggled to find enough to eat.



During hard times, some Cubans protested for better conditions and more freedom.

In 1994, people gathered along the Malecón in Havana in a protest called the Maleconazo.

The government quickly stopped the protest, and political control stayed tight.



Fidel Castro ruled for many decades, then handed power to his brother Raúl, and later to Miguel Díaz-Canel.

The Communist Party still holds most power, and other political parties are not allowed to compete in free elections.

Many Cubans continue to demand more rights and better living conditions.



Today, Cuba has strengths and struggles.

Many Cubans are well educated, and Cuban doctors work in different countries.

At the same time, shortages of food, medicine, and basic goods are common.

Internet access and free expression are still limited, and people can be punished for criticizing the government.

CUBAN BAKERY



Despite difficulties, Cuban culture shines.

Styles like son, salsa, and rumba fill streets with music.

People play baseball, box, and dance at family parties.

Artists, writers, and musicians express pride in their island and its mixed heritage, even when they have to be careful about what they say.



Millions of Cubans and their children live outside the island, especially in places like Miami, Florida.

They bring Cuban food, music, and traditions to their new homes.

Many send money back to family in Cuba and hope one day to see more freedom and opportunity there.

Cuba's story teaches us how powerful ideas and governments can change people's lives—for better or worse.

It shows what happens when one group holds too much power and when people cannot speak or vote freely.

It also shows how strong people can be, even in hard times.

