

The Impact of the Cuban Revolution

Directions → Read page 103 and 104 on the Cuban Revolution and answer the questions below. This questions DO NOT correspond to the questions that are in the GRGT Prep Book.

1. Who was the leader of Cuba before the Cuban Revolution?
2. What is a dictator? Which type of government is this most like? Why?
3. Who took over as dictator of Cuba after the Cuban Revolution?
4. What type of government was created after the Cuban Revolution? How did this affect Cuban citizens?
5. How did the Americans react to Cuba taking over property owned by Americans?
6. Explain the event that almost caused a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union? (How was Cuba involved)
7. How did the United States react to this event?

The Cuban Embargo

When Fidel Castro took over in 1959, he established Communism in Cuba. He took control of all business, industry, land, and housing, and the Cuban government employed all of Cuba's workers. Cubans that disagreed with the changes were forced to flee in fear of their lives. The United States government acted to show its disapproval when it began an embargo in 1961, refusing to trade with Cuba.

Since that time, many people and countries have spoken out against the U.S. embargo, saying it is not Castro or the government that suffers from it, but the Cuban people themselves. Yet this is not the case. For most of Castro's rule Cuba has traded with the Soviet Union and other communist states. The country has established trade relations with many other nations such as Canada, Japan, and Mexico. The fact that the Cuban people have suffered is not a result of the embargo, but of Castro's government policies.

The average income of Cubans in 1959 was \$2000 (US) per year. This figure has dropped to around \$120 (US) per year. Cuban farms, businesses, and industries make money, but the government pays its workers little. In cases where foreign companies employ Cuban workers, wages are paid to the Cuban government. For example, Sherritt International, a Canadian company, pays the Cuban government an average of \$9500 per year per worker. The Cuban government, in turn, pays its workers in Cuban pesos the equivalent of about \$10 per month.

Some people express concern over the fact that the Cuban people experience food shortages, but again the U.S. embargo is not to blame. Cuba has rich farmland that can grow a variety of fruits, vegetables, coffee, and sugar. Pre-Castro statistics show that Cuba produced almost a head of livestock per person per year and more than enough fish for the population. The problem does not lie in a lack of ability to feed the people. The problem lies with Communism itself.

Communist Cuba faces the same problems as those that caused the Soviet Union to collapse. Since the government owns and controls most of the economy and employs most of the workers there is no competition. The lack of competition means there is no reason to work harder, to do a better job, to improve technology, or to modernize. The lack of competition leads to outdated methods of production and poor quality goods and services.

The U.S. embargo has actually had little effect on the economy of Cuba. It was put into place more on moral grounds than on economic ones. Cuba can and does import food, medicines, and other products from many countries. It also sells its cigars, rum, fruits, vegetables, minerals, seafood, and other products to other nations. If the U.S. lifted the embargo, Cubans might have a greater variety of goods, but such an action could do more harm than good.

Castro's government makes no secret of its dislike of America and its ideas. If U.S. companies and tourists were to enter Cuba, the government would need to increase its control over the people to prevent them from being exposed to the American ways, which would be considered dangerous. The people could be worse off than ever. Cuban law does not allow foreign-owned businesses. Any foreign companies in Cuba are in partnership with the government. As in the case of Sherritt International, the Cuban people do not benefit from these partnerships.

Trade with Cuba could have negative effects on the economies of other countries in the Caribbean. United States dollars are very important to these countries, and Cuba could rob these countries needed business and tourism. If the Cuban government were to allow Cuban tourists to visit the United States in large numbers, it is likely that many would stay as illegal immigrants.

In the end, perhaps the most important reason for the United States embargo is to make a point. The U.S. believes in democracy; Cuba is a communist government. The U.S. believes citizens should have rights and freedoms such as freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Cuba's government does not allow such freedoms and in fact, has been known to torture and even kill its own people. The United States believes in free ownership of businesses and competition. Communism favors state ownership and control.

Those that are against the embargo point out that in fact it has not worked. They say that the embargo was put in place to encourage the Cuban people to overthrow Castro, and since it has not worked, it should be lifted. Lifting the embargo now, after all these years, would be a huge victory for Castro. He would see it as a defeat of the United States and its policies. He would see it as the U.S. giving in and accepting him and his communist government. Since the United States still, after all these years, does not accept Castro or Communism, it should not consider lifting the embargo until Cuba's people are freed from this controlling government and democratic elections are held.

After you and your partner have read the article, you will need to create a poster that lists all the arguments the writer has given about the embargo the United States placed on Cuba. Please make this poster neat and organized. Your peers will be reading these posters to view the opposing argument.

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Since that time, many people and countries have spoken out against the U.S. embargo. The United Nations has held a number of votes on the issue and only three countries, the U.S., Israel, and Uzbekistan, favor the embargo. In 1997, 143 countries voted against it. Despite the fact that ending the embargo would bring the U.S. into agreement with most world nations on this issue, America continues to enforce the trade ban on Cuba and its people.

The United States supports the embargo with arguments that Cuba is a communist country that must allow its people more freedom, particularly freedom from government torture and other human rights abuses. However, this is a weak argument since the U.S. has traded with other communist countries like China and Vietnam. China even has "most favored nation" trading status, meaning that it is charged the lowest level of tariffs. China also has a terrible record on human rights.

Some people that favor the embargo argue that it is not directed at the Cuban people, but at the government of the country. Yet the government has not suffered its consequences. The intent of the embargo was to encourage the Cuban people to rise up and overthrow Castro, but this has not happened. Instead, the Cuban people have been harmed, living with shortages of fuel, medicines, food, and other needed products. The reality is that embargoes alone have never worked to bring democracy to nations, and Cuba is no exception.

Castro does not pose a threat to the United States. The Cold War is over and America and the world have moved on. Russia, the former Soviet Union that was once the arch-enemy of America and the free world, is now a valued trading partner and cooperates with the U.S. in foreign affairs. It was certainly understandable for the United States to fear Cuba when it held Soviet nuclear missiles that could reach New York and other cities on the Eastern seaboard in 15 minutes or less, but Cuba has no missiles. It is simply one more developing Caribbean nation in desperate need of economic aid.

An embargo can be an effective tool against our enemies in a time of war, but the United States is not at war with Cuba, or at least Cuba is not at war with the United States. Cuba has not attacked the United States. It is certainly no secret that Fidel Castro dislikes America, but the United States has invaded Cuba, tried to assassinate Castro, and maintained the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base on Cuban shores. Certainly the United States would not allow another country to have a military base on American soil.

So why has America tolerated Communism in China and Vietnam, but not in Cuba? Why does the United States continue an embargo against Cuba when it has forgiven other nations for far more serious offenses? Some might argue that the embargo is in place for moral reasons. Those that favor the embargo say it must continue until Cuba gives its people more freedom and allows democratic elections and free ownership of businesses. China does not allow democracy and freedom, and the United States still trades with them. There must be another answer.

In fact there are two reasons why the United States maintains the embargo against Cuba. The first is that the embargo has been in place for a long time and removing it would mean admitting that, in some way, America has been wrong. The embargo did not have its intended effect and has, instead, turned world opinion against the U.S. Removing it now would require the U.S. government to face these facts.

The other reason to keep the embargo in place is that it pleases the Cuban-American economy. Many Cubans came to the United States in the 1950's after Castro had seized their businesses and property. They came because they feared for their lives, and they were right. Many had family and friends who stayed and were imprisoned, tortured, or killed. The Cuban-Americans strongly dislike Castro and will do whatever they can to rid their homeland of him and Communism. They support political candidates who speak out against anyone who shows sympathy to his government. Government officials want to please these people.

While these are two reasons why the United States embargo has remained, there are many reasons why it should be removed. Perhaps the best reason is that the embargo actually helps Fidel Castro, who spends so much of his time and energy talking about the evil United States and how it has harmed his people. If the embargo were lifted, the Cuban people would see that their suffering has not been caused by America and its evil embargo, but by Fidel Castro and his communist government.

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Cuban Embargo

Definition of Embargo →

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