

UNDERSTANDING CUBA TODAY



Cuba, once known as the “Jewel of the Caribbean” is located 90 miles south of Miami, Florida, where the Caribbean Ocean, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Atlantic Ocean meet. A little over 42,000 sq miles in length, it is home to more than 11 million people.

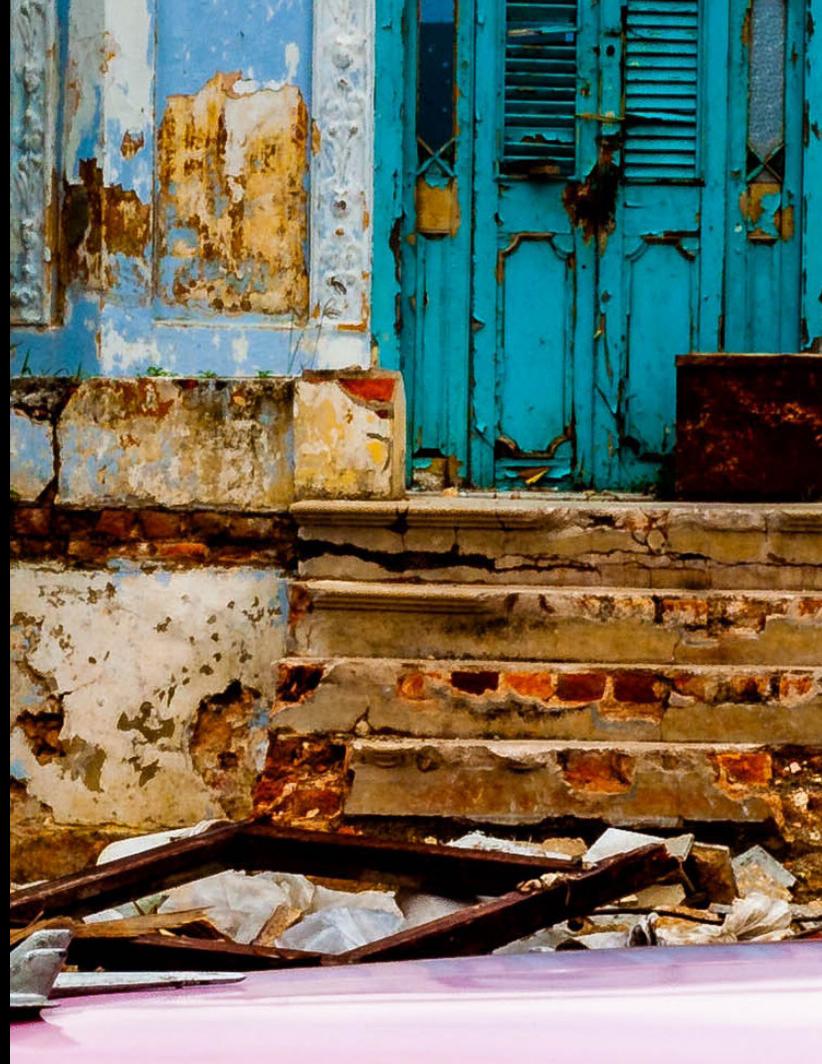




IMAGE: NATE COHEN / PEXELS



PRE-CASTRO REVOLUTION

Cuba's history is varied and rich. Originally inhabited by the Ciboney Taino people, the island became a colony of Spain during the 15th century after Christopher Columbus landed there in October of 1492. Serving as a launching point for the Spanish Conquistadors, like Hernando de Soto, Cuba developed over the next two centuries as a rich source of sugar cane for the Spanish Empire.

Cuba's long history of revolution began in 1868, when Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, a sugar planter, began the fight for independence from Spain. Others joined Céspedes in fighting for Cuban independence in the decades that followed including José Martí, who was killed in battle on May 19, 1895. A poet and artist, Martí is now immortalized as a national hero and symbol of Cuban independence.

After years of internal struggle and amidst rising tensions between the United States and Spain, Cuba became embroiled in The Spanish-American War in 1898. America, led by legendary figures such as Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders, invaded Cuba to join in the fight with the indigenous revolutionaries against Spanish rule. After signing the Treaty of Paris in 1898, America gained control of Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam. Cuba became a protectorate of the U.S. until it gained its independence in 1902. Under the Platt Agreement, the U.S. leased the naval base in Guantanamo Bay that remains under U.S. control today.

Through the next five decades, Cuba underwent a tumultuous period of leadership. Power grabs were continual and political corruption reigned. Savvy businessmen in America and Latin America invested heavily in the Cuban rum and tobacco industries, and cities like Havana flourished. However, much of the country was economically depressed and ripe for revolution once again.



IMAGE: LEONIE FAHJEN / PEXELS



IMAGE: SKY UK / NEWS

POST-CASTRO REVOLUTION

In 1958, Fidel Castro and a small group of supporters, including revolutionary Che Guevara, landed their boat, *Granma*, in the eastern part of the island and led a revolt against the repressive Batista government. Gaining supporters along the way, Castro and his forces gained control of Cuba in 1959. Castro's legalization of the Communist Party, his brutal attack against resistance efforts, the nationalization of industry, and the seizure of U.S. owned land and possessions led to sanctions and trade embargo against Cuba by the U.S. government. Political tensions have remained between the U.S. and Cuba since.

Cuba formed an economic and military alliance with Russia in 1960 that lasted until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Known as the Special Period, Cuba's economy underwent severe depression with massive food and fuel shortages. Since then, Cuba has sought economic alliances with Venezuela, Bolivia and China. Fidel Castro stepped down as President in 2008. He died in 2016. His brother, Raul, was declared President in 2008 and remained in that position until 2016 when he became first Secretary of the Communist Party retiring in April of 2021. The Communist party still remains in power today in Cuba under the leadership of President and First Secretary of the Communist Party, Miguel Diaz Canel.



IMAGE: MEHMET TURGUT KIRKGOZ / PEXELS



IMAGE: MART PRODUCTION / PEXELS

RELIGION IN CUBA

Cuba is officially a secular state due to Castro's installation of the Marxist-Lenin ideology. Religion was completely eliminated from society, education, and the government, being replaced by a belief that all human activity is a result of human actions void of the existence or influence of supernatural beings.

As such, Cuba's Roman Catholic roots, stretching all the way back to Spanish colonization, were stamped out. Religious holidays were made illegal and the state was presented as the sole provider for the people. Religious restrictions were eased in the 1980s, and Castro legalized the observance of Christmas Day in 1998.

In the 1990s, home churches began to flourish, as no official church building constructed after 1958 may exist. The resurgence of Christianity has been steady, but other religions, such as Judaism and Islam have increased as well. Santería, a cult with its origins in Africa, also developed in Cuba and has spread throughout Latin America and The United States. Today, an estimated 44% of Cubans are religious, but only 34% have heard the Gospel.



IMAGE: DANIEL SESSLER / PEXELS



COVID-19 AND CUBA

Even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Cuba had a poverty issue. Cuba's consistently strained economy and poor infrastructure meant that wages and access to quality food continued to fall as the cost of basic utilities continued to increase.

As the global pandemic continued, the government made several significant changes to Cuba's economic systems. First, they eliminated Cuba's strongest currency, the CUC. Second, the minimum wage was increased 500%. Finally, a new digital currency was introduced, the MLC, in order to control all foreign currency. These measures have left only the severely under-valued Cuban pesos readily accessible to the people. As a result, the inflation rate grew to over 85%, and the population was forced to use the "Black Market" in order to survive.

Therefore, when COVID-19 stopped tourism and halted the importation of food, of which Cuba is heavily dependent, conditions became much worse. Adding to the already strained economy and food shortages, military enforced lockdowns prevented many Cubans from leaving their homes, making it impossible to retrieve or receive food. As only 1% of Cuban households have internet access, online ordering is not a possibility.

As a response to the pandemic, vaccinations have allowed Cuba to reopen for tourism as of November of 2021; however, the extreme inflation rates still make access to quality food difficult for most Cubans.



IMAGE: MEHMET TURGUT KIRKGOZ / PEXELS



IMAGE: DEIBY TUM TUM / PEXELS

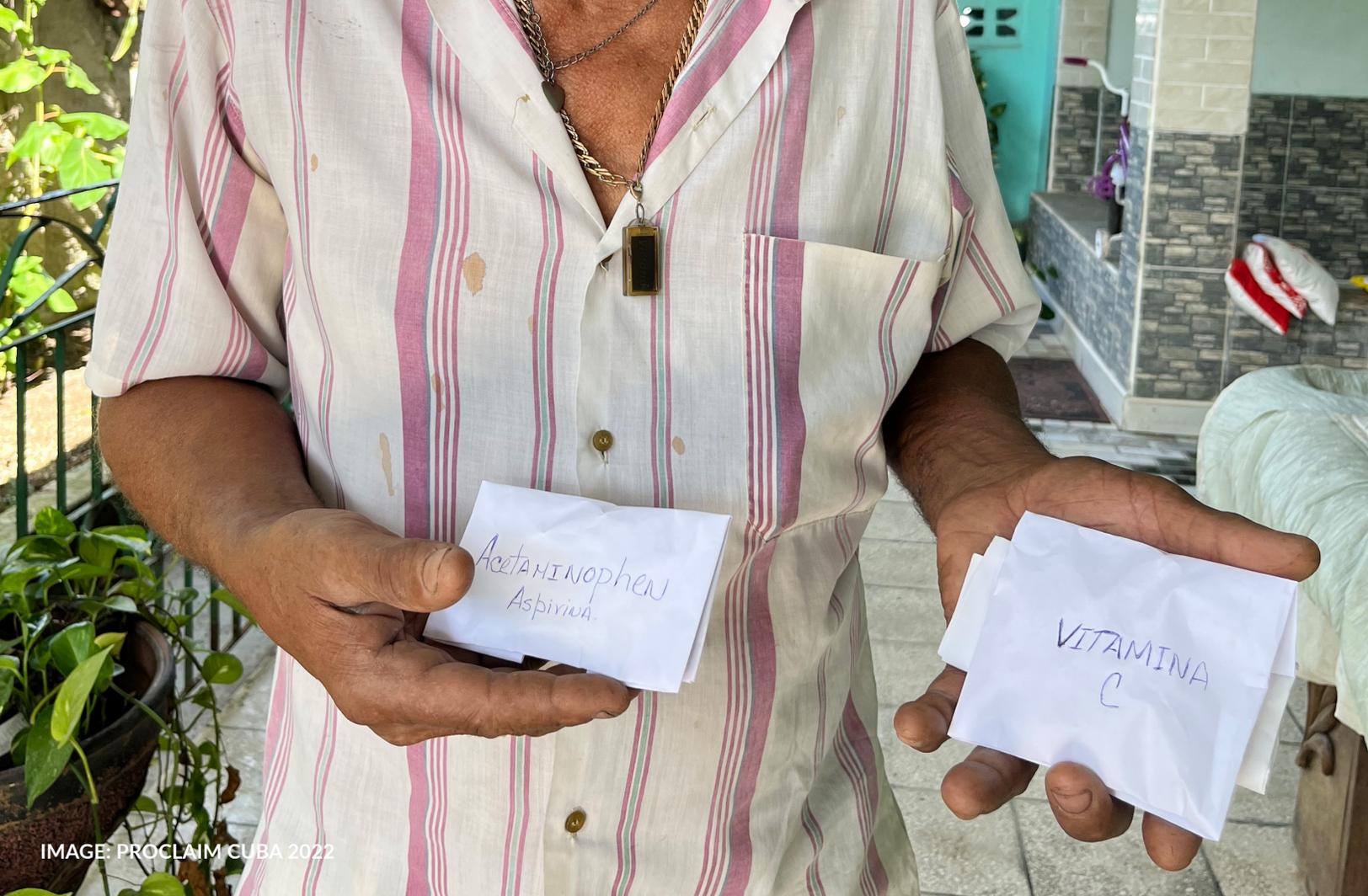
RECENT CIVIL PROTESTS IN CUBA

Stemming from the oppressive conditions experienced by Cubans during the COVID-19 pandemic, civil unrest brewed during the summer of 2021. The lack of food, medicines, and the government's protracted timeline for developing a COVID-19 vaccine prompted millions of Cubans to take to the streets in an organic, peaceful protest movement on July 11, 2021. Social networks posted pictures of protesters shouting slogans like, "Down with Communism" and "We are not afraid". Observers noted that open opposition to the government had not been experienced in these numbers since 1994.

Blaming the U.S. embargo against Cuba for the extreme shortages, Cuban president, Miguel Diaz-Canel, urged those sympathetic to the government to counter-protest. The government also reacted swiftly by restricting internet access on the island. Military troops took to the streets and hundreds were arrested and detained. A large portion of the protesters were young students and many have remained in custody without access to legal defense. Some have already been sentenced for their participation in the July protests, receiving prison sentences of up to 20 years.



IMAGE: RANDDY FUNDORA / PEXELS



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THE WORK OF PROCLAIM CUBA

Under the Communist system, no non-profit organizations can exist in Cuba, and all for-profit organizations are government controlled. This places faith-based organizations, like Proclaim Cuba, in a unique position to be able to provide support, both in providing resources and programs to the Cuban people without being regulated by the government. For over 30 years, Proclaim Cuba has been impacting thousands of lives with the Gospel, bringing hope to the hopeless through multiple initiatives.



IMAGE: PROCLAIM CUBA 2022



To engage deeper with the work of Proclaim Cuba, visit our website, subscribe to our newsletter, and follow us on social media by scanning the QR code below.





www.ProclaimCuba.org