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# "El Bloqueo" and the Initial Changes to Expect in Cuba Following its Repeal

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EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

"El Bloqueo" and the Initial Changes  
to Expect in Cuba Following its Repeal

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## "El Bloqueo" and the Initial Changes to Expect in Cuba Following its Repeal

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Abstract description: This document seeks the answer to the question, "What will happen when the Embargo in place against Cuba by the U. S. government is lifted?" This question undoubtedly came to the front of many Americans' minds when President Obama announced on December 17,2014 that the United States and Cuba would begin diplomatic relations by opening embassies in the capital city of one another's state. It uses various sources to define the Cuban Embargo and the events that led to its manifestation, the current state of affairs with Cuba (roughly 2 years after the announcement). While the United States seeks a more democratic form of government for the Cuban people, it may come over a longer period of time. This document looks for the most important immediate impact of the removal of the embargo.

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## **Introduction**

Without doubt, Cuba is a nation full of people in extreme poverty. There are several possible causes for this, some people would say that this is a result of a failed government, claiming that it is an example of the natural progression of communism. Socialism was extremely popular with the citizens of Cuba during the revolution but over time, greed and the general infeasibility of communism in practice led to its demise. Another possible cause is "El Bloqueo" (the Spanish name the Cubans give to the United States' embargo against Cuba). Most of us already know a bit about this embargo, it is well known that U. S. citizens are banned officially from travelling to the island except with special permission from the government. Another barrier from the embargo is on Cuban cigars, according to many Cubans are the best makers of cigars but until recently you were not allowed to bring them to the U. S. and you still won't find them in stores.

In 2014 U.S. President, Barack Obama, announced that we would reopen diplomatic relations with Cuba after isolating them for the last 50 or so years.

Upon hearing this news, many Americans began asking themselves what this meant for our future with our neighbor 90 miles to the south. We are at the beginning of a new era of international relations that will represent in part the legacy of President Obama and a huge development in the way the United States views and interacts with communism. Through case studies and carefully guided prediction, we can create a snapshot of what the future may look like for Cuba from our perspective today in 2016.

### **Historical Context to Define "Embargo"**

In the midst of the Cold War, a revolt was brewing just 90 miles off the coast of Florida. Fulgencio Batista, the president of the Cuba led a military coup in 1952 so that he may become a dictator (with the support of the U. S. government). Immediately after assuming authoritarian control of the state Batista called off the upcoming elections. The sudden cancellation came as a surprise to a young Fidel Castro, who had taken a recent interest in politics and reforming Cuban government to better serve the needs of the people he thought were supposed to be protected by it. In 1953, Castro joined "the Movement" in an attempt to oust Batista. That same year, "the Movement" hatched a plan to oust the Batista-led regime by attacking a military outpost but failed. As a result, Castro was sent to prison for two years. After his early release from prison, Castro was exiled to Mexico where he met Ernesto "Che" Guevara. Che was a young Argentine doctor with grand ideas about how governments should be structured to best serve the majority of its constituents. Fidel Castro, his brother

Raúl, and Che Guevarra planned another revolt against the Batista regime.<sup>1</sup> With 82 men and a small collection of arms, Castro returned to Cuba aboard the boat, *Granma*, in December of 1956. When they landed at Playa Las Coloradas, the men found that Batista was expecting them. After a damaging attack by Batista's men at the landing site, 12 men (including the Castro brothers and Che Guevara) escaped into the Sierra Maestra mountains raise a new militia and lead a campaign of militiamen on a march toward the capital of the Batista government in Havana. By January 1, 1959; Batista accepted his defeat and fled Havana for the Dominican Republic while Castro arrived to Havana as part of a victory march with his troops one week later on January 8.<sup>2</sup>

Before Batista fled Cuba, there was very little response from United States policymakers to the revolution in Cuba. Several Congressmen knew about the Eisenhower administration's support of the Batista regime by supplying large numbers of arms to the Cuban military. After the extent of this support was exposed to Congress in committee hearings, an arms embargo was placed over the island in March of 1958. When the Castro government took control of the island in 1959, members of the foreign relations committee in Congress expressed uneasy feelings about the change but acknowledged that the U. S. needed to maintain cordial relations with the state just across the straits from Florida.

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<sup>1</sup> Biography.com Editors, "Fidel Castro Biography"

<sup>2</sup> Sanchez, Curtis, and Klapheke, "Remembering the Cuban Revolution"

Washington decided to watch and wait anxiously until 1960, when the Castro regime took a couple of steps in the wrong direction. In February of 1960, Havana welcomed Soviet officials to establish trade agreements and official diplomatic relations. It disturbed some policymakers in the U. S. profoundly to see the establishment of a Soviet ally so very close to our land. Carrying levels of discomfort among Americans even farther, the Cuban government decided to repatriate all U. S. investments and property in Cuba by October of 1960 (involving seizure of said property). These frightening and staunchly anti-American steps hit home for the U. S. and we quickly began work on policy to spite and undermine our defiant neighbor.

In 1960, the Sugar Act was due for renewal. Under this law, the U. S. imported raw sugar from various places abroad. At this point, lawmakers were seeking ways to undermine Cuba's leadership and saw an opportunity as Cuba was the majority contributor to the U. S. sugar importation quota. Congress was able to amend the Act by giving the president the power to apportion the quota among the supplying states. When President Eisenhower signed the revision into law in July, he cut the remaining quota coming from Cuba. Because the sugar from Cuba was purchased above the normal market price, this action delivered a substantial blow to the Cuban economy. Congress continued to seek new ways to undermine the Castro regime. As the communist leadership continued to cement its control, the legislature cut Cuba off from foreign aid with the Mutual Security Act of 1960. In October, Eisenhower banned exports to Cuba (excluding medical and agricultural products because they helped sustain



the population of Cuba).<sup>3</sup> In 1962, the Foreign Assistance Act granted the president the power to impose an embargo and upheld the existing sanctions as long as the Castro regime stands. President Kennedy chose to exercise this power to impose a total embargo (this time banning exports of medicine and agricultural products *and* imported goods from Cuba).<sup>4</sup> The Foreign Assistance Appropriations Act of 1962 went one step further and banned foreign assistance to any country providing arms Cuba. The Foreign Aid Authorization Act threatened other countries with sanctions if they refused to ban their ships from trading in Cuba. Much later, in 1992, the Cuban Democracy Act consolidated the official embargo imposed by President Kennedy under the Foreign Assistance Act including a ban on the sale of food and medicine to the island.<sup>5</sup> The Act also states that the embargo is in effect until the leadership of Cuba takes steps to allow democracy among its people.<sup>6</sup> These indicators include the holding of free elections, giving time for opposing parties to form before elections, and "moving toward establishing a free market system".<sup>7</sup>

All of the bills outlined in this section represent facets of the Cuban embargo imposed by the United States in the early 1960s and persist to this day. According to these acts of Congress, Cuba must democratize in order to experience the implied economic prosperity guaranteed by a new era of free

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<sup>3</sup> McKercher, "Steamed Up: Domestic Policy, Congress, and Cuba, 1959-1963\*", 601-612

<sup>4</sup> USA Engage, "U.S. Foreign Policy Sanctions: Cuba"

<sup>5</sup> Rampersad, "The Anti-Cuban Embargo Movement in the United States", 406-407

<sup>6</sup> McKercher, "Steamed Up: Domestic Policy, Congress, and Cuba, 1959-1963\*", 626

<sup>7</sup> *Cuban Democracy Act*, U. S. Code, §6001 et seq.

trade with the United States. It took several years to fully develop these policies but after 54 years of complete isolation by the U. S., there may be light at the end of the tunnel for Cuba.

### **The New Hope of 2008**

In 2008, the U.S. was set to elect its 44th president. This new president was to follow President George W. Bush and President Bill Clinton, representing a combined 16 years of anti-Cuba policy. In 1992, President Clinton signed the Cuban Democracy Act into law while President Bush renewed the travel ban for U. S. citizens and added new regulations on the amount of money that remitted by residents of the United States to their families in Cuba. Obama ran on a relatively progressive, D. N. C. platform. After winning the election he went on to undo the decisions left-over from the last administration by allowing Americans to travel to the island and by remove some regulations from remittances to family members in Cuba. The platforms also sought to remind the regime that the ball is in its court. If they want to engage in trade with the United States, then they will have to be willing to move their country toward a more democratic model of governance.<sup>8</sup> According to Jose Azel, officials in the United States government believe that there are three ways to promote personal freedom (democracy) in Cuba. These include promoting the small-enterprise sector, increasing U. S. investment on the island, and encouraging American tourism.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Democratic National Convention, “Renewing America’s Promise”

<sup>9</sup> Azel, “The New Cuba Policy”

Immediately after the 2008 election, there few new developments in U. S.-Cuba relations. President Obama was elected to a second term as president in 2012 and renewed his dedication to the improvement of relations with Cuba. On December 14, 2014, Obama announced that the United States and Cuba would begin renewed, official diplomatic relations. After 14 months of secret negotiations, the two countries allowed one another to open official embassies in their capital cities, more money could be sent from the U.S. as remittances, and Americans would be able to access their home bank accounts from Cuba with their credit or debit cards. At the same time, Raul Castro promised to expand internet access for Cubans and to release 53 political prisoners.<sup>10</sup> Since the announcement in 2014, we are at a peak of U. S.-Cuban interaction in the last 50 years. Two years after the initial announcement, we have commercial flights between the United States and Cuba, American cruises may now land in Cuban ports, regulations on remittances have been reduced even further, and Americans may bring Cuban goods back to the U.S. (including up to \$400 worth of those coveted cigars).

In March of 2016, President Obama became the first U. S. President in more than 80 years to visit Cuba on official business. At a speaking engagement in Havana he said,

As President of the United States, I've called on our Congress to lift the embargo. It is an outdated burden on the Cuban people. It's a burden on the Americans who want to work and do business or invest here in Cuba. It's time to lift the embargo. But even if we lifted the embargo tomorrow, Cubans would not realize their potential without continued change here in

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<sup>10</sup> DeYoung, "Obama moves to normalize relations with Cuba as American is released by Havana"

Cuba. It should be easier to open a business here in Cuba. A worker should be able to get a job directly with companies who invest here in Cuba. Two currencies shouldn't separate the type of salaries that Cubans can earn. The Internet should be available across the island, so that Cubans can connect to the wider world -and to one of the greatest engines of growth in human history.<sup>11</sup>

From this speech we can say with some certainty that the embargo held by the U. S. against Cuba is destined to end in the very near future. We have been waiting for a more concrete plan to end the embargo since the original press release in 2014 and now it has been all but confirmed by President Obama. With this information the next question we have to answer is, "What will change for the Cuban people when the embargo is lifted from their shoulders?"

### **It Doesn't Mean Democracy, yet.**

It has been extremely clear since the very outset of the Cuban embargo and through all of its iterations that the economic barriers imposed on the state are a result of its communist regime and that it will have to take considerable steps toward a more democratic, self-determined state in order to regain normalcy with the United States. As recently as President Obama's speech in Cuba we have affirmed that we as a country are looking for Cuba to make a step towards democracy, he mentioned that everyone in Cuba should have access to the internet and that it should be easier to open a business in Cuba. If Castro makes these goals a priority, the people of Cuba will have more fiscal autonomy and

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<sup>11</sup> Barack Obama, "Remarks by President Obama to the People of Cuba" (speech, Havana, Cuba March 22, 2016), Office of the Press Secretary, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/03/22/remarks-president-obama-people-cuba>.

might ultimately push the state closer to a democratic system; but it will be just that, *more* democratic. Growing small business seems like an excellent way to promote a market-driven, capitalist economy and in turn a population-driven, democratic government but ultimately this is not will not work in Cuba.

Communist governments are not able to eliminate the will of individuals completely from their countries and have adapted entrepreneurship and other tenets of a market economy to fit their needs.

If you encourage people to start their own businesses and to employ the people around them, they will become invested in their business and use it to make money according to the market they serve. This sounds like a great way to expose people to the freedom of a market driven economy. But to a certain extent Cuba allows its citizens to be entrepreneurs through engagement in 201 service industry activities.<sup>12</sup> This engagement in an market-like business setting allows people to feel free from the oppression of government-appointed work where they are forced to meet quotas directed by a central planner. People with these small businesses are partially responsible for their own subsistence and must feel the same drive as entrepreneurs in free markets. Regardless of whether or not people still feel like they need more autonomy, this helps people feel less stifled and helps to quell unrest.

Another aspect of the market economy that may persist in a planned economy is advertisement. China provides a great example of how a consumerist concept like advertisement can be adapted to fit neatly into a socialist economy.

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<sup>12</sup> AzeI, “The New Cuba Policy”, 21

Advertisements encourage people to buy one product over a comparable product or stir up a desire to buy something in the viewer. Ads imply a certain level of competition between firms; but in a communist state where all your material needs are to be met by the state, competition cannot exist. Rather than demonize the consumerist culture that existed before the Chinese Communist Party took control of the country, party leaders bent the messages of advertisements running in major newspapers to fit their needs. Advertisements can be used to create social norms within a society and force pro-communist rhetoric into the hands of the people it seeks to maintain control of.<sup>13</sup> In China, they kept the advertisement which gives people some sense of normalcy and required advertisers to send positive messages about the Communist Party in them. The false ads helped to brainwash the people into complacency. Cuban leaders could try something similar to the C. C. P.'s approach in an attempt to maintain some control over the country while allowing competition and taking steps toward a "democratic state".

The people of Cuba already have access to an economy that feels remotely similar to a market. Encouraging people to engage in entrepreneurship may blur the line between communism and democracy a bit more, but more than likely will not push the state into a perfect democracy with a true market economy. In a speech to the United Nations, Bruno Rodriguez-Parrilla said,

The economic blockade has not met, nor will it, its purpose of crushing the patriotic determination of the Cuban people. But generates shortages; it restricts our development potential and seriously affects our economy. It

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<sup>13</sup> Gerth, "Compromising with Consumerism in Socialist China: Transnational Flows and Internal Tensions in 'Socialist Advertising'"

is, without doubt, the fundamental obstacle that hinders the economic development of our country.<sup>14</sup>

This comes straight from the mouth of a party leader in Cuba. Whether it represents the true will of the people or the will of the communist party imposed on its people, communism in Cuba is there to stay.

The Chinese Communist Party has evolved dramatically since its inception and its ascent to power in the Chinese state. The C. C. P. of today is neither a planned communist regime nor a free market economy. As it has worked to ensure that China can compete with the rest of the world the communist party compromised and sacrificed some of its control. These types of compromises could be mirrored by the Cuban party.

To ensure business elites can carry out their work to 21<sup>st</sup> century standards the people of China have relatively free access to the Internet, they are encouraged to shop online and use the web for entertainment purposes. The communist party of China has learned that it is ineffective to reach too far into the personal lives of its people. By micromanaging the affairs of its people, the communist party would waste time and put its own power at risk. The party must be unified and allow upward mobility of the social elites. These lessons, learned from the failure of the Soviet Union, have been implemented in China and have allowed the communist party to continue ruling the country.<sup>15</sup> In Cuba, there is already limited internet access and the government is loosening its grip on the lives of its people. Moving forward, the ruling class of Cuba may study the

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<sup>14</sup> Rodriguez-Parilla, “Necessity of Ending the Economic, Commercial, and Financial Embargo by the U.S. against Cuba”

<sup>15</sup> Pei, “How is China Ruled”, 46-47

factors that led to the fall of the Soviet Union or the success of the C. C. P. in the changing global landscape to maintain its control over the state. The Cuban leadership has unprecedented access to information about how it might maintain a ruling class within a more market-oriented, post-communist state and will certainly use it to slow the transition to a democratic state. So the most immediate impact at the end of the embargo will not be democracy in Cuba, what will the citizens notice first?

### **Papal Influence**

It is well known that most modern forms of Communism or Socialism reject the idea of religion under its rule. Could it be possible that Cuba will host a massive religious revival once relations are normalized with the U. S. and the goal of democratizing the state is achieved? The Manifesto of Karl Marx and early communists stated only that religion must be a private affair among the proletariat. As the movement picked up steam in Russia, however, the leaders of the revolution made it clear that there was no place for formal religion in their state.

So why does religion pose a threat to communism? In the words of Vladimir Lenin, it discouraged people from seeing the struggle of the classes and made them blind to the exploitation imposed by the bourgeoisie. Classic religions encourage the poor, working class to accept their position in life without doing anything to seek a higher socioeconomic class. It tells them that they will be rewarded in the afterlife for their dedication to god and the rules set forth by the



religion. For the upper classes, Lenin thought that religion encouraged petty charity to ensure their reward in the afterlife and did nothing to make the bourgeoisie work towards equality with the proletariat. Lenin's goal was to guarantee that the proletariat saw the inequality between the classes and to motivate them to overthrow the ruling class violently. Religion only made people complacent in his eyes.<sup>16</sup> As a former ally of the U. S. S. R., it would make sense to think that Cuba would foster the same type of militant atheism.

Cuba is a primarily Roman Catholic nation. However, there are also a number of denominations of Yoruba, an African religion brought to the new world as a result of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. After Cuba's revolution, Fidel Castro and the Communist party had no specific quarrel with religion. Their movement started out as a Socialist movement to protect the lower class, with full communist ideals and policies implemented over time as the country was drawn closer to the U.S.S.R. At the beginning of the Castro-led regime, there was no propaganda against, outright discrimination, or suppression of religion (Neither Christian, nor Yoruba). The outcome of the revolution in favor of the Communist party did result in the jailing of several bishops and church leaders, but the persecution in Cuba never reached the levels seen in the U. S. S. R. or North Korea today.

Regulation of religion came only in the form of a ban on "believers" from joining the communist party. Castro also took steps to limit the influence of the church by nationalizing and secularizing the education system on the island.

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<sup>16</sup> Vladimir Lenin, "Socialism and Religion", 83-87

Castro declared Cuba an atheist state, and while people were allowed to practice whatever religion they chose it was impossible to be employed by the state if you openly practiced a religion.

In 1991, Cuba redefined itself from an atheist state as a secular state. People continued to practice their religion and developed a very strong appreciation for Pope John Paul II after his visit in 1998. As of May 10, 2015 believers were permitted to join the Communist Party of Cuba and hold positions in it. This declaration came during a news conference with the Cuban leader after a meeting in Vatican City where he told Pope Francis that he promised to go to his Masses “with satisfaction”. This turning point came after Castro acknowledged that the new Pope had been instrumental in bringing the United States and Cuba back to the table to discuss diplomatic relations.<sup>17</sup> It is important to remember that the Catholic Church has been publicly against the measures that the U. S. holds over Cuba’s head since the 1990s.

So it seems today that Cuba’s government has ended its institutional discrimination against religion. Today, the Vatican claims that 60-70% of the population identifies as Catholic, 5% are Protestant, there are 1,500 Jews and 17% of the population is estimated to practice African religions which often encompass Catholic practices and sometimes require baptism into the Catholic faith.<sup>18</sup> The Cubans have been experiencing a revival of religious activity since the Communist Party redefined the state as secular in 1991 and they are very

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<sup>17</sup> Jim Yardley, “Raúl Castro Meets With Pope Francis at Vatican”, The New York Times, May 11, 2015, A4

<sup>18</sup> U. S. Department of State, “Cuba 2015 International Religious Freedom Report”, 1-2

passionate about the new Pope. However, the 90s represented a time of renewed passion against the Cuban regime in the United States while the country was experiencing a revival. Because the United States were not interacting with Cuba during their time of increased interest in the church, it cannot be a result of normalized relations. If anything, the Cuban people may start to secularize as a result of democratization following in the path of many other developed states.

### **From Industrialization to Internet, Great Equalizers**

Another major issue that comes up in almost all Communist states is maintaining equality between urban and rural life. A lot of change in terms of development and technology occurred in the Western world while many communist states toiled under authoritarian rule, including Cuba. In a planned economy, it makes the most sense to invest most of your industry and big economic drivers in one region. But that discrepancy creates a problem with the very ideals of Marxism, the ideology seeks to put everyone on equal ground so it is problematic to leave parts of your country undeveloped. This was incredibly evident during Mao Tse-tung's effort to unite rural Chinese people under a commune system in his "Great Leap Forward". Hoping to create an equal society, rural people were forced to form collectives. Private farming was banned, and all people ate from a community kitchen. In efforts to industrialize the economy, people were forced to meet and exceed grain quotas. They also tried to make steel by melting down the iron pots they could scavenge in

makeshift furnaces which burned all the wooden furniture they had left. At the end of the day, the people were left to live in hovels through one of the greatest famines in recent history. The intense focus on industrializing and pressure for the collectives to compete meant that they could not provide themselves with enough food to sustain their entire community.<sup>19</sup>

Today however, the greatest equalizer between rural and urban life is the internet. As we have already mentioned, China allows its citizens relatively free access to the internet so that they can conduct business competitively in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. So what access *do* Cubans have to the World Wide Web? The Communist Party recognized the power of telecommunications at the very start of its rule when it nationalized the related infrastructure in August of 1959. The first email was sent from Cuba in 1981 to the Soviet Union. It wasn't until 1996 that the regime decided to allow the Cuban people access to the internet from local cafés and hotels, today this is still the primary way that ordinary Cubans access the web. First off the hourly rate for access to the *internet* (not the Cuban *intranet*) is prohibitive for most people. People who use the internet are also aware that their use may be monitored, so they are less likely to use it freely. Although the internet is not filtered outright by a central office of censorship, there are still serious barriers to real access to the internet.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Sue Williams, *The Mao Years 1949-1976*, Streaming Video, Directed by Sue Williams, Zeitgeist, 1997.

<sup>20</sup> Gareth Hall and Guy Baron, "Access Online: Internet Governance and Image in Cuba", *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 34 (2015): 340-355

So one step that the Cuban government could take to “democratize” and pull itself closer to the United States could involve making internet access affordable for all Cubans and distancing itself from any possibility of tracking the web traffic of its citizens. As we mentioned before, the Chinese Communist Party allows its people relatively free access to the internet, but it maintains a waning control of the country. By allowing free access to the internet, the Castro regime could feasibly get closer with the United States without giving control of the island back to the individual people. Liberating the internet and giving sufficient access to its people may not democratize the state but it may make some ground in bringing Cuban people into the fold of modern monoculture.

Cubans have always had a strong tie to the culture of the United States. They love baseball and much like the Spanish spoken in the U. S., English words are often thrown into the mix. Even through there is barrier between the two states Cubans are exposed to products of the United States through visiting family and bootlegged copies of music and movies. Much like the rest of the world, Cubans follow roughly the same Top 40 pop music and view television programs from the U. S. Since relations between the two states have resumed they have been visited by celebrities such as Kim Kardashian and Beyoncé. While Cubans have already had access to cultural products created in the United States already, loosened restrictions on the internet will allow Cubans access through subscription services and e-commerce through the States. Netflix was made

available in Cuba soon after the détente and gives the citizens much simpler access to American television.<sup>21</sup>

It is important to remember that Cuba has not faced complete blockage of culture from other countries because the United States is the last country imposing sanctions against the island state.<sup>22</sup> American culture is disseminated and consumed globally. Songs produced in Los Angeles are shared via streaming services and radio stations all over the world so that the global “top 40” lists are dominated by music from the U. S. and can be heard anywhere. Hollywood movies are also some of the most globally successful productions and enjoy screenings all over the world. Through contact with the rest of the world, Cuba reasonably has access to the same American media as everyone else. Although Cuba will more than likely see greater implementation of internet connections with normalized diplomatic and business relations with the U. S., it is unlikely that Cuban culture as a whole will change drastically as a result of that access.

### **So... where does it hurt?**

If a big religious revival is not going to happen and people already have limited access to global culture, what are they really lacking? The United States ranks fifth among Cuba's top foreign trade partners. So the embargo clearly has

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<sup>21</sup> Jessica Glenza, “Netflix launches \$7.99 service for Cuba despite average wage of \$17 a month”, *The Guardian*, February 9, 2015, accessed September 30, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/09/netflix-launches-streaming-service-cuba>.

<sup>22</sup> Jose Azel, “The New Cuba Policy”, 24

holes that allow people in Cuba access to some North American goods. They can't get everything we have, and they must buy with cash but the embargo *is* porous.<sup>23</sup>

According to Totten, Cuba's mismanagement is evident everywhere. He discusses soap shortages, how people can go to the hospital for free but that they have to bring their own sheets and iodine (if they can find it), there is never enough medicine to go around. So if there are ways to get around the embargo and trade with other countries, and the shortages of medicine are a result of bad management by the government, what is the issue here? If Cuba is going to continue to mismanage its resources what positive impact will the removal of the embargo have?

The heart of the issue lies in the items they still *cannot* get because of the embargo. In his speech to the UN General Assembly, Bruno Rodriguez-Parrilla discusses some glaring problems with the U.S.'s policy towards Cuba. Cuba's main imports from the United States are agricultural products. What it can't seem to get its hands on is expensive, proprietary machinery and treatments that are patented in the United States. The Cuban Democracy Act goes so far as to prohibit the exportation of anything that could be used to produce biomedical imaging equipment.<sup>24</sup> People in Cuba are subjected to treatments that are outdated and invasive by modern standards because they do not have access to new technologies. Rodriguez-Parrilla discusses the fact that people have had to

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<sup>23</sup> Totten, "A Letter from Cuba", 32

<sup>24</sup> *Cuban Democracy Act*, U. S. Code, §6001 et seq.

undergo open heart surgery because the U.S. companies NUMED and AGA Sciences are prohibited by the United States Government from selling their amplifiers, which are necessary to catheterize the heart without opening the entire chest cavity. There are also cancer medications made for people whose bodies reject traditional forms of treatment, but they are patented in the U.S. and Cuba is not able to buy these.

The Cuban Democracy Act even keeps companies based outside the U.S. from selling their products in Cuba. Phillips Medical (based in the Netherlands) could not fulfill a contract to repair and provide spare parts for equipment they installed in Cuba because of certain elements of the blockade. Hitachi (Japanese) refused to sell microscopes made for studying the anatomy of pathogens and Toshiba (also based in Japan) could not sell magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) equipment in Cuba.<sup>25</sup> These elements come from all those bills passed in the 1960s when the U.S. said it would impose sanctions against any country it trades with if they were to provide aid to Cuba. These laws pose a real threat to the safety and development of a good healthcare system in Cuba.

Companies that make medical equipment spend an extremely high amount of money on research and development of their new equipment. To protect their investment, they patent and protect their intellectual property in countries that have strong laws to preserve such property for its owner. If a company decides to sell a new technology to Cuba, a technology that no one else has found a way to

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<sup>25</sup> Rodriguez-Parilla, “Necessity of Ending the Economic, Commercial, and Financial Embargo by the U.S. against Cuba”, 23



duplicate without violating patents, the United States could decide to revoke the patent or sell it to someone else. By holding patents over the heads of private corporations the legal "monopolies" they have over the technologies they develop, there is enough implication of threat to deter these companies from selling in Cuba.

Combined with the problem of delayed development in the technological aspect of medical development, Cuba has an aging population. Many young people have left the island and Cuba has one of the lowest fertility rates in the world at 9.9 births per 1000 living people. The country is struggling to deal with the growing number of chronic health problems that go along with the aging process. As many as 10% of the Cuban population has some form of dementia. On top of all this, Cuba's life expectancy among both sexes is 78 years.<sup>26</sup> With access to better technology to provide doctors with a better understanding of what is wrong with their patients and to do more in-depth research to understand the conditions and treatments they are exploring (which include cancer vaccines), Cuba will have the power to better the lives of its people.

The first field to see improvement (and the one with the biggest impact) after the embargo goes away will be medicine. With access to things like NUMED's amplifiers, surgeons will be able to provide services to their patients with significantly lowered risk. Although there are other industries which use proprietary equipment, biomedical imaging and research equipment is some of the most widely patented, proprietary machinery. Cuba has a responsibility to

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<sup>26</sup> Stone, "Graying Cuba strains socialist safety net"

serve its people with adequate healthcare and as soon as the United States lifts the restrictions on trade with Cuba; institutions with access to funding will be able to purchase new technologies that will provide them with unprecedented knowledge and revolutionized treatments for their patients.

### **Uncertainty about the Future**

Since the beginning of November 2016, the situation in Cuba has been hit with two possibly game-changing events. The first of which was the election of Donald Trump as the successor to U. S. President Barack Obama. Executive Orders from the desk of President Obama are responsible for many of the recent changes in U. S.-Cuba relations. Over the course of his candidacy, President-Elect Donald Trump has gone back and forth on his position in regards to the Cuban détente. During his candidacy, Donald Trump saw both sides of the issue. He has both supported the move to normalized and threatened to undo all of Obama's Executive Orders. Because of the capricious nature of the President-Elect's statements, it is very hard to speculate about the path he will take moving forward.

Another potential threat to the progress made in the last two years came about on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November with the death of Fidel Castro at 90 years old. Although this may not have any great effects immediately since Fidel ceded control of the country to his brother Raúl in 2006, it is still significant. Raúl has assumed decisive leadership over the state after being elected to the Presidency in 2011 by the Communist leadership. Although the younger leader has

governed in a very similar manner to his brother, it is possible that in his absence Raúl may make changes to the situation in Cuba. It has been under Raúl's leadership that the normalization has occurred and without Fidel's oversight, Raúl could be more open to democratization and push the party below him to accept further measures. November 2016 has brought a lot of uncertainty about the future of U. S.-Cuba relations. These events could either derail, stall, or expedite the process started by presidents Obama and Castro.

## **Conclusion**

After 50 years, it looks like the trade embargo imposed upon Cuba by the United States is finally coming to an end. President Obama stated in his speech to the Cuban people in March that the embargo **will** end and that he has formally asked Congress to take it down, it is just a matter of time. Because of the convoluted way the embargo is set up with a travel ban for Americans and threats to foreign states if they become involved with Cuba, it will take some time for the embargo to actually go away. It is not quite a single law on the United States Code to be repealed. Although we already have scheduled flights from the U.S. to Cuba and various other developments in U.S.-Cuban relations, they are merely developments. One year out, traveling to Cuba still requires permission from the State Department and although remittances to the island are less regulated, they are still limited to sending \$2,000 per every two-month period. These barriers to progress are also standing as a new president transitions to power in the U. S. and the founder of modern Cuba has died.

Almost one and a half years after the announcement that we would begin formal diplomatic relations with Cuba, our two states have made great progress but there is still a long, uncertain road before the people of Cuba will see the benefit of free trade with the United States and its allies.

It is also apparent that Cuba will have to revise its policy to meet some of the U. S.'s demands if it hopes to speed up the process. The call for new, more democratic policies in Cuba was renewed on November 28<sup>th</sup> by President-Elect Trump when he said on Twitter that Cuba must make a “better deal” for its people or he planned to repeal the Executive Actions that led to the détente.<sup>27</sup> However, I believe the country will remain under communist control (at least officially). The hope is that Cuba's leaders will shift to a system more like China's, dropping most of its control over individuals' financial outcomes and allowing them better access to the world outside Cuba. Increased capitalistic policy would no doubt benefit the people while still allowing socialist policies to provide the community resources regardless of their income.

Although Cubans will likely see increased connection to the rest of the world via the internet, they can already consume global monoculture. They have already been given some new freedoms, including the ability to practice a religion and be part of the Communist party simultaneously. When free trade with Cuba resumes, the biggest most immediate result will be access to better healthcare and biomedical research equipment. When hospitals and researchers are able

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<sup>27</sup> Donald Trump, Twitter Post, November 28, 2016, 6:02 a. m., <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump>

to buy modern proprietary equipment they will have a flood of new information and options for less risky, invasive procedures that threaten the quality of life for all Cubans.

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