

# Cuba Under Fidel and Raul

The island nation has suffered greatly under the Castros, and though Fidel has stepped down, his tragic legacy remains, with brother Raul still at the helm.

by John F. McManus

**O**n February 19, Cuba's radio and television stations announced that ailing 81-year-old Fidel Castro had stepped aside as the nation's leader. Their messages noted that the Cuban parliament speedily named his 76-year-old brother Raul as president. Accepting the office on February 24, Raul Castro stated, "I assume this responsibility knowing that as far as the commander in chief is concerned, there is only one. Fidel is Fidel. All of us know he is irreplaceable." That was Raul's way of indicating there will be no marked deviation from 49 years of communist tyranny in the island nation only 90 miles from the tip of Florida.

That is not good news for the Cuban people, who have endured Fidel's rule for the past five decades. Prior to that, in the late 1950s, Cuba was such a thriving bastion of free enterprise that its government had to curtail immigration of Europeans anxious to partake of freedom. A burgeoning economy made it an investor's dream, and the nation actually possessed the highest standard of living in all of the Western Hemisphere except for the United States and Canada. Fidel, Raul, and their comrades took control in January 1959, imposed iron-clad communist rule, and proceeded to execute opponents. Tens of thousands perished by firing squads, more died in prison camps, and no one knows how many more perished at sea fleeing Cuban tyranny.

Cuba quickly became an open Soviet satellite aiming nuclear missiles at the



**Image versus reality:** Fidel Castro, shown here with his brother Raul (left) prior to coming to power in Cuba, was portrayed by the *New York Times* and other influential American media organs as a freedom fighter. The truth was otherwise.

United States. Fidel even pleaded with Nikita Khrushchev to launch the deadly weapons at U.S. cities, but even Khrushchev wasn't that bold. The Cuban people have had no free elections in 50 years. Approximately 20 percent of the population fled to the United States. Cuban troops, armed by the USSR, not only served to keep Fidel in power, they functioned in the service of international communism when large numbers of Cuban troops were sent

to Angola and Ethiopia to protect communist governments in those nations.

Anyone who cares to learn the brutal truth about Castro's supposed paradise can find it in *Against All Hope: A Memoir of Life in Castro's Gulag* by Armando Valladares. After spending 22 years in Cuba's dungeons, Valladares was freed, went to live in Spain, told his story and the plight of his oppressed countrymen, and earned the label "Cuban Solzhenitsyn." His book is as

revealing about Cuba's communist tyranny as Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* is about the USSR's merciless despotism.

Valadares had won release after his decades of deprivations when the French government intervened on his behalf. As he ended his book, he recounted only some of the many atrocities he had witnessed:

I recalled the two sergeants, Porfirio and Matanzas, plunging their bayonets into Ernesto Diaz Madruga's body; Roberto Lopez Chavez dying in a cell, calling for water; Boitel, denied water too, because Castro wanted him dead; Clara, Boitel's poor mother, beaten by Lieutenant Abad in a Political Police station because she wanted to find out where her son was buried. I remembered Carrion, shot in the leg, telling Jaguey not to shoot, and Jaguey mercilessly, heartlessly, shooting him in the back; the officers who threatened family members if they cried at a funeral. I remembered Estebita and Piri dying in blackout cells, the victims of biological exper-

imentation; Diosdado Aquit, Chino Tan, Eddy Molina, and so many others murdered in forced-labor fields, quarries and camps. A legion of specters, naked, crippled, hobbling and crawling through my mind, and the hundreds of men wounded and mutilated in the horrifying searches.

Less than a year after reluctantly freeing Valladares, Fidel Castro was interviewed in Havana by American and French journalists. As a fitting Epilogue, the man who had survived treatment no human should ever have to endure published what Fidel told the assembled foreigners on July 28, 1983: "From our point of view, we have no human-rights problem — there have been no 'disappeareds' here, there have been no tortures here, there have been no murders here. In twenty-five years of revolution, in spite of the difficulties and dangers we have passed through, torture has never been committed, a crime has never been committed." Telling lies is consistent with creating tyranny.

Yet, during these years when so many

Cubans were trying to flee, Hollywood's leftists continued to shower Castro with adulation. Oliver Stone described him as "selfless and moral." Harry Belafonte claimed: "If you believe in freedom ... justice ... democracy, you have no choice but to support Fidel Castro." Jack Nicholson called him "a genius." Gina Lollobrigida said he "is warm and understanding and seems extremely humane." Francis Ford Coppola thought so highly of the Cuban dictator that he slobbered, "Fidel, I love you." And Chevy Chase chimed in with, "Socialism works. I think Cuba might prove that." These are only some of the outrageous statements published by acclaimed author Humberto Fontova in his book, *Fidel: Hollywood's Favorite Tyrant*. Other Castro lovers include Robert Redford, Vanessa Redgrave, Danny Glover, and Norman Mailer.

Left-leaners in politics and the mass media were hardly outdone in their gushing over Fidel. Dan Rather called him "Cuba's own Elvis." Fontova compiled a long list of plaudits for the bearded Cuban leader from the likes of Jesse Jackson, Katie Couric, Ted Turner, Charlie Rangel, Maxine Waters, George McGovern, Bill Clinton, and others.

While Castro was given a pass and frequently idolized, Chile's anti-communist Augusto Pinochet earned nothing but scorn from Hollywood and much of America's media. The Chilean leader saved his nation from an imminent communist takeover, instituted a free-market economy that quickly became envied all throughout Latin America, and even presided over promised free elections. He then stepped aside when the voters wanted someone else. Hollywood managed to produce a number of anti-Pinochet films but never any about the Castro brothers and their bloody tyranny. Nor, as one commentator noted, has Hollywood ever seen fit to provide moviegoers with the ugly truth about Lenin, Stalin, and Mao Tse-tung.

### The Truth Was Known

In September 1958, the small-circulation *American Opinion* magazine headed by Robert Welch (who founded the John Birch Society three months later) published an assessment of what was happening in Cuba. He wrote, "Now the evidence from Castro's whole past, that he is

**Castro's Cuba:** Fidel addresses thousands the day he and his guerrilla army arrived triumphant in Havana. Half a century of communist oppression would follow.



a Communist agent carrying out Communist orders and plans, is overwhelming.” At the time, Castro was portrayed by the American media not as a communist but as a reformer, even as a Robin Hood. But if Welch, a private citizen, knew the truth about Castro, could it be that top officials in the U.S. government were unaware? The evidence clearly indicates that our nation’s officials not only knew the truth but aided Castro’s rise to power, our government’s ostensible anti-communist foreign policy notwithstanding.

Welch added in his short September 1958 piece, “Of course, for the record, Castro says he is not a Communist, and reminds you that writers in the *New York Times* say he is not a Communist.... We remember how emphatically Mao Tse-ting and his good friends among the *New York Times* writers insisted that Mao was not a Communist either.” These statements by Robert Welch, we emphasize, were written several months before communist control descended on the island nation.

Looking back, we see that key U.S. officials knew that Castro took time off from studying law at Havana University in 1948 and traveled to Bogota, Colombia, with a Cuban student group. While there, well-known Colombian political leader Jorge Gaitan was assassinated and Fidel was believed by many to have collaborated with the local Communist Party in perpetrating the crime. Immediately, much of the city of Bogota erupted into communist-stimulated anarchy with Castro in the thick of it. During that bloody uprising, a band of revolutionaries seized a local radio station and a voice was heard broadcasting, “This is Fidel Castro. This is a communist revolution.” When order was restored, the young revolutionary hightailed it out of Bogota and fled to Mexico, and was soon back in Cuba.

Meanwhile, Fidel’s brother Raul had joined the Partido Socialista Popular, Cuba’s affiliate of the Soviet-backed Cuban Communist Party. On July 26, 1953, the brothers and a force of about 1,000 men attacked Moncada Barracks. The attack failed and the two Castros were captured, tried, and sentenced to 15 years in prison. Others were also imprisoned. The supposedly tyrannical Cuban leader, Fulgencio Batista, later issued a general amnesty and the two Castros, after serving only



**Flight to freedom:** These Cubans were fortunate to reach Miami by airplane on January 5, 1961, two years after Castro came to powers. Over the years, countless thousands have fled Cuba in small boats and rafts — many of the desperate victims perishing before making it to Florida.

AP Images

22 months of their sentence, went back to Mexico. Soon, Raul introduced the Argentine revolutionary Che Guevara to his older brother. And it was Raul who befriended KGB agent Nikolai Sergeevich Leonov in Mexico, thereby beginning a relationship with Moscow that fueled the Cuban revolution for several decades.

From Mexico, the revolutionaries — now numbering 81 — executed a return to Cuba, landing on the coast of Oriente Province in late 1956. Senate reports years later claimed they were supplied with arms by sources in Florida and by Russian submarines surfacing off the Cuban coast. Attracting the worst elements of Cuban society, their numbers grew steadily. Operating from Cuba’s eastern mountains, the Castro-led forces unleashed a reign of terror that included bombings in markets and anywhere else innocent civilians gathered. They destroyed bridges and roads, kidnapped U.S. citizens caught in the escalating struggle, and extorted protection money from Americans who owned businesses in Cuba. Soon, Raul Castro would be named commander of the revolutionary forces.

### **Unheeded Warnings**

Arthur Gardner, an able U.S. diplomat, was serving as our nation’s ambassador to Cuba at the time. Pro-Castro leftists in the

State Department received repeated warnings from Gardner about the communist nature of the Castro-led uprising. For his effort, he was removed and even prevented from briefing his successor, Earl E.T. Smith. Instead, Smith was told by State Department officials Roy Rubottom and William Wieland to gather information about what was happening in Cuba from Herbert Matthews, the *New York Times* reporter who admired Castro and propagandized on Castro’s behalf. For instance, in the *Times* for February 24, 1957, Matthews effused that Castro “has strong ideas of liberty, justice, social democracy.” And in the *Times* for July 16, 1959, more than six months *after* Castro came to power, Matthews claimed that Castro “is not only not Communist but decidedly anti-Communist.”

Smith discovered the truth prior to Castro coming to power, but his reports, like Gardner’s, were ignored, with the result that Castro succeeded in taking control of Cuba in January 1959.

In 1960, after the Castros were solidly entrenched in Havana, Ambassador Smith told a Senate committee, “Without the United States, Castro would not be in power today.” He emphasized the harm generated by Matthews’ articles glorifying Castro, that they had “served to in-



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**Cuba today: Raul Castro (left), shown here with Venezuela's Marxist leader Hugo Chavez in 2006, now holds the reins of power in Cuba.**

flate Castro to world stature and world recognition.” And he severely castigated the State Department for its work that “helped to overthrow the Batista dictatorship which was pro-American only to install the Castro dictatorship which is pro-Russian.”

The Eisenhower administration official-

ly recognized Castro as Cuba’s legitimate leader within days of the January 1959 takeover. A victorious Fidel, with Raul ever at his side, immediately initiated policies that saw vast amounts of property confiscated, opponents arrested and executed, a vibrant economy destroyed, Cuba’s people forced into poverty, and the nation itself

converted into a Soviet satellite. Raul oversaw the execution of soldiers who had sided with the Batista government. Gone was the Cuba that had been decidedly pro-American, a respecter of privately owned businesses and residences, and a bastion of free enterprise enjoyed by a prosperous middle class. But widespread admiration for Castro continued until 1961 when the Cuban dictator announced publicly, “I am a Marxist-Leninist.” The State Department, still infested with pro-communists, claimed with feigned sorrow that “what began as a movement for democracy and freedom has been perverted into a mechanism for their destruction.” For his work, William Wieland won promotion to consul general and settled into his assignment in Australia.

During his retirement in April 1963, Dwight Eisenhower, whose administration steered the Castros into power, stated during one of his infrequent press conferences that only a “genius and prophet” could have known Castro was a communist in the late 1950s. He didn’t intend to send a glowing compliment to Robert Welch, but his statement surely did exactly that.

With Fidel’s retirement because of age and illness, no one can be sure how Cuba will fare under Raul Castro’s leadership. He is just as much a tyrant as his older brother ever was. But the heavy subsidies Cuba received from the former Soviet Union are no more. Conditions in the island nation are deteriorating even more speedily, forcing Cuba to turn to other revolutionaries for assistance. Raul has already stated that a communist system will remain. There has been speculation that he will attempt to create a Chinese-style communist rule with manufacturing ability that will challenge all the products seen in Wal-Mart. He has already reached out to Venezuelan dictator Hugo Chavez, who can be counted on to keep communism in charge in Havana.

In other words, Cuba will remain a despotism. But no one should forget that the tyrannical regime so close to our own nation resulted from treachery inside the U.S. government aided by the *New York Times*. And its destructiveness has benefited greatly from Hollywood leftists and from pro-left politicians and media personnel — all of whom ought to be repudiated. ■

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