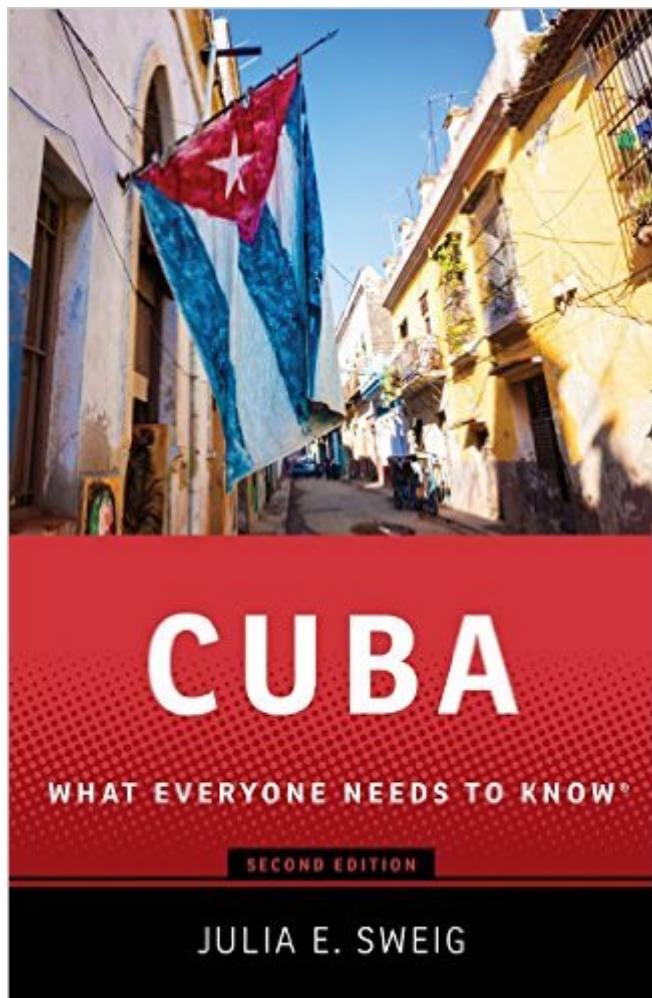


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# Cuba: What Everyone Needs To Know®, Second Edition



## Synopsis

Ever since Fidel Castro assumed power in Cuba in 1959, Americans have obsessed about the nation ninety miles south of the Florida Keys. America's fixation on the tropical socialist republic has only grown over the years, fueled in part by successive waves of Cuban immigration and Castro's larger-than-life persona. Cubans are now a major ethnic group in Florida, and the exile community is so powerful that every American president has curried favor with it. But what do most Americans really know about Cuba itself? In this second edition of the widely hailed *Cuba: What Everyone Needs to Know*®, Julia Sweig updates her concise and remarkably accessible portrait of the small island nation--and now includes material from her 2010 interview with Fidel Castro. The new edition covers the key events of the last few years: Raul Castro's assumption of power from his brother Fidel, economic and political reforms since Raul came to power, and the changes in US-Cuba relations following the election of Barack Obama. Expansive in coverage and authoritative in scope, the book looks back over Cuba's history since the Spanish American War before shifting to recent times. Focusing equally on Cuba's role in world affairs and its own social and political transformations, Sweig divides the book chronologically into the pre-Fidel era, the period between the 1959 revolution and the fall of the Soviet Union, the post-Cold War era, and -- finally -- the post-Fidel era. Informative, pithy, and lucidly written, it is the best compact reference on Cuba's internal politics, its often fraught relationship with the United States, and its shifting relationship with the global community. *What Everyone Needs to Know*® is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I found this book to be very helpful and even-handed. I was part of a group that went to Cuba in November 2014, just a month before the announcement of the plan to normalize relations between the US and Cuba. I was very interested to learn about Cuban history, politics, and social life. This book seemed quite accurate, consistent with the information we got from our tour guides, who seemed very candid. It is also quite consistent with information on Wikipedia, though this book provides a lot more information. The book is sympathetic to and critical of both the US and Cuba in various places. It was fascinating to learn more accurate information about Fidel, Che, and the revolution than what the American media generally portray. In particular, Fidel was not very good as a military commander and planner but was very good in consolidating power as the revolution progressed. I was also interested to read about Che's arrogance in trying to promote revolution in other countries without cooperating with other revolutionary movements. On the other hand, the book candidly describes American imperial interventions and manipulation -- as well as successes in Cuban society since the revolution. Probably most Americans don't recognize the major impact of the downfall of the Soviet Union on Cuba, which the book helpfully describes. The FAQ format seems a bit odd for a history reference book, but I actually found it useful as I wanted to look up various issues.

In January 2014, I visited Cuba through a Road Scholar people-to-people program for two weeks, beginning in Santiago de Cuba and ending in Havana. I had no time to prepare myself, knew nothing but the most superficial facts about Cuba before the trip, and purchased this book after my return. It is NOT a travelogue (as the title might suggest). This edition is updated to 2010 and even refers to the recently enacted relaxation in commercial activities. The strength of this book lies in Sweig's structuring her vast material into topic-oriented chapters by posing specific questions the reader may have and providing detailed answers, with references to other chapters. This doesn't require reading about Cuba's entire history all at once to gain an understanding of causes and effects.

This was an informative overview of Cuba's recent history. It is organized as a series of questions, followed by answers so it is almost like a Google collection. The information is clear and seems

quite balanced in its approach.

I am planning a cruise to Cuba in the near future and realized there is very little I know about this island nation. I hate visiting countries, cities and other places when I have no background information to enrich my experience. This is a great book about Cuba that introduces me to its many historical facts. While other books I have purchased or received about Cuba are more geared towards the tourist industry, this book is more informative in nature and goes into depth about Cuba's history from its days as a Spanish colony all the way to Obama's policies towards this nation. The book is divided chronologically into the pre-Fidel era, the period between the 1959 revolution and the fall of the Soviet Union, the post-Cold War era and finally the current post-Fidel era. While I enjoyed the book, it is not necessarily an easy read. At times I had to force myself to continue reading as the author lost me with her academic language. Motivated though by my desire to gain knowledge I continued to read, and I am happy I did. I feel better prepared to visit Cuba and feel confident my new knowledge will give me a better overall experience. Great book that I would recommend to all who are motivated to gain more knowledge about Cuba's historical facts. While I received a free complimentary copy of this book in exchange for my review, I think it's well worth the asking price.

With the recent US attempt at normalizing relations with Cuba, I really wanted to brush up on my history of Cuba and get into a better understanding. Honestly, I hadn't put much thought into it since my freshman college Political Science class and that was the end of it. I received this book in exchange for my honest opinion. Let me just say that I'm not sure this book was intended to sit down and read in large, long chunks - at least, that isn't the feeling I get based on the Q&A style that it is written in. I really like it actually - I can scan through the contents to find a question that stands out most to me and then flip specifically to that section to read and learn exactly what I wanted to know. The book itself is quite verbose and in some sections the author gets a bit heavy handed in her academia meets opinion, but overall I found her style to be enjoyable and informative. I feel like I have picked up new facts and have an overall better understanding of Cuba, as well as US/Cuba relations and interactions. I would recommend this book to anyone looking just to learn more about another area of the world, or to better understand the importance of normalizing the relations.

The author clearly knows the subject and if you can slog through her writing you'll come away with an understanding and admiration of the Cuban struggle for self-reliance. Unfortunately, her writing in

the earlier sections is dense and academically. She uses long sentences convoluted by opinionated commentary and side trips to unrelated facts and ideas. Reading them is a laborious exercise. For the first 100 or so pages, I found it particularly distracting that the word "hegemony" appears somewhere on every other page. The last 80 or so pages are more clearly written and succinct. I'd recommend a good editor for the next edition.

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