

**After Fidel, Much the Same**  
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I have acquired the habit from my Cuban family and friends of being uncomfortable discussing life in Cuba after Fidel. Also, like them, I have given the topic more than a passing thought. The major conclusion I have come to is that post-Fidel Cuba will continue along the course initiated in the post-Soviet era. Socialism and the revolution have been on shaky ground since the inception of the Special Period when unorthodox measures—like entrepreneurship, limited taxation, tourism, and later a peso-dollar dual economy—were introduced to the system for the purpose of saving the system. In so doing, the revolution’s course was altered in a way that it is likely to continue with even greater energy once Fidel has gone on to Ile-Ife. Here, I reflect on the implications of the post-Fidel era for the revolution, for Cuba’s Blacks, and for the longstanding U.S. blockade.

#### Revolutionary Implications

In the seventies, we all used to come out here [to rural Havana] to volunteer in the fields. We were full of hope and believed we were part of a great experiment to create a better Cuba. Now, I look back at those times with sadness because it might all have been for nothing...

– Ariel, Havana resident, late-40s

The Cuban revolution was first and foremost a nationalist movement that sought to create a Cuba for Cubans. Before Marxism was a clear feature, José Martí’s fervent nationalism was evident. However, as the Cuban government has accepted tourism as a “necessary evil” for the sustenance of the revolution, it has asked its own citizens to step aside to make way for wealthy foreigners. Cuban cupboards are bare, while hotels host veritable feasts three times daily; Cuban households receive their ration of water every

other day, while tourists luxuriate in swimming pools and hot water showers to their hearts' content; tourist zones are decidedly well-maintained, while most Cuban homes are crumbling inside and out. Certainly, this may simply be the nature of tourism, but the enforced exclusion of Cubans from hotels, nightclubs, and restaurants that cater to tourists further clarifies that Cuba's best is no longer for Cubans at all.

Again, one might pardon the revolution for using tourism, given that the money collected from tourists sustains Cuba's socialist system. Indeed, the Marxist-Leninist foundations of the revolution extend beyond Martí's "Cuba for Cubans" ideal and pressed for a classless system where every individual contributes for the benefit of the whole. Once more, the tools of the Special Period have dismantled this ideal. In its quest for foreign currency to spend in the free market, the Cuban government legalized U.S. dollars in 1993, creating a clear class system comprised of haves and have-nots. Given the demographics of the Cuban exile communities, the White relatives of those who left received dollar remittances from their families abroad, while Cuba's Blacks were left to hustle or go without. Both the egalitarian ideal and the moral imperative of Ché Guevara's "New Man" were severely weakened with the new (national and individual) quest for dollars. If the revolution turned down this dangerous path while Fidel was still at the helm, it is unlikely the rickety old ship has much hope of resuming course without him.

### Racial Implications

We all want him [Fidel] to die, but we're afraid of what happens next!  
The Americans will come back and the first people to be enslaved will be us Blacks. Yes, Cuba has problems now, but I'd rather it stay like it is.  
It's bad, but it's not that bad. Nobody's starving here, nobody is dying of hunger, nobody is discriminated against based on color. There are some

people who have less money—there are some people who are poorer. But it's not extreme wealth or extreme poverty.

– Rosa, Trinidad-de-Cuba resident, late-30s

Given the socialist objective of overturning the capitalist class structure in which the majority of Blacks were located at the bottom rungs of society, it is popularly believed that the greatest beneficiaries of the 1959 revolution were Cuba's Blacks. Rosa's (somewhat melodramatic) statement to the contrary notwithstanding, many Blacks have stood by *el Comandante* and will continue to support him because of the measurable difference the revolution has made in their lives. Indeed, even Rosa seems to agree with the popular dictum "*el color no importa*"—color doesn't matter—despite realities of racial discrimination and prejudice in day-to-day practice.

Again, the unorthodox measures of the post-Soviet era have resulted in increased social and racial inequality. Whites have greater access to the resources necessary to maneuver in the new environment. For example, having family ties abroad provides access to foreign currency with which to pay taxes for a home-based business; larger and more centrally located homes allow many Whites to rent out rooms to foreigners; and as can be expected, white skin opens doors to highly desired jobs in tourism, as well as tourist spaces of leisure that are closed to darker Cubans due to stereotypes that the latter are potential hustlers or criminals. Since race has rearticulated itself as a key factor in access to opportunity under Fidel's watchful eye, perhaps Rosa is right to fear the racism that will likely accompany the return of U.S. style capitalism in the post-Castro era.

#### U.S. Policy and Global Implications

Fidel: "*¡Que se abaja el bloqueo!*" [Take down the blockade!]

Crowd: "*¡Abajo!*" [Take it down!]

If the U.S. imperialist role in Cuba prior to the revolution were not ample justification for widespread anti-Americanism, nearly 50 years of economic sanctions is an easy means not only to generate nationalist sentiment, but also serve as a crutch for the revolution's many failures. The U.S. argues that it maintains sanctions in order to bring about Castro's downfall, but the only reason the socialist government can even attempt to contain the capitalist incursions exemplified by tourism is precisely because of the blockade. As one interviewee accurately surmised, "Capitalism is like a big elephant that stomps over everything." Paraphrasing Marx's argument that capitalism tends to eliminate all barriers to the expansion of capital, this young man was acknowledging that—as the Soviet and Eastern European cases suggest—it would be impossible for Cuba's socialist government to contain the onslaught of American-style capitalism as it is practiced on a near-global scale today. The blockade is what allows the Cuban government to safely experiment with capitalism within the socialist context. Indeed, so long as Fidel or his brother Raul, comprise Cuba's leadership, the blockade will remain in effect under the terms of the unjust U.S. Helms-Burton law.

Though Fidel and many supporters of the revolution from around the world regularly call for an end to the blockade, such an uncontrolled opening would likely do more harm to the revolution than good. The Special Period has demonstrated that capitalism and socialism make an uneasy pair because the core values of socialism are challenged when the state and its citizens must join the global chase for the almighty dollar.

In conclusion, after Fidel, the flickering light of the revolution is likely to be extinguished for good. Cuba's audacious social experiment will have ended, and I, like Rosa, will anxiously watch what happens next.