

Syllabus: IAFS 3000: Politics and History of Cuba

FALL 2025

COURSE INFORMATION

Course Title: Politics, History and Society of Cuba

Course Prefix/Number: IAFS 3000-802

Credits: 3

Semester/Year: Spring 2024

Meeting Days/Time and Location: Tues/Thurs 3:30-4:45pm, Bruce Curtis Bldg, E158

Instructor Information

Name: Dr. Grant Cohen

E-mail: grant.cohen@colorado.edu

Office Location: Ketchum 123

Office Hours: In-person meetings available Tues/Thurs from 11am to 1pm (please email to schedule appointments, if possible)

Zoom Office Hours: Available most Mondays and Wednesdays from 11am-2pm. [See link to book:](https://calendly.com/grant-cohen/30min)
<https://calendly.com/grant-cohen/30min>

Course Description

Cuba is a small country with a big history. The island played an important role in the nineteenth-century global economy, was the site of the most destructive war of independence in the Americas, served as midwife to the United States overseas empire, produced the most thorough socialist revolution in the Western Hemisphere, and was a key player during the Cold War. Perhaps most surprising is that the revolutionary regime continues to survive despite the loss of Soviet support, US policy aimed at isolating the socialist island, and its inherent economic disadvantages.

In this course, we will:

- Examine key figures in Cuban history, especially those related to independence and the 1959 revolution.
- Causes of the 1959 Cuban Revolution
- US-Cuba relations before and after the Revolution
- The Cuban economic system, including the US embargo, Cuba's reliance sugar and later tourism, and the prevalence of informal markets.
- A focus on modern US-Cuban relations - from Clinton to Trump.

Required Course Materials

John Dunn. Jose Marti: Cuba's Greatest Hero. Pineapple Press. 2015

All other readings will be made available to you on Canvas.

Class Specific Rules Grading Scale

A: 94+; A-: 93-90

B+: 89-87; B: 86-84; B-: 83-80

C+: 79-77; C: 76-74; C-: 73-70

D+: 69-67; D: 66-64; D-: 63-60

F: <60

Assignment Weight

News Assignments (5) – 15%

Presentation (1) – 15%

Final Paper – 25%

Final Exam – 25%

Attendance – 20%

Attendance & Participation

Attendance is extremely important. This is a small class and attendance is necessary for it to work. Meanwhile, we will get to know one another better throughout the semester, prior to our travels. If you don't attend regularly, that doesn't work.

Accordingly, 25% of your overall grade will be based on attendance

Students receive **4 “freebie” days** they can use throughout the semester. Since you have 4 freebies, religious holidays, illness, family emergencies, and other issues DO COUNT against your absences. You are advised to use your freebies for these purposes.

Each absence after the 4 freebies will result in a 4-point deductions from the maximum of 20 points. For example: 5 absences would be scored as 16/20; 6 absences would be scored as 12/20; 7 absences as 8/20; and so on.

Students with 8 or more absences may receive an “F” and should consult with the instructor if this looks to be the case. Do not wait until the end of the semester.

There is an attendance sheet at each class. It is each student's responsibility to sign in at each class. If, for any reason, you do not get the attendance sheet during class, you may sign in before you leave.

You must stay for the duration of the class to receive credit for attending. Signing in and leaving does not count as attending and is distracting to the instructor and fellow students.

If you MUST leave early, please inform your instructor BEFORE class.

Final Paper

The final research paper will be on a topic of your choice. You are encouraged to choose a topic of interest to you, and one that you can learn more about during our travels in Cuba. Assignment details will be distributed during the semester. Paper topic proposals and outlines and annotated bibliographies must be submitted by the deadlines stated in the syllabus. Failure to submit your paper topic by the deadline will result in a 5-point deduction on the final paper; the same rule applies to the annotated bibliography and outline.

News Assignments

As part of our preparation to travel to Cuba, you should be following current affairs related to the country. So, there are 5 news assignments throughout the semester. Late news assignment submissions will be accepted up to 24 hours after the due date, but will be docked 3 points. After 24 hours, news assignments will not be accepted under any circumstances.

You may be asked to discuss your prior submission(s) in class when we hold a formal news discussion.

Presentations

Each student will give one presentation throughout the semester. A signup sheet will be offered early in the semester so you can select your topic and corresponding date of presentation. The presentation topics and dates are also listed in the syllabus.

The presentation should be at least 20 minutes and thoroughly cover your assigned topic.

Readings

Students are expected to complete all assigned readings by the day listed on the syllabus.

Films

There are many great documentaries and video clips about Cuba's history and society. We will watch some of these throughout the course, most notably the *Cuba Libre* 8-part documentary on Netflix. We will end the semester watching *The Buena Vista Social Club*, a documentary involving American musician Ry Cooder's exploration of Cuba and rediscovery of the country's incredible musical talent.

CALENDAR / ASSIGNMENTS

DATE	TOPIC	ASSIGNED READINGS	ASSIGNMENT
8/21	Introductions; Syllabus; Travel Discussion		
8/26	Introduction to Cuba Jose Marti	Read: <i>Latin American Politics and Development</i> , Chapter 19, "Cuba: Revolution in the Balance?" Read: Chapters 1 to 3 of <i>Jose Marti: Cuba's Greatest Hero</i>	
8/28	Jose Marti Continued Wars of Independence	Read: Chapters 3 to 6 of <i>Jose Marti: Cuba's Greatest Hero</i> <i>Cuba Libre</i> documentary, Part 1: "Breaking Chains" (Netflix), IN CLASS	
9/2	Independence and the United States; Spanish American War Explosion of the USS Maine Platt Amendment	Read: Carmen Diana Deere. "Here Come the Yankees! The Rise and Decline of US Colonies in Cuba, 1898-1930." (1998) Library of Congress. Today in History. February 15 (1898) "Remember the Maine!" https://www.loc.gov/item/today-in-history/february-15/ National Archives. Milestone Documents. "Platt Amendment (1903)." https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/platt-amendment	
9/4	NO CLASS	NO CLASS ON 9/4	News assignment #1 due by 9/4 at 11:59pm
9/9	Other Key Figures of Independence: Antonio Maceo & Maximo Gomez	News Roundtable - Be prepared to discuss your prior news assignment submission	Presentation 1: Antonio Maceo & Maximo Gomez
9/11	Gerardo Machado, President and Dictator, 1925- 1933	Read: Russell Porter. "Cuba Under Machado." 1933. Read: Philip Dur and Christopher Gilcrease, "U.S. Diplomacy and the Downfall of a Cuban Dictator: Machado in 1933." <i>Fulgencio Batista: The Making of a Dictator</i> . Chapter 4. "Machadato." (2006)	Presentation 2: Gerardo Machado

9/16	Fulgencio Batista, President of Cuba, 1940-44; 1952-59	Read: Robert Whitney. "The Architect of the Cuban State: Fulgencio Batista and Populism in Cuba, 1937-1940." <i>Cuba Libre</i> documentary, Part 2: "War and Sugar" (Netflix), IN CLASS	Presentation 3: Fulgencio Batista
9/18	Fidel Castro Moncada Barracks Imprisonment Mexico Granma Revolution	Anthony DePalma. "Fidel Castro, Cuban Revolutionary Who Defied U.S., Dies at 90," in the <i>New York Times</i> (Nov 26, 2016) Reuters. "Key Events in Castro's Life." February 20, 2008. https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSN19225892/	Presentation 4: Fidel Castro

9/23	Fidel Castro Continued & Causes of the Revolution	Read: Hugh Thomas. "The Origins of the Cuban Revolution," in <i>The World Today</i> (October, 1963)	News assignment #2 due by 9/23 at 11:59pm
9/25	Key Revolutionary Figures: Che Guevarra Camilo Cienfuegos	Christopher Minster. <i>Biography of Ernesto Che Guevara, Revolutionary Leader</i> . ThoughtCo.com (June 4, 2019) https://www.thoughtco.com/biography-of-ernesto-che-guevara-2136622 Christopher Minster. <i>Biography of Camilo Cienfuegos, Cuban Revolutionary</i> . ThoughtCo.com (April 28, 2019) https://www.thoughtco.com/biography-of-camilo-cienfuegos-2136131	Presentation 5: Che Guevarra Presentation 6: Camilo Cienfuegos
9/30	Documentary	<i>Cuba Libre</i> documentary, Part 4: "A Ragtag Revolution" (Netflix), IN CLASS	
10/2	The US Response: Bay of Pigs Invasion	Read: Alan H. Luxenberg, "Did Eisenhower Push Castro into the Arms of the Soviets?" <i>Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs</i> , Vol. 30, No. 1 (Spring 1988) pp. 37-71.	Presentation 7: Bay of Pigs Invasion
10/7	Documentary	<i>Cuba Libre</i> documentary, Part 6: "Of Soviets and Saviors" (Netflix), IN CLASS	News assignment #3 due by 10/7 at 11:59pm

10/9	Soviet-Cuban Economic Relationship The Special Period	Read: Kosmas Tsokhas. "The Political Economy of Cuba: Dependence on the Soviet Union," in <i>Theory and Society</i> . Vol. 9, pp. 319–362 (March 1980)	Presentation 9: Soviet-Cuban Economic Relations Presentation 10: The Special Period
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10/14	US-Cuban Relations during the Clinton Administration Helms Burton Act Wet foot, dry foot Elian Gonzalez	Read: Soraya M. Castro Mariño, "U.S. Cuban Relations during the Clinton Administration," <i>Latin American Perspectives</i> , Vol. 29, No. 4 (July 2002) p. 47-76. William M. Leogrande, "Enemies Evermore: U.S. Policy towards Cuba after Helms-Burton," <i>Journal of Latin American Studies</i> , Vol. 29, No. 1 (Feb. 1997) pp. 211-221 Jaime Suchlicki. "Myths and Realities in US-Cuban Relations: 1993," in the <i>Journal of InterAmerican Studies and World Affairs</i> . 1993. Later appeared in <i>Cuban Communism</i> by Louis Horowitz (Transaction Press, 1994)	Presentation 11: Elian Gonzalez
10/16	Obama's Outreach: The Thawing of US-Cuban Relations	Read: Gardiner Harris. "Obama and Raul Castro Meet as US-Cuba Deepen Ties," in the <i>New York Times</i> (Sept. 29 2015)	
10/21	Trump, Biden, Trump: US-Cuba Relations: A Series of Setbacks	Read: NBC News. "Because of Trump Sanctions, Western Union Remittances Come to an End in Cuba." November 24, 2020. https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/because-trump-sanctions-western-union-remittances-come-end-cuba-n1248790 Raad: Laurie Baratti. "Four US Cruise Lines Fined 440mn for 'Trafficking,' in Cuba," in <i>Travel Pulse</i> (Jan 2, 2023) Article on Travel Ban, other sanctions	News assignment #4 due by 10/21 at 11:59pm

10/23	The Cuban Economy Since the Special Period Day ZERO (currency unification)	Circles Robinson. "The Fate of Savings Accounts in Cuba." in the <i>Havana Times</i> . "Day Zero: how and why Cuba unified its dual currency system" (LSE Latin America and Caribbean Studies)	Submit final paper topic by 10/23 at 11:59pm
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10/28	Communications and the Internet in Cuba Transportation	Read: "Cuba to finally give citizens internet access on their phones as government launches 3G service," in the <i>Independent</i> (December 6, 2018) "Getting Around Cuba with the Public Transport Crisis," in <i>The Havana Times</i> (September 3, 2023)	
10/30	The Embargo and US Travel Regulations	Read: Casey Champion & Grant Cohen. "US Travel policy toward Cuba: Clinton to Trump." National Security Archive. "Cuba Embargoed: U.S. Trade Sanctions Turn Sixty." https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/cuba/2022-02-02/cuba-embargoed-us-trade-sanctions-turn-sixty	
11/4	Migration, Cuban Diaspora, Remittances	Read: Jorge Duany. "Cuban communities in the United States_ migration waves, settlement patterns and socioeconomic diversity." Eric Bazail-Eimil. "Record-Breaking Number of Cuban Immigrants Entered the US in 2022-23," in <i>Politico</i> (Oct 24, 2023) Maria Abi-Habib and Eileen Sullivan. "Cuban Migrants Arrive to U.S. in Record Numbers, on Foot, Not by Boat," in the <i>NYT</i> (May 3, 2022) Viviana Díaz Balsera (Editor), Rachel A. May (Editor). "How Cubans Transformed Cuban Politics and Gained National Influence," Chapter 12 in <i>La Florida</i> (April 2016)	Presentation 12: Outward Migration in Periods News assignment #5 due by 11:59pm on 11/4
11/6	The Cuban Lobby	"Cold war narratives: why Miami's Cuban Americans remain staunch Republicans," in the <i>Guardian</i> (Oct 18, 2022)	
11/11	Miguel Diaz-Canel July 11, 2021 protests	Read: Carla Gloria Colomé. "Less electricity, less milk and less meat: Cuba's energy and food crisis worsens," in <i>El Pais</i> (Sept 29, 2023)	Presentation 13: Miguel Diaz Canel Presentation 14: July 11, 2021 protests
11/13	Current Conditions: Multiple Crises: Food, Electricity,	Read: Nelson Acosta, Mario Fuentes. "Cubans brace for impact as gasoline prices set to soar." (Reuters, January 3, 2024)	Submit Final Paper Outline and Annotated Bibliography by

	Medicine, Petroleum, Inflation	Read: Read: Patrick Oppman. Cuba fuel shortages spark fistfights, queues and holiday cutbacks." CNN (May 1 2023	11/13 at 11:59pm
11/18	Cuban healthcare & the Literary Campaign Housing & Transportation Crises	Read: "El Toque. Housing in Cuba: Collapses, Temporary Shelters, & Hurricanes," in the <i>Havana Times</i> (November 9, 2022) Read: Luis Brizuela. "Cuba's Housing Crisis, No Solution in Sight," in the <i>Havana Times</i> (October 16, 2023)	Presentation 15: The Literary Campaign & Cuban Healthcare Presentation 16: The Housing Crisis
11/20	NO CLASS	NO CLASS ON 11/20	NO CLASS
12/2	The Arts in Cuba	Film: <i>Buena Vista Social Club</i>	
12/4	The Arts in Cuba	Film: <i>Buena Vista Social Club</i>	Final paper is due by December 5 at 11:59pm
12/11 FINAL EXAM	Final Exam: 12/11 4:30-7:30pm	The final exam will be held Thursday, 12/11 from 4:30 to 7:30pm – Details TBD	