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## THE PEARL OF THE ANTILLES

Cuba has served as a playground for tourists, a model Communist state, and most recently a renewed interest for American travelers and investment. The country, a scant 90 miles off the Florida coast, has also been the subject of exciting literary output for decades.

From the time of Spanish colonial rule in the 1500s to the death of former prime minister and president Fidel Castro in 2016, Cuba has experienced a number of pivotal episodes, including the Spanish American War in 1898, the critical rule of U.S.-backed leader Fulgencio Batista in the 1950s, and the Cuban Revolution, 1953–59.

Events such as the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, the period following the downfall of the Soviet Union in 1989, and the media response to the Mariel boatlift and Elián González controversies have all been fertile ground for writers and historians.

In 1971, Hugh Thomas published his seminal *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom*, a nearly 1,700-page tome detailing the island's rich history. This sparked other writers to contribute to the impressive body of literature being published. With more books available on Cuba each year, current areas of interest include Castro's life and legacy, the nation's economy and burgeoning tourism industry, and the country's rich cultural history, especially relating to literature and the arts.

One important consideration for acquiring materials on Cuba is objectivity. Margaret Randall's *To Change the World* (2009) has been controversial because of her praise of the accomplishments and improvements that Castro initiated, an opinion disputed among those who witnessed years of oppression and economic hardship. Yet, voices such as Randall's are necessary to provide a complete picture, a counterpoint to American-dominated anti-Castro stances.

As Cuba's future continues to evolve, it is essential for readers of all ages to have an understanding of and appreciation for the history, politics, and culture of this island nation. Both mass-market and scholarly works offer exciting selections for libraries and readers. Also, libraries have a role to play in building collections that enhance our knowledge of the events that shaped Cuba—and what the future holds.

Starred titles (★) are essential for most collections.

### HISTORY

Brown, Jonathan C. *Cuba's Revolutionary World*. Harvard Univ. Apr. 2017. 600p. illus. notes. index. IS BN 9780674971981. \$35; ebk. IS BN 9780674978324.

This recent history focuses on Cuba's chief export after 1959—revolution. Castro's influence spread across countries such as Venezuela, Peru, Brazil, and Panama, sparking activist movements in reaction to massive inflation and social and political unrest. (LJ 4/1/17)

★ Gott, Richard. *Cuba: A New History*. Yale Univ. 2005. 400p. illus. index. IS BN 9780300111149. pap. \$23.

In the most comprehensive history since Hugh Thomas's classic *Cuba* (1971), Gott traces Cuba's history first as a Spanish colony and later as a nation constantly threatened by internal security and external attack. He concludes that Cuba was headed for an economic revolution well before Castro's rise. (LJ 10/15/04)

Hansen, Jonathan M. *Guantanamo: An American History*. Farrar. 2011. 448p. illus. maps. notes. index. IS BN 9780809053414.

\$35; ebk. IS BN 9780809048977.

With both an American and Cuban perspective, Hansen presents the history of controversial American soil in a foreign state, an ever-present thorn in Castro's Cuba. This readable, well-researched account traces the evolution of Guantanamo Bay from the 15th century to its current status as a U.S. naval base. (LJ 9/1/11)

★ LeoGrande, William M. & Peter Kornbluh. *Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations Between Washington and Havana*. Univ. of North Carolina. 2015. 584p. illus. notes. bibliog. index. ISBN 9781469617633. \$35; pap.

ISBN 9781469626604. \$25; ebk. ISBN 9781469626611.

Previous administrations attempted reconciliation years before the reopening of relations between the U.S. and Cuba in 2014. LeoGrande and Kornbluh provide a front-row seat to those diplomatic and economic negotiations, along with the challenges involved. (LJ 8/14)

Pérez, Louis A., Jr. *The Structure of Cuban History: Meaning and Purpose of the Past*. Univ. of North Carolina. 2015. 352p. illus. notes.

index. ISBN 9781469626598. pap. \$27.95.

Perez, a leading scholar on Cuba, explores how Cubans view their own history. In doing so, he presents a background of societal struggle long before Castro and his revolutionaries gained power in the 1950s.

BIOGRAPHY ★ Argote-Freyre, Frank. *Fulgencio Batista: From Revolutionary to Strongman*. Rutgers Univ. 2006. 416p. illus. notes. bibliog.

index. ISBN 9780813537016. \$39.95; ebk. ISBN 9780813541006.

To understand Castro and his revolutionary movement better, one needs to understand Cuba under the rule of Fulgencio Batista (1901–73). This biography places the army sergeant—turned—brutal dictator within the historical context of the "Sergeants' Revolt" of 1933, a bloodless army coup. (LJ 5/1/06)

Bustos, Ciro. *Che Wants To See You: The Untold Story of Che Guevara*. Verso. 2013. 468p. tr. from Spanish by Anne Wright.

ISBN 9781781680964. \$34.95; ebk. ISBN 9781781683361.

No list of books on Cuba would be complete without an entry on Che Guevara. In this memoir, first printed in Spanish in 2007, Bustos reflects on his life as a revolutionary after he followed Che from the Sierra Maestra to Bolivia. He also considers Che's thoughts and beliefs. (LJ 6/15/13)

★ James, Ian. *Ninety Miles: Cuban Journeys in the Age of Castro*. Rowman & Littlefield. 2008. 216p. illus. maps.

bibliog. ISBN 9780742540439. pap. \$21.95.

Although dated, this excellent book tells the stories of three Cuban expats: Eloy Menoyo (an early ally of Castro who spent 20 years in prison); jazz musician Paquito d'Rivera; and Nancy Espinosa, a Cuban housewife who followed her husband when he left Cuba.

★ Latell, Brian. *After Fidel: The Inside Story of Castro's Regime and Cuba's Next Leader*. St. Martin's. 2007. 304p. notes.

index. ISBN 9781403975072. pap. \$21.99; ebk. ISBN 9781466885912.

Castro and Cuba specialist Latell's insights about Fidel and the future of Cuba written ten years before the reopening of Cuban-American relations is a remarkable blueprint of the events leading up to that moment. There is also insight on Fidel's brother and current president Raúl Castro. (LJ 10/1/05)

Randall, Margaret. *To Change the World: My Years in Cuba*. Rutgers Univ.

2009. 247p. illus. notes. index. ISBN 9780813544328. pap. \$28.95.

Randall is one of the most prolific writers on contemporary Cuban affairs. In this contribution, she recounts her experiences living in Cuba from 1969 to 1980, offering a voice seldom heard in most literature critical of Castro's Cuba. (LJ 1/09)

★ Stout, Nancy. *One Day in December: Celia Sánchez and the Cuban Revolution*. Monthly Review. 2013. 400p. photos. maps. bibliog. index. ISBN 9781583673171.

\$28.95; ebk. ISBN 9781583673188.

Celia Sánchez was an influential contributor to the Cuban revolution: a Castro confidante and his rumored lover. Stout's important biography contributes a distinctive perspective that is often missing from other histories and biographies of the era. Sánchez died in 1980, leaving a legacy across the nation. (LJ 5/1/13)

★ Symmes, Patrick. *The Boys from Dolores: Fidel Castro's Schoolmates*.

Pantheon. 2008. 368p. index. ISBN 9781400076444. pap. \$15.95; ebk. ISBN 9780375425189.

Fidel, Raúl, and Ramón—the Castro brothers—attended the Colegio de Dolores in Santiago, Cuba. In this excellent work, Symmes uses personal interviews to provide perspective on Fidel, his early background and education, and the lives of his classmates after 1959.

## HAVANA

★ Estrada, Alfredo José. *Havana: Autobiography of a City*. St. Martin's.

2008. 288p. photos. notes. index. ISBN 9781403975393. pap. \$21.99; ebk. ISBN 9781250114662.

A guide to Havana, relating the city's cultural history from the time when Ernest Hemingway resided there in the 1940s and 1950s to the rise of casinos and the mob. The author spares no one from responsibility for the city's decline.

Frank, Marc. *Cuban Revelations: Behind the Scenes in Havana*. Univ. of Florida.

2013. 344p. notes. bibliog. index. ISBN 9780813044651. \$29.95; pap. ISBN 9780813061818. \$19.95; ebk. ISBN 9780813047843.

The city of Havana loses its charms daily, as buildings collapse and others are abandoned. Frank's interviews with residents shed light on both the hope and despair of life under Fidel Castro's rule, along with prospects for the future under Raúl Castro. (LJ 12/13)

★ Sanchez, Yoani. *Havana Real: One Woman Fights To Tell the Truth About Cuba Today*. Melville House. 2011. 256p.

tr. from Spanish by M.J. Porter. ISBN 9781935554257. pap. \$16.95.

This gem is a narrative about life in contemporary Havana—a life of waiting for food, electricity, medical care, and individual freedoms. Sanchez shares her struggles on her blog, *Generacion Y*, offering new reflections on daily existence in the capital and beyond. (LJ 5/15/11)

## ENTERTAINMENT

Bjarkman, Peter C. *A History of Cuban Baseball, 1864–2006*. McFarland.

2014. 496p. illus. bibliog. index.

ISBN 9780786493821. pap. \$35.

Baseball historian Bjarkman details Cuba's rich baseball history before the revolution, when the game was an amateur sport, to the revolutionary period, when players became the nation's primary export. Included are tales of legendary players and games. (LJ 2/1/07)

★ Bjarkman, Peter C. *Cuba's Baseball Defectors: The Inside Story*. Rowman & Littlefield. 2016. 386p. illus. notes. bibliog.

ISBN 9781442247987. \$36.

Cuba has contributed numerous baseball stars to the major leagues, including Minnie Minoso, Tony Oliva, and 2016 World Series champion Aroldis Chapman. This remarkable social history follows these and other players on their journey from the island to the pros. (LJ 5/1/16)

Connors, Michael. *The Splendor of Cuba: 450 Years of Architecture and Interiors*.

Rizzoli. 2011. 320p. photos. notes. ISBN 9780847835676. \$85.

This lavishly illustrated collection of Cuban architecture includes buildings such as mansions and plantations throughout the island that have been preserved since the colonial era. Photographs offer remarkable detail and a vivid journey through a lost era of Cuban history.

★ English, T.J. *Havana Nocturne: How the Mob Owned Cuba...and Then Lost It to the Revolution*. Morrow. 2009.

432p. illus. notes. bibliog. index. ISBN 9780061712746. pap. \$15.99; ebk. ISBN 9780061795589.

In one of the best recent books on Cuba, English spins a tale of Meyer Lansky, Lucky Luciano, and the world of Havana casinos—a lurid story of gambling, drugs, and sex amid the corruption of Batista's government. The

result is a must-read for insight on prerevolutionary Cuba.

Sublette, Ned. *Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo*. Chicago Review. 2007. 688p. notes. bibliog. index.

ISBN 9781556526329. pap. \$26.95.

Cuban music has a rich past and has influenced music worldwide, including modern jazz and rhythm and blues. It has also introduced the world to notables such as Benny Moré and Pérez Prado. This delightful volume will satisfy readers interested in all aspects of music and entertainment.

## GENERAL & REFERENCE

The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics. Duke Univ. 2004. 723p. ed. by Aviva Chomsky & others. bibliog. index.

ISBN 9780822331971. pap. \$29.95.

For a solid introduction to all things Cuban, start with this edited collection of primary sources, including speeches, articles, songs, poems, book excerpts, and other publications spanning 500 years of Cuban history and culture.

Leonard, Thomas M. *Encyclopedia of Cuban-United States Relations*. McFarland.

2010. 288p. maps. bibliog. index. ISBN 9780786445820. pap. \$49.95.

Leonard has written an excellent reference work with concise entries on relations between the two nations over the course of 200 years. Topics range from the Bay of Pigs Invasion to the Mariel boatlift, with notable events in the 18th century as well.

★ Sweig, Julia E. *Cuba: What Everyone Needs To Know*. Oxford Univ.

3d ed. 2016. 378p. bibliog. index.

ISBN 9780190620363. \$74; pap. ISBN 9780190620370. \$16.95; ebk. ISBN 9780199740819.

Using a question-and-answer format, Sweig creates an essential guide that addresses former president Batista and the future under current leader Raúl Castro. Ideal for libraries, travelers, historians, and general readers.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

Council on Foreign Relations: Cuba [www.cfr.org/americas/cuba](http://www.cfr.org/americas/cuba)

The Cuba page from the Council on Foreign Relations includes a wide variety of articles, policy papers, news briefs, and blogs on diplomatic, economic, and cultural issues, as well as a useful time line on America-Cuba relations.

Granma

[en.granma.cu/cuba](http://en.granma.cu/cuba)

The daily newspaper of Cuba's Communist Party contains sections on national and international affairs, culture, sports, and tourism. English (as well as Dutch, French, and Italian) translations are available. Included

are lavish illustrations and links to other online sources of interest.

Lonely Planet

[www.lonelyplanet.com/cuba](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/cuba)

This travel guide features sections on food, lodging, culture, architecture, and history and historic sites. Readers can also find related maps and videos.

## DVDs

Castro: Man and Myth. 50 min. Parthenon Entertainment, dist. by Cinema Guild. 2013. Free at snagfilms.com; also available for streaming on Amazon for \$2.99.

This informative documentary traces Castro's life as he became an insurgent. The biographical format follows his turn toward communism and the history of his dictatorial rule, giving an overview of the life of an admired and vilified revolutionary.

Cuba Today. 99 min. Marlin Darrah, dist. by TravelVideoStore.com. 2013. \$19.95; also available for streaming on Amazon for \$9.99.

Award-winning filmmaker Darrah creates a fascinating travelog through Havana and other cities. He explores the country's history, culture, and architecture, taking care to include glimpses of Cuba's back roads and rural landscapes.

★ Cubamerican. color & b/w. 107 min. José Enrique Pardo, ÑO Prods., dist. by Midwest Tape. 2015. \$30; acad. libs. \$325.

Five years in the making, this emotional film looks deep into the lives of Cuban families whose lives were displaced by the revolution. These exiles reflect on life in their adopted home of the United States and how they view the future of their homeland. The starkest scenes involve adults reflecting on their childhood, as they knew little of what happened after 1959 but now understand the tragedy of their history. (LJ 3/15/16)

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Boyd Childress is a retired reference librarian and longtime LJ reviewer living in Alabama. He enjoys college sports and maintains a research interest in the American Revolution and the early American Republic. His reading trends to mystery, sports, and Latin America with an emphasis on Cuba

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