

## Reactions to the Resignation of Fidel Castro

On February 19, 2008, Fidel Castro announced to Cuba and to the world that he would not be a candidate for Cuba's presidency (On February 24, the Cuban National Assembly elected his brother Raúl to the post). Head of Cuba since 1959, Castro was one of the longest serving leaders of the modern era. His time in office, along with the revolution that he helped lead, are the subject of great controversy both within Cuba and around the world. In his letter of resignation to the Cuban people, he stated, ***"This is not my farewell to you. My only wish is to fight as a soldier in the battle of ideas."***

*Directions:* The following excerpts are a handful of reactions from people around the world to Castro's announcement of retirement. The first selection of quotes are from a *New York Times* blog that is open to commentary from the world public. The second selection is a collection of reactions from world leaders and organizations. The last section represents a handful of reactions from Cubans on the island. Read each selection carefully and use the quotes to help you think about answering the questions on the worksheet "Categorizing World Reactions about Castro and Cuba."

### Selection 1 Excerpts from a *New York Times* blog, February 19, 2008

<<http://community.nytimes.com/article/comments/2008/02/20/world/americas/20castro.html>>

People in Cuba cannot buy beef, it's for the tourists. There is no fish available, except for the tourists. There are two currencies, one for the locals, one for the tourists. You cannot use local currency in many of the shops. Only people with the convertible peso can shop there, that is tourists and locals who have family overseas who send them dollars or euros...

Cubans have their food rationed (unless they can pay the high prices with the Convertible peso), seven eggs a month, as one example....

Buildings are crumbling right before your eyes. And people live in them. Buildings which are missing walls or roofs. God forbid a hurricane hit Havana, it would be a disaster beyond anyone's worst nightmares....

—Roger Binion, *Moscow*

Castro's Revolution has given the Cuban people what no U.S.-supported regime in Latin America has. Universal health care. Universal public education. Probably the highest literacy in Latin America. And Cubans have a life ex-

pectancy as high as the U.S. A mind-boggling feat for a "poor" Third World country.

History will judge Castro and Cuba's Revolution by weighing his alleged human rights abuses with these undeniable monumental achievements....

—Darwin Spence, *New York, NY*

To those of you who throughout the years have had glowing things to say about Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution, I have this to say: It is very easy to hold such views while living anywhere but in Cuba and actually experiencing what life there has been and is like. It is very easy to have Communist leanings while enjoying every personal freedom and the benefits thereof. Castro has destroyed his own country, his own people, and has made it impossible even for those of us who "escaped" him to ever be rid of the pain and suffering he has caused us and our families...

—Mirna Monal, *Parsippany, NJ*

People like to imagine that the trade embargo against Cuba keeps the poor Cubans from having all the things they need to live a decent life. This is pure nonsense. Cubans are poor because their economy is a disaster....

—Monty, *Argentina*

Cubans are certainly better off than the millions in Central America that have to suffer under capitalism, murdered in their tens of thousands by US-backed fascist dictators, kept in indentured servitude on plantations, forced to flee to the US to do crappy jobs here just so their family can survive...

—*christian h., Chicago*

Vive Castro! America needs leaders to stand up to us.

—*oedrex1, Gaithersburg, MD*

Whatever the gain in health and education, they will always be outweighed by the severity of oppression by the dictatorship...

—*Jack, Mexico City*

Everything said about Fidel Castro, good or bad, is probably true. What should not be forgotten is that he changed the course of history and stood up for those who saw no hope... for those who remember the way we deposed governments, supported dictators and snuffed out the hope of those [who] wanted a better life throughout much of the twentieth century, he was a tragic hero... He inspired many young people to care about their brothers and sisters who had less, and not to fear fighting those who were more powerful. He failed as a democratic leader... but he will remain an inspirational leader for many others.

—*Ignacio, USA*

Castro's longevity in power has little to do with either brilliance, leadership ability or success as "Numero Uno" in Cuba. He has endured in spite of his many disastrous decisions (both political and economic) because he's been able to play the blame game for all his failures by pointing to the American embargo.

—*A Gonzalez, Florida*

Castro has been out of the picture for over a year now. Next will be announced that he died after a long illness. They got what they want...; to keep control after Castro's death.

They fear the Cuban people so much. What an evil government. Thank God for the good old USA.

—*manuel diaz, new jersey usa*

... to reject the American Dream was a huge gamble. To have had nothing but empty hands at that time in 1959, yet still see the joy and promise of empty yet opened hands extended to help each other is [the] triumph [of the Cuban people]. ...

—*Neocynic, New York*

...History will not absolve Fidel, it will only wonder why it was necessary to put a whole country through such a hell for his own egotistical, personal gain. For what? What has he accomplished, except to have a country ruined economically, families broken up, countless unnecessary deaths and suffering, why?...

—*Luis Gonzalez, New York*

## Selection 2 Quotes from World Leaders and Organizations

I view this as a period of transition and it should be the beginning of the democratic transition for the people in Cuba...

The international community should work with the Cuban people to begin to build institutions that are necessary for democracy. And eventually, this transition ought to lead to free and fair elections — and I mean free and I mean fair, not these kind of staged elections that the Castro brothers try to foist off as being true democracy. And we're going to help — the United States will help the people of Cuba realize the blessings of liberty.

—*U.S. President George W. Bush*

We send revolutionary greetings to Fidel Castro. We wish him a long and happy retirement...Comrade Fidel holds a special place in South African hearts because of his decision to deploy thousands of soldiers to help our African liberation struggles...His intervention in the civil war in Angola became a crucial

turning point in our struggle against apartheid capitalism.

—*Spokesman for the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)*

How do we move forward so the Cuban people have an opportunity for a better day, for democracy?...There's been no hope that Raúl Castro, who has been his older brother's enforcer, will be the kind of agent of change Cuba needs today....Today is not the ultimate day of change, but the beginning of a process that will lead to real change.

—*Mel Martinez, U.S. Senator R-Florida, born in Cuba*

Castroism has been a symbol of totalitarianism. One cannot but hope that after this retirement a new path will open and that there will be democracy.

—*Jean-Pierre Jouyet, French minister for Europe*

The Cuban revolution does not depend on one person, on a juncture, nor on circumstance. Fidel is not giving up or abandoning anything—he is occupying the post that he has to fill in the Cuban revolution and the Latin American revolution.

Fidel always was in the vanguard. Men like Fidel never retire.

—*Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez*

He is the only living myth in the history of humanity and I believe he built that image with great competence, character and will power. He also built it with much controversy. So, if he took this initiative [stepping down], it must be good for Cuba....

What we feared was, in a bad-case scenario, that a turbulent process might happen, and that the Cubans of Miami might think that the moment had come to return to Cuba and turn the island into a conflict zone.

—*Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva*

Even if Castro no longer calls the shots,

the repressive machinery he constructed over almost half a century remains fully intact...

Until that changes, it's unlikely there will be any real progress on human rights in Cuba.

—*Miguel Vivanco, Americas director at Human Rights Watch*

### Selection 3 Quotes from Cubans

“It is like losing a father...Like a marriage - a very long one that is over.”

—*Luis Conte, museum watchman*

“I don't know what to say. I just want to leave. This system cannot continue.”

—*Alexis, rubbish collector.*

“This is a crucial moment. Cuba wants change, the people want change.

Change means allowing them to enjoy their rights and take part in the deciding Cuba's future, in an atmosphere of reconciliation and order.”

—*Oswaldo Paya, major Cuban dissident*

“He will continue to be my commander in chief. He will continue to be my president. But I'm not sad because he isn't leaving and after 49 years he is finally resting a bit.”

—*Miriam, Cuban boat worker*

## Online Resources

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### *The New York Times* on Castro

<[http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/c/fidel\\_castro/index.html](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/c/fidel_castro/index.html)>

Has numerous articles, photographs, and links to other resources on Castro and Cuba. External websites have annotation describing content.

### BBC on Castro

<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/244974.stm>>

Provides a synopsis of Castro's role as leader of Cuba and his role during the Cold War. Has additional links to videos and other websites.

### Cuba section of *Prensa Latina*

<[http://www.plenglish.com/NewsSection.asp?Section=ENG\\_Cuba&start=&end=&button=1&language=EN](http://www.plenglish.com/NewsSection.asp?Section=ENG_Cuba&start=&end=&button=1&language=EN)>

Has links to articles about news in Cuba from an alternative, Cuba-based news source.

### *Granma*

<<http://www.granma.cu/ingles/>>

English version of the official newspaper of the Cuban Communist Party.

### NPR on Castro's Health and Cuba's Future

<<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5611790>>

Links to numerous short articles, photos, and radio clips about Cuba and Castro. Also provides articles, timelines, and audio clips about Cuba from an historical perspective.

### *The Miami Herald*: Cuba After Fidel

<<http://www.miamiherald.com/1237>>

Articles and commentary from a city with a large Cuban-American population.

### Al Jazeera on Cuba

<<http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/D9E3E6AB-6F18-40E6-86BB-34F730D696B1.htm>>

Includes articles, photographs, video clips, and leader profiles related to Cuba and Castro's resignation from a major Middle Eastern television network.

### *The Guardian*: Cuba

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/cuba>>

Articles, analysis, and reactions from a leading British newspaper.