



Cuba

In the early 1500s, Spanish conquistadors brutally conquered the native Taíno Indians and took control of the island that became Cuba. The colony became profitable for Spain through the introduction of cash crops such as tobacco and sugar. Enslaved Africans were brought to the island as well to work on sugar plantations—grueling labor with a high mortality rate. Spain remained in control of Cuba even as its empire weakened in the 1800s. Independence movements in Cuba, including the *Guerra de los Diez Años* (Ten Years' War) 1868–1878, were mostly led by wealthy planters born in Cuba. While these movements did not achieve independence, they did result in reforms, most notably the abolition of slavery in Cuba in 1886.

In addition, many of those involved in the Ten Years' War played a major role in the Cuban struggle for independence of the 1890s. These included Máximo Gómez and José Martí. Martí fled Cuba for the United States in 1878, rather than live under Spanish rule. While living in New York, Martí founded *El Partido Revolucionario Cubano* (Cuban Revolutionary party) on January 5, 1892. Martí and his followers worked to start a new movement for Cuban independence. On February 24, 1895, the revolution began with a proclamation issued in the village of Baire in western Cuba calling for *independencia o muerte* (independence or death).

The Cuban liberation forces, led by General Máximo Gómez, had success especially in the Cuban countryside. In an effort to deprive the Cuban rebels of their strength, Spanish Governor-General Valeriano Weyler instituted a policy of *reconcentración* (reconcentration) in February 1896. This policy forcibly moved 300,000 Cubans from rural areas to cities and towns to be guarded by the Spanish Army. The goal was to separate the public from the revolutionary forces. The policy had a disastrous effect on the Cuban population. Approximately 150,000 to 400,000 Cubans died of starvation or disease because the Spanish were unable to provide food and medical care. The conditions were publicized in the United States and many were outraged, leading to increased sympathy for the Cuban independence movement.

Cuban liberation forces reached out to the United States, which officially recognized them in 1896. Official recognition by a foreign government is an important step to establish independence. Cuban forces were also aware of the influence of the press in the United States and tried to shape press coverage of the war with Spain.

By 1897, Cuban liberation forces controlled the eastern half of the country with the exception of a few towns and also had support in the countryside in the west. In general, the Spanish controlled towns and cities while the liberation forces controlled the countryside.

The explosion of the U.S.S. *Maine* in Havana Harbor is an opportunity for Cuban liberation forces to gain the help of the United States, but this also presents new risks. Cuba views the United States as an ally, but a potentially dangerous one. While the United States can help Cuba defeat the Spanish, they might also try to take Spain's place and turn Cuba into a colony of its own.

Opening Position:

- Cuba must be an independent country free from foreign interference.

Questions to Consider:

- What kind of relationship should Cuba pursue with the United States after Cuba achieves independence?
- What kind of relationship should Cuba pursue with Spain after Cuba achieves independence?

What can Cuba negotiate with?

Remember that you don't have to offer these right away in a negotiation.

- Offer a trade agreement with the United States for “most favored nation” status. This would provide favorable terms on sugar and tobacco exported to the United States in exchange for recognition of Cuba’s sovereignty.
- Lease port as a naval base for 50 years.
- Establish a coaling station for U.S. commercial ships.