

Cuba Embargo Debate Reignites After Beyoncé and Jay-Z Trip to Havana

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Beyoncé and Jay-Z traveled to Havana, Cuba for three days last week for their fifth wedding anniversary, angering some proponents of the [Cuba embargo](#) that was enacted on Feb. 7, 1962.

Travel to the island nation for the purpose of tourism is prohibited by the US government. The US Treasury Department approved the trip as a "people-to-people" cultural visit without knowing that the famous pair would be part of the twelve-person group. The cultural visit was approved through the non-profit Academic Arrangements Abroad, which stated that the couple received no special treatment. All twelve members of the party carried letters from Academic Arrangements Abroad and required affidavits stating they would not vary from the approved itinerary.

One year after the embargo was signed, on Feb. 8, 1963, all travel to Cuba was prohibited by the US government. People-to-people cultural visits were instituted by President Bill Clinton in 1995. President George Bush suspended the cultural visits and enacted harsher embargo restrictions and penalties, up to 10 years in prison and \$1 million in fines for a violation. People-to-people visits were re-instated by President Barack Obama in 2011. Since then, more than 220 licenses have been granted to groups that organize trips for American citizens to Cuba. The organizations are required to submit itineraries and affidavits that the citizens on the trip will adhere to the itineraries to OFAC (Office of Foreign Assets Control).

Beyoncé and Jay-Z's itinerary did not involve meetings with Cuban officials or activities such as beach trips. The couple toured Old Havana with an architecture historian and saw private performances by a children's theater group, a contemporary dance company, and popular musicians and singers, including La Charanga Habanera, a popular timba dance band who has been barred from some Cuban venues and censored from state television for provocative lyrics and dancing.

Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) said the Cuban government used the celebrities' trip for "propaganda purposes" and stated, "U.S. law clearly bans tourism to Cuba by American citizens because it provides money to a cruel, repressive and murderous regime. Since their inception, the Obama administration's 'people-to-people' cultural exchange programs have been abused by tourists who have no interest in the Cuban people's freedom and either don't realize or don't care that they're essentially funding the regime's systematic trampling of people's human rights."

Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), who co-wrote a letter to the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control with Representative Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL), stated "We're saying that no one is above the law, even if you are the diva Beyoncé, and that's wonderful that she's famous and rich, and Jay-Z, everybody loves him too. Terrific. But no one's above the law...There are a lot of better places they could go where they're not feeding a monstrous regime."

The Treasury Department, in a letter to Diaz-Balart, stated, "It is our understanding that the travelers in question traveled to Cuba pursuant to an educational exchange trip organized by a group authorized by a group authorized by OFAC to sponsor and organize programs to promote people-to-people contact in Cuba."

Representative Kathy Castor (D-FL), who coincidentally traveled to Cuba on a fact-finding trip at the same time as Beyoncé and Jay-Z, called on the Obama administration and Congress to lift the embargo, stating, "The United States of America now should normalize relations and begin a constructive dialogue with the island nation."

The United Nations has denounced the US Embargo on Cuba for 21 straight years. The 2012 vote against the embargo was 188-3 with Israel and Palau joining the United States to support the embargo.

Name _____
Period _____

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1. What activities does the embargo prohibit beginning in 1963?
2. What are the punishments for violating the embargo?
3. According to Senator Rubio, what is the purpose of the embargo?
4. According to the US Treasury Department, what was the purpose of Beyoncé and Jay-Z's trip to Cuba?
5. Which politician mentioned in the article disagrees with Senator Rubio? Circle one sentence in the article to support your answer.
6. How does the United Nations feel about the embargo?
7. Do you agree with the United Nations or Senator Rubio? Explain why in no more than two sentences.