

# THE HUFFINGTON POST

## Cuban-American Journalists Warn Against Romanticizing Fidel Castro

**They recounted the late dictator's human rights crimes.**

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Cuban-American journalists with intimate knowledge of Fidel Castro's cruelty encouraged Americans on Saturday not to whitewash the legacy of the deceased Cuban strongman.

On ABC's "Good Morning America" Saturday, Tom Llamas, whose parents fled Cuba as political exiles, urged those following the news of Castro's death to view his brutal reign with clarity.

"There is this tendency when world leaders die to kind of misplace this romanticism around some world leaders," Llamas said. "But Fidel Castro is someone who was a tyrant. He was a killer."

Llamas recalled harrowing scenes of desperate Cuban defectors he witnessed while embedding with the U.S. Coast Guard off the coast of Florida.

"Cuba at a distance may look beautiful. It may look mysterious. It may look nostalgic," Llamas said. "But up close it is cracked, it is faded. And the people are hungry. And that should be the legacy of Fidel Castro."

Llamas' comments were an implicit rejoinder to the growing popularity of Cuba as a tourist destination and re-examination of the U.S.' historic policy of isolating the country due to its disagreements with Castro's government. Thanks to the resumption of diplomatic relations, Americans' opinions of Cuba are the highest they have been in 20 years, a Gallup poll shows.

Progressives have long argued that the United States government and media have failed to acknowledge the massive gains in health care and education that Cuba experienced as a result of Castro's takeover. They say that Castro must be viewed in the context of the harm the United States' history of intervention on the island has caused and that America's concern for governments' human rights records is inconsistent.

Llamas' colleague Ron Claiborne alluded to the first of these points on Saturday morning, noting that Cuba has a low infant mortality and high literacy rate.

Cuba, in fact, has a lower infant mortality rate than the United States, according to the World Bank. The island's population is also virtually entirely literate.

Llamas insisted that these accomplishments do not diminish the suffering ordinary Cubans living under dictatorship had experienced, with scarce food and economic opportunities.

"I can remember night after night with my family stuffing envelopes with medicines, Kool-Aid, just so they can have calories — and that's what I remember," Llamas said, his voice cracking as he fought back tears.

Ana Navarro, a CNN contributor who immigrated to the United States from Nicaragua, invited Cubans and Cuban-Americans to tweet stories of family members who were imprisoned, beaten or killed by Castro's regime for political reasons. She retweeted many of the responses.

Soledad O'Brien, an award-winning broadcast journalist and producer, whose mother is an Afro-Cuban immigrant to the U.S., shared her mother's memories of Castro's brutality on Twitter. She acknowledged, however, the reasons many previously marginalized Cubans, including Afro-Cubans, view Castro positively.