

Cuba: 1996*

Time, which stopped sometime in the early 1960s, has restarted in Cuba. But I would be hard pressed to optimistic about what the future will bring. Many of the 1956 Bel-Air Chevies would be, in the US, worth a small fortune; *Habana Viejo*, Old Havana, is a world treasure, now under protection by the United Nations (UNESCO will contribute 50% for restoration, but the Cubans have little to spare to put into restoration); the magnificence of the Hotel Nacional and the Ingleterra, rid of Mafiosa, has been preserved; much of the highly influential music of Cuba, a magnificent synthesis of Africa and the Old World, predates the revolution, but always willing to experiment, Cuban rap is now heard also. The decision to legalize the US Dollar is now bringing rapid change to Cuba. Everyone who was in Cuba in 1991--during "the special period"-- sees visible improvement, more Ladas, more activity, but one would have to be naive to think that these visible improvements cut deeply. What is being created has surely helped some, but there is good reason to think these changes have hurt many. Before I try to sketch some of this, some background, too often forgotten--or unknown-- needs to be mentioned.

Background

Philip Foner (in his detailed *The Spanish-Cuba War and the Birth of American Imperialism, 1895-1898*) reminds us that while it true that what is called "the Spanish American War" was significant as regards America's increasingly muscular imperialist aspirations which in short order would include domination not only of Cuba, but of Hawai`i, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines, there were two wars. By far, the more significant one was the war against the Cubans fought first by Spanish and and then by Americans. In May of 1895, Jose Marti had written: "The Cuba War...has broken out in America in time to prevent...the annexation of Cuba to the United States." Like Fidel later, Marti would be correct in his diagnoses, but, tragically for the Cubans, wrong in his hopes. As in the Philippines where the Revolution led by Rizal was annexed and appropriated, American imperialism in Cuba required that the nationalist revolution be crushed.

Faced with a populace sympathetic to the Cubans, President Grover Cleveland's initial step was a claim to American "neutrality" in the Cuban war against Spain. This meant, as Foner notes that "the United States would permit trading in arms with Spain, but would use its entire forces to prevent aid reaching the revolutionists" (Foner, I, p. 177) The second step, predictably, was to publically guarantee that the persons and property of Americans in Cuba would be "protected" (p. 180). On January 24, 1898, the cruiser, *Maine*, was dispatched to Havana Harbor. It was blown up on February 15. To this day, we do not know who was responsible or even whether, unlikely, it was an accident. But the death of 264 sailors onboard surely served well the imperialist purposes of the US government and of US capitalists who saw Cuba as part of their domain.¹ McKinley and his cabinet laid the basis for Congressional message to be delivered: The "official" justification was that "the United States should intervene in Cuba on the broad grounds of humanity..." (Foner, I, p. 257). The actual message to Congress asserted:

* This a brief effort to report on my visit to Cuba, between June 7 and 21, 1996. The "official" reason was a conference of philosophers. I should note that while it is widely believed that US citizens cannot travel to Cuba, it has been established that travel is right, not a privilege. To circumvent this, our law forbids that we do business with Cubans; hence we need permission to spend money in Cuba. This is acquired by obtaining a licence. But in fact, this is probably not enforceable. My passport was never stamped and no one ever asked for my license.

I am no expert on Cuba, of course, and this is not a substitute for serious study.

When it appears that there is within that island a government capable of paying its debts and of carrying out the functions of an independent nation, and has, in reality, the adequate form and attributes of nationality, that government shall be quickly and easily recognized and the relationship and interests of the United States with that nation shall be adjusted (Quoted by Foner, p. 262).

This was, of course, long-standing US policy. Walter LeFeber summarizes matters well:

...[F]or more than a century (if not since 1790), North Americans have been staunchly antirevolutionary; and...U.S. power has been the dominant outside (and often inside) force shaping the societies against which Central Americans have rebelled (*Inevitable Revolutions*, p. 12).

Fidel Castro had waited long enough. After a series of dramatic victories over the army of Fuljencio Batista, in January of 1959, he led his bearded Sierra Maestra revolutionaries into Havana overthrowing Batista's American supported dictatorial regime. Realizing Marti's dream, an independent Cuban Republic was finally established.

Several facts need emphasis. First US imperialism had structured the inevitable. As Gerassi wrote (in his important *The Great Fear in Latin America* (1963, 1973):

Latin America's social and economic structure is decadent, corrupt, immoral, and generally unsalvageable.

That change is coming is obvious. That it will come about through revolution is certain... Nor can real change in structure be brought about by those who emulate us, no matter how hard we hard to convince ourselves that they can. Latin America's history is not our history, it inheritance not our inheritance, its concepts not our concepts, and its passions not our passions (p. 12).

It was not that policy-makers were entirely oblivious to the "inevitable." Writing in 1980, the US Ambassador to Panama remarked: "What we see in Central America today would not be much different if Fidel Castro and the Soviet Union did not exist" (quoted by LeFeber, p. 12).

But, of course, the difference is precisely the presence of both Fidel Castro and the Soviet Union. This leads to the second point: Could it have been otherwise? Washington granted diplomatic recognition to the new government and "hurried to assure it of America's 'sincere good will.'" Was accommodation possible?

In the popular mind, it was not and the fault is entirely Fidel Castro's. The basic problem, on this view, was Fidel's "militancy:" Szulc remarks: "From his first week in Havana, Castro used every speech to tell the United States as plainly as possible that it no longer had a say in Cuba." The "blood baths" in Cuba and the "disregard" for law, e.g. in failing to compensate owners of appropriated private property, could not, on this view, help but provoke a hostile response from the Americans.² Meyer and Szulc, for example, conclude that: "there was no real chance for settlement, even if the United States had tried to clasp Castro to its bosom (p. 36).

All of this is so much nonsense. Indeed, in his later account, Szulc asserts: "The fact was that the United States could not tolerate a revolution it was unable to influence or control immediately south of Key West Florida" (1896: 480). And the very best evidence for this is the fact that at a National Security Council meeting of March 10, 1959, two and half months after Batista's defeat, the decision was made to remove Fidel and bring "another government to power in Cuba" (*ibid.*). This was the decision which was to set off

the CIA's numerous efforts to assassinate Castro, and to lead, in April 1961, to the abortive invasion at the Bay of Pigs.

The idea that the United States might have clasped Castro "to its bosom" had he acted otherwise is preposterous, but in any case, it is worth deconstructing the standard view of Fidel and Cuban revolution.

The Cubans had fought a War of Independence. Szulc writes that "Fidel Castro obsessively feared that his revolution would be stolen from the Cubans by the United States" (Szulc, p. 479). But given the history of US policy in Latin America and the fact, just mentioned, that even before any property owned by US citizens was seized, the decision "to remove Fidel" had been made, one can hardly term his fear "obsessive."

Although always forgotten, Fidel was an anti-communist if that means what it meant during the entire Cold War era. He was, to be sure, a revolutionary. But so too was George Washington. He was, to be sure, a social reformer and indeed, *a socialist of some sort*. An agricultural country with abundant fertile land, the land-reform law, promulgated in May was nothing like "experiments" in the Soviet Union. It made peasants into landowners: the equivalent of the "yeoman farmers" so much praised by Thomas Jefferson. As Meyer and Szulc note, when Fidel came to America in April of 1959, "the evidence suggests that [Fidel] didn't know what he was, except that he was a radical revolutionary..." (1962, p. 37).³ As to "blood baths," no one denies that those killed were members of Batista's police and army who had demonstrably atrocious records of murder and torture of Cubans. Here we should note that the Sandinistas, anxious not to repeat what they saw to be mistakes made by Castro and anxious to have the support of the Americans, *abolished the death penalty*. They paid a very heavy price, of course, since armed by the US, the remaining Somoistas engaged in bloody counter-revolution, taking the lives of countless innocents.

Americans were--and are?-- thoroughly captives of the Cold War ideology which painted the world in two colors, Red and American ("Democratic" and "free"): Communism was expansionistic, a threat to be eliminated at any price wherever it appeared in the world; anyone on the left was a communist; anyone who was a communist was a lackey of the Cominterm.

As far as I can tell, Gerassi was the first to point that Castro initially kept the "old communists" at bay. The Cuban Communist Party had supported Batista and had never supported his revolutionary efforts, arguing in typical fashion, for example, that the attack on the Moncada barracks (which led to Fidel's jailing on the Isle of Pines) was "adventurous." When in power, he booted out its leader Anibal Escalante, and fired Marinello from the rectorship of Havana University. Che Guevara, with his full endorsement, attacked the Communist political economy of Carlos Rafael Rodriguez. But even if we put aside the difficult question of Castro's philosophy, there can be no doubt that his subsequent embrace of "Marxism-Leninism," formally in 1961, and, more critically of his decision in March, 1962 to align the revolution with the Soviet Union was a forced choice.

We need again to be reminded that Miami Cubans were continually flying from Florida in light aircraft, dropping bombs and incendiary devices on Cuba and that the US pretended impotence in stopping this, that the CIA had quickly established working arrangements with extreme rightist elements in Cuba-- factions which "were dedicated to the return to the pre-Castro status quo in Cuba." We need to remember that the life-blood of the Cuban economy is sugar and that the sugar quota was fully controlled by the US. Threatened as early as January, 1960, on July 15th, Eisenhower signed a sugar bill which "immediately withdrew virtually all of the Cuban sugar quota for the balance of 1960" (Meyer and Szulc, p. 62). Indeed, in the words of the US ambassador to Cuba, Phillip W. Bonsal, "...[Fidel] became oriented toward dependence on the Soviet Union only when the United States, by its actions in the spring and summer of

1960, gave the Russians no choice other than to come to Castro's rescue" (quoted by Szulc, 1986: 496).

Bonsal surely puts this correctly: The Russians, no more than Fidel, wanted to be pushed together. As Gerassi notes,

Russian diplomats were no fools. They knew that Castro would fall sooner or later from some United States intervention. Russia was unwilling and/or unable to wage a world war to defend them; and to help out economically until his fall was deemed too expensive and too useless a sacrifice (1963, 1971: 394-95).

It may be possible to say here that Fidel erred in joining the Russians, that he had a third alternative--to try to go it alone. This is tempting, but ultimately frivolous: Even if the Cubans had tried to establish for themselves non-dependence on either Russia or the United States and tried, instead, to rebuild the economy nearly from scratch, they would have had to overcome the persistent efforts by the US to overthrow the regime. That they have succeeded so far in this can only be explained in terms of Cuba's relation to the USSR. Indeed, the world-historical confrontation of the missile crisis of 1962 had as a consequence, surely unintended, a much needed respite for Cuba against further US efforts to invade or overthrow violently the regime: Russian willingness to remove the missiles bought a US commitment not to invade Cuba.

Nor was the regime in Cuba naive about what we needed if Cuba was to have socialism. Gerassi writes:

Castro wanted Russia not only to import buses but to help Cuba set up its own bus industry, not only to import elevators but also to help set up Cuba's elevator industry, not only to import pencil sharpeners but also to... Russia refused (395).

It was at this point that time stopped in Cuba. Boycotted and dependent upon Russian subsidies and credits for whatever it cannot produce, no development was possible. The people of Cuba have struggled to keep the revolution alive. That they have done this is a remarkable achievement. But, of course, they have not achieved the hopes of the revolution.

Impressions of the Present

Most people in Cuba are poor. It is true that there is no malnutrition, everyone can go to a good school, and health care is very good, perhaps as good as anywhere in the world. But at least in Havana, housing is very rundown; often there is no electricity, sometimes no water. There are no toilet seats or hot water except in the fancy tourist hotels.

There are now two economies, one running on the US dollar, the other on the peso. The peso economy is a subsistence economy sustained by the state. The basic mechanism is the *Libreta*, a kind of ration card which stipulates entitlements to basic food needs (and soap, etc.). Prices are fixed at 1959 rates. It seems that it is quite impossible for a person living alone to maintain oneself on the *Libreta*, so several must join together. The combined allotment of rice, beans and fish--there is very little meat--ensures nutrition. There is little in the way of fresh fruits and vegetables in Havana. We saw no lettuce in Havana, even at our little hotel. Instead of fresh fruit for breakfast, even at our hotel, we had a processed mango juice.

You might wonder why so little of the local produce is not available in Havana, given that there is abundant fertile land, tillable all year round? (The island is a large land mass: The big Island of Hawai'i is 4,021 square miles; Cuba is 44, 281 square miles. Moreover, much of the land is neither cultivated nor used

for pasturage. There seem to two explanations seems for this: The farmer is entitled to the produce of his labor. But a person who buys this for sale in Havana is exploiting the farmer. So there is no system of distribution of the produce. One wonders how Marx has been read? It is legal for a group of farmers to secure a truck and for themselves to market their produce. This has begun to happen, it seems, but the produce, brought to the main farmer's market in Havana, is mostly bought up by restaurants, both private and state-owned. I have no first-hand evidence that this explanation is correct, of course. Nor do I have first-hand evidence of life in the countryside or in the other larger cities and towns of Cuba. Some think that things are better for them just because they are tend to be far more self-sufficient. One very perceptive longtime revolutionary, now working in law, told us that people are no longer coming to the city and that some who came are now returning.

There is "full employment" in Cuba, but many people are not working and few, it seems, work as hard as most Americans. The *libreta* system guarantees that you will eat and evidently, you are paid a salary until a new position is found, if your job has been eliminated. Housing, evidently, is very inexpensive and, if you have lived in the same place for, I think, ten years, it is yours. If you have a college degree, then you must be employed at salary commensurate with your level of education. It is the obligation of the state to secure such work. But because the educational system is open, this has caused problems: There are now more job seekers with qualifications than jobs. Julio, the son of the man just mentioned, has a BA in economics, but like so many young people here in Hawai'i, he has chosen to work as a tour guide where tips are in dollars. Some people stay in the jobs they have because the subsidized lunches are very good!

Salaries are mainly in pesos; perhaps the average monthly salary is 230 pesos. Cigar workers do better, since after they satisfy their minimum, they can earn more on a piece-work basis, including a portion of their pay in dollars. The Partagas factory, near the Inglaterra Hotel in Old Havana, is producing handmade cigars exactly the way in was done in 1848. There is a division of labor and the process is far more complicated than one might think. Formerly only men made cigars; now there are women also. As has been the tradition for many decades, a "reader" reads to the workers some six hours a day, in the morning news and other materials, in the afternoon, a novel, perhaps Tolstoi, perhaps a mystery story. The Cubans could have sold more cigars to the European market had they been able to produce more. Cigars are expensive: A box of twenty-five standard-sized Romeo and Juliets costs some \$80.00.

Aside then from basic foodstuffs and other commodities produced in Cuba, dollars are essential. There is shopping in pesos in stores, for clothes e.g., and dollars cannot be used for some purchases, e.g., buses, the movies, some beaches. The buses are remarkable. One, called "the camel," is a huge camel-shaped semi which seats some 200 and is pulled by a diesel. It costs twenty centavos, a penny. Other buses, all ancient, cost twice as much. Buses are extremely crowded and there are long waits. Cubans have developed a remarkable queue system. In central Havana, they line up, British fashion; but in most places, one need not stand in a long line. Instead, when you arrive at the stop you ask loudly: Who was the last to come? You will follow them when the bus arrives. You may not make it the first time.

So-called "Dollar stores" are mainly in Central Havana and in the better neighborhoods of Miramar, the location of the foreign embassies and offices of many of the foreign firms who do business in Cuba. Dollar stores are not, as before, restricted to foreigners. I do not where exactly when it occurred, but it was decided to legalize trade in dollars. The huge dollar store behind the Russian Embassy--surely the ugliest building in the "New World"-- is like a Costco. It has nearly everything one can think of; but things are expensive, even in dollars. A pint of olive oil costs \$6.00, the cheapest bottle of Spanish wine sells at \$3.00. Fancy soaps (Jergens, etc.), sausages, canned goods (imported from Europe and Canada), are just about at US prices.

While it is just a guess, perhaps 20 or 30% of the population has direct access to dollars, but they also can be bought with pesos. Twenty-two pesos buys a dollar. It is quite impossible to get any sort of reliable number for those with direct access to dollars, especially since much of this is illegal. All those who are associated with the burgeoning tourist industry have access, primarily through tips. There are as well "self-employed," including taxi-drivers, "legal" taxis and "gypsies," private restaurants, but also those with skills demanded by foreign firms and households, including, e.g., pipefitters, masons, or laundresses. These "self-employed"--this is the official title--need a license. According to official statistics, there are some 58,000 in Havana (of a total Cuban workforce of some 3.5 million). The license fees have recently been dramatically increased. Licenses for "drivers" or those with cars who serve as taxis went from 100p to 400p. Fidel went out of his way to attack the drivers who, he says, are getting rich.

There are many gypsy--unlicensed--cabs: indeed, anyone with a car is a potential cab. Fare to Miramar in a metered "Eurotaxi"--an air-conditioned BMW-- runs around \$8.00. You can get a gypsy for as little as \$2.00. There is still, however, a good deal of social spirit left as regards transportation. It is not uncommon to see people ask for a ride from a car stopped at a red light. I experienced this once, but had, of course, to keep my mouth shut. Another time, a cousin of a Cuban friend here in Hawai'i that we had visited flagged down a vehicle for us, there being no taxis in this very poor neighborhood and no telephone to call one. The "driver" did not ask for remuneration, but we generously tipped him, a reward for his socialist virtue.

Licenses for sheetmetal workers went from 45 pesos to 500 pesos and laundry from 30p to 50p. Some of the "private" restaurants seem to be thriving. Licenses for private restaurants cost some \$450.00. They compete easily with the state-owned restaurants where, even with Spanish management, service is generally poor and the food mediocre at its best. I had rabbit, however, in a very pleasant state-owned restaurant. But the place was not air-conditioned and was insufferably hot. More generally, the food is better in general than that which I found in Sophia in 1991. Aside from the rabbit, the best meals I had were prepared in the modest homes of two Cubans who were generous hosts.

It seems inevitable that the costs of licenses will continue to rise in the effort to maintain some of equality. It seems also inevitable that crime and corruption, already evident, will accelerate dramatically. The double monetary system structures opportunities to get rich, legally and illegally. Law 73, which institutes income taxes for first time was passed in 1994; but it has not yet been implemented.

The most obvious illegal behavior (aside from the gypsy cabs) is prostitution. Prostitutes now loiter in the streets around all the tourist hotels. We were told that in order to ensure work conditions, they had to make payoffs to the police on duty and often, to doormen and hotel security. The Cubans took great pride in the fact that prostitution had largely been eliminated with the revolution. But there are no drugs in Cuba. Indeed, the very prominent Arnaldo T. Ochoa, who commanded troops in Angola, faced the death penalty because he was associated with Columbian drug traffickers.

Although it is a highly subjective impression, one gets the feeling that there is a new hustling attitude in Havana, but perhaps most especially with middle-level bureaucrats and those in the dollar economy. In former years, I am told that Intourist made arrangements for the conference. This year, it seems to have been arranged by the University of Havana, which not, incidentally, is a quite wonderful set of buildings on the top of the hill on Linea which runs straight to ocean. We know that the University has been subject to severe budget cuts and this may explain the feeling we got that we were easy marks for some additional funds.

There is an argument also on the reasons for the cuts. One obvious reason is the incredible strain on the economy especially during "the special period." (Budget cuts in the City University of New York were, of course, far deeper!) Another reason, already suggested, is the over supply of BAs in the very severely strained economy. Another is the possibility, recently expressed in a speech by Raul Castro that there is now a "fifth column" in the University. Several people suggested that the speech was an over-reaction and that, likely, there would not be increased intimidation by the government of people which dissident opinions. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* (31 May 1996), however, probably, was not wrong in judging that part of the fall-out of Helms-Burton policy was an ideological defensive reaction on the part of the regime.

I have said nothing about the conference, the "The Eight Annual North-American-Cuban Conference of Philosophers and Social Scientists." It ran for four days with everything translated into either Spanish or English as the case may be. This slowed proceedings especially since, with the exception of the chairing by Gerassi, people--especially Cubans--tended to make long speeches. I would have to say that the intellectual content was depressing--on both sides. There was, for example, no evidence that the Yugoslavian or Chinese experience was included in their theorizing although we were told that there was now a study group among economists who are looking at this. The more recent discussions of market socialism, e.g., Roemer and his critics, were not mentioned. There was a decided influence of "post-modern" jargon, especially among the philosophers.

Of some interest, perhaps, was a huge debate which took place among the foreign visitors. The Cubans wanted to open the conference with the playing of the two national anthems. Many of found the playing the US Anthem objectionable. We ultimately decided that we should leave it up to the Cubans and do individually what our consciences required. The "official view," repeated several times, was that the Cubans would welcome the day when the US treated Cuba with the dignity it requires--as an equal in the world of nations. Cliff Durand, our leader, had brought previously a flag which had, instead of the fifty stars, the peace symbol. That was displayed alongside the Cuban flag.

Sugar production is off, but it is clear enough that the Cubans could not generate sufficient foreign exchange with sugar. I should mention also that the Cubans are producing and refining oil, but it no one has any numbers on what this amounts to. They have chosen tourism as an alternative. Here the parallels in the political economies of Cuba and Hawai'i are dramatic.

It would be of considerable interest to look closely at various dimensions of this, including the character of the immigrant workers and how race and class developed in Cuba, both before 1896 and after. As in Hawai'i, the US mainland racial framework does not fit in Cuba. I take a moment to comment on this.

Slaves, of course, worked the sugar plantations of Cuba. In consequence of this, racial inequalities did exist in Cuba even though I think it is fair to say that after slavery ended and perhaps even before, dark skinned Cubans did not experience prejudice in the way that they have experienced in the United States. That is, I would distinguish institutional racism, rooted in the plantation political economy from attitudes of race-based inferiority.

For a variety of reasons and in contrast to the US, in Cuba, freed slaves and their descendents, usually of mixed race, could be integrated easily into mainstream Cuban society. The *coartacion*, the right of buying ones freedom for a fraction of the slave's monetary value explains a high manumission rate. The first census, in 1774, shows that of the total population of 171,620, 44,333 were slaves (25.8%), 30,847 were free "colored" persons and 96,440 were free "white" persons (Patterson, p. 470, note 80).

Appearance made categorization difficult. Accordingly, the idea of "legal color" was introduced. It was determined by indicating the race of parents on the birth certificate, a fact which parents could easily alter. Martinez-Alier writes: "Legal color shows that the basic criterion of social classification was social origin and not physical appearance" (p. 137). Fidel Castro used to say that 80% of all Cubans were black and that may well be true if color is not the primary test. People need not identify themselves in terms of "legal color" and they are likely not to, if "white" is the preferred *social* class. The official census of 1953 (in Pre-revolutionary days) showed that the combined black and mulatto population was but 27.2% of the total. It is not clear what criteria was used here, but if people were self-identifying themselves, this would be huge under-estimate according to the definition of "legal color."

In modern Cuba, dark-skinned Cubans were prominent in politics and in the labor unions. It was widely believed that Bastista was a mulatto. Dark-skinned Cubans did typically occupy a narrow range in the division of labor: musicians, artists, bricklayers, dressmakers, cigarmakers, shoemakers, bakers and cooks. They were found in most other skilled occupations. But "blacks and mulattos were under-represented in the political system, civil service, the professions, banking and finance" (Dixon, p. 233). Every effort was made with the revolution to correct institutional racism in Cuba, but since this is not easy to erase, it still remains. On the other hand, today, it is hardly unusual to see the entire range of skin coloration in one family and among groups of friends.

But to return to the tourism in Cuba. Tourism seems now to be the main route for foreign investment primarily by Spanish firms. There are some 39 Spanish firms doing business in Cuba. Corporations from Britain, France, Sweden, Chile and Israel (sic) have also invested in Cuba. *Cubanews*, a publication out of Miami which prints official government statistics, reports that some 250 new contracts are now being negotiated. Evidently, the Cuban approach is case by case and there is a strong commitment to maintain control by maintaining at least 51% of the investment.

Official numbers show that there were 750,000 tourists in 1995, of which 345,000 went to Varadero, a beautiful beach about two hours west of Havana. Varadero has something of the look of Waikiki before the high rises, except that the natural beach is very wide and of the finest white sand. There is little or no surf since the slope is gradual and extremely long. All along the beach, there are hotels, some of them wholly state-owned and managed, others partly owned and managed by foreign firms, but especially Sol Melia and Trypp, two Spanish firms. Trypp is part owner of the Habana Libre in Havana, formerly the Hilton, and Melia built what is called a five-star hotel in Vedada, the Melia Cohiba. It is a typical modern glass high rise, an eyesore in my mind. We were told that it would be the last of such, since the Cubans seem to be aware that if they are to compete they must emphasize what makes them a distinctive tourist spot.

Varadero is quite a phenomenon since it has an airport and there are now direct flights to it from a number of European cities and from Toronto and Vancouver in season. Julio, mentioned earlier, reported that most of these tourists to Varadero are content not to see any of the rest of Cuba, including Havana. The English, he reported, were the most curious. Evidently, most tourists are content to fly cheaply into Varadero, spent their week in the sun and return. The isolation of Varadero may well be a blessing for the Cubans who can derive some of the benefits of tourism without all of the costs. There are good hotels also in Miramar, in central Havana and in the Old City.

The *Nacional* in central Havana is lovely, a large version of the Royal Hawaiian and Chicago's Edgewater Beach (now gone). It hosted many celebrities and gangsters: Pictures on the wall of the veranda include Meyer Lansky and Fred Astaire. Of some interest, the Hotel opening in 1930 featured Walter

Mokahuku and his Hawaiians! We saw a 1940s water ballet in the large pool. Choreographed by a reborn Busby Berkeley, it was very lovely. I could not afford the famous Tropicana which has a cover charge of \$50.00 US. A smaller version of this can also be found in the Capri, formerly managed by George Raft and then a base for the US mafia. There is a terrible Italian restaurant on the roof of the Capri. It was there that I saw the only Japanese, almost certainly businesspeople, in Cuba.

By far the greatest personal hardship suffered by me was the unavailability of cash in Cuba. Since it is illegal to do business with Cubans, there are no US banks and no credit cards drawn on US banks can be used. A VISA on a European or Canadian bank is welcomed however. Keep in mind that this is consequence of US--not Cuban policy.

The *Ingleterra* in the old city, built by the British one hundred and fifty years ago, remains magnificent. All the hotel bars and restaurants have music, almost all of which dates from the 1950s. *Besame Mucho* is a must. But Cuban musicians are superb, and their three and four-part harmonies are unbelievable. I would add that I sat in on standup bass with a fantastic group which played in the englassed bar on the top of the Fosca, mentioned earlier. The lead was a Stefan Grapelli violinist who was wonderful. I heard salsa at the *Palacio della Salsa*, a huge ballroom in the Rivera Hotel. A brilliant fourteen piece salsa band began playing at 11:00 PM and continued, nearly nonstop until 3:00 AM. I will never see dancing like that again. As far as I could tell, there were few, if any tourists in the room. Still, all of these places, to be clear, are in the dollar economy.

There are two other types of tourism in Cuba, eco-tourism and medical tourism. I have no first-hand knowledge of the latter, but we were told that foreigners come for high-tech treatment as part of a holiday and that this was a good source of dollars.

We spend a day and night at La Terazza, an eco-tourist resort about one hour south of Havana at the edge of foothills. Conceived by the current Minister of Tourism, Osmani Cienfuegos, the brother of war hero, Camilo, it was built from scratch some twenty-five years ago, I think. A village with both apartments and houses for about 850 residents was built along with a small hotel in the same architecture, simple but quite nice. The residents were part of the planning and now share in the profits of the hotel operation. This has allowed them to sustain a recreation center, beauty shop and clinic, staffed by two physicians. I was given a medical exam by a delightful fellow who gave me a clean bill of health and prescribed some herbal medicine for a cough, caught by overexposure to air-conditioning in the city. I should note also that while Cuba is at the same latitude as Kauai (22 degrees north), it was very, very hot and humid in June. There are no trade winds.

The citizens work both in a massive reforestation project and in the hotel, giving them access to dollars. The only non-local person is the general manager of the hotel. The whole area has been designated a preserve. Mercedes served us dinner on her patio. This is an option for guests and part of the full board dining plan. Her cooking was good, even though her access to quality stores was very limited. That day, no *lechón* was available and the beefsteak was, as we generally had it, of low quality. The visitors were few in number and the place was extremely peaceful. There was nice place to swim nearby, a pond on the San Juan River with some gentle waterfalls. And there is horseback riding. It will attract a different sort of tourist. But the place could well be a model for other places, including Hawai`i.

What will the future bring? Since returning from Berlin, the week the wall came down, and Yugoslavia, three weeks before Serbs and Croats began killing one another, I have lost all confidence in predictive social science. But I do not see many possible happy outcomes. At present the people may be demoralized. The young people have no experience of conditions before the revolution or of the revolution itself. They see TV and American movies.⁴ Helms-Burton has, however, generated paradoxical outcomes.

On the one hand, there is evidence that it reinvigorated the already strong Cuban sense of nationalism. One sees graffiti which reads: "Helms-Burton wants Cuban Children to starve." On the other hand, there is the question of whether Helms-Burton can be implemented. The *European* reported last week that "many European companies fear their businesses in the United States will suffer after August, when a new piece of US legislation, the Helms-Burton Law, comes into force" (9 June 96). If, for example, the US can get away with banning executives from non-American companies from visiting the US, a blatant exercise of power in violation of all international law, the consequences could be severe. But Canada already has passed a law saying that *it is illegal* for a Canadian firm to pay a fine to the US for trading in Cuba. The Caribbean head of Phillips said that he is under orders from the head office to *ignore* Helms-Burton. One can only hope that governments will forbid this flagrant US effort to run the world.

The legalization of the dollar will surely exacerbate inequality and one can only worry what might follow from this. I do not think that there will be any problems in succession: After Fidel, there is Raul and after him, a number of men who could hold legitimacy, other things being equal. Politically acute Cubans have a high disdain for the Miami Cubans, who I believe, outshine US Zionists.⁵ Older Cubans went to school with them. It is their view that they really do not want to return to Cuba. They would rather run Cuba from Miami. Since the US still believes that the Cubans are not ready for self-government, perhaps any excuse will be sufficient to intervene once more. Again, one can only hope that international pressure against this will be sufficient to prevent it. When hearing that I had just left Cuba, leaving Nassau, a retired New York teacher living in Fort Lauderdale, probably summarized American opinion on the matter: The Cubans deserve what they have. I asked this otherwise intelligent woman if we could talk about something else. How indeed were these opinions formed?

Peter T. Manicas

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Notes

1. Foner's chapter XIV, "Why the United States Went to War" subjects to devastating criticism the conventional wisdom best articulated by Julius Pratt in his influential *Expansionism of 1898: The Acquisition of Hawaii and the Spanish Islands* (1936). As a contemporary put it, "the real interests that move the humanitarian patriotism of the American nation is a sugar ring with tobacco in the background" (Quoted from Foner, I, p. 282). The "real interests" were economic in the most straightforward sense possible.

2. Fidel was at the time concerned that the swift courts-martials would influence public opinion in the US.

It is also of some importance to note that in the American revolution, there was *no* effort to recompense loyalists who fled the New United States for the property which was expropriated by the new government, often to the benefit of key placed officials. See R. R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution* (Princeton University Press, 1969.) A more recent example is the problem of property appropriated between 1945 and 1949 for the building of the Wall in Berlin. The Bonn government has proceeded both hypocritically and illegally. Of course, compensating for this property would have put government into bankruptcy. See Norman Stone, "Property Values," TLS, 10 May 1996. Stone comments that "Uganda after Idi Amin has done better."

3. For a thorough treatment of Fidel's complicated belief system, see Tad Szulc's large biography, *Fidel* (New York: William Morrow, 1986). Szulc's suggests, implausibly if Tito Gerassi is correct, that Cuban socialism was rooted in Christianity, albeit a distinct humanist version. Fidel was Jesuit-educated.

Regis Debray probably gets it right in saying that "A Leninist is an opportunist with principles. Fidel is a Leninist. His principles remain firm, but the opportunities change" (quoted by Szulc, p. 454).

4. CNN, ESPN and HBO are available. By far the most popular television shows are two soap operas, one Brazilian and one Cuban. I saw several episodes of this which are, predictably, highly moralistic with decided "good guys"--always working people and "bad guys" always wealthy. There was a surprising absence of darkskinned folks in either series.

5. The first wave of emigres numbered some 280,000. They were almost all light-skinned, well educated and middle to upper class. Small wonder that they have prospered! The second wave of 273,000 were also middle class and largely light-skinned. The third, Mariel wave of 125,000, were largely unskilled, unschooled and male. Perhaps 40% were Afro-Cubans and most spoke no English. Many (some 60%), encountering US style racism from fellow Cubans in the Miami area, proceeded to New York and New Jersey.