

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES



FOCUS ON CUBA

The Journal of California State University, San Bernardino's International Institute

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This journal is dedicated to Cuban friends and colleagues some of whom visited California State University, San Bernardino and all of whom welcomed us so warmly to their island: Lázaro Luis Gonzalez Morales, Soraya Castro Mariño, Pablo Armando Fernández, César López Nuñez, Nancy Morejón, Julio Carranza, Angel Ricardo Nuñez Fernández, Abel Prieto, Jorge Hernández, Ana María González Mafud, Norma Gálvez Periut, Pedro Monzón, Ana María Pellón Sáez, Tania Borges Suárez, Esperanza González, Reina María Rodríguez, Raul Cordero, and Sergio Gomez Castanedo. May our dialogs, friendship, and international family grow.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Introduction](#)

About the Program

[*Reconnecting with Cuba Through Academic and Cultural Exchanges*](#)

Rosalie Giacchino-Baker and Elsa Ochoa-Fernández

Personal Perspectives on Cuba

[*Cubanisms: Debunking Misunderstandings about Cuba*](#)

María Balderrama

[*Cuban Postcards*](#)

Rafael Correa

[*Cuban Questions Unanswered*](#)

Julie Reineman

Historical, Cultural, and Social Perspectives on Cuba

[*The Image of Ernesto “Che” Guevara*](#)

Justin Romero

[*An Ethnographic Exploration of Santería in Havana Today*](#)

D. Paul Sweeney, Jr.

[*Women’s Healthcare in Cuba: Observation of Medical Facilities in Cerro, Havana*](#)

Stephanie Bernal

[*Current Programs and Issues in Cuban Teacher Education*](#)

Sergio Gómez Castanedo and Rosalie Giacchino-Baker

[About the Contributors](#)

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Many people contributed to this journal's success, especially the authors of articles, all of whom were faculty or student participants in CSUSB's 1999-2000 Cuba Program. Warm thanks go to Dr. Rosalind Bresnahan and Dr. Mayo Toruño for the hours they spent advising student writers.

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This journal is proof of the enthusiastic collaboration between the staff of International Institute Services and the International Institute through the leadership of Elsa Ochoa-Fernández.

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[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Introduction

Rosalie Giacchino-Baker

Nothing about Cuba is simple. Its long history, rich cultures, and complex international relations all invite but defy understanding. The warmth and friendship of Cubans themselves make all efforts worthwhile. It is time for personal and national dialogs to continue after disastrous interruptions. This journal reflects the first steps in a journey of discovery and communication for faculty and students at California State University, San Bernardino who participated in the 1999-2000 Cuba Program.

The eight articles included in this journal have been divided into three thematic areas: About the Program; Personal Perspectives on Cuba; and Historical, Cultural, and Social Perspectives on Cuba. The article in the first section, “Reconnecting with Cuba Through Academic and Cultural Exchanges” by Rosalie Giacchino-Baker and Elsa Ochoa-Fernández, explains how the academic exchanges and summer academic programs were organized, implemented, and evaluated.

The second section, Personal Perspectives on Cuba, contains three reflections on this Caribbean island that vary in focus, voice, and style. In her essay entitled “Cubanisms: Debunking Misunderstandings About Cuba,” María Balderrama aims directly at refuting misconceptions which label the country and its inhabitants as insignificant, hostile, and unproductive. Rafael Correa paints colorful, descriptive, and detailed “Cuban Postcards” in a journal format that interweaves memories from his native Colombia. Julie Reineman’s student voice in “Cuban Questions Unanswered” alternately reflects disillusionment and delight as she attempted to reconcile the Cuba she was studying about and the Cuba she was experiencing.

The final four articles feature Historical, Cultural, and Social Perspectives on Cuba. Justin Romero’s “The Image of Ernesto Che Guevara” analyzes a common fascination with one of Cuba’s most celebrated folk heroes by juxtaposing today’s reverential tributes with historical realities. In “An Ethnographic Exploration of Santería in Havana Today,” Paul Sweeney’s anthropological inquiries result in carefully layered descriptions of rich religious traditions, especially *santería*. Based on her visits to Cuban medical services and interviews with medical personnel and patients, Stephanie Bernal wrote “Women’s Healthcare in Cuba: Observation of Medical Facilities in Cerro, Havana,” an article that describes the extensive and accessible medical services networks that exist in Cuba despite critical shortages of supplies. The last article, “Current Programs and Issues in Cuban Teacher Education” by Sergio Gómez Castanedo and Rosalie Giacchino-Baker, proposes that the unparalleled successes of Cuban’s educational system, despite the lack of educational equipment and materials, may be the result of the excellent educational programs available for Cuba’s teachers at all levels.

Readers are invited to look at the brief biographical sketches at the end of this journal to learn more about the faculty and student contributors.

The last page of this edition explains how electronic sources were referenced in this journal.

This journal is the first in a series of academic publications showcasing the international research of CSUSB students and faculty. The International Institute hopes to publish successive editions of International Perspectives focusing on different countries or regions of the world.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Reconnecting with Cuba Through Academic and Cultural Exchanges

*Rosalie Giacchino-Baker and Elsa Ochoa-Fernández
California State University, San Bernardino*

Abstract

This article documents and analyzes an interdisciplinary, yearlong Cuban program which organized courses and a study trip to Cuba for undergraduate and graduate students at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). After a brief overview of study abroad, in general, and of university exchange programs with Cuba, this article discusses the uniqueness of CSUSB's Cuban Program. It explains how project coordinators from CSUSB: 1) collaborated with consortium members from California State Polytechnic University, Pomona and California State University, Los Angeles in contacting and maintaining a dialog with Cuban universities; 2) facilitated a unique interdisciplinary program with a strong academic emphasis in which CSUSB professors worked with Cuban professors as team-teachers or guest lecturers; 3) organized a series of cultural activities that supported Cuban courses and a study trip; 4) documented and analyzed program effectiveness; and 5) established guidelines for organizing future international experiences of this type.

According to Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley, "Changing American society requires a change in the face of education today. And that means eliminating inequalities that exist in access to higher education. It also means promoting greater participation and more diversity in study abroad by U.S. students..." (2000). Making a greater variety of international experiences accessible to more US students a challenge for today's universities.

At the dawn of the new millennium, 41 years after the Cuban Revolution and ten years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, U.S. and Cuban scholars are still struggling to restore amicable relations between the two countries. While advocating the lifting of the current embargo, international educators must work to overcome this challenge by making intercultural communication with Cuba possible through meaningful transnational educational programs. These programs, based on personal interactions and exchanges of ideas related to literature, economics, politics, education, health, social customs, and religion will lead to a new understanding and respect that transcends all differences, including politics.

The goal of this paper is to document and analyze an interdisciplinary, yearlong Cuban program which organized courses and a study trip to Cuba for undergraduate and graduate students at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB), a traditional Hispanic-serving institution (HSI), whose students have limited opportunities for a college education, much less study abroad. After a brief overview of study abroad, in general, and of university exchange programs with Cuba, this article will discuss the uniqueness of this Cuban Program. It will then explain how project coordinators from California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB): 1) collaborated with consortium members from California State Polytechnic University, Pomona and California State

University, Los Angeles in contacting and maintaining a dialog with Cuban universities; 2) facilitated a unique interdisciplinary program with a strong academic emphasis in which CSUSB professors worked with Cuban professors as team teachers or guest lecturers; 3) organized a series of cultural activities that supported Cuban courses and a study trip; 4) documented and analyzed program effectiveness; and 5) established guidelines for organizing future international experiences of this type.

International Exchanges: An Overview

The Fulbright Program, begun in 1946, facilitated faculty exchanges and study abroad opportunities. During the 1950s, UNESCO promoted international exchanges in education, science, and the arts. By 1957, the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education reported that a few colleges had started student exchange programs. Of course, the Peace Corps set groundbreaking international goals with its first group of volunteers in 1960. This spirit of internationalism inspired many universities in the United States to encourage study abroad during the 1970s and 1980s. From 1996-2000, the number of U.S. students studying abroad rose by 45% to 129,770 (Davis, 2000). Driving this enrollment increase has been the emergence of study abroad as an integral part of the undergraduate experience for increasing numbers of U.S. students. According to the same publication, there were 74,571 international scholars who came to the U.S. in 2000. While most scholars continue to come from Asia or Europe, there are two Latin American countries, Brazil and Mexico, with relatively high numbers of scholars in the U.S. There are some countries in the world, however, with few student or faculty exchanges with U.S. institutions because economic, political, geographic, or linguistic factors have led to limited access.

U. S. international relations with Cuba, for example, have severely limited academic exchanges during the past 40 years. The 1980s were the start of some of the first academic exchanges with U.S. institutions after the Cuban Revolution. During this period environmental scientists from the New York Botanical Garden, the Center Marine Conservation, the Smithsonian Institute, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Washington began traveling to the Caribbean island to study its rich flora and fauna with Cuban scientists (Kreeger, 1996). In the 1990s, U.S. regulations made it possible for scholars in different fields to travel to Cuba using special academic licenses to conduct research and attend international meetings. Most recently there has been an increase in short-term study programs in Cuba through US institutions of higher education. No comprehensive list of exchange programs with Cuba currently exists. The following are examples of university programs which provide information on-line: Duke University, Summer Programs (2000); San Francisco State University, Short Term Programs (1999); Tulane University, International Programs (2000); University of California at Berkeley, Summer Session (1999); University of Buffalo, UB Today (1997); and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Illinois Programs Abroad (1999). Other universities, such as San Diego State University, are in the process of formalizing programs. A number of organizations bring students from different universities to Cuba. Examples of these organizations are the Council on International Educational Exchange

(2000), the Lexia Program (2000), and the School for International Training, College Semester Abroad (2000). All of these programs are relatively new. They are facing the challenges imposed by bureaucracies in Cuba and the US.

Organizing the Cuban Program at CSUSB

One of 23 campuses in the California State University system, CSUSB employs approximately 430 full-time faculty members and enrolls over 14, 000 students, most of whom are “non-traditional” and come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The average age of students is 28 and nearly 55% are the first in their family to attend college. Recently designed as a Hispanic Serving Institution, the student population of CSUSB clearly reflects the demographics of its service area. The county’s Latino population is among the top five in the state and is thirteenth nationally in terms of total Latino population. A significantly growing population of African Americans and Asians also reside in the University’s service area.

Responding to its diverse student body, CSUSB has made a strong commitment to attract, retain and provide a variety of educational experiences for the broad range of student interests and needs. This commitment extends to expanding the global horizons for a body of students, most of whom have never even considered the possibility of studying or working abroad.

CSUSB’s Strategic Plan strongly supports internationalism as operationalized through International Student Services (ISS) and the International Institute. Established in spring 1999, the International Institute is an interdivisional, interdisciplinary unit that leads the campus globalization process by organizing study abroad opportunities for U.S. students, facilitating international development and exchanges for faculty, promoting the internationalization of the curriculum, and helping to coordinate programs for international students. As such, the Institute was able to provide the leadership and support services needed for the Cuban Program.

The Cuban Program was developed and coordinated through California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB) and California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, and California State University, Los Angeles, in collaboration with two Cuban institutions: the Institute for Advanced Study of the Arts (in Havana) and the University of Havana’s Center for the Study of the United States (CESEU). Cal Poly Pomona invited CSUSB to become a consortium member and to travel to Cuba in the summer of 1999 to meet members of the Cuban Ministry of Culture and participating Cuban universities and centers, as well as to make arrangements for the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Instituto Superior del Arte. Prior to their departure for Cuba, the Directors of the CSUSB’s International Institute scheduled meetings of interested campus administrators, faculty, librarians, and technology personnel to make a tentative list of appropriate classes and needed resources. Upon their return to California, arrangements were made for a yearlong series of courses and activities that would culminate in a two-week study trip during the following summer. In common with other Cuban programs, this study trip provided an opportunity for two weeks of cultural immersion and academic presentations. As explained below, however, this trip offered much more than other programs since it facilitated research opportunities as culminating activities to a rich, academic program.

CSUSB collaborated with Cal Poly Pomona, which had worked with Cuban experts to specify themes for three, 10-week quarters. The fall themes included international relations, history, sociology, and urban planning. The focus during the winter quarter was on elements of Cuban cultures: literature, religion, music, and dance. CSUSB set political economy as the focus of its winter quarter.

The Uniqueness of CSUSB's Cuba Program

Interdisciplinary Collaboration

CSUSB's 2000-2001 Cuba program was unique in at least three ways. The first of these is the use of Cuban professors, literary figures, dancers, and artists as integral parts of courses across academic disciplines during the 1999-2000 academic year. At CSUSB, six Cuban professors and two experts on Cuba participated as team teachers or guest lecturers in eight courses taught by six US professors in six academic departments to over 250 undergraduate and graduate students.

Each course utilized the Cuban professors in different ways. In the fall, four Cuban professors team taught a communications course by designing the sequence of the topics (including international relations, urban planning, sociology, and economics), which they refined through e-mail and briefings in Cuba before and after their two-week stays in the US. They worked closely with a CSUSB professor who coordinated the sessions, obtained reference materials, and had complete responsibility for assigning and evaluating students' written work. Winter quarter Cuban experts included two celebrated poets, a scholar on Afro-Cuban religions, and a well-known US video producer with longstanding ties to Cuba. These experts gave presentations to classes in four academic areas: communications, education, humanities, and Spanish. The CSUSB professors wove these presentations into their varied curricula. Whereas Cuban presentations accounted for 80% of class time during the fall quarter, their contributions ranged from 10% to 50% of class time for winter quarter classes. During the spring, one class, Political Economics, was team taught by CSUSB professors. Although scheduled visits by Cuban anthropologists/musicologists and dancers were postponed because of visa problems, plans were made to bring these experts to campus the following year. This yearlong collaboration provided unique opportunities for interdisciplinary dialogs

Research Opportunities

The second unique aspect of this Cuban program was the consistent integration of research opportunities for both students and faculty. For students, this academic emphasis included class projects stimulated by the presentations of visiting scholars that extended into research projects that could be conducted during the two-week academic program in Cuba. Faculty development options opened for professors with interests or established research agendas in Latin American studies. Specific support mechanisms for both students and faculty included funding for the study trip through external and university grants. Plans were made for the publication of a CSUSB journal

entitled “International Perspectives: Focus on Cuba,” as well as the sponsorship of presentations on Cuban research as part of a formal research forum.

Extensive Cultural Activities

The third unique feature of CSUSB’s 2000-2001 Cuban Program was the variety of cultural activities supporting it. These activities, scheduled throughout the year, included lectures by Cuban scholars; a live, theatrical presentation of “*Fresa y Chocolate*” (“Strawberry and Chocolate”) by the New York-based theater company, *Repertorio Español*, with simultaneous interpretation in English; an art exhibit and gallery talk at CSUSB’s museum by Raul Cordero, a Cuban artist from the Institute for Advanced Study of the Arts in Havana; and a Latin American Roundtable that showcased scholars from Cuba, Argentina, Venezuela, Chile, and Mexico who participated in two panels, one on critical social issues and another on literature. Informal receptions for visiting scholars made them accessible to the campus community. A sampling of Cuban films was also included in CSUSB’s International Film Festival.

Documenting the Effectiveness of the Cuban Program

This article will analyze the effectiveness of the first year of the Cuban Program as documented through participant evaluations of five classes and the summer academic program. Pre- and post-evaluations were administered to more than 140 students in five of the six participating classes. Students in these five classes were selected because they were visited three or more times by visiting Cuban scholars. Students in other participating class were not surveyed because their experiences with the scholars were limited to one or two visits. In addition, project documentation includes surveys by CSUSB professors and administrators that were completed at the end of the academic year. The effectiveness of the summer study program was analyzed through written participant evaluations, as well as through field notes taken at group meetings in Cuba.

Although it is beyond the scope of this article to describe students’ more complex development as demonstrated through coursework or research projects, data from the surveys listed above provided evidence of program effectiveness, as well as limited aspects of self-reported student achievement.

Student Evaluations of Classes

On the surveys taken at the beginning of the classes, students were asked to identify themselves by gender, ethnicity, age, academic status, major, motivation for taking the class, and language competencies in Spanish. They supplied an identification number that was used to compare their responses at the beginning and end of the classes, while maintaining their anonymity. One item of the survey probed for background knowledge in Cuban and Caribbean history, politics, economics, social conditions, literature, art, music, theater/film, and education, rating their responses on a five-point scale ranging from excellent to poor/none. Students were also asked to rate their

understanding of Cuban cultures on a five-point scale ranging from “thoroughly” to “not at all.” Four other survey items asked about how they learned about the Cuba program and about their plans to take the study trip to Cuba, including their anticipated research topics. A final open-ended question asked them to indicate what they hoped to learn from the class.

Evaluations from five classes spanning the three-quarters of an academic year, produced 99 complete sets of pre- and post-surveys with more than 50 missing cases. Data from these five classes shows that of the 99 respondents, 64% were female and 36% were male. Students’ ethnicities, European-American (24%), Latino (55%), African-American (5%), other (16%), reflected CSUSB’s highly diverse population. Although 89% of the students were undergraduates, their ages showed them to be older than their “traditional” counterparts. Only 32% of them were between 18-22 years old; 40% were between 23 and 29 years old; and 28% were over 30 years old. In terms of Spanish language competency, most of the students (81%) self-reported their listening skills as fair to excellent, and 77% indicated that their speaking skills were fair to excellent; 76% stated that they had fair to excellent reading abilities; and 68% described their writing skills in Spanish as ranging from fair to excellent. A few students (15%) stated that they took the class as an area of interest, while most (85%) said that they took it as an elective in a major or minor. In terms of what they hoped to learn from the class, respondents indicated the following: to increase understanding of Cuban cultures and history (69%); to add general knowledge of Cuba (18%); to learn about Cuban and other Caribbean cultures (3%); to understand US-Cuban relations (3%); to learn about Cuban society (2%); and all of the above (5%).

All of the items on post-surveys were open-ended questions whose responses were coded independently by two readers. When asked about the most valuable information they had learned about Cuba, the following percentage of students cited these areas:

Cuban life and culture	57.3%
Economic and social issues	16.8%
Political issues	11.9%
Comparison of Cuban and U.S. perspectives	9.7%
Cuban literature	4.3%

As might be expected, some students’ responses varied according to the focus of their classes. A large percentage of students from all classes, however, expressed an increase in their general understanding of Cuban life and cultures. The following is a typical comment: “I am far more sympathetic to Cuba and Cubans, especially in regard to the blockade.” This student expanded by saying, “I think understanding the historical perspective of Cuban-American relations, as well as the current political issues, was the information I found most valuable, although it appeared to be the most difficult for some of my classmates to accept.”

In response to whether they had changed their ideas about Cuba, 56.9% stated that they had broadened their information base that resulted in a better understanding of Cuba and the Caribbean. Although 25.7% indicated that they had not substantially changed the ideas they previously held about Cuba, 17.4% reported that they had gained more insights but had not substantially changed their ideas about Cuba. More than three-fourths of the students, therefore, reported that they had at least gained some insights about Cuba, with more than half saying they felt they had a better understanding of that country.

When asked about the major benefit of taking this class, 66% of the respondents focused on the content of the class, 28.5% on the process, and 5.5% cited college requirements or no benefits. The following is a breakdown of student responses related to class benefits:

Understanding Cuba better	61.4%
Using different learning methods	23.9%
Understanding U.S. policies	4.6%
Working with Cuban professors	4.6%
Fulfilling a graduation requirement	2.5%
None	2.9%

It must be noted that a much higher percentage (18.2%) of students in the fall quarter mentioned how much they enjoyed working with the Cuban professors. Their response was most likely based on the fact that Cubans provided about 80% of the instruction during the fall quarter and only 10-50% during the winter quarter. All of the students who indicated that the major benefit of taking this class was fulfilling a requirement (2.6%) or that they had received no major benefit from the class (2.9%) were participants in a required class in the liberal arts program in which the Cuban professors made three presentations (10% of class time).

In response to whether they were better able to communicate with people of other cultures, 57.1% said they had a better appreciation of other cultures; 16.4% stated they felt better able to communicate interculturally; and 26.5% felt their competencies in this area were substantially the same. This statement is typical of those who responded positively: “What I learned is that the better one knows the history of a people and culture, the more one will be accepting of it.”

When asked about their biggest challenge in this class, many students (47%) responded to the amount of course material covered, and 15% indicated that they had difficulties understanding or responding because of perceived language barriers such as the following statement suggests: “My high school Spanish is all but forgotten.” Some students (6%) indicated that they had difficulties voicing their opinions. This explanation was given for the hesitancy: “I was very reserved in most of my responses and feedback, and I think that was because I felt so overwhelmed with all the info I

was being fed all at once—especially coming from not knowing a single grain of info about Cuba.” Another explanation for a reservation came from a student who was careful about “not voicing my opinion too much about the negative effects of Communism.” Two percent of the respondents said they had problems accessing research materials, and 30% indicated that they had no major difficulties in the class.

Most respondents (91.4%) stated that they would recommend the class to others. Eighty-one percent specified that it was an excellent exposure to a different culture; 7.9% simply stated that they had enjoyed it; and 2.5% indicated that the class helped them to overcome stereotypes. One student stated the following: “I would recommend it for the simple reason of reviewing other views of Cuba. In America what we hear is filtered and we never get the true story.” Of the 8.6% of students who said they would not recommend the class to others, all participated in a required liberal arts class with fewer presentations by Cuban professors.

Fifty-two percent of students used the post-survey to give suggestions for future classes of this type. About a third of them (32.4%) indicated that they did not think there was enough time to cover all of the material presented during the short, ten-week quarters. Some of them (8.6%) would have liked more participation in the classes and more discussion of current events (7.1%). These last two opinions came mainly from students in the large liberal arts class. A few students (4.3%) indicated that they wanted more materials available in CSUSB’s library.

Participant Evaluations of the Summer Study Trip 2000

Seven students and seven faculty members from CSUSB participated in the two-week, summer academic program in Cuba that was a joint effort with Cal Poly Pomona and Cal State Los Angeles. The group attended academic workshops on political economy; race issues; youth and education; gender issues; arts, humanities, and culture; urban planning and urban issues; literature; and Cuba-US relations, as well as participating in four field trips to cultural and historic sites. Each student was also engaged in gathering data for a research project that was supervised by one of the accompanying faculty members.

Evaluations of the study trip asked participants to identify their personal benefits from the trip, their biggest challenges of the trip, and their suggestions for future study trips. Five CSUSB faculty members, three students, and two trip organizers responded to the survey. Open-ended questions yielded lengthy, thoughtful responses. In terms of benefits, most participants (90%) cited their opportunities to experience and appreciate a different culture on a personal level. Fifty percent (50%) stated that they valued their opportunities to learn from Cuban scholars and to buy Cuban books that are not available in the US. Four participants (40%) specified that they learned through visiting historical sites and three (30%) said that they benefited from their personal contacts with Cubans.

Most of the program’s challenges described by participants related to the logistics, although some other critical issues were discussed. Sixty percent of the respondents mentioned the need for more preparation prior to the trip and less bureaucracy during the trip. Five participants (50%) indicated

that they would have liked the opportunity to socialize with students from consortium universities (Cal Poly Pomona and Cal State Los Angeles) before the trip to Cuba. This same number (50%) indicated that they disliked the separation of faculty and students during the trip. Two persons (20%) thought that some of the activities were too “touristy,” and two respondents (20%) stressed the need for lectures on current topics. One person (10%) discussed the problem of limited time to conduct research.

Recommendations for future study trips were directly related to the challenges described above. All respondents indicated the need to prepare participants better for the logistics of the trip, including visa deadlines and projects. Sixty percent specified the need for common housing accommodations for faculty and students. Fifty percent of the respondents indicated a need for better communication before, during, and after the trip (facilitated by a listserv and a detailed handbook). Fifty percent of the participants suggested that preparation for trips should include warnings about street contacts (“hassling” of tourists) and more information on bargaining in markets and tipping procedures. Fifty percent suggested continuing the scholarships for student travel. Two respondents suggested that the program highlight positive aspects of Cuba with fewer comparisons to the U.S.. One person recommended that this study trip not be continued in the future.

Informal dialogs with students and faculty reinforced the benefits of this trip as part of the Cuban program. Participants in this pilot trip took their responsibilities to make suggestions seriously. Only some of them understood the difficulty of organizing activities with Cuba under current political conditions.

Several formal meetings were held in Havana with Cuban organizers who stressed their need to receive information about U.S. participants and program needs as soon as possible.

Establishing Guidelines for Future International Field Experiences

The successes and challenges of the first year of the Cuba program have been documented. Most participants agreed that this program brought invaluable cultural insights and perspectives to participants from CSUSB. Students, faculty, and organizers indicated through a variety of surveys and interviews that the following strong points should remain and be expanded as part of the program:

- Cultural activities that reinforce academic themes
- An interdisciplinary program that “pulls in” as many people across campus as possible
- Personal and professional links between visiting scholars and U.S. professors and students
- A more balanced perspective on Cuba
- Critical and controversial dialogs on Cuban-American relations
- Increased opportunities for research for faculty, students, and administrators
- Increased opportunities for students to go abroad, and in the process, learn about other unique cultures in the Americas

Through the same surveys and informal interviews, students, faculty, and organizers made the

following suggestions for future programs on Cuba:

- More time for adequate preparation for Cuban experts' logistical needs, including immigration, remuneration, and travel procedures
- More time to publicize the program to increase the number of student participants
- More information from visiting scholars about their presentations prior to their arrival (for effective integration into the curriculum, in some cases)
- More time spent by Cuban scholars at CSUSB so that the university community can benefit from their expertise
- More materials available on Cuba, especially in the area of contemporary literature, society, race relations, art, music, and education
- Less fragmentation of Cuban scholars' short time in the US, which was spent at three different universities
- More participation by U.S. faculty and students in hosting responsibilities
- More collaboration on activities and projects, including on-line discussions, with other universities sharing Cuban scholars
- Publication of a transcript of videotaped class sessions (with an introduction by participating professors)
- Changes in many of the logistical details of the summer academic program, including accommodations, communication, orientation, and follow-up sessions
- More coordination of summer seminar topics and student research projects, including more time for individual research

Final Thoughts

More U.S. universities need to organize long-term, interdisciplinary, academic and cultural exchanges with a greater variety of countries. We need to explore options that include controversial and less visited areas, in addition to the more common English-speaking contacts. In our search to help students gain the knowledge and experiences that will help them function in a global society, we should not overlook the richness of organized, integrated programs that prepare students for international field experiences by bringing foreign faculty and cultural activities to U.S. campuses. Of course, we need to continually refine and evaluate the goals and procedures of these international programs. Just as importantly, we need to document our successes to promote their value. Future research in this area should compare the results of short-term, isolated programs with those, like this Cuban program, that more fully utilize campus resources across disciplines. Follow-up studies to this Cuban program should analyze the possible long-term effects of the project in terms of internationalizing the curriculum, providing professional development opportunities for students and faculty, and establishing community/global linkages. In the case of Cuba, these linkages could include expansion of academic, cultural, and political dialogs. International educators have barely begun to tap the potential for creating programs that bring the world to our

campuses and our campuses to the world.

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[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Cubanisms: Debunking Misunderstandings about Cuba

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Abstract

Many people in the United States have strong and uninformed opinions about Cuba. Frequently, these opinions are negative, and these “Cubanisms” are grounded in misunderstandings, limited information and political mythology. This short essay focuses on three misunderstandings and utilizes selected data to debunk these myths.

“When you believe in things you don't understand,
then you suffer.” Stevie Wonder, *Superstition* (1996).

Cuba. This four-letter word elicits mixed, often negative emotions for many, particularly individuals from the United States. I experienced strong, oppositional reactions in numerous conversations when I shared with members of the university community that I was to be part of a two-week academic study tour to Cuba. Why would anyone want to go to Cuba? Why visit a hostile country? What can you learn from going to Cuba? With these queries I would also get many unsolicited pejorative remarks about the Cuban people and the country, including its government and president, Fidel Castro. Having travelled to other parts of the world including Latin America, Canada, Europe and northern Africa, I do not recall receiving comments or questions of such nature as I did when I told people I was visiting Cuba. Comments about Cuba frequently manifested a negative viewpoint or doctrine of this country.

Soon I discovered that these comments were frequently grounded on limited, or even on no information, resulting in misunderstandings and negative opinions about Cuba. Because these comments were so unique to Cuba, I have labelled them "Cubanisms." In this piece I have selected three common misunderstandings or Cubanisms I observed. I will attempt to debunk and shed light on these misinformed opinions using multiple sources of information, including first-hand observations from a two-week stay in Cuba. *

On Cubanisms

As I shared my intent to visit Cuba, I began to realize that people's responses and comments to this trip fell into two distinct categories: black/white or negative/positive.

Many responses were favorable and were characterized by curiosity and questions, including comments such as: "I want to hear about your trip and what you learned when you get back," or "I would like to see any pictures you take." However, the negative comments stood out due to their disparaging and extremely pejorative overtones. These Cubanisms were often characterized by

tones of disgust and fear and followed by comments such as "I heard Cubans are hostile people, and it is unsafe for Americans [referring to people from the United States] to travel there." I even had a student suggest in one of my classes that he thought of all men with beards as communists like Fidel Castro. This comment was characteristic and indicative of the strong and negative emotions brought on by the word "Cuba."

My background in psychology and sociology has trained me to categorize behavior as a method of increasing awareness and understanding of social phenomena. As the Cubanisms persisted, patterns emerged from which I was able to create three distinct categories of misunderstandings that I will discuss in the next section.

Misunderstanding #1: Cuba is an Insignificant Country!

The question, "Why visit Cuba?" reveals several assumptions, particularly about the perceived insignificance of this island. "Why visit Cuba?" tends to suggest a lack of importance about this country and a visit or journey that may seem a waste of time. Assuming that some countries are more worthy of visiting than others suggests an "ism" usually characterized by what anthropologists call "ethnocentric behavior." Ethnocentrism not only suggests that one's place is more valuable, worthy, and significant than others are, but also that one's position is superior. Thankfully, these Cubanisms and ethnocentric perspectives are not shared by the more than one million tourists, scholars and students visiting the island yearly.

A brief look at history, particularly that which looks at the colonization of the Americas, reminds us that Cuba is far from insignificant. As the seat of the Spanish viceroy and the largest island in the Caribbean with a location only 90 miles from the mainland of the United States, the island of Cuba has a rich cultural and historical heritage. Regardless of one's political ideology, Cuba occupies a strategic place in the Caribbean and the world.

Misunderstanding #2: Cubans Are Hostile!

When I heard this comment I would engage individuals and inquire about their definition of "hostile." Most responses included comments such as: "I heard the people are evil," and "You can't trust the Cubans." Or, frequently I heard, "They hate Americans [referring to people from the United States]."

Admittedly, safety for most travelers is a major concern. During my stay I felt safer walking the streets of La Habana than walking in downtown Sacramento or Washington D.C. In comparison to other countries, including the United States, Cubans do not exhibit any "Cuban hostility" toward anyone in particular, including "Americans." Discussions with fellow group members, including students and colleagues, indicated their observations and experiences of Cuban hospitality. Cubans, like other people in any other part of the world, are curious about tourists, including Americans. My own conversations with Cubans were no different or less or more hostile than those I have had with Canadian, Moroccan, German, or British nationals.

Tourists have a special status in Cuba, and the government makes great efforts to assure the safety of those entering the country. There is clear vigilance around hotels to assure protection of guests. Also, there is a consensus that tourists, particularly those from the United States, are not to be bothered in any way, and instead, are to be protected. Interestingly, the protection of tourists seems to be a priority within the daily routines of police. Policemen patrolling the streets are particularly attentive to any manifestation of "hostility." The average Cuban, unlike the average "American," is not armed and, consequently, the number of violent crimes is minimal. Cuba has one of the lowest rates in the world of violent crimes against women.

I was fortunate to meet and talk with many Cubans in different contexts, from university professors to citizens to business people. Cubans, like people from other parts of the world, are very curious about us in the United States and had questions about our food, our climate, our cars, our schools, and how we lived. These questions were framed discretely, emphasizing the human aspects of our life in the United States, while avoiding political discussions. Also, Cubans are literate and well educated people and understand who makes social and economic policy in all countries, including the United States. That is, while most Cubans disagree with the actions of the United States government towards their country, they do not blame individual Americans, or U.S. tourists, for governmental policy decisions.

Some of our colleagues required medical attention during their visit, and they were happily surprised to see how attentive the Cuban medical personnel were to their needs. This was hardly hostile behavior. All hotels have a physician and/or nurse on duty, and there are clinics for tourists should they need medical assistance. This is not evidence of "hostile" behavior.

Misunderstanding #3: One Can't Learn Anything from the Cubans!

This comment I found to be a manifestation of a classic ethnocentric perspective, grounded in ignorance and bordering on isolationist ideology. I have selected three areas from which we can learn from the Cubans. Cubans have clearly demonstrated their global leadership and advancement in the areas of education, health and technology.

Education - Literacy

In 1994, Vice President Gore commented to the Canadian magazine, Computer Current, published by Today/Tomorrow, "It's disgraceful we have this level of literacy [referring to the United States]; countries like Cuba put us to shame when it comes to this." In this comment, former Vice President Gore is referring to Cuba having one of the highest literacy rates in the Americas and one of the highest in the world. According to the 1994 World Almanac (printed in the United States), Cuba has approximately 0% illiteracy. The United States is cited with a 4.5% illiteracy rate, while countries like Argentina have 4.7%, Bolivia 22.7%, Mexico 12.7%, Nicaragua 13.0%, and Venezuela 11.9%. Also, Cuba has one of the highest rates of teachers per capita in the world with one teacher per 37 inhabitants (Tovar, 1997).

Health - Children

Recognizing that the United States ranked 17 in the international listings of children under one year lacking adequate immunization and plunging to 70th place if children are non-white, President Bill Clinton, in 1993, set out to fight the low immunization rate of children. In the 1990s tuberculosis cases reported in New York City approximated 20 per 100,000 inhabitants, while Habana reported 8.5 cases per 100,00 inhabitants. Also international data collected by UNESCO and other world health organizations reported only two recorded cases of tetanus, two of measles, two of German measles, 11 of mumps and 11 of whooping cough in Cuba. In other words, vaccinations and the access to free health care have virtually eliminated these diseases from this island nation (Tovar, 1997).

Although more than 6,000 physicians fled Cuba during the Kennedy administration, the country's priorities in making health care accessible by having available one doctor per 200 inhabitants makes this the highest rate of doctors per capita in the world.

Technology - Medicine

Tremendous advancements have been made in the areas of biotechnology and genetic engineering. For example, Cuban scientists developed the meningococcus type BC vaccine (VA-MENGOC-BC), the only one of its kind in the world. The vaccine against hepatitis B was also created by Cuban scientists, as well as Ateromisol or PPG, a medicine that reduces cholesterol levels without reducing positive body fats. Advances in the area of medical equipment include complex prostheses and radioactive isotopes. Unfortunately, the international blockade, spearheaded by the United States, impedes the importation of many of these products into the world market (Tovar, 1997).

Conclusion

Given recent events, like the attack on Iraq and the shooting down of a Chinese plane, it appears that world peace and dialogue are not priority international policy concerns for the new Bush administrations. Now only a few months into the new presidency, we are experiencing military build-up and attacks on other countries instead of diplomacy. Consequently, Cubanisms, I believe, will continue to be heard and perpetuated on a grand scale because relations between the United States and Cuba will deteriorate. History has taught us that one of the most effective ways to divide countries and rationalize violence is to perpetuate misunderstandings based on mistruths and the dehumanization of a society. Unfortunately, when there are pervasive misunderstandings about any country, its people and, ultimately, the world will suffer. I felt privileged to be part of this study group and to be part of those people working towards eliminating Cubanisms and, instead, contributing towards increasing understanding among peoples of the world.

*Cuban Study Trip - June 24 - July 9, 2000. Approximately 50 students and professors from Cal State, San Bernardino; Cal State, Los Angeles; and Cal Poly, Pomona were involved in this academic exchange.

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[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Cuban Postcards

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Abstract

This article is a brief account of a two-week visit to Havana, Cuba in the summer of 2000. The author gives an intense composite picture of his Cuban experience by writing daily “postcards” to describe individuals he met within the context of their socio-economic circumstances. The author’s account resonates with the emotional response that the Cuban Revolution evoked in the people of his generation throughout the South American continent during the early 1960s. It was at the same time of this summer visit, coincidentally, that a small boy named Elián González reminded the world of Cuba’s prolonged and determined struggle against the giant of the North. These Cuban postcards will once again prod the collective memory regarding Cuba’s precarious situation in the Western Hemisphere.

Sunday

Something wakes me up. Some distant, menacing rumbling that in slow motion fuses with early morning people sounds and the deep growl of old engines down in the street. The sounds reach my floor and sneak through the glass and the heavy drapes on the windows, inundating the darkness of my room in the Hotel Presidente.

So this is what Cuba sounds like. Havana, anyway. We got in late last night after spending an entire day traveling from Los Angeles, California. We were late leaving, but no one would tell us why. Finally we discovered that President Clinton was stopping by in a midsummer campaign swing and, as per standard procedure, nothing lands or takes off until Air Force One is secured and the President is on his way to whatever it is that he does in these election year pit stops.

When we were ready to board the plane, there was another little surprise. Our Costa Rican Airlines Airbus was parked a long distance from the terminal, right next to the El Al jetliner. A couple of pariahs bring to mind an ironic contemporary parallel in the land of malls and Disneyland. The Israelis attract too much attention because of their uncompromising defense of their land. Cuba, although posing no physical threat to the United States, has earned the American government’s scorn and resentment because of events that took place forty years ago. The direct flights inaugurated this summer between Los Angeles and Havana have brought subtle hints of better relations. But we continue to keep our distance.

On the way from the airport to the hotel, we saw very little. Havana seemed to be under a blackout, or at least, an electrical slowdown. So I’m finally seeing Havana in the daylight, and it doesn’t look like the Day After, nor is every building in the city ratted out and taken over by rats and homeless people, as is the case in many cities of our own country. Havana’s citizens are not walking around like zombies listening to giant loudspeakers engraved with the hammer and sickle.

This is why I came to Cuba: to take my own pictures, to etch my own postcards.

Monday

The early morning Caribbean air carries the happy sounds of children playing in the schoolyard across the way from the hotel. Men and women hurriedly walk to work, I assume. Crowded *camellos*, elongated busses, make their way up the *Malecón* surrounded by scores of bicycles. In the hotel, service personnel get ready for another busy day, while at the main entrance, taxi drivers discuss the last round of events surrounding the fate of Elián González. Sensual salsa rhythms float from the building next door.

This picture does not resemble the one the media in the United States likes to paint. My first reaction was to think that considering the many years of hardship Cubans have endured, what I was witnessing was a marvelous example of human resilience. Since the early 1960s, because of their government or the interference of foreign governments, Cubans have been forced to make do through their ingenuity and perseverance--truly admirable qualities.

Take, for example, the thirty-year-old Cuban with a Russian first name and an English surname who cleans my room. She tells me of the eight years already invested studying library science and computers. Cuba is experiencing a glut of well-trained professional, so she opted for a job in tourism because that's where the money is. She had to apply and compete with scores of other young professionals for one of the designated slots in tourism. Her mother, a psychologist, runs an elementary school in Alamar, the largest housing project in the Americas, right outside Havana. Her father used to have a *paladar*, a small restaurant, in Guanabo, on the way to Varadero. But after the government "cleaned" the area, that is, took the prostitutes away from this very popular tourist spot, her father lost the business.

Or the case of a prominent poet and her husband living on an eclectic house they built with their own hands on the rooftop of their apartment building. They had been living downstairs with her mother and several other relatives. More space was needed if they were to start a family of their own. It took them three full years to collect all the materials from different sections of the city: bricks from Vedado, doors and small stained pieces of glass from an 1890s house in Old Havana, windows from three or four different locations, all far away really when you have no way of transporting what you find. Gleefully, the poet recalls the black humor of the latest hard times in the early 1990s. She remembers that all the neighborhood cats disappeared in just a few weeks, including two of her own. Bursting with laughter, she tells of a friend whose hunger was so great that he decided to fry a grapefruit. "The best pseudo-steak I have ever eaten," he still likes to boast.

Tuesday

It's my third day in country. I just had lunch at a wonderful restaurant in Old Havana. The building used to belong to Spanish nobility in colonial times. Outside and right across an old church, tourists, mostly from Europe and Canada, cool off sipping tropical drinks. I decide to

walk back to the hotel, braving the mid-afternoon heat and humidity. Strolling along the ever-popular *Malecón*, I'm delighted with my decision to walk. An entire cavalcade of poems, novels, and films about Cuba comes to mind as I walk, the sea mist adding to the day's humidity and fogging my glasses.

Groups of men, women, and children sunbathe and swim in small pools formed by cement blocks and rocks along the *Malecón*. The Caribbean Sea pounds the rocks and the swimmers. At any time, someone may be swept away. But no one but me seems to notice the fury of the water. Every so often, faces and hands invite me to join them below the street level. The sun is at a slant as I walk westward, and it plays on the water creating some exquisite bands of transparent blue, cobalt blue, aquamarine, and small whitish wisps that form a plateau just in front of the "beach front" before becoming loud, pounding waves. The foam from the waves lasts a bit longer, and then it is sucked in by hot rocks and cement slabs.

I walk a few more blocks, and then I decide to take a taxi. The loquacious middle-age man is driving a Mercedes Benz E-320. There are very few vehicles in Havana, comparatively, although I'm told that last year cars were even more scarce. It strikes me as ironic that in a city with a heavy transportation crisis, one can find such luxurious cars being used as taxis. On second thought, it makes perfect sense. Everybody should be able to enjoy that luxury. But then, everybody does not include the common man. Tourists enjoy the luxury cars, tourists who bring dollars into the country. In practical terms it means that the Cuban government now sees the advantages of having an open door policy about tourism. Several European countries have partnerships with Cuba, and every year there are more investments and business opportunities generated. Something has to be done to counter the 200 million dollars circulating in the Black Market just in the last three years, according to a Cuban economist. It's worth noting that Cuba has always been right in the middle of some colonialist or neo-colonialist enterprise, all the way back to Velazquez and Cortes. But I'm sure that presently the European Common Market has the best interest of the island at heart!

It turns out that the E-320 driver had been a major in the Cuban army and a veteran of the War in Angola. I wonder out loud how many Cubans think of that fateful episode the same way so many Americans think of the Vietnam War. The driver, however, is not taking my bait. I want to find out what the man in the street thinks, at least one man. I try again since he is Black, and I'm curious to find out how Africans regard the Black Cubans. "No," he says, "There was no mingling, and since Cubans only spoke Spanish and Africans spoke god knows what messy tongue twister, no *¡coño!* there was no mingling." And that's all he is going to say about the African campaign. He's more interested in asking me about the reasons "we" have not relinquished the little boy named Elián González. He's aware that according to the polls, most Americans favor the return of the child to his father in Cuba. The man is intrigued, and so am I, by the power exerted by the Cuban exiles in Florida, specifically in Miami. "The Miami Mafia" is what Alarcón, President of the National Assembly, calls them every afternoon in his famous televised speeches, debates, and diatribes intended to keep the Cuban nation informed. I try to explain to him the workings of our style of democracy: the power of interests groups, the diversity of opinions that

have clogged the issue rather than clarified it, the legalistic moves made by both sides, and the cumbersome work of the judicial process. I realize my explanations are Greek to the man. “If the President of the United States said that Elián could go home,” he asks, “how come the boy is not back yet?” He’s sure of the answer. The Cuban exiles infiltrated the system bit by bit, and now they own a piece of the rock. I say nothing, but I agree with the former army major.

Tuesday Night

A couple of colleagues and I stumble around in a darkened neighborhood looking for Pablo Armando’s house. Since there are no streetlights, we cannot find names or numbers. We seem to be the only people alive. “Are you looking for the poet’s house?” A voice jumps suddenly out of the black soup that surrounds us. Before anyone can answer, a teenage girl materializes out of nowhere. If we keep walking another 50 or 60 paces, she explains, we’ll be able to hear the noise from Pablo Armando’s house. And then she’s gone again. This IS magic realism.

Pablo Armando Fernández has been in Cuba since the early 1960s. He lived in New York before that, a young poet enjoying his self-exile. Guillermo Cabrera Infante brought him back to work with the Revolution, and since then he has lived in the same house in Vedado. The big, sprawling, two-story house suits him well, although I question the policy that would force others to give up their big houses so several families could move in. Pablo is probably one of the few people who did not have to move out or share his large house with other families. Maybe this is a sign of the friendship he enjoys with Fidel. Pablo Armando came back from Spain yesterday. A heavy reading tour of six or seven cities has taken its toll. The poet’s face sags, and tiredness around the eyes reveals more than mere jet lag. I sit with him in the living room. Other guests mingle in a patio to our left, enjoying the night air. We talk about California and Pablo Armando’s experiences at CSUSB and Cal Poly, Pomona last winter. Next to him, on an end table by the sofa, there is a small picture that reminds me of another postcard from another time. Then I realize the picture was taken in the little patio next to the living room. There in the middle is Pablo Armando. Sitting very close on his left is Gabriel García Márquez, and framing him on the other side is Fidel Castro, showing his profile as if someone were calling to him at the moment of snapping the picture. “It was Fidel’s 70th birthday--we celebrated it here, right in the patio,” explains the poet. The words match his tired expression.

Tuesday Night--The Next Week

Elián González came home one afternoon last week. The following morning the signs peppered around town demanding that the U.S. “Return Our Child” were gone. I was very surprised that there had not been a huge concentration of people waiting for him at the airport or celebrating at the Plaza de la Revolution, in front of the U.S. Interest Section building. Nothing. Both the people and the government were silent. In the streets there had been an eerie calm all day long, a guarded anticipation. In my hotel room, I watched the historical events unfold thanks to CNN. But today was different. Just a few blocks away in Vedado at the Hall of the Revolution, the public

celebration for Elián's return-the national victory-was getting underway, carried by the State's television channel. At first, I wasn't terribly interested in the small town proceedings: children singing, a brass band playing, and some local committee members fussing over something or other. Then the band paraded onto this gigantic stage, and still playing, took positions all around the stage. The music changed. It became more martial, more sonorous. Everybody on stage and in the audience stood erect, with everybody singing now. A bolt of electricity shot out from the TV set. In full parade uniform, elegant in its simplicity, Fidel had walked to the middle of the stage accompanied by Elián's father.

For people of my generation, Fidel always represented someone very special, at least at the very beginning of the Revolution, the bearer of promises and dreams, which, unfortunately, never saw the light of day. Immediately I was back in another place, almost 40 years ago.

After the Bay of Pigs invasion, people all over Latin America had been enraged and frustrated by the U.S. interference in the fledgling Cuban experiment. At that time, I was a student in a military academy, a prep school, in my native South American country. The students' reaction to the invasion, manipulated by the upper class men, was quick, swift, and highly impractical. We all volunteered to go to Cuba and defend the island from another "Yankee" invasion. We would hijack one of Avianca's planes, and in less than three hours, we would be landing at José Martí Airport in Havana. That easy.

We drew our weapons (Mausser rifles, WWII vintage) and commanded the buses to the airport in the south side of the city. We sat in the hellish heat of the tarmac for hours until the younger cadets started crying. They were hungry, thirsty. Most of us needed a restroom visit anyway. The school's first sergeant, a veteran of the Korean Conflict, finally walked up to the "command bus" and in no uncertain terms told us to stop the shenanigans. We had two minutes to get our proverbial behinds in formation so he could and his cadre could collect the weapons. It was all over in an instant.

No one knew, outside of a few airport personnel and the academy instructors, what had gone on that day. At dinnertime, my mother wanted to know if I had done anything special. I kept quiet. I knew she wouldn't understand. Many years later, in one of the very rare occasions when I saw her, I recounted the events of that day in 1961 when the cadets had volunteered to go to Cuba to defend the Revolution. True to her nature, she shrugged it off with a laconic, "I hope you got what you deserved."

That was the kind of fire and passion that Fidel and the Cuban Revolution inspired in young people. Many people of my generation faithfully followed his cause until he veered off and the dramatic actions in the name of freedom and dignity became just plain shenanigans. Now, here was some of that passion he had instilled so long ago. And then I understood a little better the kind of uncompromising loyalty that most of his people still show. He has disappointed many of his followers, yet when it comes to sentimental expressions of patriotism, Fidel is still the master. Too bad empty gestures do not restore confidence or motivate the new generations. My thoughts trailed to the explanations I give my students about Hispanic traits: *caudillos*, loyalty and attachment to "Patria chica," and the stubborn cult of personality that so permeates our culture

today. On stage, Fidel very slowly and deliberately was pinning on Elián's father the highest Medal of Honor that Cuba awards its heroes.

Friday

Our visit is almost over. Tomorrow we'll be heading back to Southern California. Our bus drivers are busy making sure we get to see all the "official" sights: Papa Hemingway's house, the marina where he used to keep his boat, the Museum of the Revolution housed in the old Batista Palace of Government, etc. One of the drivers has brought his 14-year-old daughter with him, and she has easily become part of the group. A beautiful, intelligent woman, she tells me that she is doing very well in school. There is only one problem, though. She can't seem to decide what she's going to study at the university. She asks my opinion about whether she should continue preparing for medical school or whether she should apply, and get this, to the more difficult Liberal Studies division. I get a kick out of that, wishing our American students could hear it also. The study of medicine is so universal that Cuba is experiencing a glut of physicians. There is a medical doctor for every 130 people in the island. The pay is almost nonexistent. While visiting my poet friend of the rooftop house, I met a man who came to deliver fish, a physician from the countryside who supplements his income by fishing and distributing his catch to regular customers. Cuba has gone as far as to begin exporting its medical personnel surplus to other countries in Latin America and Spain. Brazil, for instance, has been hosting doctors for several years now, thus improving medical services in the provinces while helping the Cubans to save some needed money.

The young woman is leaning towards a major in Liberal Studies. She'll be in the money, she explains, because she will speak other languages. She will learn about plastic arts, philosophy, music, and communications. In other words, according to the new musings of the leadership, she will be a much more able and resourceful member of the Revolution. As it stands right now, tourism will be the salvation.

The first morning in Havana, I heard a distant, menacing rumbling. Later I discovered it was the pounding of the Caribbean Sea on the Malecón, only a couple of blocks away from the hotel. This last day in Cuba, as I reflect on the variety and richness of the postcards of life I have collected, I hear another type of distant and, this time, truly menacing rumbling. It is not the Caribbean Sea. It comes from across the fast currents of the Gulf Stream, farther north. This rumbling has been around for a while now, long before 1959, long before Fidel and his Revolution. It continues to resonate in every life and every event in this island. Significantly, it is not the rumbling of anger or warmongering, but rather the din of a self-absorbed people's callused indifference and neglect.

Cuban Questions Unanswered

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Abstract

When most people hear of a visit to Cuba, the first thing that they ask is "What is it like?" Such a simple question is not easy to answer in simple terms. It was different. The island was beautiful. The people, generous and open, live without items that U.S. Americans consider "basic necessities." This paper attempts to provide a snapshot of Cuba through vignettes and photos of Cuban people, as well as impressions of some issues that impact their lives. Rather than trying to inform readers of a specific aspect of Cuban life, this paper attempts to give a personal perspective based on a short stay.

In the summer of 2001 I was afforded the opportunity to join an academic delegation to Cuba that included students and faculty from three California State University campuses. I participated as a student in the academic program that included lectures, discussions, and field trips. Of course a part of the attraction lay in knowing that relatively few U.S. citizens receive visas to visit the island and that such cross-cultural exchanges will hopefully lead to better political relationships between the two countries. However, I think more than anything I wanted to know, "What is Cuba really like?" I reached the conclusion that Cuba is an island full of contradictions. It is very difficult to comprehend, or even pretend to understand, its complex structure after a mere 14-day visit. Even after an attempt to view things with an open mind, I found it difficult to recognize and restrain my preconceptions. Often, I felt the information Cuban experts gave during lectures and my own perceptions of Cuba based on my observations did not exactly match. Through my photos and journal, I tried to record my reactions to this island nation, starting with the day of our arrival and extending to the week after our return.

De colores:

Our first full day in Cuba we went to visit the famous and beautiful Varadero Beach. The white sand and the tranquil blue-green waters were certainly memorable, as was the festive atmosphere. The Cubans working in the area dressed in sharp uniforms, as they would at any resort. As I ate lunch, I remember observing with interest that the waiters appeared very "European" with their light skin, while the cooks were noticeably darker, more like the majority of the Cubans I saw near our hotel, and I doubted that it was mere coincidence. It was a question I did not ask, but to which I hoped I would find an answer during our upcoming lecture on race issues.

During the lecture on "Race Issues in Contemporary Cuba," our group was told that "Physical appearances take on cultural significance" and that the significance given to skin color by people

living in the U.S. is not comparable to that of Cubans. It was explained that every Cuban family has a broad spectrum of skin colors, from very light to very dark, and that racial segregation as Americans know it does not exist in Cuba. We were also told that, "Since the 'Triumph of the Revolution, the government has taken drastic measures to create equality. During the first period after the Revolution, the racial problem diminished because everyone fought, ate and worked together, without differences." According to this explanation, racism today does not exist in Cuba; it only exists in the minds of visitors who attempt to impose their own value system on Cubans. Unfortunately, this answer was difficult for many students to comprehend, myself included. Additionally, when students asked about perceived racial inequalities, they were told that their questions were "incredibly racist." So we stopped asking, leaving an uncomfortable information gap. Although racism doesn't legally exist in Cuba, there seem to be widening economic and social differences based on access to U.S. dollars.

Las cosas pequeñas:

Soon after arriving in Havana, the students all figured out that the toilet paper belonged in the trash, not the toilet, and to make sure they had a supply on hand. Most remembered to bring some emergency rations, as traveling in *any* country can bring about the unexpected, but in the resorts and public restrooms there was usually someone willing to exchange a few squares of paper for a tip. One evening, I went with a classmate to a local bar for dinner where the entire menu consisted of fried chicken and homemade potato chips. At one point, she left to use the ladies room, but she returned because there was no toilet paper. When she asked the girl who worked behind the counter, she was told, "There is none." My friend offered to purchase some, and she was told, "No, there is none--this is Cuba!" When I reached into my backpack to produce my travel roll, the bartender said, "You have toilet paper? Please, we are poor. Leave it here with us!" In some of the *paladares*, the private restaurants where we dined, the Cubans were so *unaccustomed* to having paper that they didn't even have a trashcan to dispose of it. Paper is only one of a long list of items that are difficult to find in Cuba since the U.S. imposed the embargo. Other shortages include critical food, medical, and technological supplies.

One commercial distinction I noticed was the availability of Coca-Cola products. In all of the more affluent tourist spots, Coke and Sprite, bottled in Mexico, were available. However, in the smaller or less expensive places, generic sodas were served. One evening I was having dinner with several faculty members in a small *paladar*. One of the professors pointed to a lemon-lime soda at another table and asked, "Is that like a Sprite? I'll take one." The waiter brought him an actual Sprite. The irony was that we students had been frequenting that place for dinner, and when we requested Coke or Sprite, we were served the generic substitutes. Presumably the distinction was both in the location as well as the patron. Certain products in Cuba seem to be reserved only for well-to-do tourists or for Cubans who can afford them. Something so seemingly insignificant spoke volumes.

La gente:

I once read that if your vacation photos capture all of the natural and man-made beauty of that country but exclude the people, you have not photographed the country. With that in mind, I set out to photograph the people of Cuba and to capture their daily life. Although a number of my pictures turned out well enough to share, they cannot compare with the richness of the conversations I shared with people before and after the shots.

One morning, I saw a group of grandmothers meeting in a plaza near the hotel. I asked if I could take a picture, and they agreed. As we sat and talked, they told me that they met every morning to exercise and that they had been doing so for 30 years. Their original name was "Student Martyrs of the Revolution," but today they go by "Physical education of the golden-aged grandmothers." They were eager to pose as well as lavish me with hugs and kisses.

Photo 1: Grandmothers of the Revolution at exercise

Speaking of *abuelas*:

A beautiful cathedral was within walking distance from our hotel, so I went to Mass on Sunday morning. Considering that Cuba has been a Communist country for 40 years, I expected to see only a handful of parishioners. I was pleasantly surprised to find nearly 300 in attendance. Instead of the pipe

Photo 2: Callejón de Hamel

organ, the priest played his guitar, and a small, rather off-key choir accompanied the singing. The Mass was fairly typical of Catholic services. The most noticeable element was the one that was missing: young people, especially males, families, and children. I spotted only two young girls accompanying their mothers. The altar boys appeared to be in their seventies, and the majority of the parishioners were grandmothers. The same ones who had been devout Catholics prior to the Revolution were virtually the only ones practicing the faith today.

¿Qué quiere decir "religión"?

One afternoon I struck up a conversation with an elderly Cuban gentleman I frequently saw outside of my hotel. His job was to document the license plate numbers of all vehicles that parked in front of our hotel, when they arrived and when they left. I was curious to ask his opinion on my observations and concerns. I wondered how an entire generation raised without the benefit of any religious upbringing will react to the pressures of the increased availability of the United States dollar in Cuba and the materialism that goes with it. He admitted that the government recently attempted to revive an interest in religion because it recognizes the importance of certain moral standards promoted by the church.

I'm not a "religious" person myself. When I was growing up, my family went to church regularly, and they still do. I choose not to. I don't believe that church attendance is a good determiner of one's ethics or morality, or lack thereof. But, as a believer, I do know that when people go through great personal strife or social upheaval, they often find comfort in returning to the faith of their childhood. Most importantly, I believe in the power of choice and the freedom of religion.

However, to say that because the majority of Cubans do not practice a form of European *Christianity* that they are a country without any *religion* is incredibly narrow-minded. *Santería* is as much a part of the Cuban identity as are the colors of their flag. Houses are painted with specific colors to honor the African gods. Religious images can be found in the jewelry and artwork on the street. In one section of Havana, every crevice of an entire block has been painted by the world renowned Salvador González Escalona with the bright colors and symbols of the *Santería* religion. Even a simple meal of beans and rice takes on a religious significance with the explanation that, because the black beans are symbolic of all of the evil in the world, they are

served in a separate dish from the white rice that symbolizes good. However, they must be served together since both are needed in order to achieve balance in life, and balance is necessary in order to live deeper and fuller lives. It is with this ideology, I believe, that Cubans have learned to accept the good and bad in their lives.

La educación:

Cuba is proud of its educational system that has remained free to Cubans even during the worst periods of economic crisis. Students are encouraged to continue with an education past the twelfth grade by either attending the university or a trade school. One type of vocational opportunity available to many Cubans is working in a cigar factory. One factory in downtown Havana employs approximately 700 workers and produces over 35,000 cigars daily.

Photo 3: The Malecón

In speaking with various Cubans about their education, I found a discrepancy between education and employment opportunities. One young man studied refrigeration repair, but he found work in a bakery. Another young man had studied metallurgy and had worked in a preschool with disabled children before deciding on a job as a disc jockey in a club for tourists. He said it provided him a better income and more free time. Many agreed that there were few employment opportunities in the fields for which they were prepared.

Las bellas artes:

Unlike the U.S., Cuba has maintained a strong emphasis in the arts, and promising young people from all over the island are encouraged to attend the highly acclaimed Art Institute in order to study with the most talented of their peers. Studies include "plastic arts" (painting, drawing, sculpting), music, voice, drama, and dance, including traditional Afro-Cuban performances. Students who cannot afford their own musical instrument are provided one, so no one is excluded.

In Havana, artists proudly show business cards announcing their livelihoods as "Instructors of Dance" or their certificate stating that they are "Artistic Producers." Along the *Malecón*, musicians practice their art and invite passers-by to visit "*La Casa de la Música*" to hear them perform. They explain that during their free time, they give music lessons. Listening to them, I couldn't help but wonder whom their students were and how they paid for lessons.

Photo 4: Elián Square

Music is a huge part of Cuban culture. Salsa bands play in nearly every major restaurant for the enjoyment of the tourists. Many of the restaurants are open-air patios, so the music can be heard by passers-by, as well. Consequently, there is often a small gathering of Cubans standing nearby, listening to the music, who know they cannot go in and sit at a table. Cubans can go into certain bars or restaurants but only if accompanied by a tourist. First, the cost of a *mojito* (a rum drink) or beer, usually about \$3.00, is irrationally expensive for a Cuban earning \$15 a month. Secondly, although not always enforced, some Cubans are technically prohibited from entering certain places, such as tourist hotels, unaccompanied. Consequently, many tourists who go out for an evening of dancing, think that they are "experiencing Cuban culture," when in fact, it is nothing more than a tropical illusion. There are, of course, clubs for the Cubans to enjoy, but tourists do not frequent them since they accept only Cuban *pesos* that were surprisingly difficult for tourists to obtain.

If you have money, you can make money:

Cubans who receive money from relatives living in the U.S. have the most resources available to them. For about \$50 a month, a family can purchase a permit to open a *paladar* in their home. They pay an additional tax of approximately 85% on all sales, and they are strictly regulated on the number of persons they can allow in the *paladar* at any time. They must provide the government receipts for all food and beverage purchases they make, which must correspond with the amount of claimed income. They provide meals to tourists at an average of \$12 a person. Of this \$12, \$1.80 stays with the family, covering the costs of running the business. While it barely

seems that this would be worth the effort, it is one way of earning dollars, and it does permit those families to purchase food items that might normally be out of reach for their less fortunate *compañeros*.

One of the best sets of photos I took was of two men preparing to go fishing. Fishing is popular in Havana since it provides the opportunity for both food and a small, additional income. Some Cubans own deep sea rigs, while others simply have a spool of fishing line and high hopes of catching something from ashore. Oversized inner tubes serve as fishing boats for those

Photo 5: The fishermen and their makeshift raft

Making do:

fortunate enough to own them. With nothing more than a spool of line, hooks and bait, they don sets of fins and stretch a net across the top of the inner tube to serve as a holding area when they catch something. Working with the current, they sit on the edge of the tube and propel themselves back and forth along the coast for hours. The men I photographed were not fortunate enough to own inner tubes, but they had built small rafts. These rafts were about four feet square and a foot thick, constructed of various small blocks of styrofoam, magically held together against the laws of physics, and propelled by foot. The men were preparing to leave the shore at sunset--about 8:00 P.M.--and would return ten hours later at sunrise.

Lo que tengo es tuyo:

One of the most difficult things for me to comprehend was the generosity of people who had virtually nothing, and yet insisted on sharing with me. On two different occasions, I was invited into people's homes. The first event was not too far from my hotel. I saw a man in the middle of a vacant lot, cooking something in a huge cast iron pot over a campfire. I wanted to take a picture, but felt that I should make polite conversation first. "Is this your *paladar*?" I joked, and we began chatting. He explained he was cooking the *sopa* for a party. Just then the host came out to check on the food and immediately insisted on inviting me in his home. The family was celebrating the birthday of the 105-year-old matriarch. "Born in the same year Martí died," her grandson kept telling me as he fixed me a plate of food and served up a drink with *ron* (rum) and fresh fruit. I watched as great-grandchildren, other family members, neighbors and friends came to pay homage to Emiliana, bringing bottles of *ron* to share with the conversations. As it turned out, I never got my picture of the cook. Instead, I took a portrait of the family and promised to send copies of it as my gift since I had arrived empty handed.

Photo 6: Birthday party

The second occasion took place when I went to visit the city of Regla. Known for its strong ties to the religion *Regla de Ocha*, or *Lucumí*, commonly known as *Santería*, I wanted to visit Regla on a Sunday to see what kind of activities I could watch. I decided to take the ferry across the bay because it was the cheapest means of transportation. The cost of a ticket was only about 30 cents; I was the only tourist among the group of 30-40 people. Despite my ability to pay for my ticket, the Cuban gentleman in front of me graciously insisted on paying for my trip.

Photo 7: New friends from Regla and their mangos

I wandered around the quaint city taking pictures until I happened upon a baseball field. A handful of guys were practicing, and two men were watching. They called to me to come talk with them. One, about my age, was a bartender, and the other, around 50, cooked in the same restaurant. First, they gave me a couple of mangoes, which I was happy to have since the produce market only took Cuban pesos, which I didn't have. Then they asked if I was hungry and what I liked. Trying to be safe, I said, "Oh, beans, rice, chicken--whatever." They invited me to the cook's house, where his wife prepared a delicious meal of chicken, black beans, and rice JUST FOR ME. They also ran out and bought a bottle of *ron*, which I don't really drink, also for me. They sat and drank *ron*, while I ate lunch and listened.

Jorge told me that Cuba is still the greatest place on earth to live; it's the only place in the world where a man without a job can still be fed and have a roof over his head. He told me that he about makes five pesos a day as a cook, then he pointed to my meal and added up what it would cost if he had to buy it: about 30 pesos. The only thing I couldn't decide was whether it was more polite to eat EVERYTHING, or to eat part of it, and leave the rest for them.

It was an incredibly humbling experience, especially when they turned the tables and began asking me about MY living expenses. I felt that I should be the one providing lunch, and yet they seemed to understand my income/expenses probably put me in the same situation as they were since I am taking out loans for school. It was very emotional and difficult to comprehend. How does this work?

On the other hand, as I remember looking around their humble home, I cannot even begin to compare my situation with theirs. What once was a couch is now nothing more than a wooden frame. A 50s-looking chair sitting in the corner has been sat on until the springs have finally popped up through the upholstery. After eating my mango, I needed to wash my hands. I was directed to a plastic tub sitting in the sink, filled with water, where I rinsed my hands. The towel had been used so many times; I politely dabbed my fingers on it before proceeding to discretely dry them on my own clean clothes. I wondered what it would be like to live without a dependable water supply or access to soap.

They invited me to return. They wanted to see me again before I left Havana, and they offered their home to me the next time I visit Cuba. I believe if I had taken them up on their offer, they would have offered me their bed, while they slept on the floor. Like so many other Cubans I spoke with, they seemed truly content with their lifestyle.

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Is it really as it seems?

Much of the artwork I saw had a unique quality to it; things were not what they appeared to be. What seemed to be a bowl of fruit or a horse, upon closer scrutiny was really something else, maybe the body of a woman. I felt this was symbolic of the Cuban society and typical of a people striving to express themselves freely, all the while living under strict repression. Although I left with a better understanding of the island and the people of Cuba, there were many questions left unanswered, often because the questions remained unasked, another sign of repression, I think.

What does it all mean?

Although I know that material wealth does not insure happiness, I also know I would not be happy living in Cuba. The people were wonderful; the music was great; and the food was absolutely delicious. But after two weeks of delicious beans, rice and wonderful fried chicken, however, I was ready to return home. I didn't fall in love with Cuba, but I would be interested in going back in the future to monitor the urban development that is improving every year. Cuban experts agree that the economy has progressively gotten better since 1989 and that increased tourism infuses U.S. dollars into the economy that helps the country. Cuba is experiencing increased contacts with other cultures. In 1998, 84,000 Americans visited Cuba, including 18,000 who did so illegally, not to mention the arrival of thousands of tourists from all over the world. I believe that they are about to experience the birth of what will become the future Cuba. I wonder what will happen to an entire generation that has grown up in the aftermath of the "Triumph of the Revolution:" a generation that may never have set foot in a church but is now raising its own children, a generation that has never played "Monopoly"™ but is inevitably going to be inundated with foreign investors seeking a new market and attempting to play by capitalist rules.

A day or two after I returned, I wrote the following items in my journal: "I actually wanted to clean the dishes this morning. It was so nice to have a clean dishrag, soap, running water and a towel at my disposal." "I felt silly today, but when I went to the market, I got all choked up. Just looking at that long aisle of fresh, refrigerated produce, with an entire row of vegetables--broccoli, celery, carrots, mushrooms, four varieties of lettuce--I could feel my eyes welling up. It just doesn't seem fair..." "I see children in the U.S. who are miserable because they don't have the right THINGS, and Cuban children who are perfectly happy to have a home-made scooter board. Who knows?"

Complex questions cannot be answered in only 14 days. However, I am grateful for the opportunity I had and the time I spent in Cuba. Trying to explain my perceptions has been difficult because nothing is as simple as I would like it to be. But I do know this: the people I met and the hospitality I was shown has made a lasting impression on me. Cuba is indeed a country full of beauty.

The Image of Ernesto Che Guevara

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Abstract

The myth and legacy of Ernesto "Che" Guevara evokes both questions and controversy regarding his role in history and the ideals his image has represented. His contributions and involvement in the Cuban Revolution jolted him to the forefront of the world's political arena. His adversaries and allies alike misunderstood his vision of liberty and revolution. However, the recognition that he gained politically was overshadowed by his death in Bolivia. Today, no one has embraced his vision or his image more than the Generation Xers who remember him through posters and T-shirts. For many, Che's countenance has embodied a growing awareness of the inequalities and injustices that plague our world. He has defined a new kind of icon that transcends Cuban history and culture and has evolved to represent a variety of social and political agendas today.

The Image of Ernesto Che Guevara

The image of Ernesto "Che" Guevara has become one of the most memorable icons in Latin America and all over the world. Guevara's image today is characterized by an almost holy expression that is reminiscent of the messianic Jesus Christ. Thirty years after his death, his legacy has transcended Cuban myth and culture and has become symbolic of struggle and revolution all over the world. On living room walls in Cuba, it may be more likely to see a picture of Che or Fidel than one of the Virgin Mary or Jesus. To many Cubans, Che's pictures are a reminder of the revolution and struggle that so many of them fought and died for. For the older generations that have lived to see and tell of his legacy, they do so reverently. For the young, they remember him with the solemn pledge "We will be like Che."

Many of Che's admirers and followers have been quick to point out the physical similarities between pictures of Che and Jesus Christ. To those who are familiar with Che's amazing story, this comparison to Jesus adds to the mystique surrounding Che's life and death. In Vallegrande, requests are made for special Masses on behalf of Che's soul, and on taxicab dashboards, Che has replaced statuettes of the Virgin Mary. Che's own mural sits in a university where some say his eyes gaze out across a pasture towards the rugged mountains where he fought his last war.

When the Bolivian army brought Guevara's limp body pocked with bullet wounds and dripping with formaldehyde into a hospital basement, they thought they had shot down his chance of becoming a legend. On that day, October 10, 1967, hundreds of town folk lined up at the Lord of Malta Hospital in Vallegrande to lament over the loss of one of Latin America's most cherished

patriots. According to Eric Bliss, an agricultural technician who stood in line, there was something daunting about the expression on Che's face. "You know the images of Christ that you see everywhere with the slender face and the pointed nose? He looked like that. It was undeniable. What's more, his eyes were open. No matter where you were you looked at him. It always seemed like he was watching you" (Otis, 1996, p. 1-2).

Who then was this man who seemingly defeated American imperialism in Cuba while simultaneously inspiring the multitudes today to "rage against the machine?" For many in Latino communities here in the U.S. and throughout the various regions of South America, his life and death and the ideals he fought for have evolved to encompass many of the opinions and sentiments of young people today. Many of these young adults do not know much about Che's achievements in history and the contributions he has made to humanity. His writings, Guerilla Warfare and Man and Socialism, are quite brilliant and radical in thought. However, those who wear his image on T-shirts or who have his poster on their bedroom walls, usually know very little about the ramifications of Che's work. Rather, Guevara's image itself and much of his life has been embraced as symbols of revolution and rebellion.

What then explains Che mania? After all, he failed in all but one of his revolutionary adventures. And in Cuba, where he was one of four top commanders in the 1959 rebel triumph, he directly participated in dozens of executions. In 1962, he helped push Nikita Khrushchev to place nuclear missiles in Cuba; then during the missile crisis, he pushed for a first strike, only to be bitterly disappointed when Moscow withdrew its offensive missiles (Hammer & Nordland, 1997). Guevara's allure seems to stem, rather, from a longing for pure, uncompromising ideals. "In a world of ferocious competition and consumerism, some element of humanity is still looking for a hero with values," says Orlando Borrego, a Che confidante during the early years of the revolution. "In Che, they have a paradigm: a man who was absolutely honest, and completely selfless. Che has other things going for him, too: he died young, and he looked good in a beret" (Hammer & Nordland, 1997, p. 2).

These days the Cuban government buys up Swatch Revolución watches with Che's image, not to confiscate them--but to sell them back to tourists. In America, Che's appeal is no longer limited to aging leftists. He's popular with the Gen-Xers, too. The rock-rap group Rage Against the Machine uses his image to sell its music. Over the past two years, sales of Fischer Revolution skis have quadrupled; Che's likeness decorates vans that promote the skis. Then there's Label at a New York boutique. It now has a post-grunge fashion line of dresses and shirts with Che military motifs.

It has been 33 years since his death, and the efforts to bury his legacy have only made Che's image stronger. In their efforts to downplay the hype surrounding his death, officials decided to erase all traces of the Argentine-born Marxist, reputedly to make sure that his grave could not become a shrine. According to authorities his body mysteriously vanished the next day. Despite their failed attempts, the shroud of secrecy became part of the folklore, which undoubtedly added to the mystery surrounding his death (Dorfman, 1999).

Saul Landau, a professor at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona and author of

various articles on Che, wrote an editorial regarding his impact entitled "The Last Icon." In the article, Landau (1997) had the opportunity to sit down with Fidel Castro and write his thoughts on one of Cuba's most revered comrades. In 1968, Fidel Castro had finished writing his introduction to Che Guevara's Bolivian diary when Landau first filmed a weeklong documentary with him in Cuba's eastern province, Oriente. Back then, Fidel still showed signs of grief and rage against the Bolivian Communist Party for betraying Che. In many ways, he felt that their senior officials and their Soviet directors had conspired to somehow leave Che vulnerable to the Bolivian army, whom the American CIA was sponsoring at the time. His untimely death was more than a loss of a close friend, but also the end of their dream of world revolution through their victory in Cuba.

Six years later, Landau and Fidel met up in another informal ride along the outskirts of Havana. According to Landau, Fidel still spoke highly of his comrade but was not as sympathetic as in their interview years earlier. According to Fidel, "Che was reckless." When asked about the onset of their insurrection and Che's involvement, Fidel remarked, "I had warned him on several occasions during our guerrilla war in the Sierra Maestre that he was too valuable to lose. I was worried because he had no fear of death and would expose himself heedlessly to mortal danger" (Landau, 1997, p. 4).

Retired Air Force General Nino de Guzman of Bolivia is one of the last surviving witnesses to speak with Che before his execution and gave a much different account of what had happened. In an exclusive interview with the Associated Press in 1998, Guzman revealed his last moments with Che and shared Guevara's bitter feeling of betrayal towards comrade Fidel Castro. "Fidel betrayed me," Guzman said Guevara repeated several times during their last conversation. He gave Guevara some tobacco, and the wounded guerrilla took a brown-covered, hand-written booklet out of his boot and handed it to Guzman. When Guevara's skeleton was recovered, pieces of the tobacco were found in his jacket pocket. The booklet was Guevara's last proclamation to Latin Americans and Bolivians before his execution (The Che Guevara information archive, 2000, p. 1).

Researcher Jon Lee Anderson wrote one of the more recent biographies on Che entitled *A Revolutionary Life* in which he gives a more intimate look at Guevara's life and death. In his book, he interviews Che's family, friends, acquaintances, political contacts and various comrades. Among other things, Anderson went through letters, diaries, and numerous documents in archives in Washington and Havana. Unfortunately, both Fidel and Raul Castro denied him interviews in his efforts to uncover the untold story of their lost friend. Despite their missing accounts, Anderson managed to write a thorough biography of Che's heroic life. Amidst his greatness, the book gives a rather unexplained account of Che's chaotic personal life, and, in many ways, a mysteriously cold, insensitive side of the man. In his first marriage, Che bid his family good-bye after he joined the *Gramma* expedition to bring Castro's guerillas to Cuba. He later remarried one of his colleagues during the insurrection who bore four of his five children. After their victory in Cuba and some time thereafter, Che again bid his family and new-found country farewell, in order to fulfill what he considered "the most sacred of duties: to fight against imperialism wherever one may be." He wrote, "This comforts and more than heals the deepest wounds." To his kids he rendered a revolutionary's good-bye. He wrote, "Grow up to be good revolutionaries. Study hard

to be able to dominate the techniques that permit the domination of nature. Remember that the Revolution is what is important and that each one of us on our own, is worthless" (Landau, 1997, p. 42).

Heart wrenching as it seems, Che's departure epitomized the whole sense of self-sacrifice for the greater good of humanity that he emphasized throughout his career. This idea is very difficult to conceptualize because of the notion of "self-interest" that our culture, society and economy have adopted over the course of American history. Much can be attributed to the influence of the Puritans and Quakers who believed that through hard work, material gain was justified and salvation could be achieved. Gradually, the success of our economy and our society has been built on this fundamental idea.

Unfortunately, these ideas have translated into the belief that through the pursuit of self-interest, assuming hard work, we can somehow make things better for society as a whole. And although this argument holds some merit, it neglects to consider the disparities between the rich and poor among other serious social issues. Instead, a system of markets somehow is expected to resolve these problems, and we are left with a solution that simply reflects the discrepancies of our social system. The problem, however, is rooted in how our society is structured and the incentives that motivate us.

According to Guevara (2001), capitalists believed that socialism was characterized by the subordination of the individual to the state. Guevara argued, "The difficult thing for someone not living the experience of the revolution to understand is this close dialectical unity between the individual and the mass, in which the mass, as an aggregate of individuals, is interconnected with its leaders" (Guevara, 2001, pp. 7-8). This phenomena is seen under a capitalist system; however, these same phenomena were not viewed by Che as legitimate social movements. If they were, it would not be entirely correct to call them capitalist. He argued that these movements only live as long as the people who inspire them do, or until the harsh reality of capitalism puts an end to the popular illusions which made them possible. According to Guevara, under capitalism, man is controlled by a pitiless code of laws, which is usually beyond his comprehension. The "alienated" human individual is tied to society in its aggregate by an invisible umbilical cord: the law of value. It is operative in all aspects of his life, shaping life's course and destiny. Guevara viewed capitalism as a manipulating institution whose laws are blind and invisible to the majority and act upon the individual without his thinking about it. He argued, "The individual sees only the vastness of a seemingly infinite horizon before him. That is how it is painted by capitalist propagandists who purport to draw a lesson from the example of the Rockefellers" (Guevara, 2001, pp.7-8). The amount of poverty and suffering required for the emergence of a Rockefeller, and the amount of depravity that the accumulation of a fortune of such magnitude entails, are left out of the picture. He concluded that one could only succeed at the expense of another. Guevara felt that there still remains a long way to go in constructing the economic base, and that the temptation to follow the beaten track of material interests as the moving lever of acceleration development still greatly exist.

Many of Che's ideals were influenced by his travels in South America. In a letter he wrote to

his parents, Che tells about his journey and his thoughts on armed insurrection. He wrote, “I believe armed struggle is the only solution for people who are fighting to be free, and I live in accordance with my beliefs. Many will call me an adventurer, and I am. Except I’m an adventurer of a different sort, one who risks his skin to test his beliefs” (Otis, 1996, pp. 3-4).

The adventurism and charisma that Che emulated were partly what made him so appealing to the Cuban people and the rest of the world. Interestingly, here was a man born in Argentina, heir of Spanish nobility and grandson of one of Latin America’s wealthiest men, fighting for the freedom and liberation of the poor. (Landau, 1997). The impression that Che left was unique in the sense that so many people perceived him in so many different ways. However, more than his public appeal, were the sacrifices and risks he took which legitimized the authenticity of his character.

The attention that was brought to the Cuban revolution reflected the United States’ intentions regarding Latin American affairs and the U.S. government’s relentless efforts to manipulate and control foreign policy in the Western Hemisphere. In Washington, Che was a Spanish-speaking Ho Chi Minh who was persistent in turning all of Latin America into revolutionary “Salsa” (Otis, 1996). To deal with him and a whole generation of Guevara-inspired rebels, millions of U.S. dollars were allocated in an attempt to eliminate these revolutionary leftists. They offered an endless string of scholarships to The School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Ga., where soldiers from Latin America were taught to battle Marxist insurgents. Guerrilla warfare theorists Brian Loveman and Thomas M. Davies Jr. wrote in scrutiny of American policy arguing, “It may be said that the last quarter century of U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America has consisted essentially of defeating the threat, the legacy, and the legend of Ernesto Che Guevara” (Otis, 1996, pp. 6-7).

Despite the United States’ efforts to destroy the Communist party in Cuba along with two of its more recognized leaders, Guevara and Fidel Castro almost single-handedly overcame American imperialism. Today, you can still see signs of anti-imperialism billboards with pictures of Che as a reminder of the revolution. Cuba’s own historic museum of the revolution has a whole section that is dedicated to the sacrifices and contributions he made for the Cuban people. And in the province of Santa Clara there stands a museum totally dedicated to Che along with another of the many monuments in his honor.

It is undeniable that Che has become a symbol of rebellion and revolution, not only in Latin America, but all over the world. However his mission was misunderstood by many during his time, and many of those who have written biographies on his life and death still fail to capture its true meaning. Time has seemed to vindicate his death in the sense that what was an attempt to end his life and his purpose, only made his cause stronger. Today his image has become the icon for the struggle against injustice and has been embraced by the younger generations. Ironically, thirty years after Che's death, his image has become stronger and has become one of the most influential icons of this century.

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[Back to Table of Contents](#)

An Ethnographic Exploration of Santería in Havana Today

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Abstract

This paper recounts the events that led to the author's initiation into the Afro-Cuban religion *santería* in Havana, Cuba. After going to Cuba with the intention of making contacts with Yoruba descendants and researching music, the author was accepted into the *santería* community and given the rare privilege of participating in a ritual and photographing the shrines and altars of many Cuban believers in contemporary Havana. The general outline of a blood sacrifice ritual is recounted after compiling first-hand ethnographic information from a priest of the religion known as a *santero*. This is the first of two parts, and the sequel will be published at a later date.

One year ago I would have described Cuba and its culture with what I now term “The Three Cs: Castro, Communism, and Cigars.” During the winter of 2000, I began to develop an interest beyond Afro-Cuban music, my initial focus, toward the aesthetics of the Afro-Cuban religion *santería* as portrayed in such Cuban films as Strawberry and Chocolate and Plaff. Initially I wrote a paper that compared Haitian *voudu* and Cuban *santería*, the syncretic or hybrid Afro-European religions that came into being because of slavery in the Caribbean region. Essentially, the identities of African gods were disguised by giving them the names of saints who had similar traits or characteristics. The word *santería* means the way of the saints. In this way, the slaves could worship their old gods and fool their slave masters in the process. I really knew little about either religion, and my references were meager at the time of my growing interest. I also entertained the fantasy of being able to witness and photograph either a *santería* or a *voudu* ceremony in Cuba, but I knew that the odds of this occurring would be slim. Nevertheless, I hoped to meet important people and to find obscure resources that would serve me well in Havana. Cuba seems to have a mystique because so little is really known about the country in the United States today. On the eve of departure, I did not know how much the trip would change my life or the focus of my graduate research. I have now, as a result of the two-week academic exchange, turned my attentions as a graduate student to the Caribbean nation only 90 miles south of Florida. What follows is an account of my ethnographic fieldwork and the unexpected results that I obtained in Central Havana.

My interest in Cuban music was refueled, like many Americans, by the release of Buena Vista Social Club on CD. Also, I enjoy the Afro-Cuban influence on jazz recordings by Dizzy Gillespie, Vince Guaraldi, Chucho Valdéz, Mongo Santamaria, and other artists. However, my knowledge of the music of the Caribbean religions was very limited. I suppose many have seen the dramatic *voudu* images of people dancing in frenzied trance-like states in the James Bond movie Live and Let Die? Or, perhaps the first introduction to *voudu*, *santería*, and *palo* was through the 1980s thrillers The Serpent and the Rainbow, The Believers, and Childsplay? I learned that music and dance are essential in *voudu*, *santería* and a host of other Afro-Caribbean religions to worship the African gods. In order to prepare for my trip I amassed a small reference library of books, articles and dissertations on *santería* and related religions for comparative study. The research gave me some insight on *santería*, but I knew my knowledge of the religion was still superficial. Even *if* I did meet a *santero*, a priest of *santería*, in Havana, would I really learn anything? *Santería* is a secret, personalized religion, but today things are changing, and outsiders are sometimes permitted to learn more about it.

I decided that my anthropological training would be utilized best through fieldwork and I speculated that wandering through non-tourist parts of Havana would turn up something. After all, *santería* allegedly oozed from the pores of Cuba, or so the books and articles I read would have me believe. As a point of interest, the title of a book published in 1929 by W.B. Seabrook refers to Haiti as The Magic Island. I thought that Cuba would fit that description, too, and now I think that the title is also well suited for the island nation. Trying to separate realistic probabilities

from wishful thinking, I packed for the two-week expedition, paying especially close attention to my photographic gear as I planned to create an illustrated portfolio in support of my upcoming research. The flight to Cuba was uneventful and I stayed up all night with two friends to greet the new day in Havana.

Photo 1. A neighborhood in Old Havana

As dawn tinged the eastern sky, I prepared my cameras and began to wander the streets surrounding the hotel, accompanied by only one friend because our third chum became separated somehow. First we went down the hill to the famous *Malecón*, which is a seawall boardwalk and boulevard, then back through many interesting intersections that converge at odd angles. The architecture is amazing, despite its present, run-down condition. One house that I saw bore the insignia of a rooster between two exterior windows. When a shirtless adolescent appeared from the doorway going about his morning business, I pointed at the house and questioned him: “*Oricha?*” His gaze followed my finger and he replied: “*Si, oricha.*” The *orichas* are the deities or spirits of West African origin who are the objects of worship in Cuban *santería* and related religions. In the years that the Yoruba people were enslaved in Cuba, approximately 1518-1873, African gods were disguised by syncretizing them with Catholic saints who exhibited similar traits. Another shirtless Cuban emerged from the house--an older, stocky man. He invited us into his home to see the altars and shrines for his *orichas*. I was fascinated by what I saw. An elaborate altar adorned with red and white colored cloth with a matching *maraca* were draped around the statue of a female saint who the man said was Saint Barbara. Elsewhere were figurines and masks of African origin, but one carved wooden mask on the wall depicted a Native American in full headdress. A statue had a cigar protruding from its mouth, and I knew that this was an offering of sorts because some *orichas* enjoy smoking tobacco and drinking rum. I gave the man a dollar, which is about 21 Cuban pesos, and thanked him for letting my friend and me into his home.

While in Cuba, bus rides and lectures were provided, and the three CSU campuses involved had ample time to make introductions and exchange information. It was on an occasion such as this that I first learned of the *Callejón de Hamel*, also known as “Salvador’s Alley.” Prompted by

the knowledge that the entire street is painted with large, colorful murals all dedicated to the *orichas*, a small contingent of students made the initial reconnaissance. I knew then that I must return to this remarkable street to utilize more favorable light for my photography. The images are striking. However, I still did not know their significance entirely. Inside the office that doubles as a gallery for the artist, I saw a carved wooden drum suspended from the ceiling that was painted many different colors. I asked the woman overseeing the exhibit if the drum was a *batá*. Smiling, she said that it was another type of drum sacred to the religion, a type of drum used in ceremonies and rituals. Unfortunately, I am unable to remember the name at this time. She then introduced herself as the artist Salvador's daughter. Patiently, she pointed to an exquisite painting on the wall and explained the symbolism of an eye superimposed over vibrant fields of red, yellow and other colors. Although at face value the painting was very beautiful, the deeper meaning it exhibited began to settle in my mind. Eagerly I led another group of travelers back to see this remarkable place and studied the murals longer to gain better understanding of their content.

Although the numerous outdoor cafés in Old Havana feature live music, my first exposure to musicians took place on a Thursday evening after the 9 PM *cañoñadas*, or canon-firing ceremony, at *Castillo del Morro*. For the benefit of visitors, an Afro-Cuban band began to play in one part of the courtyard. The sounds and rhythms they produced impressed me because only one man played all three *batá* drums mounted on a special stand. This is an unusual circumstance because normally three separate musicians play the three drums. After taking many pictures, I approached the *batá* drummer to purchase a CD. He did not speak English well, but the lead singer came over and we conversed. The man wrote down his address and told me to call the next day to arrange stopping over to purchase a CD. Grateful, I promised to do just that. The next day, however, my roommate and I discovered the phone number lacked one important number. I decided that because the address was not too far from the hotel, I could stop by on foot if necessary. As events unfolded, I did not have to worry about calling the members of the group known as Baobab.

On the first Saturday, one week after arriving in Cuba, there was another group activity. The plan was to attend an outdoor concert/ceremony called a *rumba* in a neighborhood of Havana. As everyone filed into the open area, I milled past the crowded bar, through rows of folding chairs already filled by mostly Black Cubans, to the large area behind the stage. I calculated that most people would watch the various performances from this location. As I wandered absent mindedly, I became aware of someone grabbing my hand and saying, "Hello." When my eyes focused, I was shaking the hand of the Baobab *batá* drummer. He pointed over to where the rest of the band gathered and they waved and smiled. The singer strolled over and greeted me, as did the group's manager, and I was finally able to buy one of their CDs.

It was at the *rumba* that I realized how powerful the religious side of the music was in relation to *santería*. What Baobab had played at the fort for tourists was clearly a secular set because now they were invoking the *orichas*. A young girl danced wearing red and black garments and holding a hooked stick known as a *garabato*. Children often dress up in such attire to represent Elegguá, the first *oricha* petitioned to open the door so other *orichas* may arrive and

bless their children. In *santería*, Elegguá is syncretized with the Holy Child of Atocha or St. Anthony of Padua. Red, black, and white are his colors, and Elegguá is the master of crossroads and the doorkeeper of Olodumaré the Creator. Elegguá is also the divine trickster who bears an alter ego known as Eshú. The first song at any religious ceremony is always addressed to Elegguá so that he may find favor with the participants and allow the other *orichas* to appear when summoned.

The first song performed included dance, as do all songs of *santería*. The girl dressed as Elegguá danced, and the audience was on its feet. The spectacle reminded me of a Southern Baptist prayer meeting. Members of the audience sang, danced and twirled on stage, and once again, an image from the church scene in the movie Blues Brothers came to mind. The energy was contagious. I noticed that in addition to dancing and drinking copiously,

Photo 2. A girl dancing for the *oricha* Elegguá

smoking is a favorite Cuban pastime. So much smoke hung over the event that at times it seemed like the *rumba* was held indoors. The bar began to run out of beverages, but I participated in “passing the cup” with the Cubans, sharing both rum and beer.

At the *rumba*, I encountered a *palero*, a priest of the Congo religion *palo* that is akin in many ways to *voudu*. An important Cuban artist was pointed out to me, but it was the man standing behind him who interested me more. He was not particularly tall, but muscular and thin with a graying beard. He held one arm aloft with a large white feather, as if warding off something. Aware of my interest, he smiled and allowed me to take photographs. Later, I wandered back to the doorway where I first saw the *palero* standing. This time he squatted down and drew small circles, stars and other symbols on the ground. Once again I zoomed in to photograph his mysterious activity. I approached him and gestured questioningly at what he was

doing. Knowing we could not communicate verbally, the man literally rolled the bones for a divination. Two small bones that were painted with symbols at one end fell with the symbol ends almost touching in a snowplow pattern. The *palero* pondered the result momentarily, looked up to me and indicated that he wanted something to write on. I gave him my notebook and was puzzled by his handwriting. It was an address, that much was clear. The Foreign Language Department Chair, Professor William Martinez at California State Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo, deciphered the mystery of what the *palero* wrote after I returned to the United States. The man's name was Elio A... and he was writing down symbols for *Milagros Santos Maeniarú*, 10 October, the saint's feast date. Very little has been written about the religion *palo* so I am unable to equate the saint with one of *santería*. Perhaps they are the same or are syncretized differently. I realized that his oracle gave him permission to speak to me, but it would have required a translator because he spoke in a thick Spanish dialect. Unfortunately, I could not meet with the *palero*, but I hope to do so on a future trip. One of the best sources I have come across so far on the religion *palo* is the work by Miguel Barnet (1994) entitled Autobiography of a Runaway Slave. As the two-week excursion began to wind down, I already felt richly rewarded from the photo opportunities alone, so I did not mind that my exposure to *santería* had been limited. However with four days to go, on a Wednesday afternoon, strange events were set into motion.

With two friends in a central Havana shopping mall, I started to smoke a cigar when a Cuban approached requesting a light. His name was Gilberto and he was a photographer of architecture and also a private instructor of Afro-Cuban music. Gilberto was delighted to hear about my interest in music and my roommate's desire to purchase a professional-quality bongo drum. Our new friend led us to a café to celebrate our acquaintance with a drink, the popular *mojito*, which is a rum-based drink, and further conversation revealed more about us. When Gilberto heard about my wish to meet a *santero* and learn more about *santería*, he told me that his brother is a *santero*. We then arranged to meet again the next day, Thursday, at noon. Meanwhile, Gilberto led us to a music shop where we purchased CDs much less expensively than in stores in tourist areas. We then bid him farewell until the next afternoon.

This unexpected development caused a flurry of speculations and questions, and my roommate and I bought a nice bottle of rum to give to the *santero* as a gift. That night I pondered my good fortune because I was finally about to meet someone intimately acquainted with *santería*--the mysterious but omnipresent religion. At the same time though, I realized that in Cuba nothing surprised me anymore.

The next day, our taxi dropped us off in Central Havana, a district behind China Town but within walking distance of the Capitol Building in Old Havana. Gilberto greeted us in the street as we searched in vain for the address. First, he led us up to a dilapidated building on the corner of a major street where a popular band rehearsed a new song. We watched and listened to the musicians practice until Gilberto told us it was time to go meet his brother. As we walked back down the narrow street flanked by tall buildings, I observed the run-down aspects superimposed with the timeworn beauty of the structures. Children played in the street, and their mothers shouted at them through open doors. I glimpsed elderly Cubans sitting in doorways and shrines to

various *orichas* inside homes. Across the street from a yellow pastel-colored Catholic Church with Spanish architecture, we stood before the weathered, bright blue door of the *santero's* residence. The entire family lives in the house divided in two by a door inside. I cannot state the man's name so hereafter he will be referred to as *the santero* or my *padrino*, which means godfather.

With rapt attention, I observed the intensity of the *santero*. He quizzed me, testing my knowledge of *santería* and the *orichas*. I conceded that I knew very little, but I wanted to learn more so I could conduct accurate research. The *santero*, in accented English, began to talk about the *orichas* and the Yoruba people of West Africa. He pointed to a place behind the door, and for the first time I saw the stone heads. The heads were constructed of either

Photo 3. Images representing Elegguá

stone or cement, and cowrie shells formed the eyes, ears, nose, and mouth of Elegguá, guardian of the crossroads and messenger of the Orichas to Olodumaré the Creator.

In *santería* it is customary to place the likeness of Elegguá near the main entrance or a window if the residence is upstairs. Other items held my attention as well. A small brass bell, a vase with a sunflower and a small, rusty iron cauldron brimming with various objects dominated the corner near the Elegguás. The bell is a symbol of Ochún, who is similar to Aphrodite in

Photo 4. The ensemble comprising the warriors

Greek mythology, the goddess of sensual love. The sunflower represents the energy from the sun and is also Ochún's color, gold, or yellow. The cauldron contained a large hunting knife, iron implements, and a cast mold of a knight in armor and even plastic toy soldiers. The iron representations of a bow and arrow in miniature, combined with the aforementioned objects, all represent the warriors, called *Los Guerreros*, particularly Ochosi the hunter. Other warriors represented included Elegguá and Ogún, the Yoruba god of war, iron, and smithery.

On the back wall of the room, hung a chromolithograph of a Black female saint wearing flowing blue robes. Yemayá, the mother of many original *orichas*, is presented as Our Lady of Regla, the Black Virgin, and her colors are blue and white. I took in all of these images; then the *santero*, perhaps on a whim, rolled a divination with four pieces of a coconut shell. He seemed surprised by the result and moved over to roll again in front of the stone Elegguás, behind the front door. The four shells fell in the same pattern as the first throw, and the *santero* laughed. He said, "The *orichas* say, why do you ask again? We already told you the answer." From that moment on, the *santero* revealed more about his life's work and several legends of different *orichas*. He showed us his most powerful altars; the cauldrons honoring San Lázaro and a mysterious *oricha* he only referred to as Tronco Malo. Roughly translated, the name of this *oricha* refers to communication, but it implies danger or trouble. I believe that Tronco Malo might be a cover name, or *camino*, for the Yoruba god Changó, or perhaps he is one of hundreds of uncataloged *orichas*. Regarding the later *oricha*, the *santero* said that every day he wages a mental war to show who is in control of whom. Also, he said, "That guy can kill you."

My friends and I watched intently as the *santero* once again chanted in the Yoruba dialect called Lucumí and rolled the four coconut shells, a form of divination known as *darle coco al santo* according to Migene González-Wippler, and *Obi* according to the *santero*. *Obi* means coconut, and *obinus* is the plural form in Yoruba, referring to the shells rolled in divination (1999). The *santero* asked each of us in turn our full names and told us who our patron *orichas* are. One does not choose his or her patron; the *orichas* choose and will always look after that individual like a guardian angel, also called an *eleda*. This is a manifestation of predestination, a key belief in *santería* and the Yoruba religion *Ifá* where the *orichas* select their children before birth. When people advance further in the religion to become *santeros* or *santeras*, a *santero/santera* with the same *oricha* must initiate them.

I decided that this transition was a good time to present our gift to the *santero* for spending over four hours answering our questions. At a signal, my roommate produced the bottle of rum from his bag and the *santero's* obvious approval gave us all a sense of relief. Instead of leaving, we were beckoned to drink some of the rum from a cup fashioned out of a coconut shell. The *santero* then blew rum over the three Elegguás and other warriors behind the door. "The *orichas* are pleased," he announced. Gilberto and his brother taught us a Yoruba song, and showed us

how, after a divination is rolled, all present must kiss their own hands and then place them on the ground. Also, we learned that when Changó is present everyone must stand up because he is so powerful it would be disrespectful to stay seated. Postures and prostrations are common in the religion, especially as signs of respect for elders and the high priests called *babalaos*. The *santero* told us, “You must come back tomorrow morning, and I’ll need forty dollars to prepare a ceremony for the necklaces.” All services and ceremonies have a price and the *orichas*, through divination, determine the fee. Joseph Murphy states that the fee for any ceremony is supposed to be based on what the person can afford (Murphy, 1988, pp. 64-65).

On Friday morning my two friends and I returned to the *santero*’s home. Gilberto let us in and went upstairs to announce our arrival. In the small area adjacent to the main room where the powerful altars were kept, I noticed a white rooster and a dove that were to be sacrificed. The birds seemed calm and possibly unaware of their fate, and this surprised me. I thought that the birds would make attempts to escape because they were not restrained in any manner. After returning to the United States, I acquired an article by George Brandon entitled “Sacrificial Practices in Santería, an African-Cuban Religion_in the U.S.,” and Brandon confirms that his *Santero* informants mention the phenomenon of the animal’s passive behavior prior to sacrifice, and say that the animals are “*muy bravos*” (1990, p. 132).

The *santero* seemed tired, but he greeted us warmly and said he still needed to get a few things for the ceremony. We followed him outside and around the corner opposite the church to where a woman sat next to tables of candles, statues of saints and other religious paraphernalia. Our *padrino*, or sponsor, selected candles, holy water, and a pyramid-shaped substance that looked like chalk. I now know that the woman was operating a *botanica*, a place where practitioners acquire herbs, or *ewé*, and other components for magic and healing. The “chalk” is called *efun* or *cascarilla*, and it is composed of dried, ground eggshells and used for magic symbols and markings around the home and during rituals.

Although the necessary components for the ceremony were assembled, the *santero* still had to prepare a few things. I watched him crack open a medium-sized coconut and pour the milk into a shallow ceramic bowl, and then cut out the meat. As he diced the choice parts, the *santero* explained that this would replenish the *orichas* when they consecrated our necklaces, which are known as *collares* in Spanish or *elekes* in Lucumí. The next step was to cut four sections from the shell, about three to three and a half inches across with the coconut meat forming a white, concave side. These new, temporary disks served as the tools of divination for the upcoming ceremony. The *santero* mentioned to me as he worked that the old shells he used were handed down to him by his late uncle, also a *santero*.

In the bowl partially filled with coconut milk and meat, the *santero* placed our *collares*. Juan, which is a pseudonym for my roommate, was claimed by Changó and his *elekes* contains alternating red and white beads spanning the entire length. Jennifer, also a pseudonym, is a daughter of Obatalá and her necklace is composed of only white beads. My *collares* represents Yemayá, and it is assembled with blue and crystal beads in alternating groups of seven. All of the beads come from West Africa and have a deceptive heft to them.

In the small, cramped room where the altars are situated, the *santero* used the *efun*, or chalk, to draw an intricate magic circle representing the earth, four cardinal directions and four winds. At the four points he placed small white candles and set the bowl in the center. Then, he took the rooster into the kitchen next door where most of his family lives. He explained that the head and feet of the animals to be sacrificed must be washed. Grasping the rooster by its legs he carefully washed the head and feet and performed the same procedure with the dove. After the preparation, it was time to begin the ceremony called *ebbó*--a sacrifice.

The *santero* lit the candles and the cigar that I brought for the *ebbó* and began to chant in Lucumí prayers to dead ancestors called *moyumba*. All *santería* ceremonies begin with such prayers before Elegguá is greeted and petitioned so he may bestow favor on the initiation. Also, this is proper protocol so that Obatalá, Changó and Yemayá could bless the *collares*. After the opening prayers, the *santero* blew cigar smoke and rum all over the altars and stone heads of Elegguá and the warriors. He also stamped the ground three times, the number sacred to Elegguá, with a large *garabato*, a hooked stick once used for sugarcane harvest, to gain his attention.

The fowl was held over the bowl and an incantation was made. The *santero* plunged his knife into the bird's heart and let the blood drip into the bowl and sprinkled some over the representations of San Lázaro, called Babalú-Ayé, and Tronco Malo. Because his knife was old and a bit dull, it took some effort to remove the rooster's head. The head was then placed upon the altar of San Lázaro, atop the remnants of past offerings. The *santero* explained that the rooster's blood is "hot" and possesses a powerful life force that replenishes the *orichas* and the *aché*, or power they extend onto the *collares*. Holding the headless rooster upside down over the ceramic bowl, he poured white honey, laced with cinnamon, called *oñí*, down the neck. The blood and honey mixed with the feathers and other contents in the bowl.

Our *padrino* explained that doves and pigeons have "cool" blood and are necessary to balance the libation, or feeding, of certain *orichas*. The *santero* set down the rooster's remains and picked up the dove, gently cupping it in his hands. He spread first one wing, then the other and chanted in Lucumí while moving the wings in a circular motion over the bowl's rim. Another prayer was said and then the *santero* in one quick motion snapped the bird's head off. The severed head was placed on San Lázaro's altar, and the blood was sprinkled over the bowl and both altars. Once again the *oñí* was poured over the bird's neck. Then, seven of the largest feathers from each wing were plucked and placed on the altar to placate Changó and possibly Yemayá, whose number is seven. Plucking feathers is a petition to the *orichas* for peace on the initiate, his or her family, and the *elekes*.

The feathers were placed specifically on San Lázaro so that the souls of the birds will be renewed in the afterlife. The *santero* told us that the remains of

Photo 5. Altars of Tronco Malo (left) and San Lázaro (right).

the dove would be taken the next day to the Park of Brotherhood in Old Havana. The park is at a crossroads where a very tall, old, perfectly straight *Iroko* tree grows. This tree is of African origin, and the *orichas* sometimes decree that disposal of the *ebbó* take place there so the offering gets to Olofi, a remote Yoruba god who is syncretized with Jesus Christ.

The *collares* were then rubbed together in the blood, *oñí*, and the feather mixture to imbue them with *aché*. After this step was completed, the necklaces were draped over the altar of San Lázaro. The *santero* informed us that San Lázaro accepted the offerings “very nicely.” The previous day the *orichas* told our *padrino* through divination that Babalú-Ayé would accept the *ebbó* and the ceremony was nearly complete at this point. The coconut milk was mixed with the *efun* and rum to “cool” the *collares* which were then cleaned in the coconut shell bowl we used to drink rum the previous day. After this the *santero* placed the *elekes* outside in the sun to dry for an hour or so.

The *santero* looked at me and said it would be all right to take pictures. Although my camera was present both days, I had not used it, and I was very happy for this rare privilege. Quickly I snapped as many pictures as I could, but I also had to respect the *santero*'s command to skip over the soup tureen where his “secret” was kept. *Santeros* generally keep their *otánes*, the stones of power, with certain herbs and cowrie shells in tureens. Usually, the ceramic tureens are the same color that symbolize the *santero*'s patron *oricha* according to Joseph Murphy (1988), Lydia Cabrera (1970), and other authors.

The day of our initiation just happened to coincide with Juan's birthday. The *santero* said that he must, in addition to blessing the *elekes*, make a special amulet known as a *resguardo* or *niché osain* for Juan. He did not say specifically why, but perhaps the *orichas* who know the future, felt Juan needed protection from something. As he constructed the amulet, the *santero* told us a legend, or *pataki*, about Changó because I asked why there were so many squash near the *orichas* in his home. The *pataki* was unfinished and a bit choppy, but it goes something like this:

A long time ago in Africa, Changó was given many squash by Olofi because he was obedient to the Yoruba god. Changó was a fierce warrior who emerged the victor in many wars and consequently gained a lot of land. The other *orichas* however had no squash. Olofi asked them why they did not have any, and in utter disrespect, the arrogant *orichas* said they could get squash whenever they wanted. It so happened that the squash Changó possessed contained gold coins inside, a reward for his loyalty to Olofi. The other *orichas* were very angry and jealous of Changó's elevated status, so they issued him a challenge. Changó accepted and began to play his drums so loud that his enemies began to dance and he made a laughing stock out of them. He then took their land, and to this day the other *orichas* have no squash. Changó communicates with the deity of the mountains, Osain, who consecrates the wood used in the construction of all sacred drums. The union embellishes strength and the power of the mountains whenever the drums

are played.

At this point in the story, the *santero* suddenly laughed. He said that he could no longer tell us about this legend because all the hair on his body was standing on end. He said that this was a warning from the *orichas* not to divulge too much information. From that moment on our *padrino* spoke only of Changó in context to the *resguardo* that he was constructing for Juan. Taking a red thread, he dipped it in blood and sealed it with white candle wax. An incantation was made, and the fur of a four-legged animal, most likely a goat, was sewn to conceal the secrets inside.

After constructing the amulet, the *santero* gave it to Juan, instructing him to keep it on or near his person. Our *padrino* retrieved the *collares* from the street and stood in the doorway while he dried and polished the beads with his handkerchief. When he was finished, the three of us donned our *elekes* for the first time.

Now in a celebratory mood, it was time to toast Juan's health with a drink. We walked down the street to the backside of Chinatown and listened to the *santero* greet people. We were invited into a few homes to see the *eggun*, or dolls representing dead ancestors, set up just inside doorways, and I took several photographs of different *eggun*. Dropping behind my friends and Gilberto, the *santero* and I had a private conversation. He said I should purchase a book entitled *El Monte* by Lydia Cabrera (1970) and that he knew I would do well with my research. Also, he said that the people in Havana revere him as a saint. However, he quickly interjected, "I am not a saint, I just do their work." The *santero* is a healer because he serves Babalú-Ayé, or San Lázaro, the *oricha* of infectious diseases. The *santero* then spoke more about an incident that took place during the *ebbó*.

A family came into the home while we watched our *padrino* perform the initiation. Not an hour before he told us that he heals people who come to him when doctors and hospitals are at a loss. The mother and father were very distraught because their little boy was gravely ill. His skin was yellow, his face sunken, and he had large, open sores on his scalp. Despite his illness, the youth tried to smile at us, but he clearly did not have much energy to do more. The *santero* paused from our *ebbó* to consult the oracle and then told the boy's parents that tomorrow they should return.

Walking down the street, the *santero* said he was always very busy and that the sick boy was only an example of his many daily tasks. In earnest he looked at me and said, "I am going to die." I think he meant someday, not immediately. The point of this I hypothesize was that he needs a successor to continue his work because in an age of globalization, the youth forget their culture and beliefs. There were times when our *padrino* seemed upset with us. Perhaps we were a bit stubborn, or perhaps he was instructed to go out of his way for us. I think it was a little of both.

In a Chinese restaurant, conveniently and appropriately decorated red and white, Changó's colors, we toasted Juan's birthday and initiation. Our little party took place in the late afternoon, and I noticed many curious glances from European tourists dining there. When we finished our drinks, we filed out into the street and the *santero* took us on a little tour of his neighborhood to show how *santería* thrives today. He explained how the Yoruba slaves concealed the identity of the *orichas* by disguising them with the identity of various Catholic saints. Outside of the church

across from his residence, the *santero* told me not to take pictures inside. However before we entered the cathedral, I photographed ceramic saints and colorfully dressed dolls, called *eggun*, and other things placed on the steps outside.

Photo 6. A statue of Ochún on the steps of a church

The first large statue of a saint we stopped to look at was that of a woman dressed in a red cape. This was Saint Barbara, whom the Yoruba syncretized with Changó. According to Catholic lore, Saint Barbara controlled lightning and weather and is the patron saint of soldiers. The Yoruba recognized these attributes and also syncretized many other *orichas* with Catholic saints. Suddenly I understood what I saw that first morning nearly two weeks prior in a private home. One by one, our *padrino* identified the *orichas* and their Catholic counterparts as they are represented in churches all over Cuba. The statue on the steps out front that wore yellow and white robes was Ochún, and she is syncretized with Our Lady of Charity. Ochún is depicted standing over her domain, all rivers and lakes, and three men all named Juan are in a boat below her. Legends say that she saved them from drowning during a storm, and a similar scene is illustrated in images of Yemayá who is identified with Our Lady of Regla, the Black Virgin. Obatalá is also known as Our Lady of Mercy, and the saint is dressed in white robes that symbolize purity. Fascinated, I listened, but I also began to experience sensory overload. My friends and I decided we had had enough and agreed to meet later in the evening. Our plan was to join Gilberto and the *santero* at a concert in Old Havana, then we would possibly go to another place where their father's group, Yoruba Andabo, would play and summon the *orichas*. Yoruba Andabo is famous in Cuba and Latin America, and I collected several of their recordings during the two-week stay in Havana.

There were many interesting things that took place that evening, but that will be another story for another time. As my research expands my knowledge, I will be better able to describe the musical elements of *santería* and also the phenomena of *oricha* possession that I both witnessed and experienced first hand. The bibliography at the end of this text is intended to be a recommended reading and listening selection that will direct students and curious readers to other works on *santería* and comparative religious studies. I photographed all of the illustrations contained in this

article and they are copyrighted, 2001 Paolo Venaglia-Sweeney©. I hope that my personal account will add to the body of English literature available to people interested in Cuban culture in Havana today and especially the Yoruba presence in the religion known as *santería*.

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[Back to Table of Contents](#)

*Women's Healthcare in Cuba: Observation of Medical Facilities in
Cerro, Havana*

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Abstract

This project was based on interviews and observations related to health care services available to women in Cuba. These observations included a tour of medical facilities in Cerro—a municipality located in Havana, Cuba. Interviews with Havana physicians and patients, as well as observations of patients, show some of the successes and limitations of Cuba's health care system. This firsthand observation is then compared with other research. The negative effects of the economic crisis and embargo on the health of Cuban women are illustrated.

Introduction

In 1960, Che Guevara, a medical professional himself, stated in his speech “On Revolutionary Medicine” that above all else, doctors should work to provide health care services to all people. One of the beliefs of socialism is that providing free health care to all citizens is the government’s responsibility. The Cuban government considers its health care system to be one of the revolution’s greatest successes. In the 40 years following the Cuban revolution, life expectancies have increased, and maternal and infant mortality rates have decreased substantially. In spite of severe economic setbacks, Cuba has managed not only to continue its commitment to the public health sector, but also to make improvements through educational campaigns, improved communication systems, and data collection.

In keeping with the concept of socialized medicine, the Cuban government offers a range of health-related services and programs to its citizens free of charge, with a special emphasis on maternal and infant health. My research focuses on women’s health care issues; my objective was to observe what types of medical and health-related services are available to women. Statistics from the World Health Organization and the Pan American Health Organization (the Latin American regional office of the World Health Organization also known as PAHO), helped to put into perspective some of the successes and limitations of women’s health care in Cuba. In addition, I obtained from the Cuban Ministry of Health some literature that defines Cuba’s health care strategies for combating specific health problems. I wanted to discuss with Cuban women and healthcare professionals the quality and availability of services to women.

My research centered on the central metropolitan section of Havana called Cerro, which has a population of about 600,000 (“Havana City,” 1997). While there, I observed different levels of Cuba’s highly structured healthcare system from the neighborhood family doctor’s office, to a special maternity home for pregnant women. My research sources included interviews with five Havana-area doctors: two doctors of obstetrics and gynecology, one resident physician, and two general practitioners, one of whom is the director of a Havana clinic in Cerro. Dr. Jorge Puentes-Corral, an obstetrician/gynecologist, acted as my host as he led me on a tour of different medical facilities where I met and spoke with patients and three of the other doctors. I observed twelve patients in the maternity home and spoke with two of the women who were resting in their beds when I arrived.

Structure of the Healthcare System

“Total biological, physical, and mental well-being” of the Cuban population is the goal of health care providers, said Dr. Jorge Puentes-Corral (personal communication, July 3, 2000). They achieve this through what they call community-based programs, which carry out health care strategies and educational campaigns that the Ministry of Public Health (MINSAP) directs. The health care structure in Cuba begins at the national level with the Ministry of Public Health, and

“extends through the provincial level, the municipal level, and to the local community” (Davis, 1998). This structure is intended to guarantee that all citizens, even those living in remote locations, benefit from the health care system, a benefit that was not possible in the private medical system that existed before the Revolution.

A Brief History of Socialized Medicine in Cuba

In 1960, Che Guevara gave his famous speech “On Revolutionary Medicine,” which described the ideological differences between socialist medicine and private medical practice. Cuba’s health care system was completely overhauled after the revolution when it changed from a privatized to a socialized structure. While creating a new policy on health care in 1960, Cuba’s national health system declared that health is the state’s responsibility and that everyone has the right to health (Davis, 1998), a point that was reiterated during my interviews with Cuban physicians. Dr. Puentes-Corral emphasized that not a single doctor practices private medicine in Cuba today (personal communication, July 3, 2000).

Following the revolution, Cuba suffered what Dr. Puentes-Corral called “a profound loss of medical professionals” (personal communication, July 3, 2000). Fifty percent of its 6,000 physicians had left the island by 1962. As a temporary remedy, the government sought help from doctors in Mexico and other parts of Latin America (Davis, 1998). In 1961, the government prepared to educate future doctors by converting a large, spacious nuns’ convent into a teaching hospital as part of the University of Havana (J. Puentes-Corral, personal communication, July 3, 2000). Medical students attended school free of charge, but in exchange, they agreed to serve for one year in remote, rural areas that had the greatest needs. Che Guevara spoke of the need for doctors to serve in rural areas and also to “be a farmer” in order to help the poor (Guevara, 1960).

Over the years, Cuba not only realized Guevara’s vision of socialized medicine, but also provided new opportunities to future aspiring doctors. With over 60,000 trained physicians, 54.6 per 10,000 people, (PAHO, 1998), Cuba has the highest doctor-patient ratio in the world, according to Randal (2000). By 1995, the number of doctors in Cuba grew to 20 times what was available in 1959 (Davis, 1998). In addition, Cuba recruits medical students from various regions, social classes, and racial backgrounds (Waitzgen, Wald, et al., 1997).

The Family Doctor Plan

Cuba continues to evaluate and make improvements to its health care system. The Family Doctor Plan is one of these improvements. Until 1984, the levels of community-based medical care included polyclinics and hospitals (J. Puentes-Corral, personal communication, July 3, 2000). In 1984, the Program of Integral Community Attention, better known as the Family Doctor y 3, 2000). Plan, *Los médicos de las 120 familias*, was initiated, adding an extra level of community care to the system.

Under this plan, an assigned family doctor attends 120 families in a given neighborhood block. The family doctor lives in the community that he serves, providing primary and preventative care to the 700-800 people in his assigned area. The family doctor carries out any special health-awareness programs that the national level directs. In addition to seeing each patient twice a year, the family doctor is also responsible for maintaining health records and seeing that his patients receive vaccinations and health screenings. Patients usually

Photo 1. The district of Cerro in greater Havana

see their assigned family doctor first and, if needed, receive a referral to the hospital for specialized care, except in emergencies when patients can opt to go directly to the hospital emergency room (Waitzkin, Wald, et al., 1997).

Che Guevara believed that doctors should be humble in their practice of medicine, with the primary motivation being the pride of serving their neighbors (Guevara, 1960). Keeping true to that belief, family doctors live in the same neighborhoods in which they are assigned to serve, and the doctor-patient relationship is a close and personal one. “In Cuba, doctors are like friends; [patients] tell you their problem,” said Dr. Melba-Sosa Leyva (personal communication, June 27, 2000), a resident physician who is completing the three years of family medicine training required of all residents (Waitzkin, Wald, et al., 1997). This arrangement between doctor and patient can break down the barriers that are often present in a privatized structure where doctors live in one, usually wealthier section, and the patients live in another. In addition, the income that a Cuban doctor makes is extremely modest compared to privatized standards; Dr. Sosa-Leyva told me that she makes the equivalent of twenty-five U.S. dollars per month (personal communication, June 27, 2000).

Photo 2. The neighborhood clinic in Cerro

As was stated earlier, under the socialist system providing health care is the state's responsibility. The doctors I spoke with emphatically stated that they take personal responsibility for their patients' care. According to Dr. Florángel Urrusuno-Carbajal, it is the doctor's, not the patient's obligation to see that patients get the care that they need (personal communication, July 6, 2000). In fact, when a pregnant woman does not show up for her pre-natal visits, one doctor said that she makes a house call to provide the services in the patient's home (M. Sosa-Leyva, personal communication, June 27, 2000).

The main objective at the primary care level is counseling and prevention. As an example of preventative care measures, women between the ages of 25 and 65 receive Pap tests every three years. Family doctors counsel patients in order to eliminate risk factors such as smoking, obesity and lack of exercise (M. Sosa-Leyva, personal communication, June 27, 2000).

The doctors listed some of the common health problems in women. Obesity is a frequent health problem among women in Cuba (J. Puentes-Corral, personal communication, July 3, 2000). Obesity is more common in female patients than males and tends to increase with age. Other health problems which exist among women include hypertension, anemia and diabetes. In Cuba, 26.3 percent of women aged 15 and over use tobacco, according to PAHO (1998). The web site for the Hospital Clínico Quirúgico Hermanos Ameijeiras, located in Havana, lists dates for educational programs that help patients manage these common health problems (*Hospital Clínico*, 2001). Cuba commonly uses mass communication in the form of public service announcements on the airwaves as a way to educate the public about prevention and control of health problems (PAHO, 1998).

The family doctor practices medicine in the neighborhood doctor's office called a *consultorio*. The *consultorio* is open 24 hours a day, since the doctor's home usually sits above his office. J. Puentes-Corral (personal communication, July 6, 2000) stated that patients rarely have to wait long in the *consultorio* in order to see their doctor, a common complaint among patients prior to the implementation of the Family Doctor Plan (PAHO, 1998).

Photo 3. A doctor explains the health bulletins

While not working in the *consultorio*, the doctor is out making house calls to one of the 120 families assigned to him. He or she may also rotate shifts at the local polyclinic, which offers more specialized community health care services.

The *consultorio* in Cerro is relatively small and has only the most basic equipment. The *consultorio* contains a waiting room where patients can read some health care pamphlets from a small bookcase. An exam room around the corner contains a few medical supplies. The only air that circulates within

Photo 4. Women patients in the maternity ward

the rooms comes from open doors and windows. A lamp located next to the exam room provides artificial light, but sunlight comes in through the high, frosted windows located near the ceiling to provide additional lighting. The exam table is a metal table with no additional padding other than a cloth. Medical equipment is laid out in the open on a metal tray. One tool, a cone-shaped object, is used as a stethoscope. Since paper is in short supply, the waiting room bulletin board is

decorated with neatly placed cutouts and drawings against brown paper backgrounds, a huge difference from the slick, commercially-produced color charts and graphics that are common in U.S. hospital marketing pieces.

In spite of the lack of high-technology equipment, Cuba has managed to make remarkable strides in the quality of health care that it provides to its citizens. Today, the major health problems and causes of death in Cuba are similar to those of developed countries, including heart disease, cancer, and diabetes (Davis, 1998). This is markedly different from the main causes of death, infectious and parasitic diseases of 30 years ago (PAHO, 1998).

Like the rest of Cuba's population, women's life expectancy is high and comparable or even superior to that of more developed countries. The average life expectancy of women is 74.3 years (PAHO, 1998).

Polyclinics and Hospitals

The polyclinic consists of a group of medical specialties that exist under one roof. The polyclinic offers social services, emergency services, pediatrics, gynecology, diagnostic ultrasound, dermatology, psychiatry, radiology, and statistics, said Dr. Urrusuno-Carbajal (personal communication, July 3, 2000), director of the polyclinic in Cerro. The polyclinics are structured so that patients may visit with specialists from 8AM-12PM, and for emergencies from 8AM-4PM. After hours, two family doctors are available all night. Like the *consultorio*, the polyclinic in Cerro operates on relatively low-tech equipment; for example, the building relies mainly on light coming from the windows, and air circulates through windows and rotating fans. Four polyclinics, approximately 200 *consultorios*, and a total of 280 family doctors exist within Cerro.

Due to the chain of command required to gain permission, getting access to some of the healthcare facilities depended on the connections and influence of the doctor I was with. I was unable to visit a hospital. In total, 281 hospitals exist throughout Cuba (PAHO, 1998). Dr. Puentes-Corral, however, convinced the guard to let us through as he led me and another student on a brief tour through the corridors of the University of Havana's medical school site, the same one that was converted from a nun's convent in the early years of the revolution.

PAMI (The Mother and Child Plan)

"All [national health care programs] are important, but the most important is the Mother and Child program," said Dr. Florángel Urrusuno-Carbajal (personal communication, July 3, 2000). This program places a special emphasis on the needs of pregnant women, newborns, and children. Infant mortality decreased from 62 per 1,000 live births in 1959, to 7.2 per 1,000 live births in 1998. Some of the special needs addressed in this program include attention to breast exams, cervical cancer screenings, genetic testing, pre-conception risk, low birth weight, and family planning, said Dr. Carbajal. Educational campaigns, such as breastfeeding campaigns that lowered

the infant death rate from acute gastroenteritis, have increased the quality of life for Cuban women and their infants (Davis, 1998). The efforts to carry out the objectives of these educational campaigns are evident during tours of the *consultorio* and polyclinic: cutouts and hand-drawn signs taped against bulletin boards emphasize the importance of breastfeeding and good nutrition.

Better data collection methods and research into causes of death make it possible to provide even better medical attention to women and their newborns. Prior to 1969, the causes of prenatal death were not even investigated, but today, all prenatal deaths are recorded in hospitals, (J. Puentes-Corral, personal communication, July 3, 2000). Committees at the provincial and national level analyze every maternal death. Since this maternal death analysis was initiated in 1970, the maternal death rate has decreased by more than half, from 70.5 per 100,000 in 1970, to 32.6 in 1995 (Davis, 1998).

In 1996, improvements were made to the first Infant and Maternal Mortality Program, first implemented in 1995 (J. Puentes-Corral, personal communication, July 3, 2000). The Ministry of Health designed strategies for dealing with maternal mortality factors, including complications from caesarian sections, pregnancy risks, toxemia, and abortions (Davis, 1998). Other statistics provided by PAHO (1998) showed a decline between 1992 and 1996 in maternal death from 3.3 per 10,000 live births to 2.4.

Maternity Homes

Since Cuba places special emphasis on maternity and infant care, expectant mothers with high-risk pregnancies or other special needs can visit the maternity home where an on-duty nurse lives and is available 24-hours. A total of 209 maternity homes exist throughout Cuba (PAHO, 1998). This particular house in Cerro offers 12 beds, with the majority of women arriving on an out-patient basis. One maternity home exists per municipality, said Dr. Juan Casellanos (personal communication, July 3, 2000), director of Cerro's maternity house. The common reasons for going to the maternity home are the need for additional nutritional supplements, the risk of carrying a low-weight baby and carrying twins which is also considered a high-risk pregnancy. Cerro is one of the lower-income areas within Havana and frequently a high number of adolescents and single mothers visit its maternity homes. Depending on how critical her needs are, a mother-to-be can visit the home during the day, or she can be admitted by doctor referral, usually at 22 weeks, until the end of her pregnancy. In-patient services are provided to the patients who are at greatest risk.

"Obtaining vitamins for pregnant women in the maternity homes is not a problem [because] in Cuba it is considered a priority," said Dr. Juan Casellanos (personal communication, July 3, 2000). The supply of iron salts and folic acid in the prenatal period has reduced the incidence of underweight infants (Davis, 1998). Iron deficiency anemia is the most common nutritional problem in Cuba since 40 percent of women in the third trimester of pregnancy, 25-30 percent of women of childbearing age, and around 50 percent of children up to age three, all suffer from it (PAHO, 1998).

Cuba makes pre-natal care efforts to guarantee a diet of 2800 calories per day (Davis, 1998). The in-house nurse cooks and provides balanced daily meals to residents in their beds, all free of

charge. One of the women I spoke with there told me that as the mother of a small boy, she stops by in the afternoon in order to have a place to rest, and then she leaves in the evening. She said that she found the home to be very calm and tranquil (personal communication, July 6, 2000).

Two of the women I observed in the maternity home were suffering from iron deficiency and possibly malnutrition and were sleeping when I arrived. They risked delivering low birth weight infants. Both of these women seemed a little younger than the rest of the other women since they appeared to be in their late teens or early 20s. This age group is the most likely to experience these difficulties during their pregnancies, the doctors explained to me.

Not all the women in this home necessarily suffered from pregnancy difficulties or from problems with dietary deficiency. One woman was an English instructor who was pregnant with her babies, a set of twins. With the exception of two patients whose pregnancy difficulties I mentioned earlier, the patients I spoke with expressed their contentment with the healthcare they received. They appeared happy and pleased with their services that the maternity home provided. One of the things that struck me was their eagerness to make me feel welcome. For instance, in spite of my protests, they sat up out of bed, put the fan towards me, and accompanied me downstairs when I left.

When I visited this summer, this maternity home was two stories high, with patients of the higher risk pregnancies located downstairs. Their beds were metal-framed twin beds with a mattress and pillow and no bedding or sheets. There was a television in the room of the women with the low birth weight pregnancies. A rotating electric fan cooled the room. A tray next to their beds held their belongings.

Obstetrics

Pregnant women receive a number of tests in order to ensure that no complications exist. The average number of prenatal visits per woman increased from 17.2 in 1992, to 23.6 in 1996 (PAHO, 1998). Prenatal screenings are free of charge and include glycemia, urine, vaginal, and ultrasound tests (M. Sosa-Leyva, personal communication, June 27, 2000). As early as 1987, Cuba had included HIV testing for pregnant women (Keys & DeNoon, 1997). During a typical 37-40 week pregnancy, a woman sees her doctor once a month until week 30; from weeks 30-35, she sees the doctor every 15 days. At week 36, she sees the doctor once a week (M. Sosa-Leyva, personal communication, June 27, 2000).

Childbirth and Delivery

The doctors' goal is for at least 99 percent of all births to take place in the hospital, said Dr. Elena Martinez, a doctor at the Antonio Maceo polyclinic. Home birthing is not permitted (personal communication, July 6, 2000). In fact, Cuban doctors have been so successful at this goal that PAHO lists their percentage of deliveries by trained professionals at one hundred percent (1998).

By U.S. standards, Cuban women appear to have fewer choices in their healthcare decisions as far as where they can give birth, who can be present at the time of delivery, and whether or not an

episiotomy can be performed. Some of the reasons appear to be due to lack of supplies, lack of space, and in some cases, value judgements about what is best for the patient. During labor, for example, the doctors give local anesthetic with either nidocaine or lidocaine; epidurals are not possible because anesthesiologists are unavailable (J. Casellanos, personal communication, July 6, 2000). A list of medicines in “critical short supply” include anesthetics (Frank & Reed, 1997).

The number of routine episiotomies performed in Cuba during child birth, based on M. Sosa-Leyva’s explanation, sounded like more of a value judgement on the part of medical authorities: “The deep laceration [of a natural vaginal tear] is too great, and it is easier to repair one cut easily” (M. Sosa-Leyva, personal communication, June 27, 2000). Although episiotomies are also widely performed in the U.S., the book The New Our Bodies, Ourselves (1984) expresses the opinions of those who denounce this procedure as unnecessary in most cases.

Another interesting note is the limitation of a Cuban father’s ability to participate in the delivery. Fathers are not allowed to be present at their child’s birth. I received two different explanations for this. According to Dr. Sosa-Leyva, the presence of men in the delivery room might make the delivery too chaotic (personal communication, June 27, 2000). A more experienced doctor whose specializes in obstetrics noted that the small delivery room makes it impossible to allow the father to attend the birth (J. Puentes-Corral, personal communication, July 6, 2000).

Maternity Leave and the Law

Two of the doctors of obstetrics and gynecology explained Cuba’s policies regarding maternity leave from work. The Maternity Law was modified six or seven years ago. Maternity leave is guaranteed by law, and new mothers can take up to a year and six months leave without losing their jobs (J. Puentes-Corral, personal communication, July 6, 2000). In the twelve weeks following delivery, a woman will receive 100 percent of her salary for the first child. After the twelve-week period, the woman will receive 60 percent of her salary if she decides to continue her leave. After a year, she can continue her leave without salary (J. Casellanos, personal communication, July 6, 2000).

Access to Abortion

Abortion is legal, safe, and provided free of cost to Cubans. In the last ten years, one woman died from abortion complications in the entire municipality of Cerro (F. Urrusuno-Carbajal, personal communication, July 6, 2000). Abortion is encouraged when the pregnancy will result in grave health problems for the mother or when severe deformities exist for the fetus, the doctors explained. Abortions are by law limited to pregnancies at no later than 20 to 24 weeks. They are permitted only in hospitals. As the father of a five-month-old daughter, J. Casellanos expressed his personal opposition to abortion (personal communication, July 6, 2000).

As a result of the economic crisis that occurred in the early 1990s, the number of abortions increased. “Women,” said Dr. Urrusuno-Carbajal, “just did not want to give birth” (personal communication, July 6, 2000). To discourage abortion as a means of contraception, doctors educate their populations about family planning and contraceptive methods (J. Casellanos, personal communication, July 6, 2000). These educational campaigns seemed to be successful. The abortion rate decreased from 70.0 per 100 deliveries in 1992, to 59.4 in 1996 (PAHO, 1998).

Birth Control Options and Accessibility

As Dr. Urrusuno-Carbajal pointed out, economic hardships affected many women’s decisions to terminate their pregnancies in the early 1990s. The embargo has also affected women’s access to medicine and birth control options. Even though contraception is provided free of charge, it is still difficult to obtain. Until 1990, most Cuban women relied on birth control pills as a form of contraception, according to a study by the American Association for World Health (1997). A 1995 merger between a U.S. company and a Swedish company, which supplied the lab equipment to produce the pills, cut off access to repair parts when the equipment broke down. As a result, Cuban women had no choice but to rely on donated pills from other countries that caused imbalances in their hormone levels (Frank & Reed, 1997). Dr. Sosa-Leyva did not have much information to give me in relation to this merger and how it directly affected her patients, but she did acknowledge that it is difficult to access certain types of contraceptives. She stated, “It is a lot of trouble, but we now are producing part of it” (M. Sosa-Leyva, personal communication, June 27, 2000). For example, since the IUD is not domestically produced, Cuba has to buy it from other countries, said Dr. Sosa-Leyva (personal communication, June 27, 2000). Since condoms are expensive to produce in Cuba, they rely on donations of these supplies from other countries (Waitzkin, Wald, et al., 1997). This is unfortunate, since 79 percent of women use contraception (PAHO, 1998).

Effects of the Embargo on Women’s Health

The embargo affects Cuban citizens because the patents on many components in special equipment are owned by U.S. companies. When machines break down, the health of the Cuban population becomes endangered. Dr. Sosa-Leyva acknowledged that U.S. policy makes it difficult for Cuba to maintain their equipment. “We cannot buy components,” said Dr. Sosa-Leyva (personal communication, June 27, 2000).

“We witness ...X-ray...and other lifesaving machinery standing idle for want of US-produced spare parts,” said Peter Bourne, chairman of the American Association for World Health (“Cuban Health,” 1997). For example, the U.S.-owned Eastman Kodak company produces x-ray film for mammogram machines (Davis, 1998).

As a result, life-saving preventative care is available to only the highest-risk groups. X-ray screenings for breast cancer are still obligatory for women between the ages of 45 and 55 years (M. Sosa-Leyva, personal communication, June 27, 2000). Until 1990, however, all Cuban women over 35 received regular mammograms. In the mid-1990s, the lack of x-ray film caused

the shutdown of breast cancer screening programs (Frank & Reed, 1997).

Even access to basic but necessary medicines and supplies are affected by the crisis. According to Randal, “Supplies such as rubber gloves, are reserved for surgical procedures.” Peter Greenberg, M.D. of the Stanford University Medical School, found that the embargo has affected Cuban doctors’ patient management due to “lack of antibiotics, equipment, current textbooks, and basic medical supplies” (2000). One doctor admitted that the lack of medicines sometimes forces doctors to try to find substitutes for needed medicines. “When you need one kind of medicine for one patient, it is hard to ask for a change” (M. Sosa-Leyva, personal communication, June 27, 2000).

Several researchers agree that Cuba’s commitment to providing health care has kept the system functioning. According to one World Health Organization official, “Cuba has invested more in health services than almost any other country, and it has a higher health profile than the United States” (Kirkpatrick, 2000). Several studies contradict the U.S. State Department’s assertion that Cuba, not U.S policy, is to blame for the crisis. The Special Period in the early 1990s forced the Cuban government to drastically reduce its spending on healthcare: from 227.3 million in 1989, to 56.9 million by 1993 (Davis, 1998). Theodore MacDonald, author of “A Developmental Analysis of Cuba’s Healthcare System since 1959,” stated that Cuba’s high allotment of its budget to provide healthcare to all its citizens saved the island from what he calls “human catastrophe.” In addition, a 1997 study by the Washington-based Association for World Health, which is affiliated with the World Health Organization, supported MacDonald’s finding by acknowledging that the Cuban government’s high priority to its health care system averted what they also called a “human catastrophe.” (MacDonald, 1999).

In spite of setbacks caused by economic factors, Cuba has maintained its commitment to providing free health care to its citizens. This is not to say that criticisms of the system do not exist. I found the doctors that I interviewed to be accommodating and willing to answer my questions. I sensed a strong spirit of commitment to their profession, not out of material gain, but out of concern for people. The people whom I interviewed about the Cuban health system, even casually, spoke about it with pride. By observing the health care of women in particular, it seems that Che Guevara’s belief that human life is invaluable has been preserved through the decades, even during the most difficult times.

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[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Current Programs and Issues in Cuban Teacher Education Today

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Abstract

Universal education was one of the top priorities of the early years of the Cuban Revolution. Since that time, Cuba has maintained one of the most highly educated populations in the world, despite severe shortages of basic educational equipment and supplies. Teacher education programs have played a key role in eliminating illiteracy and developing high academic standards, yet few in the United States are aware of how these systems function. This paper is a preliminary, collaborative effort by Cuban and U.S. colleagues to describe the Cuban programs that are educating world-class teachers.

Everyone on earth has a right to be educated and, in return, the duty to contribute to the education of others.

[José Martí, *La educación en Cuba*, 1989, p. 3]

The most recent United Nations statistics reveal that economic embargoes resulting in a lack of material resources have not diminished Cuba's educational achievements. On the contrary, 42 years after its revolution, this island nation continues to demonstrate an ongoing commitment to educating all of its citizens by consistently dedicating in the range of 23% of its annual national budget for that purpose (Borroto López, 1999). Illiteracy rates in Cuba are some of the lowest in the world. According to the World Education Report 2000, illiteracy rates are 3.7% for Cubans aged 15 and older and only 0.3% for Cubans aged 15-24 (UNESCO, 2000).

Universal education was one of the top priorities of the early years of the Cuban Revolution. In 1959, about 22% of Cubans over 15 were illiterate; by the end of 1961, 700,000 persons had been taught to read. The year 1961 was proclaimed the Year of Literacy (*El Año de la Alfabetización*) and the Year of Education (*El Año de la Educación*). As described by Garcia (1986), Kozol (1978), Sanders (1983), and Torres (1991), this first Cuban literacy campaign sent brigades of young people as young as twelve years old into the countryside with a determination to raise literacy levels in their fledgling nation using a pedagogy that Paolo Freire termed "liberatory" (Freire, 1970). Regular schools were closed for an eight-month period while the *brigadistas*, dressed in Cuban blue jeans, worked as educators. These young teachers were given *Venceremos*, a book for students, and *Alfabetizamos*, an instruction guide for teachers, as well as a few teaching ideas crammed into short, 10-day training programs. The regular teacher education programs also underwent extensive reorganization during this same period of the revolution. When the shortage

of teachers became critical because of the emigration of many educated Cubans, the pool of instructors for secondary, vocational, and technical schools was increased by sending volunteers through emergency teacher-training courses.

After a series of educational reforms, teachers in Cuba today are provided with comprehensive education in the subjects they will teach, strong backgrounds in current educational theories and methods, and extensive practice in applying these theories and methods in a variety of supervised field experiences. All Cuban educators working at the elementary or secondary level have to have completed studies for a teaching license or be taking classes toward that goal. This requirement for teachers reflects the current state of educational development in the country. Only in exceptional cases are non-teaching professionals given temporary contracts to teach.

Very little is known in the U.S. about current teacher education in Cuba. This article is a preliminary, collaborative effort by Cuban and U.S. colleagues to describe the programs that are educating world-class teachers.

General Background on Education in Cuba

Education in Cuba is compulsory from grades one through nine. Cuban teachers are licensed to teach in one of the following areas: Preschool Education: birth to age 5; Primary Education: ages 6-12 (First cycle: grades 1-4; Second cycle: grades 5-6); Secondary Education: ages 12-18 (Basic secondary: grades 7-9; Higher secondary pre-university: grades 10-12); and Special Education: birth to age 18.

The school year lasts 46 weeks, starting September 1 and continuing through the first weeks of July. Each educational level operates on different calendars. Teacher education programs are divided into two semesters: from September to February and from March to July. Classes last for a semester with final exams taken at the end of each term.

Teacher Education Institutions and Admissions Policies

The network of teacher preparation institutions functioning in Cuba today was established by the General Educational Reform Law of 1976. There are currently 15 Higher Pedagogical Institutes, all funded by the government as public institutions. These institutions offer 21 specialized licenses under one of the following areas: Preschool Education; Primary Education; Secondary Education; and Special Education. Physical education teachers attend the Higher Institute for Physical Culture or one of its provincial branches. Like all education in Cuba, there are no charges for fees or books. There are no privately funded teacher education institutions in Cuba.

Most students enter teacher education programs after completing six years of primary school (*Primaria*) and three years of basic secondary school (*Secundaria Básica*), and three years of higher secondary (*Preuniversitario*). These students have received a *bachillerato*, a secondary-

school-leaving certificate, after successfully completing their pre-university studies. A smaller number of students whose goal is to become technical or vocational teachers enter the Pedagogical Institutes after completing their specialized studies at secondary schools known as *Institutos Tecnológicos*.

To be admitted to a Higher Pedagogical Institute, students must pass entrance exams in history, mathematics, and Spanish. They also have to take aptitude tests and undergo interviews that determine if teaching is an appropriate career option for them. Among the qualities that interviewers look for are ethical values and the ability to act professionally under all circumstances. Students are ranked according to the results of their exams and interviews. The highest ranked students are admitted to the teacher education programs. These tests and interviews are comparable to those in any other area of academic study. Successful applicants come from all working sectors of society.

Persons already working in educational institutions in Cuba who do not hold teaching licenses are given national priority for admission to Higher Pedagogical Institutes. These “*educational workers*” do not have to take competitive entrance exams. Their classes are scheduled to accommodate their work hours. The number of openings in the Higher Pedagogical Institutes is determined by the estimated number of teachers that will be needed in the country.

The Structure of Teacher Education Programs

There are three basic components of the curriculum for obtaining a teaching license as part of a degree in education: academic work (general studies, professional studies, and specialized studies), field experiences (practical training that includes practice teaching), and research projects. Teacher education programs take five years for students taking regular daytime classes and six years for students who attend classes while working in educational institutions.

Academic Work

All students must take the following classes as part of their general studies at the Higher Pedagogical Institutes: Spanish Language, History of the Cuban Revolution, Physical Education, English, Mathematics, and Art Appreciation.

There are a number of core education classes that must be taken as part of their professional studies by teacher education students regardless of their area of specialization: Educational Development, History of Education, Teacher and Society, Adolescent Development, and Educational Psychology.

Other classes in teacher education programs vary according to specialization. Preschool, primary, and special education each offer a single option for a teaching license. There are twelve areas in which basic secondary and higher secondary teachers can specialize for their teaching: Mathematics and Computer Science, Physics and Electronics, Chemistry, Biology, Geography, Vocational Education, Marxism-Leninism and History, Spanish and Literature, English Language,

Russian Language, Art Education, and Music Education. Teachers in the field of technical education can specialize in one of six areas: Mechanics, Electronics, Construction, Economics, Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, and Mechanization.

Field Experiences and Practice Teaching

Field experiences, including practice teaching, are recognized as the framework upon which teacher education is built. Hands-on work in schools takes on increasing complexity and importance during the program and accounts for about 50% of the curriculum.

The following is a general outline for field experiences common to all Higher Pedagogical Institutes. During the first and second years, students spend a day each week, as well as an extended one-month period, working in schools. During the third and fourth year, the number of field experiences is expanded to 50% of students' coursework as designated in the prescribed curriculum. These structured and focused experiences vary according to regions. Students spend the entire fifth year doing supervised work in schools. During their last year in the program, students attend lectures at the Pedagogical Institute once each week to complete their required coursework and to prepare for their culminating project.

During the entire teacher education process, the Pedagogical Institute and the school share the responsibility of planning, shaping, and directing the students' field experiences. This work in the schools is completely integrated into requirements for students' academic disciplines and research.

Research Projects

The research component of teacher education takes on greater significance because students, from their very first years, develop their research skills while engaged in field experiences. They learn to apply research skills to the real problems that exist in their surroundings, namely the school, the family, and the community.

Students in all majors have to complete two projects related to their programs. These projects can be planned and evaluated as part of their discipline, as part of a specific class, or independently. As part of these culminating activities, students have to defend a diploma project. The defense of program and diploma projects takes place at the end of the academic year.

Job Opportunities and Support for New Teachers

After completing their teacher education program and defending their diploma project, all graduates of Higher Pedagogical Institutes are guaranteed a job, the details of which depend on openings available within the social services system. If there are no teaching positions available, recent graduates may be assigned to work at the municipal and provincial level to cover the positions of educators who have been selected for full-time faculty development opportunities. From an administrative point of view, recent graduates of teacher education programs have a

guaranteed income that can be increased through successful annual evaluations.

Pedagogical Institutes that have educated new teachers and municipalities that welcome recent graduates both have the responsibility of following their progress through coordinated classroom visits, as well as through periodic workshops, and postgraduate courses or training.

Faculty development through courses, seminars, or teaching workshops usually takes place during working hours, often by releasing teachers from their normal duties while giving them their regular pay. This frees teachers from having to use their vacation time for faculty development.

The graduates of these teacher education programs have begun to form a special group of educational leaders from which future advisors and inspectors can be drawn. These persons can be used at various levels to lead and assist other teachers.

Challenges Facing Teacher Education in Cuba

The Ministry of Education is committed to initiatives that will improve Cuban teacher education programs. These areas for educational reform include vocational education, decentralization, and educational quality.

Vocational Education

Cubans are naturally drawn to study in prestigious academic programs that have led, for example, to an oversupply of doctors and architects and a shortage of technicians. An initiative is underway to increase interest in vocational careers starting in elementary schools. Pre-University Vocational Institutes for Pedagogical Sciences were formed in 1994-95. These Institutes provide regular programs at the secondary level while establishing articulation with the Higher Pedagogical Institutes to ensure that their graduates enter teaching careers in vocational education.

Decentralization

Cuba's educational programs have been organized and standardized at a national level. Although this system has produced one of the most highly educated populations in the world, there is a need to increase flexibility in the operation of teacher education programs that would permit institutions to maintain principles, goals, and essential content while decentralizing the decision-making process. Decentralization would make each educational center responsible for considering local conditions and needs when applying national standards.

Educational Quality

In addition to raising the level of class content, especially in scientific areas, changes in teaching methods are also needed. Cubans recognize that, ". . . methods with their tendencies toward the simple transmission of knowledge are inadequate" (Borroto López, 1999, p. 199). The major problem in this area, however, is the lack of technological equipment. Because the

computer is recognized as an invaluable tool for students' intellectual development, technology is viewed as a critical component of teacher education. Unfortunately, current economic conditions have made it almost impossible to provide educators with the hardware and software they and their

Students' need to function academically in a global society.

Final Thoughts

Despite recent severe shortages of basic educational supplies and equipment, Cuba has maintained one of the most highly educated populations in the world. Additional research is needed to explore the reasons for this educational system's successes. Cuban teacher education is certainly one of the areas that deserves further study. This paper is a preliminary attempt to define some of the programs and issues involved. Dialogs between educators in Cuba and its Spanish-speaking neighbors are well in progress, but this same type of collaboration between Cuban educators and their counterparts in the U.S. are long overdue.

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[Back to Table of Contents](#)

About the Contributors

María Balderrama

Professor Balderrama is a native of the Mexicali/Calexico Valleys where she attended public schools. She was taught to have pride in her culture and family, to value bilingualism and to respect other cultures, particularly those cultures with which she was not familiar, or did not fully understand. For this reason, her family emphasized travel as a way to “find out for oneself” about other people, their customs, and their countries. After visiting Cuba with the CSUSB study group, Dr. Balderrama was invited back in December, 2000, when she presented/published a paper at La Universidad de La Habana Seminario Internacional on the “Crisis of the Education of Chicana/os in the Southwest.” She has been invited back to do another presentation in February 2002 on “Chicana/os in Higher Education.” Presently, as an Associate Professor she teaches courses in multicultural education and bilingual curriculum and schooling, including research and foundations courses in the Master of Arts Program.

Stephanie Bernal

Stephanie Bernal graduated from CSUSB, with a degree in Communications Studies and a minor in Spanish. Her areas of academic interest include media and Latin American studies. The 1999-2000 Cuban Studies Program was a unique opportunity for her to integrate these interests. She found it to be a life-changing experience. It was also a valuable opportunity to learn about Cuban culture during a significant historical time in U.S.-Cuban relations. Her future plans include pursuing a master’s degree in Communication Studies and continuing to conduct research in other Latin American countries.

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Dr. Rafael Correa, a native of Colombia, is a member of the Foreign Languages and Literatures Department. His areas of scholarly interest include Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Latino populations in the United States. His publishing interests range from the discourse of “Discovery and Colonization” to “Gender Studies, Critical Theory, and Oral Traditions in the Caribbean.” His latest project centers on the legacy of political violence in Postcolonial Latin America as reflected in the narratives of José Luis Gonzalez (Puerto Rico), Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Fernando Vallejo (Colombia). He was recently named Interim Coordinator of the newly established Latin American Studies Program at CSUSB.

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Rosalie Giacchino-Baker is the Co-Director of CSUSB’s International Institute and a professor in the College of Education’s Department of Language, Literacy, and Culture where she specializes in second language and multicultural education. Her international experiences include

work in France, Micronesia, England, Belize, Mexico, China, Thailand, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Vietnam, Argentina, and Cuba.

Sergio Gómez Castanedo

Sergio Gómez Castanedo is an advisor and researcher in the Cuban Ministry of Higher Education. His career in education spans thirty years, and he has published extensively about the educational systems of his country. He has traveled throughout Latin America and Europe.

Elsa Ochoa-Fernández

Elsa Ochoa-Fernández serves as Director of International Student Services and Co-Director of the International Institute. She received her bachelor's degree in French and a Master of Arts degree in French and Romance Languages from Louisiana State University. A native of Colombia, South America, she teaches Spanish at CSUSB and at the community college level. She currently serves as national Vice-President of Phi Beta Delta, a society of international scholars.

Julie Reineman

In 1999, Julie earned her B.A. in Spanish from CSUSB. After a visit to Peru, she began an M.A. program in English composition at CSUSB, with an emphasis in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). She completed this graduate program in 2001 and has begun a Spanish M.A. at CSU, San Marcos.

Justin Romero

As an undergraduate at CSUSB, Justin has been recognized for outstanding academic achievement while pursuing a bachelor's degree in economics. After completing his education at CSUSB, he plans to apply to graduate programs with the goal of acquiring a doctorate in economics and eventually teaching and conducting research at the university level.

D. Paul Sweeney, Jr.

In 1993 Paul received an A.S. Degree in humanities from Washtenaw Community College in his hometown, Ann Arbor Michigan. In 1995 he completed his B.S. in history and anthropology from Eastern Michigan University. Presently, Paul works on an M.A in Interdisciplinary Studies at CSUSB, concentrating on history and anthropology, with an emphasis on visual presentation through his photography. His primary research areas are Caribbean religions and cultures that retain "Africanisms," and their presence and influences in those cultures today. Upon completion of the program, he intends to obtain a Ph.D. and teach at the university level, compete in cycling, and maintain a secondary career in professional photography.



[Back to Table of Contents](#)