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Cuba: An Elusive Truth

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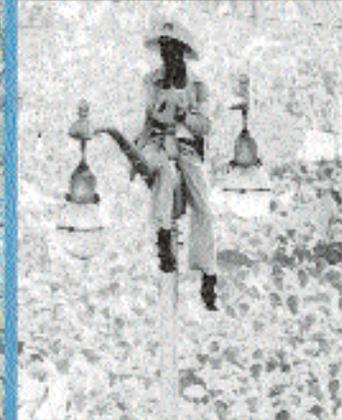
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CUBA

AN ELUSIVE TRUTH



2003 DEPTH REPORT · UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN
COLLEGE OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATIONS

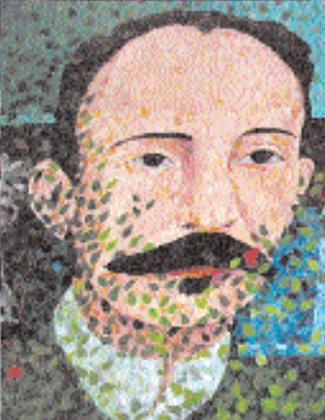
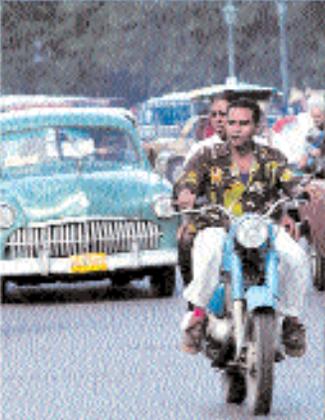


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Searching for the truth

Early on the morning of Jan. 1, a dozen University of Nebraska journalism students left familiar surroundings in Lincoln for Miami and Havana.

Their goal: To find the truth about Cuba.

For six months, they had prepared for the mission. They read scores of newspapers, magazine articles and books. They scoured Internet sites and analyzed documentaries. They chatted with U.S. senators and Nebraska farmers. Before leaving, they felt confident their extensive research had yielded certain immutable truths about Miami's large exile community and Cuba's history, politics, economy, culture and customs.

During the 12-day trip, the students conducted 186 interviews. They interviewed U.S. congressional leaders and the president of Cuba's parliament. They interviewed members of Miami's most powerful exile groups and the CEO of Cuba's chief import agency. They interviewed news directors of Miami's Radio Martí and editors of Cuba's state-controlled newspapers. From each of the official voices, they heard many truths.

In between, they also interviewed doctors, lawyers, teachers, students, bus drivers, cabbies, psychiatrists, prostitutes, tour guides, AIDS patients, social workers, teenagers, artists, musicians, street hustlers, dissidents, Hemingway scholars, bartenders, economists, reporters, priests, santeros, farmers, fishermen and Castro's former mistress. From all the unofficial voices, they heard many more truths.

On Jan. 12, when their plane touched down in Omaha, the students were confident of only one thing: The truth about Cuba — elusive as a tropical breeze — lies somewhere between Miami and Havana.

In Havana, for example, some students were lied to by government spies. In Miami, some exiles accused the students of being government spies.

Meanwhile, some Cubans who had agreed to interviews feared government reprisal. To protect them, their names were either changed or only first names were used in this report.

Three months after leaving Havana, the students learned another truth: The fear of speaking out was not an unfounded one.

In early April, the Cuban government rounded up 75 dissidents — including a



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Cuba's state-controlled newspapers may be the country's official voice, but its people speak their own truth.

number of journalists — and charged them with undermining the socialist system. All were quickly convicted and many sentenced to lengthy prison terms.

In the end, this report is dedicated to the search for truth — for which 28 Cuban journalists were collectively sentenced to 546 years in prison.

— Joe Starita

Where have you gone, Jose Martí?

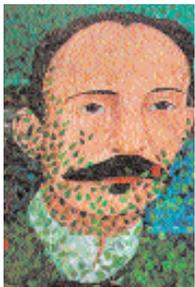
He dreamed of an ideal Cuba. More than a century after his death, the street-level view reveals much gray and one black-and-white truth: The poet's dream has left and gone away.

By Matthew Hansen

In truth, man speaks too much of danger. Poison sumac grows in a man's field, the serpent hisses from its hidden den, and the owl's eye shines in the belfry, but the sun goes on lighting the sky, and the truth continues marching the earth unscathed.

— Jose Martí

They're marching down a Havana street single file, olive uniforms giving them away even if you somehow miss the black rifles resting on their shoulders.

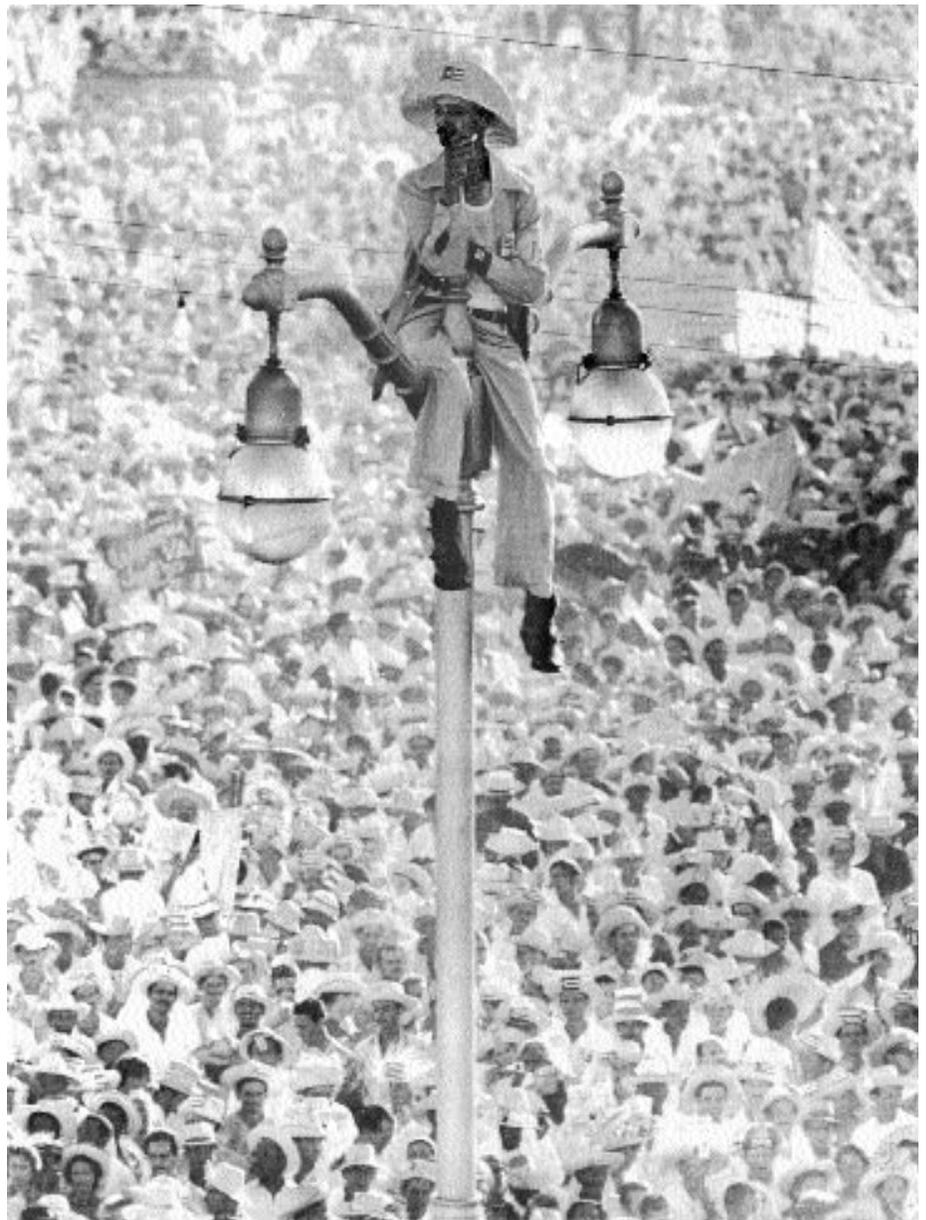


Jose Martí

The tour group spills off a Mercedes bus and into Revolution Square, American eyes fixating on El Comandante's army first and the buildings comprising the heart of his regime second.

To the left, a towering gray granite statue of nationalist poet Jose Martí, the backdrop of many a famous speech. Behind that, the Palacio de la Revolucion, the country's political headquarters. Farther left, the Department of Defense, where generals once plotted tactics against certain invasions from the north.

And up to your right, beyond the soldiers, sits the Ministry of the Interior. You'll find the eight-



PHOTOGRAPH BY ALBERTO KORDA, REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION FROM THE KORDA PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION OF GEORGE BURKE HINMAN
A single peasant sits casually atop a lamppost high above Havana's Revolution Square on July 26, 1959. Thousands of peasants from throughout Cuba gathered in the square to hear Fidel Castro celebrate the revolution's triumph.



Oct. 29, 1492

Christopher Columbus lands and claims Cuban island for Spain.

1511

Columbus' son, Diego, settles Cuba under Spain's rule, where it stays for 400 years.

1597

The Castillo del Morro, a fort in Havana's harbor, is built to protect the island from invaders.

1500

1600

story edifice on many a postcard because a towering black-metal mural of beloved Che fills one side.

That side also has no windows. Unseen, the younger brother heads a government arm from his hidden den.

“You would not like to go over there,” the tour guide says through a thin smile.

The square itself could pass for the abandoned parking lot of a closed Kmart, all cracking asphalt and sagging power lines. No activity save for those dozen-odd soldiers marching slowly out of sight.

To belittle this place, of course, is to ignore half its truth. Here, in Revolution Square, is where hundreds of thousands once cheered when he bellowed freedom from Batista, freedom from poverty, freedom from America. Right where the people stood when a dove fluttered from the sky and landed on his shoulder, a sign from the Santeria gods that he was their Chosen One.

This is where it began, a regime that’s outlasted 10 U.S. presidents, a half-century Cold War and countless hot ones, survived both a 42-year-old embargo by the wealthiest democracy in the world and the death of a communist empire.

It’s a regime that struggles on, weakened but still marching, to this day.

In this wide-open square you talk of truth quietly. But in the narrow streets of Havana the talk is growing louder and more diverse. There, amid the salsa and stickball, between the tourists and the beggars, among the laughter, rum and rumba, that’s where you attempt to piece together what the dead poet claimed to find so easily.

A 32-year-old artist shakes his



GEORGE BURKE HINMAN

Above: Che Guevara's mural covers one side of the Ministry of the Interior building in Havana's Revolution Square. Below: The granite statue of Cuba's best-known poet and nationalist leader, Jose Martí, serves as the backdrop for many speeches in Revolution Square.

head. Good luck. You are standing at ground zero in his city that’s the backbone of his country that’s so very different from your own.

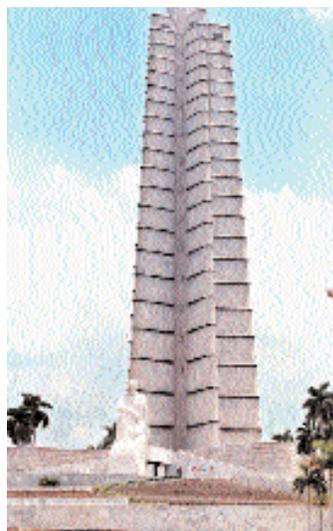
And you are so very far from the truth.

“Listen. Cuba is an illogical temple,” Gregorio says, pointing toward a sunlit sky. “You have to be able to see the illogical temple.”

Man loves liberty even if he does not know he loves it. He is driven by it and flees from where it does not exist.

The old man eyes you for a second, maybe less. “Buenos días,” he grunts.

Then he’s busy scanning the empty street outside for the omnipresent police. Coast clear, he ushers you into his first-floor apartment. The building is like many in Havana — a whiff of former greatness obscured by



years of neglect obscured again by the possibility of rebirth. Past, present and future all disguise themselves under an unpainted shade of gray.

Inside live the old man, his

sick sister, a half-dozen dying plants and the clutter from a lifetime as a psychiatrist.

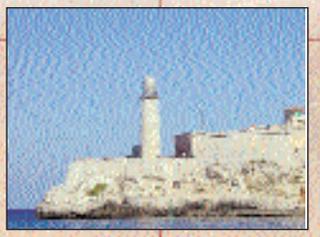
The government promised to repair the building years ago. Maybe the workers don’t come because they’re busy. And maybe, he thinks, they don’t come because he’s done something wrong.

The conversation proceeds in fits and starts, blocked by barriers of language and age, culture and money, three layers of paranoia lacquered on top.

The old man speaks in rapid Spanish and broken English and universal hand signs. One minute, he is admiring what El Maximo has created. He’s praising good education, free health care and an infant mortality rate comparable to America’s.

Problems? None really. He nods. This is good. This is true.

The next minute he leans



1762

England declares war on Spain, takes Cuba and trades it for Florida in 1763.

1792-1815

The Napoleonic Wars bring increased trade in tobacco, sugar and other crops to Cuba.

1868-1878

Cuba’s first war for independence is thwarted by Spain after 10 years of heavy fighting.

1895

Cuba is again at war with Spain, a fight for independence that will last more than four years.

1700

1800

1900

forward, whispers to put the pen down and starts in about how Cuba's economy is failing. How he can't get the right medicine for his sister's Parkinson's. How the police tap the hotel phones and punish contrary voices.

Then quickly back to the party line, a cyclical rumba leaving your notebook full of positives, your ears filled with negatives, your mind still searching.

Later that day, a cab driver named Jose, speeding along the city's outskirts, laughs when told the story.

"Three words: People are afraid."

An hour here will teach you that the island Columbus stumbled on five centuries ago is all of that — and so much more. It's the salsa's infectious beat and the rhythm to match. Caring doctors, tough teachers, world-class boxers and loving mothers live here. It's a sports purist's heaven, where you sidestep a raging stickball game or the wayward soccer ball. It's Charlton Heston's hell — guns impossible to come by, deadly man-to-man violence unheard of.

It's the nervous excitement of a University of Havana student close to graduation and the real world. It's easy laughter and a hand on your shoulder and something abstract tugging at your soul.

And it's those old man's eyes ... tired, clouded by a lifetime of fear. They're more straightforward, more honest, than anything to pass through his lips. They know that talking freely ignores Fidel Castro's 44-year stranglehold on mouths. Talking freely ignores what he's done for Cuba, and talking also ups the fear.

The respect comes from some notion that this Cuba is an improvement over what came before, most notably a regime marked by widespread corrup-



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

The average street in downtown Havana is narrow and crowded. In the background is the Cuban Capitol, modeled after the U.S. Capitol.

tion, crooked elections and both American business and organized crime sticking fat fingers in an already thin economic pie.

B.C.: "Cubans tended to believe they were a little banana republic that didn't count for anything. Just a place where Americans came to get drunk on the weekend," says Wayne Smith, former head of the U.S. Special Interests Section in Havana and a leading expert on Cuban affairs.

A.C.: "He gave them pride in being Cubans. He put Cuba on the map."

The change, to its leader, also meant controlling what his people said, heard and thought. It meant one voice — the truth! — bold-faced across front pages, blaring from the evening news and staring right back as every "Socialismo o Muerte" billboard whizzed by.

It meant months like April.

"Listen. Cuba is an illogical temple. You have to be able to see the illogical temple."

Gregorio, artist

Cuban courts sentenced 75 dissidents to jail sentences as long as 28 years for "working with a foreign power to undermine the government." On April 11, a Council of State ruling sent three men to the firing squad wall, where they were executed for attempting to hijack a ferry headed to the United States. The bullets came eight days after their arrests and five days after their convictions.

The jailed dissidents and executed hijackers are just the latest additions to a group of untold thousands wasting in prison cells and decomposing in graves.

Their crime? They didn't listen.

"No one crosses the Comandante," Smith says.

They're still toeing the line in official Cuba, both in the halls of power and in the classrooms of a typical social workers school.

There the tour group begins to fire questions at a select group of teenage students.

Question: Favorite music?

Answer: Cuban rap and

American pop.

Question: Favorite movies?

Answer: Horror and shoot-em-ups.

Question: Favorite movie star?

Answer: Jackie Chan.

Both American and Cuban smiles circle the classroom.

Question: How are you different from your parents?

Uneasy silence. The only boy in the group, quiet until now, stands up and locks eyes with the questioner.

Feb. 15, 1898

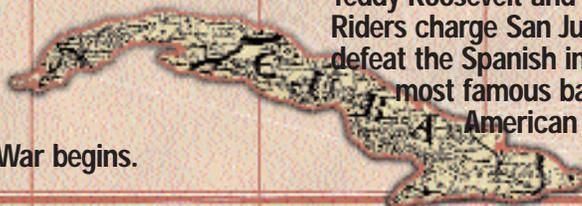
After the explosion of the USS *Maine* in Havana Harbor, the Spanish-American War begins.

July 1, 1898

Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders charge San Juan Hill and defeat the Spanish in one of the most famous battles in American history.

1901

Congress adds the Platt Amendment, limiting Cuba's right to self-rule. Under it, the U.S. could intervene militarily at any time.



1900

Answer: "Politically, we are no different from our parents." His stare never wavers.

He who turns inward and only thinks avariciously of cultivating his appetites loses his humanity and becomes loneliness himself. He carries in his heart the dreariness of winter. He becomes in fact and appearance an insect.

The first question is always the same.

"Where you from?" If the answer is the United States, they tell you of a brother in New Jersey or a cousin in Miami. Then it's down to business.

Want cigars? Need a tour guide? A good restaurant? A good time? I'm your man.

Businessmen sell newspapers and coins of Che. Artists draw caricatures. Cuban musicians form makeshift street bands, recruiting a German or Spaniard to fill in on the maracas.

For dinero, always dolares, part of a burgeoning capitalist spirit rooted in the economic ruin of the 1990s and Cuba's subsequent return to tourism.

"Cuban people are friendly because they want something from you," says Pedro Ugarte Bravo, a 31-year-old cook and erstwhile tourist aide. "It's a fake friendship."

Back in 1959 Castro pronounced the tourist persona non grata. Foreigners had brought only corruption, gambling, prostitution and drugs, he said.

"They didn't want to be monkeys in a zoo, with the tourists watching them," Smith says. "But, in 1992, what are you going to do? Back to tourism."

For decades, the Soviets had imported raw Cuban sugar and nickel at an inflated cost and exported finished products at bargain-basement prices. When cou-



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

The Tropicana is a popular cabaret for tourists visiting Havana, but few Cubans ever see the extravagant shows.

pled with cash, the total subsidy amounted to about \$6 billion annually. Back then, democratic revolution neatly coincided with a plummeting sugar market. Smith estimates the Cuban economy shrank by half during the early years of what Castro ironically dubbed "the Special Period."

The worst year was 1993, artist Gregorio says. Blackouts lasted days. A once-reliable food ration dwindled to nearly nothing. No paint or brushes or hope to be found anywhere.

It's gotten better mostly because of Cuba's campaign to bring in European tourists, advertising the country's beaches and natural beauty as an affordable alternative to Aruba or Cancun.

But Cuba's tourism boom also creates a series of moral contradic-

tions its people wrestle daily. In this system, hotel bellboys make more than doctors. Although a dollar goes a long way, 26 pesos, its supposed equivalent "can't buy you no shit," said Mateo, a government employee. Foreign companies build four-star tourist hotels next to crumbling apartments. Most Cubans can't get two feet into these hotels before security stops them. That same security often looks the other way when teenage jiniteras wearing heavy make-up, high-cut skirts and profit-hungry smiles glide through the entrance, headed to the bar.

So men and women force themselves into the tourist game, becoming the proverbial insects, sometimes to provide the bare necessities, sometimes to get

ahead.

The artist complains about tourism's evils as young Cuban men lead tourists into his gallery. The cabbie blasts the tourist system minutes after volunteering to drive you 10 miles even though he's not a licensed taxi driver. And the cook admits he's trying to figure out ways to pry dolares from you right now.

"That's how we live," Pedro says. "Nobody lives on salary. Nobody."

People are made of hate and of love, but more of hate than love. But love, like the sun that it is, sets fire and melts everything.

Raúl Costoya seems like a reasonable man. He sits at activity's edge in Miami's Domino Park,

1928

Cuban President Gerardo Machado declares it illegal to run against him in the presidential race. He wins the election without an opponent.



1940

The Constitution of 1940 entitles all classes to equal rights, ensures a minimum wage and calls for equal pay for equal work.

1943

Soon after Cuba enters World War II in support of the United States, President Fulgencio Batista legalizes the Communist Party of Cuba and establishes relations with the Soviet Union, an ally of the United States.

1920

1940

1950



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

A newly married Cuban couple speeds along the Malecón in a 1950s-era Edsel.

the epicenter of the aging Cuban-American community. Behind him perhaps 75 elderly Cuban men and exactly one elderly Cuban woman play cards, chess and the game that lent the park its name.

The 78-year-old retiree just whipped out a well-padded wallet to show off faded black-and-white photos of two daughters, three grandsons and one great-granddaughter, all living in Cuba. He prattled like a proud patriarch, listing names, ages and jobs in excited Spanish.

So, a mistake. You ask what positives came from the Revolution. And now Raúl is staring as if the Bearded One himself just plopped down on the next park bench and asked the exile to light his Cohiba.

"Nothing. In Cuba everything that was good came before the

Every Cuban speaking wants to see Cuba bettered, at least from his or her own perspective. They may hate Castro, and each other, but hard-liners, moderates and Castro sympathizers alike share one thing: They all love the island.

Revolution."

Welcome to Miami. At last count, 650,000 Cuban Americans lived in Miami-Dade County, some forcibly removed from Cuba, most landing on Florida's shoreline by choice.

Sometimes, it's hard to believe that they and Cuba's current inhabitants came from the same planet, much less the same island, because their relationship to Cubans, and vice versa, marches to the strangest of truths.

Cubans ridicule their northern

neighbors — "Crazy," says a construction worker named Anthony standing on the Capitol steps, spinning finger around ear for emphasis — even though Miami Cubans send millions to relatives on the island each year. In fact, those \$10 and \$20 bills make remittances the island's largest single source of income, trumping even sugar sales.

For their part, Miami Cubans are the strongest supporters of an embargo whose effects, any expert will tell you, hurt the Cuban

populace to some degree.

To hear the shrillness of voices on either side of the Gulf Stream is to know hatred. To witness the passion of those same voices is to know love.

"One of the things about revolution and counterrevolution is that it's a very polarizing process," says Max Castro, a senior research associate at the University of Miami, a Miami Herald columnist and a Cuban-American who advocates ending the embargo. "The other side, the enemy, is black and white. If I say, 'look, there are 99 bad things about Cuba but one good thing,' they are going to point at that and say, 'You are a friend of Castro.'"

The dead poet himself hasn't escaped the polarization. Both Castro and Cuban opposition leaders claim his words as their own, which is why you can walk out of Miami's own federally funded Radio Martí, board a plane and land an hour later in Havana's Jose Martí International Airport.

The hard-line anti-Castro Miami Cubans, the Cuban government and, increasingly, more moderate voices on each shore — they're fighting for minds, too. They want you with them on the embargo, on Castro, on the truth.

And so it goes. Schedule a meeting with one Miami doctor and arrive to a full-fledged, 10-person Cuban Liberty Council presentation complete with a Cuban lunch, Cuban coffee, a video about Cuba and more passion in one afternoon than you'd normally encounter in a month.

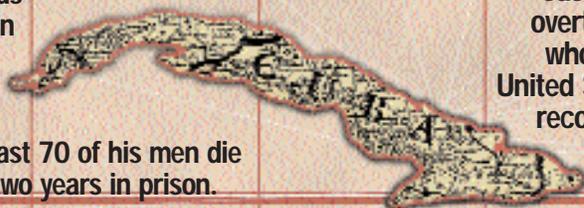
Let the superlatives fly.

"Everything that you hear in Cuba is B.S., completely B.S.," says one speaker.

Then people scream. A woman cries. "There has not been one country that has gone as wrong as Cuba in the history of

July 26, 1953

Fidel Castro leads revolutionaries in a raid on the Moncada Army Barracks. At least 70 of his men die and he spends two years in prison.



1959

Castro's revolution overthrows Batista, who flees country. United States formally recognizes his new government.

April 1961

A CIA-trained Cuban exile force lands at the Bay of Pigs and tries to initiate a popular revolt. Castro's military crushes the ill-fated invasion in three days.



1950

1960

all mankind,” says another, oblivious to Hitler’s Germany, Stalin’s Soviet Union and Pol Pot’s Cambodia.

A growing number of Cuban-Americans think this rhetoric is, well, crazy. A recent Cuba Study Group poll shows 46 percent of Miami Cubans favor lifting at least the embargo’s travel ban, while 28 percent wish to end the long-standing policy altogether. Those numbers jump higher among recent Cuban immigrants, eroding overall support for a policy that, for decades, has spurred Miami exiles to donate money and time to the powerful Cuban-American political lobby.

Max Castro helped organize a March 2002 conference in Coral Gables to discuss ending the Cuban embargo. Three hundred Miami Cubans showed up, which wouldn’t and couldn’t have happened a decade ago.

There is also evidence that the power of the Cuban American lobby, always so crucial in delivering congressmen, senators and even presidents to Washington, is waning. The CLC is a splinter of the once-mighty Cuban American National Foundation, which lost popularity after the death of charismatic and controversial leader Jorge Mas Canosa. Cuban-Americans leaders themselves admit they don’t have the resources to compete with big American business interests intent on ending the embargo.

“The estimates say we’ve spent \$300,000 to \$400,000 in the whole last five years,” says lawyer Marcell Felipe, who sits on the CLC’s board of directors. “Archer Daniels Midland, in the last two years alone, their group has spent 5 million. And that gives you a little bit of an idea how things shape up.”

Of course, this all happened before Cuba’s crackdown on free

speech, an action that may ice over any previous thaw.

Which is not really the issue, many Miami Cubans say. You’re missing half the truth again. The gray obscured by all the black and white is that every Cuban speaking wants to see Cuba bettered, at least from his or her own perspective. They may hate Castro, and each other, but hard-liners, moderates and Castro sympathizers alike share one thing: They all love the island.

Exit Havana’s aforementioned Martí airport to see why.

Hundreds of people crowd one another outside, bodies pressed close to a security fence. And then the right person — a brother, mother or best friend — emerges from the double doors, luggage in tow. And a Havana Cuban and a Miami Cuban hug. Right then, they’re both just Cuban.

As Cuban as the poet. So whose side is he on anyway? The answer, of course, is enveloped in gray.

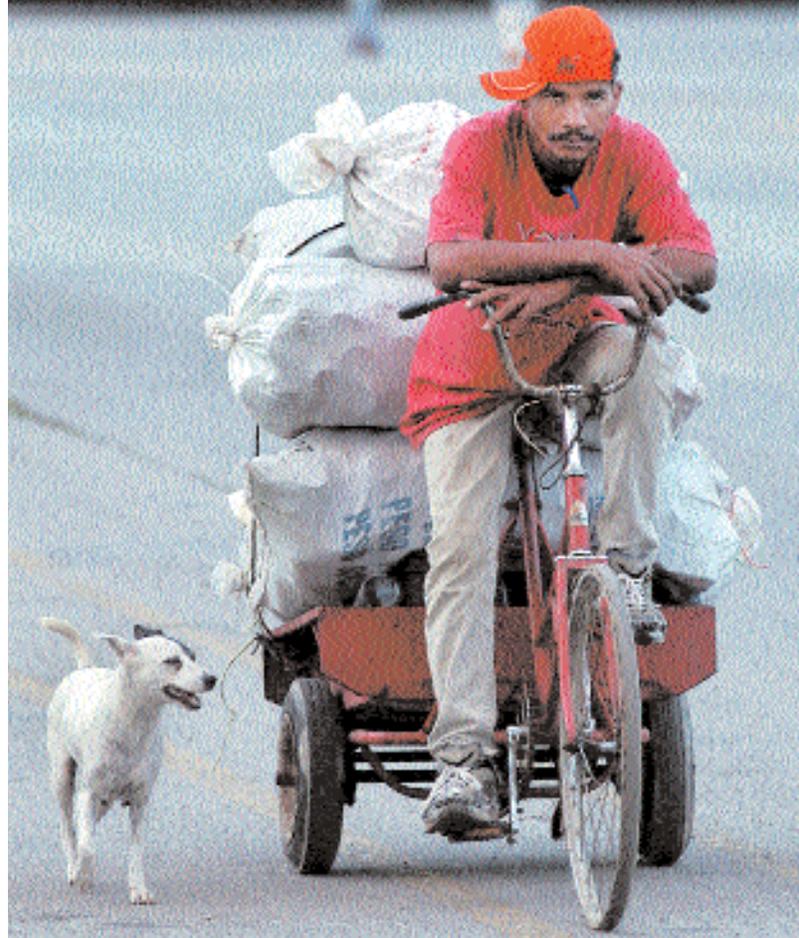
“I read my Martí,” artist Gregorio says. “It’s like my Bible. The government says they follow Martí. The Miami Cubans say they follow Martí. No. I know my Martí.”

Man is a wing.

The music is very near the truth.

It’s Sunday afternoon in Central Havana and a rumba rages, all drums, hips and catcalls. The band is loose and fast, forever nearing a sure collapse into rhythmic anarchy, never totally collapsing. A crowd of mostly poor, mostly black Cubans meets the dizzying pace, fueled by cheap rum and the sort of joy you can’t buy with a Master Card.

Roberto leans into a wall, exhausted. His breath proves he’s swigging rum from a beer can and



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

With a little help from his friend, a laborer delivers the goods in Havana.

has been since morning. He’s struggling for the right words in English, some final truth to offer before you board the Mercedes tourist bus ushering you to an official Cuba he knows little about.

Finally, a declaration.

“Fidel Castro is a son of a bit,” he says, eyes locked on yours. “Son of a bit.”

He loves so much about this place — this dance, his friends, and most of all, a 9-year-old daughter. “She is beauty,” he says.

But he can’t stand it anymore,

the police, the fear, the poverty. He wants to see the world. He needs to dream.

Which, of course, is only half the story.

Gregorio provides truth’s book-end on your last day in Havana. The artist looks at this place, and he sees the same goodness. He’s bitter about the same injustice.

And, yes, he’d like to march the earth unscathed, the danger gone, the light his guide.

So why not leave? He has money. The Cuban borders are open. Florida’s coastline and U.S. citizenship await.

“Maybe I am Cuba. I am illogical. I love my country. “Do you understand?”



AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

October 1962

The Cuban Missile Crisis occurs when America finds Russia building intermediate range nuclear missiles in Cuba. Russia removes them 11 days later.

1991

The fall of the Soviet Union throws Cuba into economic despair, an era known as the “Special Period.”

April 2000

After a daring raid, 6-year-old Elián González is ultimately reunited with his father in Cuba.

May 2002

President Jimmy Carter visits Cuba promoting the Varela Project and chastizes Castro for his disregard towards civil rights and liberties.

April 2003

Castro’s government imprisons 75 dissidents and executes three suspected terrorists for the hijacking of a ferry.





KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Cuban American men play dominoes in front of a huge mural of leaders of the Americas in Domino Park in Miami's Little Havana.

Diverging journeys

Miami's exile community complex, ever changing

By Dakarai Aarons

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen smiles as she begins the story of how a little girl from Havana became the first Hispanic woman in the United States Congress. But first, she must tell the story of how she got to Miami.

Ros-Lehtinen was 7 when she, her parents and brother boarded that fateful Pan Am Airlines flight in 1959.

"My brother and I were thrilled," she said. "It was our first flight."

Their mother, however, was not thrilled. She cried the entire flight, sad to leave her homeland, Ros-Lehtinen recalled.

The family didn't plan on staying long. They simply were coming to wait out the revolution that had just placed Fidel Castro in power.

"We bought round-trip tickets because we thought (the revolution) would be months at most."

But, more than 40 years later, Castro and Ros-Lehtinen both remain in their respective places — he as the stalwart head of a

socialist nation, she as the elected representative of a thriving democracy.

"Pan Am has gone out of business, but we are still here."

And Ros-Lehtinen is no longer a 7-year-old girl from Havana who spoke no English. She is now a seven-term congresswoman representing Florida's 18th Congressional District. Her district of approximately 640,000 people stretches from Miami Beach to Key West, with Miami's Little Havana section as its center.

Ros-Lehtinen represents a

community with great power both in South Florida and in the United States. As chairwoman of the Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights, she wields a good deal of congressional influence on Cuban policies.

The Cuban American exile community has had a steady hand of influence in shaping U.S. policy toward Cuba for decades. It is also a community that is ever changing. In today's Cuban American exile community, there is no such thing as a simple

answer. Ask the same question of two people, and the result is often two very distinct answers.

Enter Max Castro. Castro, no relation to Fidel, is a senior research associate at the University of Miami and a columnist for The Miami Herald, El Nuevo Herald and La Opinión newspapers.

A sociologist, he studies refugees in the Western Hemisphere, including in his native Cuba.

The issue arguably the most divisive among the community now is the United States embargo on Cuba.

Castro agrees with some portions of the embargo, like the ban on selling weapons to Cuba, but he said the current U.S. policy is misguided.

"I think that an embargo should be undertaken, number one, under the conditions of a multilateral agreement and for a very short period of time where there might be some result," he said. "But in this case, you're talking about a unilateral embargo, a very broad embargo. An embargo should be targeted."

The primary reason the embargo still exists is because of the influence of a select group within the community, "hard-liners," who are controlling the agenda, Castro said. And that, he said, could be inhibiting the process of change.

"It concerns me, too, because I think it's something that retards change in Cuba," he said. "There are plenty of people in Cuba who are very positive toward seeing things change, but they don't want people in Miami controlling their fates."

Controlling Cuba's destiny is not her intent, Ros-Lehtinen said.

"We don't impose an embargo to destroy the regime. People blame the U.S. for what are essentially Castro's failings," she said. "The Cuban people are dying, and your Band-Aids are not going to help them."

"If Cuba was such a paradise, why are people dying — literally — to come to the United States? The answer is there is no future in Cuba, no future in communism."

And helping create a future for her homeland is one of the reasons Ros-Lehtinen first sought



M. Castro



García



Ros-Lehtinen

"If Cuba was such a paradise, why are people dying — literally — to come to the United States? The answer is there is no future in Cuba, no future in communism."
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen

public office 21 years ago. But lifting the ban on trade will not help anyone but Fidel Castro, she said.

"How has the 40-year embargo helped the Cuban people? It hasn't," Ros-Lehtinen said. "It has not brought the people closer to freedom."

The embargo must remain, Ros-Lehtinen said, until Cuba grants freedom to political prisoners and becomes a democratic state.

"We want to see free, internationally supervised elections," she said. "The embargo doesn't prevent free elections in Cuba. (Fidel Castro's) the one who says 'elecciones para que?' Elections for what?"

Meanwhile, Joe García, of the Cuban American National Foundation, said his group's efforts are often misunderstood.

"You know everybody is going to say: 'Well look at this. This is a crazy Cuban speaking for Miami, trying to force his will.' No, I am not a crazy Cuban. I am proud to be an American, but America stands for more than just sales."

The CANF's primary concern is the destiny of the many family and friends left behind in Cuba, García said.

"It's become politically correct to somehow blame Cuban Americans for having too much say on (the) foreign policy of Cuba. Why?" he asked. "We may have been wrong about some things, and we have been corrected when we have been wrong."

"But what I am not wrong

about is that the Cuban people suffer at the hands of that regime, and those who participate with that regime are (increasing) that suffering."

Ros-Lehtinen agreed.

"We have been a very positive influence in the American society," she said. "We may not be strong in terms of numbers, but we make our opinions heard in a very real and direct way."

Yet, Ros-Lehtinen said she felt no pressure to vote a certain way on Cuban-related issues.

"I just vote my conscience and explain to my constituents why I vote the way I do," she said.

Cuba has been in desperate need of money since its primary economic partner, the former Soviet Union, collapsed in the early 1990s. Since then, Cuba has run up a debt with countries around the world and wants to add the United States to that list, Ros-Lehtinen said.

"Castro doesn't pay his bills. He owes everyone money, and the U.S. would be no exception," she said. "I think Castro will come up with the cash for the first initial sales, but it won't last long."

García agreed.

"How can a bankrupt dictatorship be a good business partner?" he asked. "It is like doing business with the Mafia. Once you start down that road, trust me, no business is worth it."

But Max Castro says he is not alone. There are people in Miami who hold views similar to his, but many are not willing to speak,

partially because their view is not politically popular, and also out of loyalty to their exiled parents.

"Even for myself, basically, my father had died and my mother was out of it before I started speaking out," Castro said. "There's this very close relationship of almost guilt, because their parents made such sacrifices to come to this country, working two or three jobs and so forth. So you have sort of a silenced generation that doesn't have, by and large, the same beliefs."

This change in view is apparent in a February poll conducted for The Miami Herald.

In the poll, 54 percent of the 400 Cuban American exiles interviewed supported the Cuban American National Foundation's talking with Cuban officials in hopes of discussing a democratic transition in Cuba.

Additionally, 56 percent were in favor of a meeting between exiles and Cuban officials about the island nation's relationship with the exile community.

Yet 52 percent said Cuba would become a democracy only by the forceful removal of Castro's communist regime.

If his removal does occur, normalized relations with Cuba could be a possibility, said Ros-Lehtinen.

"I think in my lifetime I will see a free Cuba," she said.

And of the demise of Fidel Castro? "May that day come," she said.

Max Castro also sees the possibility of that happening, but he said there are opposing views on whether the end of Castro's reign would be positive immediately.

"I think probably the hard-liners would party and the other group would worry about what would happen," he said. "You could have civil war in Cuba. You know, Castro has enough charisma to control without tanks on the street, but what happens when someone like (Fidel's brother) Raúl takes control who is not as politically able?"

Whatever the end result may be, members of the Cuban American exile community say they will be there, helping to create a peaceful transition.





KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Radio Martí employees work the control room while guests are interviewed in the station's Miami headquarters.

Truth and propaganda

By Shane Pekny

On Dec. 17, 2002, Oswaldo Payá stood at a podium before 626 delegates of the European Parliament to accept the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, a prestigious international honor for the soft-spoken opposition leader from Cuba.

But his photo didn't appear that day in *Juventud Rebelde*, one of the island's most prominent newspapers. Instead, it was Fidel Castro on the front page, inspecting a new art exhibit in Havana. The headline read, "Artistic nature dazzles."

Cubans weren't supposed to hear about Payá or his Varela Project, which had submitted 11,000 signatures to Cuba's National Assembly demanding a referendum on democratic reforms.

But Radio Martí was there. The station, which broadcasts news and entertainment to Cuba 24/7, reported live from Strasbourg, France, courtesy of U.S. taxpayers.

"Mr. Payá is in there," recalled Margarita Rojo, Radio Martí's acting news director, "and he walks and he starts talking. The people of Cuba are tuning in. And they were listening to him. ... And I thought, personally, that's it. That's our \$23 million right there."

But three weeks later, Josefina, a journalism student at Havana University who requested anonymity, posed this question: "So, tell me, do you know what is the Varela Project?"

When asked, many of her fellow Cubans didn't know, either. It seemed the multimillion-dollar message wasn't get-

Office of Cuba Broadcasting

- Annual budget: \$25 million
- Employees: 163
- Radio Martí weekly broadcast hours: 168
- TV Martí weekly broadcast hours: 28
- Headquarters: Miami
- AM radio transmitter: Marathon Key, Fla.
- Shortwave radio transmitter: Greenville, N.C., and Delano, Calif.
- TV transmitter: Cudjoe Key, Fla.

ting through.

Some Cubans cannot tune in to Radio Martí because it's jammed by the Castro regime.

Many others simply tune it out. After 18 years of broadcasts

littered with anti-Castro rants and pre-1959 nostalgia, they've lost trust in Radio Martí.

Indeed, listenership surveys showed a decline between 1995 and 2001. The drop coincided with the station's move from Washington, D.C., to Miami.

Political disagreements among factions of the Cuban American community continually wrack the Office of Cuba Broadcasting, which runs Radio and TV Martí. The *Miami Herald* reported more than two dozen investigations, audits, inquiries or policy reviews at the office in the past 15 years.

Nevertheless, supporters in Congress set aside about \$15 million for Radio Martí and \$10 million for TV Martí in fiscal year 2003. It's worth the money, they say. Just as Radio Liberty helped liberate the Eastern Bloc,

Radio and TV Martí will help liberate Cuba.

But the station's critics say those millions of dollars are wasted.

"It's just another rambling exile station with all the same crap and bullshit that the exile stations have," said Wayne Smith, a former head of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana. "Except this one is paid for by the American taxpayer and goes out as the official word of the U.S. government. It's disgraceful."

■ ■ ■

After gaining clearance from the guard, driving through the outside security fence, emptying their pockets and passing through a metal detector, visitors find themselves in front of a wall.

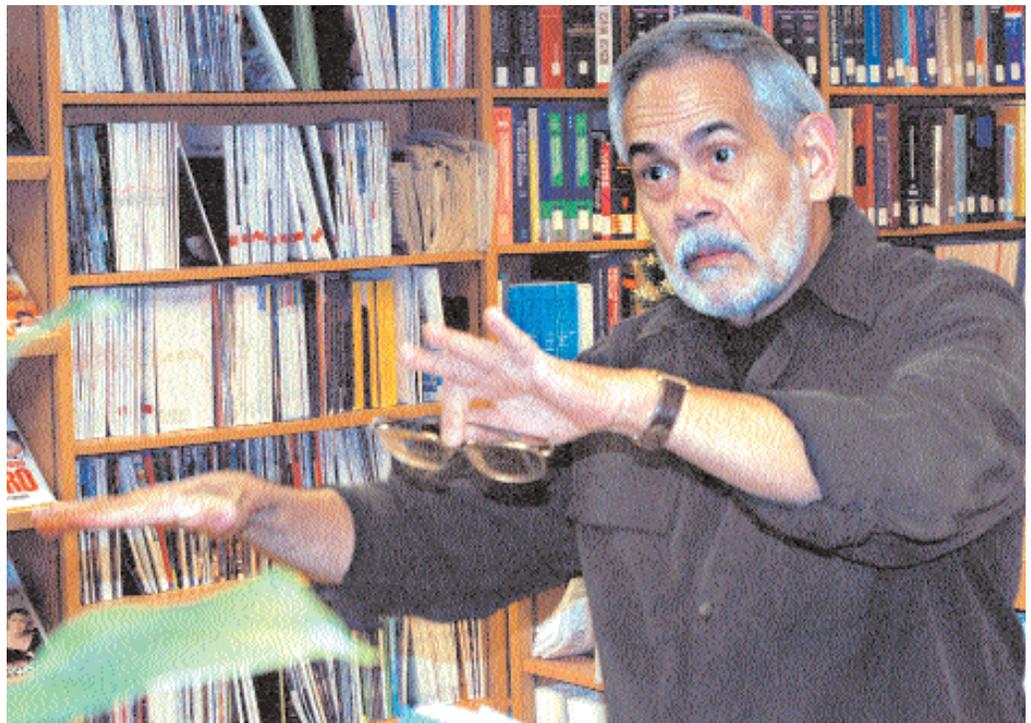
Three nicely framed portraits hang there: one of President George W. Bush, one of Vice President Dick Cheney and a larger painting of Jose Martí, the Cuban poet and freedom fighter, a martyr in the war of independence from Spain.

Welcome to the Office of Cuba Broadcasting. This warehouse-like building in west Miami is owned by the U.S. government, embroiled in anti-Castro politics, intertwined with Cuban culture and history, both ridiculed and applauded in the debate over U.S.-Cuba relations, and intended — in the spirit of Martí himself — to serve the people, to deliver the truth.

Through Radio and TV Martí, the office sends to Cuba a mix of news, analysis, commentary, music and entertainment — overall, a typical program lineup, despite its unique history.

Radio Martí was based originally in Washington, D.C., but it was born in Miami's exile community. The station's father was Jorge Mas Canosa, the fiery founder of the Cuban American National Foundation.

Mas Canosa created the foundation in 1981 and quickly made it one of Washington's most powerful lobby groups. Its stance was unwavering: no appeasement of Fidel Castro, no lifting of sanctions, no easing of tensions with Cuba.



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Orlando Rodríguez is the former director of Radio Martí. His contract expired in February 2003.

Its first big victory was the initial broadcast of Radio Martí in 1985. TV Martí went on the air five years later.

From 1985 until his death in 1997, Mas Canosa served on a presidential advisory board that was supposed to ensure the fairness and accuracy of Martí broadcasts. But his critics accused him of using the station to campaign for the presidency of post-Castro Cuba.

Jay Mallin, Radio Martí's news director from 1985 to 1990, said "political hacks" dominated the station throughout the 1990s, skewing content toward the foundation's point of view.

Starting in 1996, per the wishes of Cuban American House members, the Office of Cuba Broadcasting moved to Miami. Rep. Lincoln Diaz-Balart, R-Fla., said Radio and TV Martí could take advantage of the "immense human resources and expertise available in South Florida." And he extolled the more than 150 new jobs the move would bring to his home district.

■ ■ ■

Did the move to Miami change Radio Martí?

"The press ought to be inquiry and censure, never hate or anger, for neither leaves room for the free expression of ideas."

Jose Martí, 1875

"Oh, definitely," said Mallin, who contracts with the station to host a show aimed at Cuba's military called "En Marcha." "It became more of an exile station than a government station. ... It became "Calle Ocho." Calle Ocho, or Eighth Street, is the main commercial strip in Miami's Little Havana.

Meanwhile, listenership dropped significantly. A 1995 U.S. government survey of recent Cuban arrivals in Miami found that 76 percent had tuned in weekly. In 1999, another survey of travelers to Miami found listenership had dropped to 58 percent.

A more recent series of surveys — conducted in Cuba by a European market research firm

on behalf of the International Broadcasting Bureau — counted far fewer listeners. While weekly listenership held steady at 9 percent from 1998 to 2000, it fell to 5 percent in 2001.

Radio Martí's most ardent supporters dismiss the lower percentages, saying Cubans on the island may be afraid to admit they listen to the station. On the other hand, say critics, surveys conducted in Miami include primarily those fed up with the Castro regime — a segment of Cuban society more likely to seek foreign media.

Nevertheless, when comparing apples to apples, Radio Martí's audience shrank, but did not disappear, between 1995 and 2001.

And despite that decline, surveys both on the island and in Miami revealed that Cubans listened to Radio Martí more than any other foreign radio station.

In 1999, after seeing evidence of declining listenership, the Inspector General's Office in the U.S. State Department asked a panel of independent journalists to review Radio Martí broadcasts.

The question: Did the station



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Miami-Cubans (clockwise, from top left) Marcell Filipe, Dr. Alfredo Melgar, Dr. Lidia Usategui, Alfredo Manrara and Dr. Rigoberto Rodríguez discuss conditions in their homeland at Cuban Liberty Council offices in Miami.

The Broadcasting Board of Governors

In 1942, the Voice of America's first broadcast began with a pledge in German: "The news may be good. The news may be bad. We shall tell you the truth."

Since then, U.S. government broadcasters have learned a few more languages – 60 more, to be exact.

Radio and TV Martí are only a small part of a \$550 million effort to reach every piece of the globe that doesn't have free media. The Broadcasting Board of Governors oversees Radio Sawa (Middle East), Radio Sawa Iraq, Radio Farda (Iran), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Afghanistan, Radio Free Asia, the Voice of America (worldwide), Worldnet satellite television and myriad other stations.

Altogether, these stations broadcast 2,800 hours a week and employ nearly 2,500, according to the board's 2001 annual report.

Radio and TV Martí are run by the Office of Cuba Broadcasting, which reports to the nine president-appointed members of the Broadcasting Board of Governors. The board must ensure that all broadcasts follow the Voice of America Charter.

favored personal acquaintances in hiring. The 74-year-old resigned April 1, explaining that the directorship was a bad job for someone who had quintuple bypass surgery two years ago.

"There was a lot of pressure and a lot of vested interests," he told *The Miami Herald*, "and I didn't have another choice. It was either my life or take a retirement for the moment."

Some of Lew's stress may have come from his concerns over espionage. He alleged in

follow the Voice of America Charter, as required by law?

The answer: no.

The panel reported incidents of on-air vulgarity, unbalanced commentary and unprofessional, unrehearsed monologues. Its report stated: "Substituting criticism and editorial commentary for analysis was a recurring problem in news broadcasts — perhaps the most glaring and disturbing problem of all, from a journalistic standpoint."

So the report recommended a series of reforms to ensure editorial decisions were made at the top, not on the fly. But either way, with momentous, divisive news events on the horizon, editorial decisions at the Office of Cuba Broadcasting would become only more difficult.

■ ■ ■

On April 22, 2000, armed federal agents seized Elián González from the home of his great-uncle in Miami. The news spread worldwide in minutes, but Radio Martí didn't mention

the predawn raid for four hours.

"I wasn't the news director, luckily, luckily," said Rojo, who took the position in November 2002.

Although she didn't participate, Rojo guessed why the editorial meeting that morning lasted four hours.

"I am sure it was happening. How to do it? How do we transmit it? How do we inform it? What sound bites?"

"Elián was a tough cookie," she added. "Elián was tough because everybody had an opinion. It was so difficult to recuse yourself, to detach yourself and your personal opinion from what you were going to report."

Two years later, Radio Martí's newsroom faced another test.

On May 14, 2002, former President Jimmy Carter gave a speech at Havana University in which he praised the Varela Project. Cuba's state-run media aired his words live, but Radio Martí didn't broadcast the whole speech until the next day.

In a June 2002 House sub-

committee hearing, Salvador Lew, director of the Office of Cuba Broadcasting at the time, defended the delay.

First of all, he said, borrowing a signal from Cuban media would expose Radio Martí to an international copyright dispute, and second, he didn't trust the regime would broadcast the speech objectively.

But Phil Peters, an adviser to the House Cuba Working Group, told the subcommittee that Lew and his predecessor, Herminio San Román, had no excuse for delaying momentous news stories.

"It seems quite clear," he said, "that both stories were withheld because they were controversial in Miami, where many opposed Elián González's return to his father's custody, and many opposed President Carter's views on Cuba policy and his dialogue with Cuban authorities."

The Inspector General's Office released another report in January, which found, among other problems, that Lew had

the June 2002 hearing that agents of the Cuban government had infiltrated Radio and TV Martí. International Broadcasting Bureau Director Brian Conniff added that Radio Martí is “obviously a target of infiltration on the part of the Castro government.”

Much like Lew, who used to be Mas Canosa’s spokesman, Pedro Roig, the newly appointed director, has roots in the hard-line Cuban American community. In fact, he trained under the CIA alongside Mas Canosa in preparation for the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, according to *The Miami Herald*.

Roig is the third new director of the Office of Cuba Broadcasting in six years. Once again, the new guy will have to unite a diverse staff.

“There are different factions jockeying for support right now,” said Mallin, host of “En Marcha.”

The infighting at Radio and TV Martí is not unique in U.S. government broadcasting.

Gene Sosin dedicated 33 years to broadcasting through the Iron Curtain, first with Radio Liberty and later when it merged with Radio Free Europe. He said the station hired many Soviet émigrés and military defectors.

“They had a lot of hatred against the Stalinist regime and wanted to get even,” Sosin said.

At the same time, he added, exiles served his station well because they were — sometimes literally — brothers and sisters to the audience.

■ ■ ■

And that’s what broadcasting is all about — the audience.

Asked about the state-run media in Cuba, Pedro, a soft-spoken government employee who requested anonymity, shook his head.

“Ringling Circus,” he said.

So do Cubans listen to Radio Martí instead?

“No, no, no. That’s the other part of the circus.”

Abel Contreras de la Guardia, a translator and tour guide for the Cuban government, echoed his employer’s sentiment.

“People here have better



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Some Cubans who still live on the island say they listen to Radio Martí.

The Voice of America Charter

The Voice of America Charter, drafted in 1960, became law in 1976:

“The long-range interests of the United States are served by communicating directly with the peoples of the world by radio. To be effective, the Voice of America must win the attention and respect of listeners. These principles will therefore govern Voice of America broadcasts.

1. VOA will serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news. VOA news will be accurate, objective and comprehensive.
2. VOA will represent America, not any single segment of American society, and will therefore present a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions.
3. VOA will present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussions and opinion on these policies.”

things to do than listen to lies. (Radio Martí) is fake news.”

And from Guillermo, a nearly toothless 58-year-old retiree, came a different take: “Yes. Everybody listens to Radio Martí.”

On the island, answers vary widely. But the most common response is yes — with this caveat: The news is good, but the commentary is bitter, anti-Castro rhetoric.

“It’s part of true,” Pedro said. “Part of true. ... For example, it is true that journalists here cannot speak. We don’t have the freedom of choice. It’s true.”

“It’s not that easy,” he added. “It’s very biased, and it’s very misleading. Very misleading.”

But before Cubans can choose whether to trust Radio and TV Martí, they must receive the signals. To overcome jamming by the Cuban govern-

ment, Radio Martí airs 24 hours a day on five frequencies — one AM station at Marathon Key, Fla., and four shortwave frequencies from Greenville, N.C., and Delano, Calif.

The Cuban government attempts to jam all five frequencies, a difficult and expensive task, considering the signals come from three directions. The jamming is most effective in Havana and other urban areas, said Rojo, the station’s news director.

Radio Martí has sought permission to broadcast from Caribbean countries, which would make the signal even harder to jam, but U.S. officials could not find a workable location, Brian Conniff said at the June 2002 House subcommittee hearing.

The options available to overcome television jamming are much more limited. To avoid

interfering with other stations, TV Martí must transmit a targeted signal from a blimp tethered 10,000 feet above Cudjoe Key, Fla. Conniff said operators repeatedly adjust the beam’s direction and switch between three UHF channels to keep the jammers on their toes.

TV Martí airs from 6 to 10:30 every evening. But its narrow signal, sent from only one transmitter, is simply too prone to jamming. Aside from the U.S. Interests Section in Havana, which receives the station via satellite, TV Martí seems to air without an audience. Even Rojo conceded the television jamming is “quite, quite effective.”

“I wouldn’t go as far as 100 percent,” she said. “But I would say effective jamming.”

Furthermore, many Cubans cannot afford televisions. According to the CIA World Factbook, the island has one TV for every 4.3 Cubans.

“I’m always delighted to talk to TV Martí,” said Smith, the former head of the U.S. Interests Section. “I can say anything I want to and I know it’ll never be seen nor heard.”

■ ■ ■

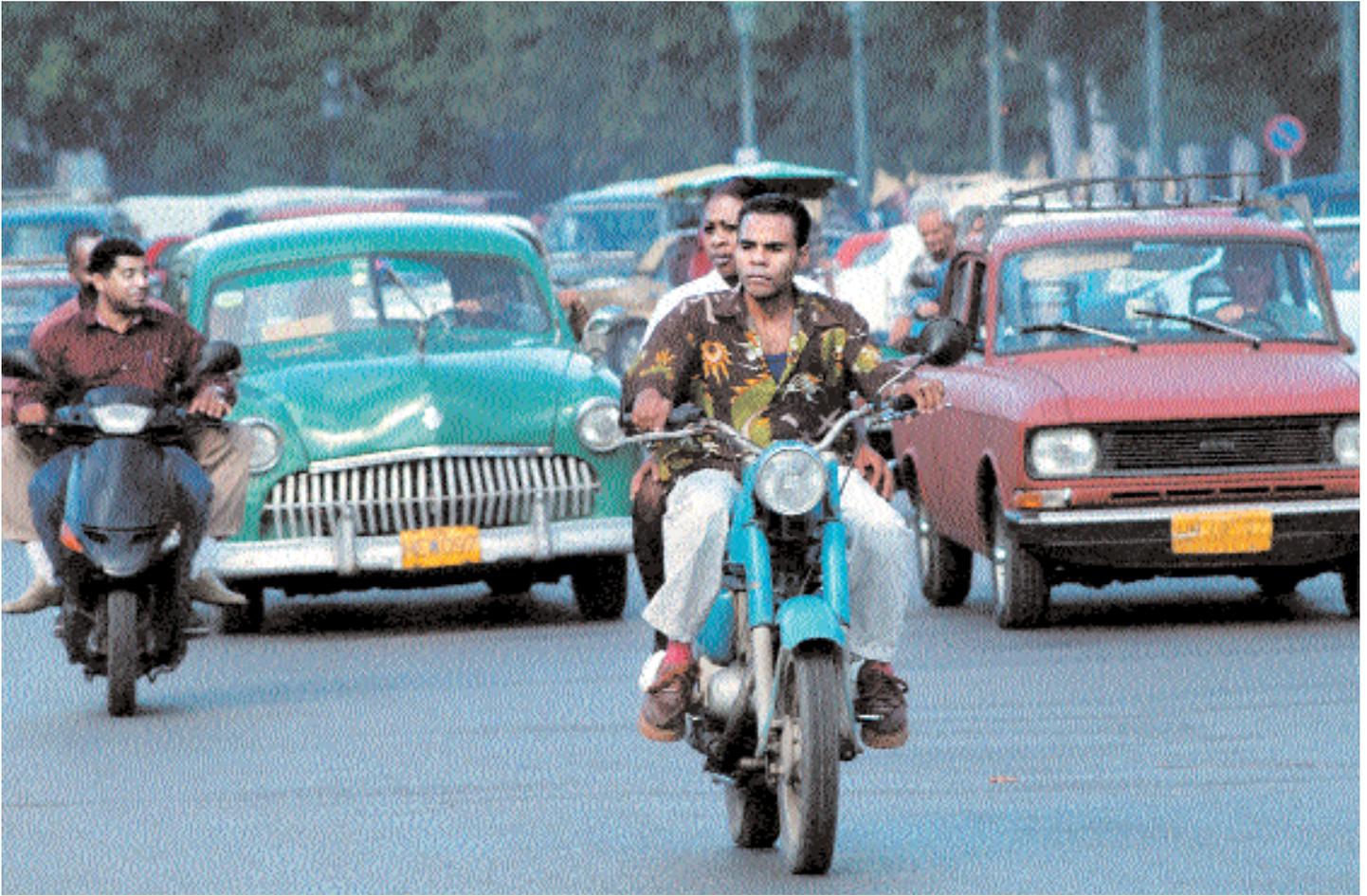
Jamming, political infighting, fears of espionage, critics on all sides — Rojo doesn’t worry about these things. She’s worried about explaining a complex story — like that of Payá and his Varela Project — to a highly literate, albeit sheltered, audience. And always in her mind is Radio Martí’s historically important mission.

“Go to Poland,” she said. “Go to Russia and ask how much Radio Free Europe and how much Radio Free Russia and Radio Liberty meant to those dissident and opposition leaders.”

When change does come to the island, the message sponsored by U.S. taxpayers will be the first outside voice Cubans hear — be it propaganda or the truth.

But as best said by George David, a straight-shooting radio veteran and TV Martí’s technical operations chief, “One man’s propaganda is another man’s truth.”





KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

The streets of Cuba are a chaotic mix, thanks in part to the four-decade-old U.S. trade embargo and Castro's unyielding policies.

A hard time changing

Castro's rule, U.S. policies complicate life in Cuba

By Shane Pekny

Jose motored down a narrow Havana street in his little white Fiat, the wind messing his curly gray beard. He jockeyed for space with three-wheeled taxis, bicycles, Soviet-built Ladas and Fords and Chevs, circa 1955.

He passed shops and homes, some crumbling, sick-looking, all in need of paint. He passed dozens of children who eyed his foreign passengers, some planning, rehearsing, waiting to beg for a dollar.

"The embargo is part of their tragedy," the 57-year-old said. "It's part of their problems. But the

government here is the other part."

Cubans are tired of fearing the revolutionary police, Jose said, speaking on condition that he not be identified by his real name. They're tired of ration cards and bare shelves. Tired of hearing about el bloqueo, the decades-old U.S. trade embargo.

Ninety miles to the north, another Cuban, Marcell Felipe, is tired of Fidel Castro's government, too. He and many fellow exiles in Miami lost everything — homes, friends and family, their country — to the 1959 revolution.

But Felipe, stridently pro-embargo, doesn't feel sorry for himself. "No, I don't feel like I've

lost my country," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "I mean, it's still there."

For anti-Castro exiles, U.S. policy is a tool to reclaim what Castro stole, to get back what they deserve — libertad.

And U.S. policy is a tool they've come to grasp firmly. The more than 650,000 Cuban Americans in Miami-Dade County can swing the vote in Florida, and Florida, as in 2000, can determine who occupies the White House.

The current occupant, up for re-election next year, threatened in February to veto a \$390 billion spending bill if it contained

embargo-weakening language. The bill arrived on his desk without any such language.

For the rest of the United States, Cuba is a footnote. The Cold War has long passed, and members of Congress have been visiting Cuba and promoting engagement, not isolation. Business groups are lobbying against the embargo. Farmers want to sell more food to Cuba's hungry people.

But in April, Castro, always split between limiting internal dissent and appeasing current and potential trade partners, ordered a crackdown on dissidents. Seventy-five were jailed for allegedly con-

spiriting with the U.S. government. Three men who tried to hijack a ferry to Florida were executed.

At least for the current session of Congress, the crackdown has shifted the embargo debate, said Brian Alexander, executive director of the Cuba Policy Foundation.

“Hard-line embargo supporters have been given the upper hand by Castro,” he said, “and I believe that you will see reduced enthusiasm on the Hill for easing the embargo.”

Indeed, the Cuba Policy Foundation’s director, board chairman and directors resigned in mid-May to protest the recent wave of repression in Cuba.

But supporters of engagement say the embargo has failed. Castro, 76, still runs Cuba. Meanwhile, Europe, Canada, Mexico and Israel have allowed their companies to invest billions in the Cuban economy since 1990, heading off the regime’s bankruptcy.

From one side, trade and investment. From the other, an embargo. The contrasting policies cancel each other out, providing the Castro regime with financial support and, as Jose pointed out, political cover.

“The embargo is the most stupid thing that the United States did,” he said. “You made Castro a hero.”

■ ■ ■

The embargo exists today partly because it existed yesterday. George W. Bush is the 10th U.S. president to enforce it, and like his predecessors, he’s not about to let history absolve Castro, the Cold War fighter who never surrendered.

“Do you want to go down as the first president who dealt with Castro?” asked Wayne Smith, former head of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana. “There’s a certain psychosis that American politicians tend to see Castro as a bearded little pip-squeak — he may be 6-foot-3, but his country isn’t — who has defied us and jeered at us, in a sense, and got away with it. There’s nothing more likely to drive a superpower crazy than that.”

So the slogan lives on — “Socialism or death!” — and so does Castro. Through four decades, his Washington counter-



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Above: Vegetable sellers ready their goods for buyers at a public food market in Havana. Below: Many Cubans still use the horse and buggy for transportation.



parts have dealt with him in Cold War fashion, despite an undeniable fact: The embargo has failed to force political change in Cuba.

Still, Felipe, a director of Miami’s Cuban Liberty Council, doesn’t call it a failed policy.

If the embargo were lifted, he said, and Cuba recovered economically, Castro would pick up right where he left off — exporting violent revolution.

In 1975, Cuba sent hundreds of thousands of soldiers to fight in the Angolan civil war and intervened in the war between Somalia and Ethiopia. Cuban forces also fought for leftist factions in Colombia, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Venezuela. In 1973, after their

release from a North Vietnamese prison, several U.S. soldiers recounted how Cuban interrogators had tortured them.

Smith, who has spent hundreds of hours speaking with Castro, said the leader “had overriding, powerful internationalist objectives. He wanted to play on the world stage.”

But Cuba, reeling economically, eliminated four-fifths of its armed forces in the 1990s, according to the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. At a 1996 Senate Intelligence Committee hearing, the CIA warned not of the Castro regime, but of the instability that may follow his resignation, ouster

or death.

In February, directors of the Defense Intelligence Agency, CIA and FBI warned about many threats to U.S. security, but did not mention Cuba.

However, Cuba remains on the State Department’s list of nations that sponsor terrorism. In May 2002, John Bolton, undersecretary of state for arms control, accused Cuba of developing biological weapons. Secretary of State Colin Powell later distanced himself from the accusation.

Smith, as a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy in Washington, has written several articles regarding Cuba’s link to terrorism — or lack thereof.

“There is no objective reason at all for keeping Cuba on the terrorist list,” he said. “Keeping it there is simply part of our government’s hard-line and somewhat irrational policy toward Cuba.”

But hard-line exiles say nobody should consider lifting the U.S. embargo until Castro ends the embargo he imposes on his own people.

Indeed, the Cuban government controls nearly everything — media, employment, food rations, medical care, driving privileges, even perks like Internet access. Cubans on the streets of Havana say dissent is not tolerated.

“If the president speaks, you



PHOTOS BY KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star
Niurka Gonzalas holds the ration book she uses for food as Marcos Villa, the father of her three children, looks on. Below: Pedro Alvarez, who heads Cuba's import agency, says the embargo cuts Cuba's potential exports by 20 percent.

Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 (also called the Torricelli Law)

- The president, by denying them assistance, should dissuade foreign countries from dealing with Cuba.
- Foreign-based subsidiaries of U.S. companies may be penalized for dealing with Cuba.
- Ships that stop at Cuban ports may not dock at any U.S. port for 180 days.
- Donations of food and medicine are exempt from the embargo. Sales of medicine and medical supplies are exempt, too; however, a strict licensing system discourages medical sales.
- The United States should be prepared to ease the embargo in "carefully calibrated ways" when Cuba installs a transition government and schedules free, multi-party elections.

have to go," said Jose Antonio, a 44-year-old whose place of employment had recently closed. "It's an obligation. Otherwise, you lose your job."

Everything sold to Cuba passes through the government. Therefore, food, medical supplies, investment dollars — everything is used first to benefit those in power, Felipe said.

Ending the embargo would deliver a great victory to Castro, he added, and a psychological defeat to dissidents within Cuba.

"You can imagine if you were a dissident and you are constantly bombarded with only one source of information, which tells you, 'You're little, we're big. You're nothing. You are not going anywhere.' And now, all of a sudden, you have gotten the news that the United States has lifted the embargo. Well, all the hope that you had is crushed."

■ ■ ■

In a global market, where everyone trades with everyone, it's difficult for any single country — even one with the world's largest economy — to bankrupt another.

So how much has the U.S. embargo hurt Cuba's economy?

"Of course, the embargo has an impact, but relative to all the other factors that are killing the Cuban economy, the impact of the embargo is small," said professor William Trumbull, who teaches a class at West Virginia University on Cuban economics.

Among those other factors is foreign debt, which according to the World Bank equaled 92 percent of Cuba's gross domestic product in December 2001.



The Economist reported in May 2001 that some of Cuba's creditors had either stopped lending or started charging higher interest. The U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, which collects investment data from the Cuban government, reported that foreign investment dropped from nearly \$450 million in 2000 to \$39 million in 2001.

But the impact of the embargo is not insignificant. The United States would become a new source of credit and a vast new market for Cuban goods. Pedro Alvarez, who heads Cuba's import agency, said it cuts Cuba's potential exports by 20 percent.

Dr. Marilyn Claro, vice director of the Frank País Public Health Center in Havana, said other countries in Latin America can get aspirin for 5 cents each. Cuba, because it cannot buy from U.S. companies, pays 15 cents.

Hard-liners consider such claims mere propaganda.

"(Castro) can buy aspirin at a 20th of the price of the U.S. market in Venezuela or Costa Rica or anywhere else," said Joe García,

executive director of Miami's Cuban American National Foundation.

Although a 1997 report by Oxfam America did not mention high-priced aspirin, it did blame the embargo for many shortages in Cuba's health care system.

The report said Prostaglandin, a drug used to aid child birth, was unavailable in Cuba because Upjohn is a U.S. company. According to Oxfam America, U.S. companies produced half of all world-class drugs developed between 1972 and 1992.

"The United States did not cause the health care crisis in Cuba," reported Oxfam, "but the United States should cease measures that exacerbate that crisis."

Oxfam also reported that Cuba had maintained its dedication to health care. According to UNICEF, Cuba's 2001 child mortality rate — the number of deaths per 1,000 children 5 and younger — was nine. In 1990, that rate was 13, and in 1960, it was 54. Cuba has almost caught up with the United States, which had a child mortality rate of 29 in 1960 and eight in 2001.

Even though Cuba must pay higher prices and shipping costs, Professor Trumbull said its economy could do far better. He compared Cuba to New Zealand, a geographically isolated country with few natural resources. New Zealand's economy is booming, he said, despite its dependence on distant trading partners.

However, as Alvarez, Cuba's top import official, pointed out, U.S. ports will not accommodate any vessel that has visited Cuba in the previous six months. That restriction encourages many shippers to exclude Cuba from their regular trade routes.

■ ■ ■

Asked about Cuba's lack of a free, independent press, Renato Recio, a writer for the Cuban newspaper *Trabajadores*, responded the way the rest of the island's loyal revolutionaries do.

"Obviously, we do not say everything that we could say. When a country is at war, the country must take special measures."

For many Cubans, this wartime rhetoric does not ring hollow. They have seen many U.S. attempts to topple the revo-



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Workers load tomatoes on a farm just outside of Havana using a 1970s Russian tractor. Most of Cuban farm equipment is outdated and from the former Soviet Union.

lutionary government. But Castro decries el bloqueo — meaning “the blockade,” a more militaristic term than “embargo” — more than anything else.

While many Cubans call it a blockade, too, others are more likely to say “embargo.” Still others, like Jose Antonio, the unemployed 44-year-old, call the wartime rhetoric “bullshit.”

Without the embargo, the Cuban government wouldn’t know whom to blame, said Max Castro, a University of Miami professor and Miami Herald columnist.

“The state of siege that the Cuban government imposes on the population ... It’s like what happened here on 9-11 multiplied by 100 times over 44 years. ... It would erode, and then they would have to deliver.”

Embargo supporters recognize it helps Fidel Castro stir Cuban nationalism, but they contend his real source of power is not excuses.

“Fidel’s power comes from one thing: repression,” said Omar López Montenegro, a leader of the Cuban American National Foundation.

■ ■ ■

“I guess I’ve drawn the analogy from time to time,” said U.S. Rep. Tom Osborne, the former Husker football coach who now represents Nebraska’s rural western district, “that if you were running a certain football play and

Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act of 1996 (or Helms-Burton)

■ U.S. nationals who owned property in Cuba before the revolution, including Cuban Americans who left Cuba after 1959, may file suit in U.S. courts against foreign nationals who deal with that property. This provision, known as Title III, has never been enforced. It has been suspended repeatedly by both former President Bill Clinton and President George W. Bush.

■ The United States may deny entry to any foreign national who deals with Cuban assets that belonged to a U.S. national before the revolution.

■ If an international financial institution grants Cuba a loan, the United States will withhold payment of an equal amount of money to that institution. However, Cuba is a member of neither the World Bank nor the International Monetary Fund, the world’s two primary lenders.

you ran it for 40 years and it didn’t work, you’d probably try something different.”

Congress may be poised to do just that. It already opened one small crack in the embargo by legalizing cash-only food sales to Cuba in 2000. Since then, the United States has become Cuba’s largest source of imported food, according to the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council.

An analysis by the Cuba Policy Foundation found that opponents of the travel ban outnumber supporters in the House 230-148. A majority of the Senate is aligned against the travel ban, too. However, the Republican leadership, with the president’s backing, will seek to quiet that majority, said Alexander, executive director

of the Washington-based anti-embargo organization.

And after the jailing of 75 dissidents in April, Castro may no longer seem to be, as Nebraska Sen. Chuck Hagel said in fall 2002, “a toothless old tiger.” But Hagel, Osborne and other members of the Cuba Working Group haven’t abandoned their arguments for engagement. They just might have a harder time defending those arguments.

“Lawmakers’ skittishness will be based on a much more blunt argument,” Alexander said, “which is that an opponent in a campaign could charge them with coddling Castro or being soft on human rights. When that happens, the much more complicated and nuanced arguments of how

engagement leads to reform can be lost.”

Neither the House nor Senate holds enough votes to lift the embargo entirely, according to the foundation’s analysis. Alexander said the next political battle will occur this summer, when he expects Congress to debate the 2004 budget and embargo-related amendments.

Congressional support for easing the embargo is backed by even greater support among the general public. Respondents to a 2001 nationwide poll favored lifting the embargo entirely by a margin of 52 percent to 32 percent.

The poll, conducted by an independent firm on behalf of the Cuba Policy Foundation, also found that 67 percent wanted the United States to permit travel to Cuba, while 24 percent supported the current ban.

Meanwhile, Cuban Americans in South Florida are becoming less bitter and their number more diluted.

Data from the 2000 Census revealed a startling fact: Miami’s Little Havana, the heart of the Cuban American community, was slightly less than 49 percent Cuban. Immigration from Mexico, the Dominican Republic and other Latin American countries had vastly outpaced new arrivals from Cuba.

Those numbers were later disputed, but even conservative estimates showed the Cuban American population in Miami-Dade County was roughly equal to that of other Latin Americans.

In February, a Miami Herald survey found 54 percent of Cuban Americans supported a proposal by the Cuban American National Foundation to hold talks with high-level officials in the Cuban government — other than Fidel and Raúl Castro — while 39 percent opposed the idea.

Even in the early 1990s, polls revealed substantial support for this sort of dialogue. But a large majority — 77 percent in 1992 — usually favored U.S. military intervention. By April 2002, a poll commissioned by the Cuba Study Group, an organization of prominent Cuban Americans, found support for “abrupt and violent” change in Cuba had dropped to 16 percent.

“When people left Cuba,” Max



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Above: Some side streets in Havana resemble a 1950s movie set. But like the '50s, the city has its share of public works problems that include foul air and living space.

Castro said, "they were called worms. They were called scum. Their homes were taken. There are reasons for the bitterness, but ultimately I don't think it's a very good thing, to either individuals, to the community, for the prospects for Cuba, the people of Cuba. But I can understand it. I felt it. I've had it myself. I've been cured of it."

The Bush administration will maintain its stance on Cuba, said Smith, the former U.S. diplomat in Cuba, but politicians cannot ignore changing public opinion.

"A great majority of Floridians want to see the embargo lifted," he said. "... So you may lose more votes from holding to this position than you gain by kissing the asses of exiles."



Across the Gulf Stream, Jose cruises in his little white Fiat through the streets of an unpainted, socialist city.

He doesn't understand Miami's exile community. He wants the embargo lifted.

In his day-to-day life, a few more tips from U.S. tourists would go a long way. In his state-run world, he cannot see how the embargo hurts the government — rather, the *man* who dominates his life.

Besides, Jose said, Castro's revolution delivered security. The rations aren't much, but they're always there.

After more than 42 years of the U.S. embargo, Jose was supposed to see libertad. He was supposed to have the right to speak freely. Havana was supposed to be painted.

Instead, he's seen only different shades of poverty, varying degrees of repression. He's been tired and afraid for a long time now.



Seeking a multilateral embargo all by itself

In February 1997, a Wal-Mart manager in Winnipeg, Canada, removed Cuban-made pajamas from his shelves. Why? Because, he told the Winnipeg Free Press, "It is in conflict to a U.S. law." Shortly thereafter, reported the Christian Science Monitor, thousands of Cuban pajamas disappeared from 135 Wal-Mart stores across Canada.

But Canada wasn't about to let a U.S. law hinder its foreign trade. Under pressure from government officials, Wal-Mart Canada soon began selling the pajamas again.

The Cuban pajama flap, as it came to be called, highlighted the disagreement between the United States and the rest of the world regarding Cuba.

Before 1989, the embargo had little effect because Soviet subsidies — between \$5 billion and \$7 billion annually — fortified the Cuban economy.

After the Soviet Union collapsed, it seemed the embargo could finally put pressure on Fidel Castro. But Cuba found two major ways to survive: trading with foreign-based subsidiaries of U.S. companies and courting investors from third countries.

Congress cut off the foreign subsidiary loophole with the 1992 Cuban Democracy Act, known as the Torricelli Law. But it didn't topple Fidel Castro. With tourism, foreign investment and limited free market reforms, Cuba climbed out of the so-called Special Period.

In March 1996, a few weeks after Cuban fighter jets shot down two airplanes belonging to Brothers to the Rescue, an anti-Castro exile group, President Bill Clinton signed the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, known as Helms-Burton. It aimed to discourage foreign companies from dealing with Cuba.

The Torricelli Law and Helms-Burton applied U.S.-Cuba policy to third countries, and those countries were not pleased.

In fact, every year since 1992, the U.N. General Assembly has voted by growing margins to condemn the embargo. The most recent vote in November 2002 was 173-3. The only country to vote consistently with the United States is Israel, a country that, in contradiction of its vote, is one of Cuba's most important sources of investment.

In 1996, the Organization of American States determined that the U.S. embargo was a violation of international law. Many key U.S. trading partners, including Mexico, Canada, Great Britain and the European Union, passed legislation that prohibited their citizens from complying with the Torricelli Law and Helms-Burton.

It was one such law in Canada that compelled Wal-Mart to start selling those Cuban pajamas again.

In the late 1990s, the European Union and the United States locked horns over the embargo, but they have since agreed to disagree, said Miami University Professor Joaquín Roy. They were not going to start a trade war over the embargo before Sept. 11, 2001, he said, and they are much less likely to do so now. Issues related to al Qaeda, Iraq and North Korea dwarf their disagreement over Cuba.

— Shane Pekny



A new economic engine

Tourism, quest for U.S. dollars act as fuel

By Shane Pekny

On the 25th floor of the Habana Libre Hotel, the dance club is packed with tourists, mostly Canadian and European. At the bar, beer and rum and Coke slide one way, U.S. dollars the other.

Above, the ceiling is painted black and speckled with tiny, sparkling lights. It's made to look like the night sky. Swirling cones of pink, blue and green light the stage, where a young woman, tawny shoulders exposed, strides toward the audience.

"¡Cántelo conmigo! Da la, da la, da da da..."

The tourists half-heartedly repeat the melody.

The singer laughs. "Que pobres."

Outside the club, behind the reflection on the floor-to-ceiling windows, under the true starry sky, the dark city of Havana sleeps. Below, in the narrow streets and alleyways of the old city, live the true pobres of Cuba.

Down there is where Juancarlos works for new shoes. His current pair, black canvas with no laces, flop with every long-legged stride. He might slow for a moment to smile at a friend, to wave with one of his big black hands, but not for long.

Tonight it's a three-peso note, the one with Che Guevara's photo. He can trade it to an English-speaking man down the street for an Alexander Hamilton.

But it could be almost anything — rum, cigars, marijuana, cocaine, girls or maybe just directions to a good restaurant. Juancarlos has no use for any of it himself.



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

A turista suns herself near the Habana Libre Hotel's swimming pool.

The Che note acquired, exchange made. "You need something else?" Juancarlos asks. "Are you hungry?"

■ ■ ■

Tourism is Cuba's new economic engine. It hums in the big hotels, little shops and narrow streets throughout Havana.

U.S. dollars — illegal until 1993 — now can buy anything, anywhere. Cuban pesos can buy fewer things, smaller things — and only in certain places. Therefore, many Cubans ask, why study medicine or engineering or journalism when I could wait tables?

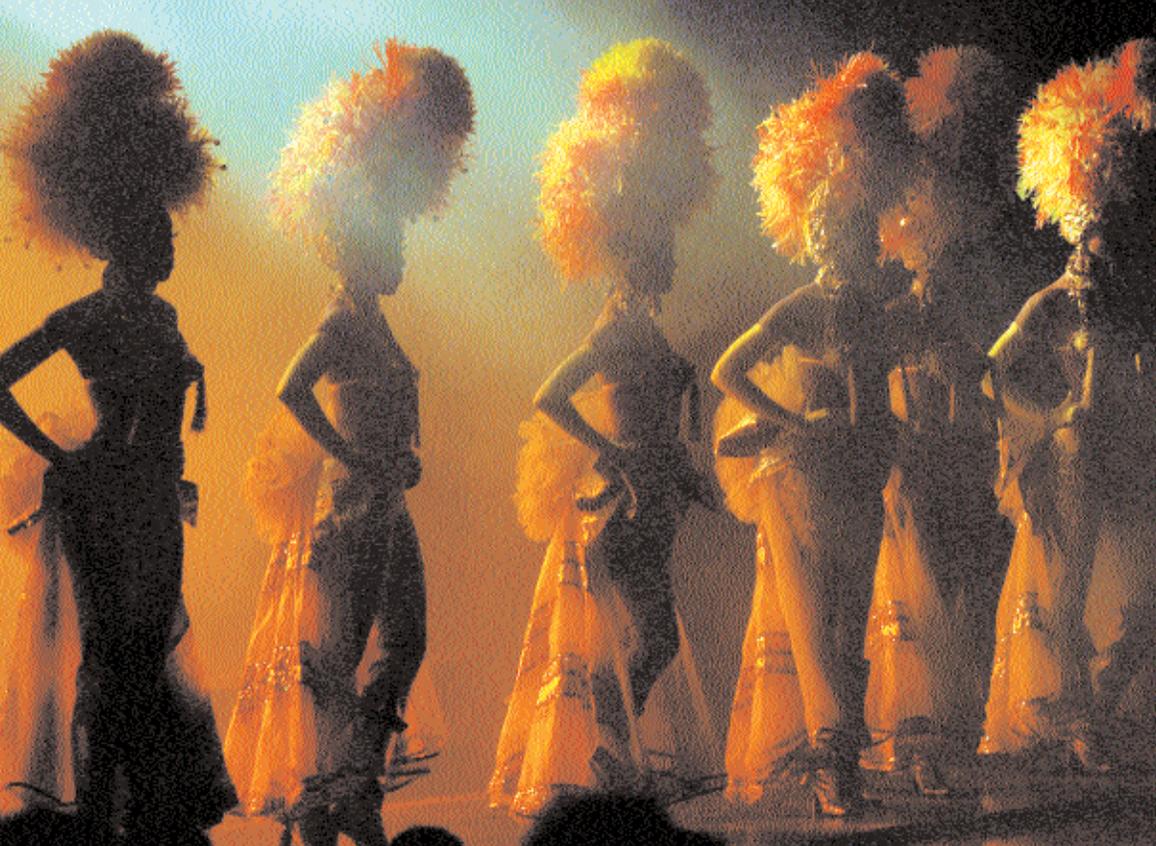
Rights of Cubans to enter hotels, restaurants

The current Cuban Constitution was inaugurated Feb. 24, 1976. Article 43 equates the right of Cubans to enter any hotel or restaurant with the most fundamental human rights:

The State establishes the right, won by the Revolution, of its citizens, without distinction based on race, color, sex, religious creeds, national origin, or any other type offending human dignity to:

- Have access, in keeping with their merits and abilities, to all positions and state and administrative jobs and of production and services
- Be given equal pay for equal work.
- Have a right to education at all national educational institutions, ranging from elementary schools to the universities, which are the same for all.
- Be given medical care in all medical institutions.
- Live in any sector, zone or area and stay in any hotel.
- Be served at all restaurants and other public service establishments.
- Use, without any separations, all means of transportation by sea, land and air.
- Enjoy the same resorts, beaches, parks, social centers and other centers of culture, sports, recreation and rest.

But not everyone can wait tables. Plenty of Cubans still teach and practice medicine, living their lives within the socialist framework. On their way to work every day, they see plenty of people earning more money than they do, both on street corners and through the windows of Havana's



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Showgirls perform at the Tropicana Cabaret in Havana. In its heyday during the 1950s, the club drew the likes of Nat King Cole, Josephine Baker and Carmen Miranda.

finest restaurants.

The tourists in those restaurants carry more than dollars; they carry ideas, too. And while tourism hasn't allowed Cubans to speak freely, to read what they please, tourism has at times allowed them to speak with foreigners who know what a free society is like.

For that very reason, post-1959 Cuba forgot tourism. In the march toward socialism, Fidel Castro didn't want decadent, camera-toting capitalists spoiling his revolutionary party. But in the early 1990s, when Soviet subsidies disappeared and the sugar market plummeted, Cuba had no choice. It desperately needed a new dance partner.

Since then, tourism has become the Cuban government's largest source of revenue, according to the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, which collects data from the Central Bank of Cuba.

Tourism revenue totaled \$1.8 billion in 2001, compared with \$243 million in 1990 and \$84 million in 1985. Last year, Cuba hosted nearly 1.7 million tourists — almost five times more than in 1990.



Canadians are the most common tourists in the streets of Havana, followed by Germans, Italians, French, English and Spaniards, said Antonio Díaz, vice director of the Cuban tourism firm Havanatur Celimar.

Americans, however, are rare. U.S. law aims to prevent them from visiting Cuba. Certain categories of travelers, such as students, journalists, humanitarian workers and those with family living on the island, can apply for special permission from the Office of Foreign Assets Control.

But U.S. tourists seeking only a good time must either pretend to fit one of those categories or fly to Cuba through a third country. Cuba accommodated nearly 80,000 U.S. travelers — legal and illegal — in 2001, excluding those of Cuban descent visiting family members, according to the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council. Only 7,400 such travelers visited Cuba in 1990.

Cuba's tourism industry took a hit during the worldwide slump that followed September 11. While Díaz spoke optimistically

in January, claiming the flow of visitors had recovered, Tessie Aral, vice president of Miami's ABC Charters, said in April that travel to Cuba had subsided again. She attributed the drop to three factors:

- War in Iraq and related terrorism concerns.

- An April crackdown, in which the Cuban government jailed 75 citizens for allegedly conspiring with the U.S. government and executed three men who attempted to hijack a ferry to Miami.

- The possibility that the U.S. government would ban direct flights to Cuba, as it has twice previously amid increased tensions between the two countries.

Several groups planning trips with ABC had recently canceled, Aral said.

In recent years, hard-line opposition to Castro's regime had become less popular politically, and according to the Cuba Policy Foundation, majorities of both the House and Senate are aligned against the travel ban.

A July 2002 study predicted — absent the travel ban — that the number of U.S. tourists visiting Cuba would climb to 2.8 million during the next decade. The study, commissioned by the Center for International Policy in Washington, D.C., assumed Americans would visit Cuba as often as Canadians.

But, like so many events in the past, the April crackdown on dissidents has re-inflamed U.S.-Cuba relations, and the easing of sanctions remains politically difficult.

The U.S. government already closed one major avenue to Cuba on March 24 — less than a week after the crackdown began — when it stopped granting certain educational travel licenses. While students still may travel to Cuba as part of their coursework, alumni groups, museum staff and other cultural organizations no longer will be granted licenses. Rumors abound that tighter restrictions are on the way.

"I believe due to the overall feelings of this administration and the recent events in Cuba, the lifting of the travel ban may have been pushed off a couple of years," said Aral, who recently led a group to Capitol Hill to lobby against the travel ban.

Even if the travel ban ended, a shortage of hotel rooms and resulting price increases would hamper an accelerating tourism industry, Aral said.

Debt may slow Cuba's tourism industry as well. Nearly all of Cuba's hotels and resorts were built with the help of foreign investors. Cuba's inability to make loan payments slowed foreign investment in 2001, and as a result, the development of tourist accommodations may slow, too.

Nevertheless, said Aral, whose firm booked 36,700 travelers to Cuba in 2002, U.S. businesses — especially Florida tourism firms — have an eye on Cuba, thinking the travel ban, the embargo and even socialism won't last forever.

"I think there are a lot of people doing analyses," Aral said, "because they think, again, that it is a fountain that is waiting to be drank out of."



Lazario leaned against the railing at his second-story paladar, the restaurant the government licenses him to own. The sun sat low in the west, reddening his tanned face.

"None of these people work," he said, nodding to the street below, where dozens of young men strolled about, asking each passing tourist what time it was. Dozens of young women strolled the street, too, asking foreign men if they desired company for the evening.

Like them, Lazario profits directly from tourists. He is allowed 12 seats in his restaurant, which doubles as the porch of his family's home. But unlike those below, he pays hundreds of dollars in taxes every month, regardless of income.

Lazario earned a university degree and teaches at a technical school. At 5 p.m., his day is far from over; he waits tables at the paladar until 11 p.m. or later.

He looked tired, but spoke proudly: "Tourists leave here very satisfied."

The Cuban government struggles to control the money spent by foreigners. After all, the original purpose of investing in tourism was to rescue the socialist regime from bankruptcy.

At the same time, tourism can undermine the equality that socialism was supposed to guaran-



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Laundry hangs behind scaffolding, a common sight because much of Havana is in some stage of renovation or disrepair.

tee. Lazario charges about \$6 for a four-course meal and \$1.50 for a bottle of beer. In one hour, he can easily gross the equivalent of a month's salary as a teacher.

Lazario said a recent crack-down on oversized, tax-delinquent restaurants had put many proprietors out of business. Paladares, therefore, are tough to find.

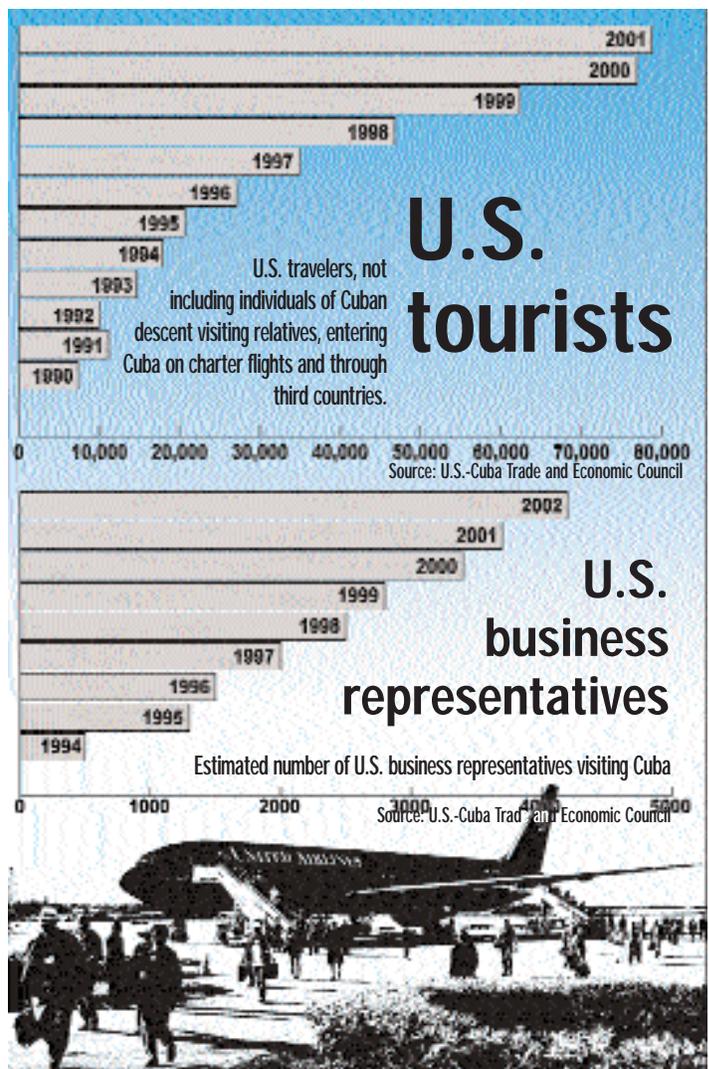
The Cuban government owns the vast majority of restaurants in Havana. Employees don't earn dollars. Their government salary — often the equivalent of \$7 to \$10 per month — comes in Cuban pesos, which cannot be used in most well-stocked stores.

For government employees, even tips are hard to keep, as those who work service jobs must pay a tax. Other service workers take no tips at all.

"I'm not supposed to accept tips," said Pedro, a soft-spoken government employee who requested anonymity. "But I'm not supposed to starve either. That makes a little bit of a contradiction."



Alberto, a 26-year-old who works the streets daily, showed a ticket that a police officer had just issued him, he said, for speaking to a Canadian tourist. The fine equaled roughly \$40. If Alberto





KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Above: Tourists check in and mill about the lobby of the Hotel Nacional, a Havana landmark. Below: 1950s-era American cars crowd the parking area at Jose Martí International Airport outside Havana.

Fast facts

- Tourism has become the Cuban government's largest source of revenue, according to the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council.
- Tourism revenue totaled \$1.8 million in 2001, compared with \$243 million in 1990 and \$84 million in 1985.
- Canadians are the most common tourists in Havana, followed by Germans, Italians, French, English and Spaniards.

didn't pay it within two months, he explained, he'd go to jail.

But it wasn't just money Alberto sought from the tourist. He also wanted information. He said he doesn't trust Cuba's state-run media, and he has doubts, too, about the news he hears on Radio Martí, the U.S.-government radio station that broadcasts from Miami.

To discern truth from rhetoric, Alberto said he learns "por extranjeros," or through foreigners.



So it's not only foreign currency that penetrates the socialist state; tourists bring ideas, too — ideas that may undermine the Castro regime.

"The more American citizens in the streets of Cuban cities, the better the cause for a more open society," said Wayne Smith, who headed the U.S. Interests Section in Havana during the Carter and Reagan administrations.

But can tourists — most of whom seek only recreation, few of whom speak Spanish — really be

cultural and political ambassadors?

"No evidence, no studies that I know say American tourists can bring political change," said Jaime Suchlicki, director of the Institute for Cuban and Cuban American Studies at the University of Miami. "In that case, let's send American tourists to North Korea and Iraq."

Either way, the Cuban government, in subtle ways, attempts to limit interaction between Cubans and foreigners. On the streets or at sidewalk cafés, Cubans usually

don't have trouble — or show any trepidation — about conversing or even sitting down for a beer with foreigners.

But at certain hotels and restaurants, a security guard is likely to stop anyone who even looks Cuban. At the Habana Libre, only when escorted by foreigners may Cubans enter the lobby unencumbered. However, younger female Cubans often enter freely.

Pedro Alvarez, Cuba's top import official, rejected the claim that Cubans are barred from all the hotels in their own country.

"There are certain restrictions now," he said. "But there are many hotels where Cubans can rent a room. All of the hotels are not restricted for international tourism."

As with any tourism-dependent Caribbean country, economic barriers remain. Canadians enjoy a per capita gross domestic product 13 times greater than that of Cubans. Therefore, even when permitted, few of the island's residents can afford to eat or drink at a table next to their foreign guests.

■ ■ ■

So how do you feel when you walk past the hotel and see tourists eating such good food?

"Como perro," said Alberto, the 26-year-old independent tourist guide. "Like a dog."

Tourism has brought billions to the Cuban government and — on a good day — it puts \$50 in Alberto's pocket. But while it's made many Cubans richer, it's left many more *feeling* poorer.

Aral, the vice president of ABC Charters, was born in Cuba in 1957. Her family left four years later, disenchanted with the direction of the revolution. She sees tourism altering that same revolution today.

"The dream is not there," she said. "Everybody is not the same, obviously. You have people who graduated as engineers working as cab drivers because they can make a better living for their family."

But Aral said she hopes tourism will never alter the island's true allure — Cuban culture.

"You go to a hotel there, and there's music. Here, you know, you go to a hotel, and it's quiet."





KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

The streets of Havana are the workplace for jiniteras, Cuba's "good-time girls," who try to make money for themselves and their families.

The cost of sex

Cuban women learning an old lesson: Sex sells

By Jill Zeman

This story begins with young girls giggling at El Oasis, a bar along Havana's tourist-driven district called the Prado — a place where Cubans are charged a \$5 cover, tourists \$3.

It continues in a dark corner, where a pony-tailed man with his wedding ring intact drinks a Cristal — a popular tourist beer — as he strokes the knee of a young Cuban woman.

Nearby, girls laugh flirtatiously together, share pints of ice cream and caress the men beside them. The men — all European — eye each other, compare the girls and

hope their money will be well spent.

The story will end later in a darkened room ... in heaps of clothes and a fistful of cash.

For the men, it's just another day on vacation. But for the girls, it's their way of life. They are the jiniteras, Spanish for "jockey," derived from the verb "to ride" — a Cuban pun.

On any given night, this story is replayed in countless Havana hotel lobbies, bars, restaurants, dance clubs, plazas and in the streets.

The motivation is simple. Young Cuban girls have discovered what savvy advertisers and

movie moguls learned long ago: Sex sells. Especially when an increasing number of well-heeled foreign men descend on an island where the average Cuban earns less than \$10 a month.

Some of these girls do it strictly for cash — so their children can have shoes. Some dream of being swept away out of Cuba. And some do it just for the chance to go out, to break the humdrum of daily life.

Either way, one thing is certain: Tourism has fueled a prostitution boom providing thousands of desperate young Cuban women an opportunity to pocket valuable American greenbacks in

Fast facts

■ Cuban prostitutes can earn anywhere from \$40 to \$80 for an hour with a man.

The average Cuban who works for the government can earn \$80 in salary in about 10 months.

■ Jiniteras look for men in tourist areas, such as the Prado and the Malecón. They also hang out near major hotels such as the Habana Libre and the Nacional.



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Hotels crowd the waterfront in Havana. Jiniteras are a common sight in areas frequented by tourists.

Biographies of jiniteras

Name: Rosa

Age: 21

Time on the street: five years

Sound off: "If I get a different job, I'll take it."

Name: Janet

Age: 19

Time on the street: two months

Sound off: "We don't want people copying our behavior.

We'd never suggest people live this life."

Name: Jean

Age: 18

Time on the street: two months

Sound off: "I go out on the streets one or two times a week, just to keep myself eating. The money doesn't last long because things are so expensive."

this cash-starved country.

"My father earns 195 pesos (about \$7) a month," says Rosa, a 21-year-old jinitera, "...and I can make \$40 or \$50 per man."

Interviews with numerous prostitutes, their friends and family, government officials and activists reveal a number of economic, social and political issues tied to the burgeoning prostitution problem. Among them:

■ Cuba's struggling economy offers little reprieve from poverty outside the tourism industry. The sought-after dollars are in tourists' pockets.

■ Although Fidel Castro says prostitution is illegal, police choose to enforce the law arbitrarily.

■ Despite its high-profile prostitution, Cuba boasts the lowest AIDS rate in the Caribbean, which is attributed to education and readily available condoms.

Even though these girls put food on the table, it's not an ideal lifestyle, especially when they don't always know what they're getting into, says Ana Milagros Martínez, of the Federation of Cuban Women.

"Sometimes they don't know they are prostitutes. They say they are looking for fashion

"I was very afraid at the beginning, but the need (for money) pushed me to do it."

Janet, a 19-year-old jinitera

shoes, fashion dress, so they go into hotels. Then ..." Milagros Martínez says, shrugging her shoulders.

But leaving that life may not be possible when tourists represent an oasis of cash for the girls.

"It's worthless, now, to have a job if it doesn't pay enough," says Janet, a 19-year-old prostitute. "I wouldn't do what I do if I had a good job."

Girls as young as 9 or 10 work as prostitutes on Havana's streets.

Their high-pitched voices give it away. But when it's time to work, these girls strut the strut of confidence.

Rosa didn't start until she was 16 but has worked nearly every night since.

"The Americans, they're the best," she says, "because they give me lots of gifts."

Some jiniteras wear skimpy, shiny skirts — often gifts from tourists — while others bundle up in whatever mishmash of cloth they can find. Rosa is of the latter. On consecutive January nights, she wore a faded Los Angeles Raiders metal-snap coat — a gift from a tourist.

But their wardrobes aren't important to the men, who come in all shapes and sizes, races and nationalities.

Typically, Rosa sees men in their 30s, though it's common for a man 30 or 40 years older to request her services.

A man's passport means little to the jiniteras. It's the wallet that counts.

The money Rosa brings in after an hour or two of work goes to food, clothing, diapers and other necessities. Without it — and with a government job — she, her husband, Jose, and 2-year-old Juan Carlos would have to survive on monthly food rations that last only five or six days, she said.

"I stay out until 3 or 4 in the morning if I can't get any money," she says. "Right now, we just eat whatever we can get."

But Cuban officials argue the situation is not that bleak. All Cubans are guaranteed food, says Ricardo Alarcón, president of the National Assembly of People's Power and potential Castro successor. The meals are nothing fancy, but it's enough to live on.

"Nobody in this country really needs to beg in order not to starve," he says. "No women or men have to prostitute himself or herself to eat."

■ ■ ■
It's not the men or her health that scares Rosa the most. It's la policia.

Prostitution is an accepted illegal practice in Cuba. Kind of like jaywalking in the States. People do it all the time — police see it all the time — but there's always an unlucky few who get caught.

At work on the Prado, Rosa speaks softly and nervously, constantly scanning the street for police. If busted, she will be fined, jailed or both.

She may have been more



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

The Malecón, a sea wall that runs along the edge of Havana, is a popular place for lovers and tourists — and prostitutes.

nervous because less than 15 minutes earlier, her friend Alberto was ticketed for speaking to some Canadian tourists.

The fine? He'll have to shell out 450 pesos — an average Cuban's two-month salary.

Rosa's friends have been arrested for prostitution. And one ticket can undo a week of work, if not more. It's a scary risk, she says.

Jean, an 18-year-old prostitute, shares Rosa's fear.

"I haven't got in trouble yet, but (the police) always ask for my ID. It's scary, because all of my friends have been busted."

Although the police pose a constant threat to the jiniteras, some say the government isn't doing enough to stop prostitution.

Milagros Martínez, of the Federation of Cuban Women, says it's painful to see the girls out on the streets. Federation members sometimes go onto the streets, find prostitutes and take them home. But often, the girls go right back.

"We know that they are prostitutes. But we just can't catch them and send them to jail," she says.

Castro on prostitution

"One day when I was down in Brazil, an Argentinian asked me, 'Is it true that some girls who are university graduates sometimes practice prostitution?' I replied instantly, without thinking, 'That proves prostitutes in Cuba have a university level.'"

— Fidel Castro during a speech to the Cuban workers' congress in Havana.
Source: Reuters, May 1, 2001

Prostitution may be a social problem in Cuba, but it's not as bad as it was following the collapse of the Soviet Union — a time Castro calls the "Special Period" — or before the revolution, says Antonio Díaz, vice director of Havanatur, a government-run tourism company.

And it's not as though the government ignores prostitution. Educational programs explaining the dangers of prostitution have been set up to discourage the jiniteras, he said.

"The problem is not tourism — the problem is the economy. Tourism is the solution, not the problem."

Castro, like many Cubans who support communism, often touts the island's successes when speaking to reporters

about social ills like prostitution.

According to a May 1, 2001, Reuters story, Castro championed Cuba's education system in a speech to close a workers' congress in Havana:

"One day when I was down in Brazil, an Argentinian asked me, 'Is it true that some girls who are university graduates sometimes practice prostitution?'" Castro said. "I replied instantly, without thinking, 'That proves prostitutes in Cuba have a university level.'"

■ ■ ■
A typical night for Rosa starts on the Prado. She sits with fellow prostitutes — but Jose and Alberto are never out of eyesight — and whistles at tourists as they walk by.

Pssst! Señor! Te gusta? If he likes her, he'll stop, they'll talk. If he doesn't, she'll try another.

Once she gets a bite, they'll go to a restaurant, a bar, take a walk. The night always ends the same.

For Jean and her friend, 19-year-old Janet, the story's the same.

And nearly all the girls will finish it at a casa particular, a private home licensed by the government to rent rooms to visitors. Owners look the other way, say Jean and Janet.

If they're lucky, Janet says, they'll go to a hotel. But to make it upstairs, the man must bribe the bellboy at the elevator, as Cubans aren't allowed in many hotels.

Jean and Janet can earn \$50 to \$60 per night, and only go out on the streets once or twice a week. And though the girls leave much richer, working as a jinitera is by no means a walk in the park.

"I just think about finishing, when it will be over," Janet says of what it's like having sex with strangers.

But for Janet, the strangers



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

The streets of Havana are dark after night falls, but they're busy with traffic and streetwalkers.

El Maximo's maxims:

"The enemy preaches the habit of theft, and in their mass media, they try to stress, to insinuate, to inculcate the idea of theft, of breaking the law, in the middle of shortages and difficulties — which is what forces us to strengthen all the measures against that and to strengthen all the measures against manifestations of prostitution and to punish very severely all corruption of minors."

— Castro in a speech to the Credit and Service Cooperatives, International Conference Center, Havana, June 3, 1998

"We began taking adequate measures to combat these outbreaks (of the AIDS virus). And we are still perfecting our methods. ... We understand this problem, and our methods are human."

— Castro quoted in Reuters, May 2001

are almost always cordial. Neither she nor Jean have feared for their safety while working.

And the experience is still new for the girls. Jean and Janet both decided to start working on the streets two months earlier because they needed money for food, for clothes, for their families.

"I was very afraid at the beginning, but the need pushed me to do it," Janet says.

And unlike Rosa, the two don't have the support of their families.

"Our families don't agree, but it's our decision ... they're getting accustomed to it," Jean says.

■ ■ ■

Soap, toothbrushes, shampoo and aspirin are hard for Rosa to find in Cuba, but she has no problem obtaining condoms or other contraceptives from local pharmacies.

Cuba initiated a hefty educational campaign to help curb the spread of AIDS. HIV screening is mandatory for all expectant mothers, people who've had sexual contact with HIV patients and those with sexually transmitted diseases, says Dr. Byron Barksdale,

American physician and director of the Cuba AIDS Project. Cubans can get tested for free at clinics and hospitals throughout the country, he said.

Most jiniteras are aware of the risks their lifestyle incur, and protect themselves accordingly.

"I'm not worried about my health at all," Rosa says. "I've always practiced safe sex — every time."

The threat of AIDS is compounded by more foreigners who provide more business for the girls.

It's hard for the jiniteras to gauge whether there are more tourists now than 10 years ago. After all, many were still wearing their yellow primary-school skirts at the time.

They just know there are enough foreign men out there to keep food on their tables.

But Rosa and Jose's friend, Alberto, is one of countless Cubans who resent the influx.

"I feel like a dog when I look through the windows of the Habana Libre," he says of a popular tourist hotel.

■ ■ ■

Jose hopes his 2-year-old, Juan Carlos, will grow up to be a chauffeur.

Why? Because very few people in Cuba have cars, and people need rides.

Besides, it's easier on the body than construction or other physical labor.

And Jose and Rosa know one thing for sure: They'd never wish their lives on young Juan Carlos.

Though their lives aren't easy, none of the jiniteras could set a timetable on how long they'll sell their bodies.

"I'm trying to do this for a while (to make some money), but I know in the back of my head, I must stop," Janet says.

Yet it's not something the girls are ashamed of. Both Jean and Janet say they'll tell their future children they worked as prostitutes.

"We'll tell them we had to do it. But we would never want this kind of life for them," Jean says.

"We would never suggest people to live this life."

An ideal life, for Jean, would be to work legally for the government in the tourism sector. She's still in high school, and hopes to find a job that will pay for her necessities.

Janet, who completed the 11th grade, is now saving as much money as she can. She hopes to save enough so she won't need to work on the streets while she attends college.

But there's also a paradox facing these young girls:

While increased tourism brings more money to the country, it also brings more tourists to the girls, thus making it more difficult to stop working on the streets.

And tourism is what has made the illicit prostitution industry explode, says Milagros Martínez of the Federation of Cuban Women.

"Tourism has a risk. That risk was prostitution ... It's a social problem. There are many people that come to Cuba to promote prostitution. They come and they leave, and then where is the problem? It is here."



From heartland to Cuba

North Platte doctor runs AIDS project

By Jill Zeman

"The remarkable thing about the Cuba AIDS Project is that it is direct, personal and immediate. It is people helping people... The persons with AIDS whom I met in Cuba are not numbers and photographs; they are real. Their lives are difficult, their stories inspiring. This is a trip I will never forget." — Brooks Johnston, Dallas, Texas.

In 1997, Byron Barksdale went from tourist to doctor on his first trip to Cuba.

It was then he was called to assist a gravely ill man he referred to as "a walking corpse."

The man survived, as did Barksdale's love affair with all things Cuban.

Barksdale, a North Platte pathologist, since has taken seven more trips to Cuba. He can't get enough of it. Today he visits the island not as a tourist, but as a man renowned for how much he's contributed to Cuban society, via the Cuba AIDS Project.

The project sends Americans, with hard-to-find personal hygiene items and over-the-counter medications in tow, directly to Cuba, circumventing the U.S. travel embargo. It's a nonprofit, humanitarian project, and Barksdale has served as its international director since 1999.

Although not literally, Cuba is in his blood.

Twenty-two years in Nebraska, and Byron Barksdale can't shake that Southern accent.

As a child, he moved with his family between Florida and

Georgia. It was in Lantana, Fla., 60 miles north of Miami, that Cuba became more than an island to him.

As Americans watched their country creep closer and closer to the brink during the Cuban Missile Crisis, Barksdale watched Army Jeeps drive south toward Miami. When he was in grade school, he watched ships travel along the South Florida coast from West Palm Beach to Cuba. And in high school in Tallahassee, he became friends with many Cuban Americans.

Later on, his brother, John, was stationed in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, from 1969 to 1972. His job was to eavesdrop on Cuba for the U.S. Navy.

Medical school took Barksdale to the University of Kentucky in Lexington. A residency in Dallas was followed by a brief stint in Charleston, S.C. After that, Galveston, Texas.

And in 1981, he saw an opening for two pathologists in North Platte. Barksdale and his wife, Lyle, took the offer. And they've been there since.

■ ■ ■
"Just wanted to let you know that I delivered several bags of items to Father Fernando, I mentioned your name (Byron) and was warmly greeted." — Steve Faytis, Sanibel, Fla.

When Father Fernando de la Vega is alone, he sometimes sits in Havana's Montserrat Church with the lights off and worries about how he'll pay his bills.

He worries about having enough food to serve his AIDS support groups. He's afraid he'll have to conduct Mass in the dark if he can't find money to pay for utilities.

But still, he has faith. Faith in God and in people like Byron Barksdale.

"But always, there are wingless angels that appear and say, 'Look, you can have \$20,' and I can pay the electricity."



Dr. Byron Barksdale

■ **Occupation:** Pathologist, international director of the Cuba AIDS Project.

■ **Age:** 52.

■ **Goal:** To send Americans to Cuba to provide patients with necessary supplies.

■ **Visits to Cuba:** Eight

■ **Born:** Claxton, Ga.

■ **Lives:** North Platte, Neb.

■ **Quote:** "I don't know how many people in D.C. read (about the Cuba AIDS Project) and say, 'Here's this hick, rural Nebraskan Republican pathologist — why do we want to listen to him?'"

Angel or not, Barksdale initially had no intention of spearheading the Cuba AIDS Project.

In 1995, his quest to learn more about Cuba led him to Alberto Montano, an HIV-positive Cuban American living in Miami who then led the Cuba AIDS Project.

Montano told Barksdale in a telephone conversation that the project needed him on the board of directors. He argued that with a medical doctor listed as a director, the project could gain easier access to prescription medicines to take to Cuba.

Barksdale said OK to the figurehead role. He wanted to see Cuba, he wanted to help

Cubans, but he thought that was all he could do from Nebraska while still working full-time as a pathologist.

Then he met Father Fernando on his first trip to Cuba in 1997. The priest had next to nothing in his wallet, which made an impression on Barksdale.

"This is a guy who basically had 12 cents in his wallet and he brought people in, spending everything he had — blood sweat and tears — spending all of his own money, helping people worse off than him, and he wasn't particularly well off," Barksdale said.

"So I said, 'This is a guy I will try to help if I can.'"

He donated money, medicine and personal hygiene supplies for AIDS patients who meet at Father Fernando's church. But apart from that, his role in the Cuba AIDS Project was limited.

Until October 1999, when Barksdale received a call from Lucia Escobar, treasurer of the Cuba AIDS Project, saying Alberto Montano had died in Miami.

If the project were to continue, Barksdale was told, he would have to lead it.

"And I said, 'Wait a minute. The original deal was that I was supposed to go down there, basically be able to see Cuba without any responsibility. This is not supposed to happen. It's like a bad movie,'" Barksdale recalls with a laugh.

"And I said, 'OK, I'll try.'"

But he had a wife, four children and a full-time job — in Nebraska.

"It was a huge commitment for him to do," Lyle Barksdale said. "But I was eager for him to pursue it. It was a very good effort for him, because of his interest in Cuba and because Cubans have so few resources."

She didn't once doubt her husband's ability to take over

the project. “He’s got a lot of energy, drive and dedication. He’s got a great sense of humor, too, which helps him communicate, no matter what language.”

Moving to Miami wasn’t an option. But allowing Americans to visit Cuba and deliver much-needed items to AIDS patients was.

Barksdale — to whom Father Fernando and others at the Montserrat Church refer as “Dr. Byron” — told Father Fernando he could promote the AIDS project by setting up a Web site.

“Soon every time people came to Cuba they brought a small bag of medicine or personal items for our group,” Father Fernando said.

And since October 1999, hundreds of them have done just that, strictly through word-of-mouth advertising. Phone calls and letters about Cuba pour in to Barksdale’s business and home, his wife, Lyle, said.

“There’s only so many hours in the day, but he’s managing it quite gracefully,” she said.

Barksdale regrets never meeting Alberto Montano in person, but he doesn’t regret the drastic turn his life has taken.

“I hate to think that my life, or anybody’s life, is predetermined, but it’s kind of mysterious sometimes how things come together, and then, you’re doing it.”



“The trip truly changed my life, and I am grateful for all of your help. I will be in touch, and I hope you can keep me updated on the needs of the church so we can start to collect supplies here.”
— Tammy Chang, University of Michigan Medical School

Byron Barksdale can’t stop collecting anything about or from Cuba. Just ask his wife.

“He’s accumulated so much over a number of years, just from calling people and looking on eBay. He looks for anything with any reference to Cuba.”

And they’ve got a garage and basement full of boxes to prove it.

Barksdale collects worthless Cuban stock certificates and



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Dr. Byron Barksdale wants to sell T-shirts with the Cuban flag on them.

“They’re too close for us not to be interested in them.”

Dr. Byron Barksdale

keeps them sealed in plastic bags. He’s got thousands of railroad, sugar and other financial stock certificates — from when Americans owned the bulk of business in Cuba — rendered worthless by Castro’s removal of the Cuban Stock Exchange in 1959.

Barksdale hunts for the certificates online, has a network of history buffs across the country, then occasionally sells the certificates on eBay.

He also collects certificates from late 19th century Texas, early Playboy certificates —

those are favorites — and presidential memorabilia.

More people are getting ahold of Cuban stock certificates, so Barksdale doesn’t sell many of them. He’s more interested in the historical value of them anyway.

The biggest problem hasn’t been finding rare certificates, autographed photos of presidents or a letter Lyndon Johnson signed Nov. 23, 1963, on Air Force One as he became president.

It’s where to put the stuff.

“I had them in the house, and my wife said, ‘Do you really need any more of these? Why don’t you do something worthwhile with them, like burn them or put them in the trash? I’m going to start charging you rent for all this excess space you use for your Cuba crap.’”



“I have traveled pretty much around the world, and I thought I had experienced it all. Cuba however, was an experience like no other I had ever had. The warmth of its people, the depth of its culture and the civility and kindness which I was exposed to were overwhelming.” — Tim Firestone, Cuba AIDS Project participant

If and when the U.S. trade embargo is lifted, Barksdale will open the Havana Bay Company.

He dreams of a day where Cuban products can be sold openly in the United States.

Cohiba cigars. Havana Club rum. Original paintings. Hand-woven clothing.

He’s already got the signs, the T-shirts, the works.

There’s a sign with the Cuban flag, but Barksdale replaced the trademark white star with the Havana Bay Company logo.

Another sign advertises Golf Cuba, with the logo in place of a golf ball.

In his garage, he stores hundreds of blue T-shirts that say “Scuba Cuba,” which he gives to everyone who talks to him about Cuba.

Barksdale doesn’t know when he’ll be able to sell these shirts in Cuba. Or when he’ll be able to show Americans what treasures they can buy from the island.

“They’re too close for us not to be interested in them. And if I can play just a small part in that, then why not have that as a small purpose in my life.”

He feels, though, the day is inevitable. He predicts that 100 years after Fidel Castro’s ascension to power, Cuba and the United States will again be allies.

“You can’t be 100 percent isolationist to Cuba. There’s got to be these points of light that get back and forth, whether it’s (cooperation on) hurricanes, or AIDS, or whatever, we’ve got to be able to signal each other.

“And I’m hoping that I can crawl through one of those windows of opportunity.”





KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

HIV-positive men gather at Montserrat Church in Havana for the Thursday night AIDS support group. Cuba has the lowest AIDS rate in the Caribbean.

Living with AIDS in Cuba

Controversial means keep infection rates low

By Jill Zeman

It's 6 o'clock on a Thursday night in Havana's Montserrat Church, and Father Fernando de la Vega is trying to explain the mishmash of souvenirs that decorate the church's upstairs.

As volunteers cook chicken and rice for the night's AIDS support group meeting, Father Fernando points to a plastic fish that sits atop a bookshelf. It's a Big Mouth Billy Bass, designed to spring into song and dance at the

push of a button.

But no one at the church has ever seen the gift from a Portuguese tourist come to life, because no one can find any C-cell batteries. Batteries are just one of many hard-to-find, highly sought-after goods on the island.

The scarcity of items doesn't stop Father Fernando's group from thriving, however.

Like many Cubans, he has learned to make do with next to nothing.

In the fight against AIDS, Cuba itself has done the same.

The island maintains the lowest AIDS rate in the Caribbean, which many attribute to:

- Cuba's innovative and controversial tactics, such as quarantines, the destruction of foreign blood products and mandatory HIV testing.

- Cuba's ability to gain access to medicine and supplies necessary to treat AIDS patients despite the trade embargo.

"It's a privilege, living in Cuba with AIDS, if you compare it to the rest of the world," said Houari Abdelaziz, a 50-year-old

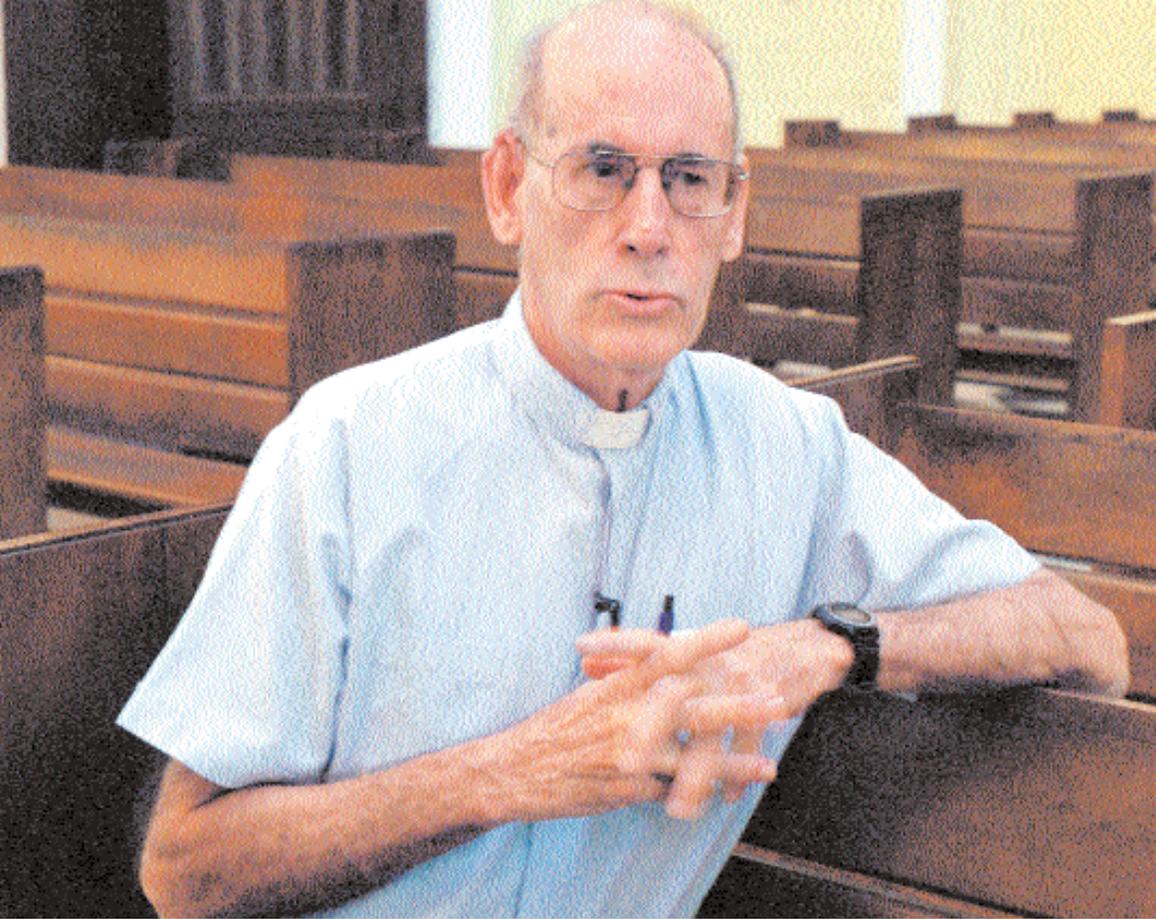
who was diagnosed three years ago.

"In Cuba, we know we will die, but they help us live longer."

■ ■ ■

Walk through one door of the room where the Thursday night support group meets and you end up in the sanctuary of the Montserrat Church. Walk through the other, and you're in the room where Father Fernando parks his red Soviet Lada.

On Thursdays, gay men gather at the church. There's a Wednesday night group for



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Father Fernando de la Vega and Sister Fara González work with HIV-positive and AIDS-infected people in Havana.

to plague the island, so HIV is rarely transmitted that way. And thanks to the foresight of Dr. Jorge Perez, only 10 cases of AIDS have been transmitted through blood transfusions, Barksdale said.

Before the first case of AIDS was diagnosed in Cuba, Perez, an infectious disease expert, suspected blood product transmission of AIDS was possible, Barksdale said.

So in 1983 — two years before AIDS hit the island — he called for the destruction of all foreign blood products in Cuba.

“I’m sure there were people saying, ‘This guy’s crazy,’” Barksdale said. “It’s like President Bush calling all the Red Crosses and saying we need to destroy all the blood.”

In America, 16,175 cases of AIDS have been transmitted via blood transfusion, according to the World Health Association.

■ ■ ■
Cuba’s first case of AIDS — diagnosed in 1985 — came from a soldier returning from Mozambique. Perez and government officials knew then that drastic measures were in order.

At the time, no one understood the nature of the virus, Barksdale said. And if it turned out to be highly contagious, Cuba’s chronic recession, the U.S. trade embargo restricting the availability of modern clinical laboratory testing and the scarcity of antibiotics and prescription drugs could prevent it from stemming the tide of an epidemic.

So Cuba quarantined anyone who tested positive for HIV.

Barksdale, Perez — and many Cubans with AIDS — are quick to say the patients weren’t put in prison.

They were isolated in sanitariums until doctors figured it out, Barksdale said.

The first such sanitarium, Santiago de las Vegas in rural Havana, took in patients diagnosed with AIDS and taught them what types of medicine to take and how to care for themselves.

Restrictions were slowly rolled back over a seven-year period, Barksdale said. First, patients were allowed weekend visits with their families. Next, they were allowed to work outside the sanitarium.

By the numbers

Since 1983, 4,517 people have tested positive for HIV in Cuba.

■ 1,050 of them have died of AIDS.

■ 116 patients died in 2001.

■ 85 patients died in 2002.

Since 1983, 12 children have been diagnosed with AIDS.

■ Six have died.

■ Six have survived.

How AIDS is transmitted

■ Sexual intercourse.

■ IV drug use.

■ Blood transfusions.

■ Mother-to-baby in childbirth.

Source: Cuba AIDS Project, February 2003



straight people with the disease.

And on this Thursday night, the men are festive. They laugh, hug each other and perk up when the group leader hands out gift packages full of vitamins, Band-Aids, razors and soap.

They sober up, though, when a visitor asks how they contracted the disease, because most attribute it to carelessness.

AIDS in Cuba is not transmitted from mother to child. The government mandates AIDS tests

for pregnant women, and those testing positive must deliver via Caesarean section, said Dr. Byron Barksdale, a North Platte pathologist and director of the Cuba AIDS Project.

Intravenous drug use has yet

Today, newly diagnosed Cubans stay for an average of three months before being sent back out to society.

"I thought my life was over when I was diagnosed," said Ariel Dominguez, 27. "They gave me help and support. ... They told me not to be afraid of life, and that society will finally accept me."

■ ■ ■

Father Fernando's AIDS support group started with a concert.

With a musician friend, he planned a benefit that raised about 500 pesos — a little less than \$20. With the money, he prepared snacks for AIDS patients he invited into his church.

About 15 people showed up. And they kept showing up, even though Father Fernando was running out of money and food.

So he wrote letters to friends in the United States and Puerto Rico, who sent money.

And he turned a snack into a meal.

The number of patients doubled, then tripled. And relatives and friends in the States began sending money, medicine and personal hygiene items through tourists.

Four years after the group started, Barksdale visited the church, and Father Fernando explained how the North Platte doctor could help.

Barksdale, who took over as director of the Cuba AIDS Project in 1999, now arranges for Americans to visit Cuba legally, provided they bring over-the-counter medicines, vitamins and personal hygiene items for Father Fernando's church — the largest support group in Cuba — and other sites throughout the island.

Visitors can circumvent the U.S. travel embargo with Cuba under the project's travel permit. Those who go to Cuba must declare they are traveling for humanitarian purposes, not tourism.

Along with supplying food and medicine, Father Fernando brings in doctors and psychologists to meet with the patients each week.

The interaction between group members has been beneficial, he said.

"They have understood that they're all together in the same



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Houari Abdelaziz (left) and Ariel Dominguez participate in an AIDS support group each week at Havana's Montserrat Church.

ship, and the diagnosis is not the last of life."

■ ■ ■

Barksdale wishes Americans could understand why AIDS in Cuba affects them.

About 180,000 Americans visit the island annually, and after the travel embargo is lifted, millions may make the trip, he said.

Barksdale worries not only about Americans carrying the virus to the island, but also about their contracting it and bringing it back to the States. The Cuban strain of AIDS is African and genetically differs from the United States'. The morphing of the two strains could create a new strain, setting back medical research and changing how the disease should be treated, Barksdale said.

He wants the U.S. government and health care providers to understand that AIDS in Cuba is a public health concern for the United States.

"I don't think there's 180,000 or 1 or 2 million Americans who go to Sub-Saharan Africa each year, and it's free travel," he said. "We can go to Sub-Saharan Africa right now, and you don't see spring breakers going to Zaire. But as soon as Cuba opens up,

because of the embargo or whatever, Cancun's going to have some competition."

■ ■ ■

In Cuba, health care is provided by the government, so there's no doctor or prescription bills for AIDS patients to pay.

Cuba produces seven anti-viral medications domestically, Barksdale said. The government also offers support facilities for nutrition, patient education and prevention, he said.

HIV/AIDS prevention is taught in schools, and educational radio and television spots run frequently. Members of at-risk groups also receive information about the virus, said Dr. Marilyn Claro, vice director of the Frank Pais Orthopedic Hospital in Havana.

"If someone gets infected, it's not because of a lack of information," she said.

"The government really takes care of people, but I wasn't paying attention," said 19-year-old Salvador Rodríguez Garcia, who tested positive when he was 16.

"I was very young when I was diagnosed. I had no clear ideas about myself — I didn't protect myself, because I didn't think it

was possible for me to get AIDS."

Before he was diagnosed, Garcia studied nursing. He had to quit school and spent three months in the sanitarium, where he took lessons called, "Learning to Live with AIDS."

He gets an injection three times a week and takes a vitamin complex each day to treat his disease. And so far, he feels good.

Although Garcia no longer attends school, he now speaks to young Cubans about the dangers of HIV/AIDS. He speaks with people at Father Fernando's Montserrat Church, he talks to students and he works with young, gay Cubans.

Ariel Dominguez, who has AIDS, respects Cuba's educational efforts, but says the country still has a way to go. Despite Cuba's AIDS education through television, radio and print, a lot of taboos remain — as they do in the United States, he says.

"Some people will see us and say, 'Oh, AIDS. It's a plague,' and they get away from us.

"We live to be accepted by a society with no kind of taboo or remorse."





SARAH FOX

Antonio Díaz and Ofelia Acevedo examine red paint splashed by Cuban police in December on the Havana home of Acevedo and her husband, Oswaldo Payá. A friend said the red paint is a threat symbolizing blood. Payá is the leader of the Christian Liberation Movement, the group sponsoring the Varela Project. Díaz was sentenced in April to 20 years in prison for his involvement with the project.

Hope, threat or sellout?

Varela Project incites mixed opinions

By Sarah Fox

Isaías likes talking to tourists. The 25-year-old Havana cashier dodges police to practice his English — and to learn the truth about the outside world.

“Many people say capitalismo is a monster. It likes to eat people. I ask myself, ‘Why do people say that capitalismo, America, the United States, is a monster?’”

Isaías wants to know the answer, but police can ticket and fine Cubans for talking to for-

eigners. He tells a reporter that if police approach, she should tell them he is her friend. While police try to keep him from talking to foreigners, they’ve also succeeded in isolating him from fellow islanders.

Like many Cubans, Isaías has never heard of a petition drive that could bring him the freedom to talk about whatever he wants. It’s called the Varela Project — El Proyecto Varela — and it is hotly debated by some and unknown to many.

And what is the Varela Project? It depends on whom you ask. On the one hand, it’s simple — a petition drive of 11,020 signatures presented to Cuba’s National Assembly of People’s Power in May 2002. Sponsored by dissident leader Oswaldo Payá’s group, it asks that Cubans be allowed to vote on freedom of speech, amnesty for political prisoners and the right to form businesses, among other things. On the other hand, like many Cuban issues, it reflects a complex rela-

tionship among dissidents, Miami exiles, the Cuban government and the U.S. government.

More than 45 interviews with dissidents, ordinary Cubans, Cuban government officials, U.S. diplomats and Florida Cubans reveal that el Proyecto Varela is viewed largely through the eye of the beholder. Specifically:

- Dissidents say it’s a nonviolent way to reform a repressive government that harasses, detains, imprisons and silences its citizens.

- Some Miami exiles dislike

the project because it tries to reform Cuba's government instead of advocating its end.

■ The Cuban government views it as an illegal movement fueled by the American media and Washington imperialists that could infiltrate and destroy Cuban socialism.

"Somebody decided in Washington, D.C., that everything has to be Varela," said Ricardo Alarcón, president of the National Assembly of People's Power and Cuba's former U.N. ambassador. "It is not for AP, not for CNN, not for The New York Times to tell other countries how to have a constitution."

Regardless of viewpoint, the project was largely unknown in Cuba until former President Jimmy Carter spoke about it in a nationally televised speech at the University of Havana during a May 2002 visit to the island. Petitioners gathered 30,000 more signatures after his visit, said dissident leader Vladimiro Roca. Many say the gathering of all those signatures — out of Cuba's 10.9 million people — is unheard of. They say it shows the culture of fear is changing.

"It's not the Varela Project that changes the society; rather, it's the society changes that has brought the project," Roca said. "The Cuban government is characterized by complete immobilization. It always wants to stay where it is. (But) 11,020 signed. They've manifested their desire that there be change in this place."

■ ■ ■

Marlene, a middle-aged day care worker, is looking for tourists.

Seeing an American walking through Old Havana, she approaches with a big smile, as if the American were an Avon representative and Marlene had just run out of makeup. Does the American have an extra pair of blue jeans for her daughters? No? How about some gum or toothpaste?

It takes a few steps to a solitary lawn, a few cautious looks for police and 10 more minutes of chitchat before Marlene will talk about what's on her mind — her imprisoned uncle. According to Marlene:

In 1996, her uncle broke up with his girlfriend. To make him



SARAH FOX

Omar Rodríguez Saludes, an independent journalist, interviews a woman he thought was a human rights activist in her Havana home Jan. 9. Lily Collazo's husband, Roberto Martínez, looks on. The U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, hanging on Collazo and Martínez's wall, is reflected in the mirror.

Spying in on loss of trust

By Sarah Fox

How do I know you're not a spy?

The first time I heard this, it came from a 29-year-old Cuban with a black scrub of a goatee and a necklace of blue and green beads. It was early January, and I was walking through Old Havana, and he had scraped up his English to ask me where I was from.

New York? Washington, D.C.?

He was so persistent — as I look back on it now, he was looking for money — that I decided to turn the tables and asked if I could interview him. After all, I did need to interview ordinary Cubans, and since he wanted to talk to me, I may as well try.

We sat down near Havana Bay so if anyone wanted to eavesdrop, we would see them coming.

I knew the young man wearing jeans, a khaki baseball cap and a green, yellow and blue striped shirt probably had

never talked to a foreign reporter. And I knew, too, you should always start with the easy questions.

So I pitched him a softball.

What's it like to live in Cuba?

Alarmed, he pitched one back to me.

How do I know you're not a spy?

I told him, of course, he could tell I wasn't a spy. I spoke Spanish with an American accent.

He wasn't convinced.

So I unzipped my coin purse and pulled out a University of Nebraska-Lincoln student ID card and my Kansas driver's license.

See? It says Universidad de Nebraska.

He looked at the university ID, the picture so faded you could hardly see it. He examined the driver's license, the picture of me with longer hair instead of short hair.

Finally, he said OK.

He told me his monthly food ration lasts seven to eight

days and he drinks sugar water when he runs out of food. He can't work because he lost his glasses a few weeks ago. He has to wait eight or nine months for a new pair because there's no wood and no glass. And speaking negatively about the government, said this father of an 8-year-old girl, could land someone in prison for 10 to 15 years.

A few months later, I called a Miami psychiatrist to ask him about a dissident still back in Havana.

How do I know you're not a spy?

I told him the name of the person who had sent me to him and gave him my professor's name and phone number so he could verify that the UNL journalism college really was doing a depth-reporting project on Cuba.

He said it was OK; he trusted me. But he held back during the interview. There was a

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COURTESY PHOTO

Elsa Morejón is married to political prisoner Oscar Elías Biscet González. He has been in and out of prison since June 1998 and was sentenced April 10 to 25 years on charges of “acts against the sovereignty and independence of the national territory.” Morejón said her husband’s only crime is upholding human rights.

Varela Project facts

■ The project calls for a referendum — the submitting of a measure, proposed by a legislative body or popular initiative, to popular vote.

■ The project was started by the Christian Liberation Movement, a group that promotes human rights and peaceful change. CLM members started gathering signatures in 2001 to submit to the National Assembly of People’s Power, similar to Congress.

■ The leaders submitted the petition and 11,020 signatures May 10, two days before former President Jimmy Carter arrived in Cuba for a visit. Petitioners gathered 30,000 more signatures after Carter’s visit, said dissident leader Vladimiro Roca.

feel sorry for her, the girlfriend set herself on fire. She died. And her father was a policeman.

The father talked with all the judges and the testifying doctor the day of the court verdict, where the uncle was sentenced to 25 years for murder.

She said she and her family have written letters to the government but can’t talk outside the family about what they see as an unjust imprisonment.

“It’s been very cruel,” Marlene said. “If you don’t have a family that’s police here, you’re nobody.”

■ ■ ■

Elsa Morejón also knows a prisoner. She tells a foreign journalist the following:

In 1998, she and her husband, Oscar Elías Biscet González, had good jobs — she as a nurse, he as a doctor of internal medicine.

But something troubled him. He noticed hundreds of

“It’s an ideological racism. God created the world so we could have dignity. We are not doing an unjust cause.”

Elsa Morejón, wife of political prisoner Oscar Elías Biscet González

women were coming to his hospital for abortions as part of Cuba’s free health care system. Cuba has 56.6 abortions for every 100 live births, but health officials are now trying to promote contraceptives more, according to Christopher Baker’s book “Cuba.”

In April 1998, Biscet and a friend made public a clandestine abortion study they’d researched the previous year. In June 1998 they officially delivered it to the Cuban government and asked the government to end all abortions in Cuba, according to information from Biscet’s Web site.

He and his wife lost their jobs that same year. But Biscet became more involved in human rights, including organizing a march to protest the government’s political prisoners.

Then he became one himself in November 1999.

The now-41-year-old Biscet spent three years in prison and was re-sentenced April 10 to 25 years in prison on charges of “acts against the sovereignty and independence of the national territory.” Left behind and prohibited from working, 44-year-old Morejón had her fax machine, personal pictures and medicine taken away by police in March, according to Vicente Lago, a Miami supporter of the couple.

“It’s an ideological racism,” Morejón said. “God created the world so we could have dignity. We are not doing an unjust cause.”

■ ■ ■

Raúl Rivero gets up and moves to an open window several times. He needs to smoke.

“I am stressed, generally,” the 57-year-old says in January. According to Rivero, these are among the reasons why:

In 1976 he had just finished a four-year stint as the Moscow correspondent for a state-run Cuban news agency, Prensa Latina. But the other foreign

journalists he met in Russia made him think.

“I knew them and understand that I don’t be a real journalist,” Rivero said. “I be like a messenger between the government and the people.”

When he renounced his membership in a Cuban writers’ union and a Cuban journalists’ union in 1988 and left the state press for good, it was the end of a “long and painful process.”

“We haven’t press in Cuba. The press is dead. No, it’s not dead — it’s been murdered by the government,” he said. “It’s terrible people have to read these stacks of propaganda.”

Because Rivero didn’t have a job at first, he depended on his wife and relatives to survive. He sold his watch, his car, his clothes. In 1995, he founded his own news agency, CubaPress.

Rivero saw the independent journalist movement grow to about 100 journalists in about 20 news agencies who wrote for foreign Web sites, newspapers and magazines. They even published a magazine, “Of Cuba,” within the country in December 2002.

But Rivero was arrested March 20, the same day U.S. military action against Iraq began. The week saw a sweeping arrest of dissidents and independent journalists, who were charged with collaborating with U.S. diplomats to undermine the Cuban socialist state.

After a one-day trial in early April, Rivero received a 20-year prison sentence.

■ ■ ■

While Marlene, Morejón and Rivero wish they had what the Varela Project could bring them, the Cuban government said the project is unconstitutional and represents foreign meddling.

“How many signatures do Americans need to have universal health care?” asked the National Assembly’s Alarcón. “I know that

the U.S. Constitution cannot be amended that way.

“Give me the name of another country in the world that can change its constitution because a number of signatures asks for that.”

According to Article 137 of Cuba’s Constitution, the constitution can be modified only by a vote of at least two-thirds of the members of the National Assembly. In some cases, a majority of citizens must also approve the assembly’s proposal, according to the article.

The constitution cannot be changed by a petition drive, and therefore the Varela Project is not worth the National Assembly’s time, Alarcón said.

“I receive every day — every day — different kind of proposals, complaints, requests ... that normally I don’t feel necessary to publish,” he said.

However, dissidents and some U.S. experts disagree with Alarcón’s analysis.

Alarcón is wrong when he says the project is trying to change the Cuban Constitution, said dissident Roca, who recently spent five years in prison. The project is trying to change Cuba’s laws, not its constitution, Roca said.

Varela supporters say the project is constitutional because it conforms to many constitution articles, specifically Article 88: “The proposal of laws is the responsibility of ... the citizens. In this case it is an indispensable prerequisite that the proposal be made by at least 10,000 citizens who are eligible to vote.”

The Varela Project calls for a referendum. Theoretically, the normal procedure for a referendum in Cuba would be to present the petition to the National Assembly, said Hans de Salas-del Valle, a research associate at the University of Miami. If the assembly passes it with a majority vote, Cubans would get to vote on it. After the Cuban citizens vote, the assembly formally approves the voters’ decision.

Besides the constitutional complaints, Alarcón said he is tired of hearing about the Varela Project from Americans, who he said are using it as a tool to undermine Cuba.

Pedro Alvarez, director of a Cuban food and agricultural



SARAH FOX

Milagros, 15, helps her 8-year-old friend Leisy gather coconut husks after the younger girl’s mother cut the husks to get the coconuts. The girls were working just outside the Havana home of a Cuban government spy who had pretended to be a human rights activist since 1990.

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wedge between us, as if I had accidentally mixed up his name or called him at home at 11 p.m.

Later, I asked another Miami doctor a sensitive question about the same dissident.

The only reason you would need to know that is if you’re from the FBI or the Cuban intelligence. If you ask any more questions like that, this interview is going to end very soon.

On some reflection, I thought it entirely plausible that Cuban government spies might pose as journalists and call up Miamians who had ties to dissidents. It was probably wise of these two men to be wary of me. Spies were probably fairly common.

It wasn’t long before I found out just how common.

I had taken a taxi the afternoon of Jan. 9 to the bumpy, uphill streets of San Miguel de Padrón, a tumble-down neighborhood in Central Havana. Another UNL student and I had come to talk with a human rights activist.

Lily Collazo greeted us warmly. When we asked how

many political prisoners Cuba had and what her organization did to publicize their plight, she spoke more slowly so we’d be sure to understand.

Soon, a man in a blue baseball cap and blue shirt stepped through the open screen door with a tape recorder. Lily asked us to excuse her for a minute. Her friend Omar Rodríguez Saludes, an independent journalist, also had come to interview her.

Hot on the pursuit of news, Omar held up his battery-operated, metal tape recorder and asked her about a recent release of Cuban political prisoners. Lily’s husband came out to watch.

Omar was one of about 100 independent journalists working in Cuba. Forbidden to publish inside Cuba, they write for Web sites, newspapers and magazines in Florida, Spain and Latin America. They report on things the state-run media may be reluctant to publish, such as an ammonia leak from a factory or a teacher shortage. They send their stories by fax or dictate them by phone. Foreign employers wire money to their bank accounts — \$30 to \$75 a

month. In a country where the average salary is \$10 a month, they earn considerably more than the average Cuban.

But it doesn’t come without a price. The police frequently visit journalists, confiscating their cameras, typewriters and fax machines. They pick them up before news conferences with dissidents and drop them off miles away from the meeting, according to a New York Times profile of Omar in May 2002.

He was ecstatic when my classmate and I told him we’d read about him in the Times last fall.

Great! Someone read it and knows who Cuban independent journalists are!

Lily took a picture of us — two American students next to Saludes, grinning broadly under his baseball cap. We stood in front of a collage on Lily’s wall — pictures of the U.S. Capitol dome, the White House and pink fireworks exploding in Washington, D.C.

Omar left to write his story, and we finished the interview.

“The government doesn’t want to give up birdseed,” said

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SARAH FOX

Efrén Fernández, seen here in a friend's Havana home, said in January that police regularly watch Varela Project supporters' homes. Fernández was arrested in March and sentenced in April to 12 years in prison on charges of trying to undermine the socialist state.

Varela Project history

The project is named for Félix Varela, a 19th-century priest who opposed slavery and is considered the first Cuban to advocate a complete separation from Spain.

The project seeks:

- Freedom of speech
- Freedom of association
- Amnesty for political prisoners
- The right to form businesses
- Election reform

Varela founder Oswaldo Payá bases the project on various articles of Cuba's 1976 Constitution. One article says citizens may propose laws if the proposal is made by at least 10,000 Cubans eligible to vote. The project calls for the assembly to let Cubans vote on the proposed laws within one year. Thus far, the assembly has ignored the project and passed another referendum in June 2002 that makes Cuba an irrevocable socialist state.

import company, said in reference to the United States' travel ban that Cuba does not try to change the American government.

"We do not demand the Americans to have six parties or to elect a Democrat or a Republican," said Alvarez, director of the government-run Alimport. "We work with Republicans, and we respect them. We work with Democrats, and we respect them."

Father Varela fought for independence from foreign powers, and it is rude to Cubans to name a U.S.-supported project after him, Alarcón said. He also deplored the naming of U.S.-government-funded Radio Martí, which broadcasts to Cuba from Miami.

"It's really insulting to have first Jose Martí to be manipulated by the U.S. government and then Father Varela," he said. "By next year it will probably be (1800s general) Antonio Macéó."

Dissidents had other views.

Efrén Fernández, a member of the Christian Liberation Movement, the project's sponsor-

ing organization, said in January the project is truly Cuban, not American.

"It's the same demagoguery we've heard for years," said Fernández, who was arrested in March and sentenced in April to 12 years in prison on charges of undermining the socialist state. "Who are the thousands of people who've signed it? They're not foreigners. They're Cubans."

"Nobody says, 'If you don't sign this, you can't work. If you don't sign this, you can't go to the university.'"

■ ■ ■

While many Varela backers thought the project was a hope for a new Cuba, many Miami Cubans shied away because of its leader, Oswaldo Payá.

Mutual dislike of Payá may be one of the only issues on which some Miami Cubans agree with the Cuban government — although for very different reasons.

While Cuban government officials dislike Payá because he threatens their power, some Miami Cubans say Payá is a communist because he is trying to

reform the system.

Schroth & Associates, a Washington, D.C., and Miami polling firm, conducted a poll in February for The Miami Herald. The poll of 400 Cuban-Americans in Miami-Dade and Broward counties found:

■ 43 percent said the fact that the Varela Project is allowed to operate in Cuba is evidence that supporters are being manipulated by the Cuban government.

■ 23 percent said they opposed the project.

■ 19 percent had an unfavorable view of Oswaldo Payá.

One of the Herald's columnists, Max Castro, said many Miami Cubans see the revolution in black and white.

"There are people who denounce (the Varela Project) because they want to see ... four days open season on communists," he said. "Payá has a different approach. He talks about dialogue and compromise. The people who don't like that approach to politics would get on the radio and attack him."

Ninoska Pérez Castellón, a Miami Cuban American radio talk show host, said she thinks Payá is courageous and is entitled to his own opinion but works too much with the government.

"We don't necessarily support the Varela Project because we feel that it is within the socialist constitution," she said. "We support changes but not within the system."

Pérez Castellón also criticized Payá for comments reported by The Washington Times that Payá made about the U.S. government in December when he was in France to receive a human rights prize.

"To me, if you receive a prize for human rights and you travel to Europe to say that you are against the U.S. embargo and that it is immoral for Afghanistan prisoners to be held in Guantánamo, I don't think you're doing much harm to the regime," she said.

Raúl Janes, a 70-year-old Miami Cuban who was sitting with friends near domino tables in Little Havana, also said he does not support the Varela Project.

"It excludes the exiles in Miami (and) does not recognize

the sacrifice of political prisoners,” he said.

Jorge González, who used to be involved in the Christian Liberation Movement and now lives in Hialeah, Fla., said Payá is not a communist and in the past distrusted ex-communists.

“I think he had the following idea that a communist would always be a communist until death,” González said. “Payá was always anti-communist by conviction.”



But Miamians who question Payá’s relationship with the government shouldn’t fear. Many experts say Cubans will never get to vote on the Varela Project.

Antonio Jorge, an economics and international relations professor at Florida International University, said it seems like there has been no official response.

“I don’t think you can ask a totalitarian system to reform itself and to reform itself into its opposite,” said Jorge, who was once Castro’s chief economist. “It’s beyond me how people insist on the idea that Castro may reform the system.”

Jaime Suchlicki, director of the Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies at the University of Miami, said the project is constitutional. Alarcón says it isn’t because he doesn’t want to lose power, Suchlicki said.

“Alarcón’s position is that you can have a plebescite but not a plebescite asking for political change,” he said.

In fact, the government recently supported a project of its own.

In June 2002, the National Assembly passed constitutional amendments approved by about 8.2 million voters out of 10.9 million people who live in Cuba. The amendments say among other things that Cuba is an irrevocable socialist state and will never return to capitalism.

Luciano, a 40-year-old Havana man, remembers the June referendum.

“The whole Varela Project, they threw the kitchen sink at it,” he said. “Oh, it was turmoil. After that, we had to sign a paper — you agree that socialism is the best way. ... Pressure to sign was so subtle.”

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Lily, president of the Pro Human Rights Party. “They’re not elections — it’s the day of selections, because they select among the communists. We want a change, but it has to be a peaceful change.”

That night, I told my professor about our day.

Remember the reporter we read about in The New York Times article, Omar Rodriguez Saludes? We met him today!

My professor was happy.

So you were just there in that house, and he stepped in to interview the person you were interviewing? That’s amazing. Great you got him.

Had we come later, we wouldn’t have had him at all.

In early April, Lily and her husband sat in a Cuban courtroom and revealed they were spies from the Cuban State Security. The husband, Roberto Martínez, testified against 37-year-old Omar during a series of one-day trials for 75 dissidents and independent journalists. The 75 were charged with conspiring with the U.S. government to overthrow Cuba’s socialist government.

On April 7, Omar was sentenced to 27 years in prison, the second-longest of anyone.

When I read about the trial, it took a while to sink in. Lily and her husband were two of

12 infiltrators from the Cuban government who spoke at the trials.

Lily, who had worked in human rights as a spy since 1990, revealed herself as “Agent Tania.” Her husband said he was “Agent Ernesto.”

Sickened, I thought of how I’d probably told Lily the names of other dissidents and journalists I’d interviewed that week. I’d asked her if she’d known one of them when he was in prison. I wondered if Lily talked about us at the trials, if she had a picture of us with Omar and whether her husband used it in his testimony against him.

That same week, I spent two hours with another independent journalist. Manuel David Orrio, the head of two journalists’ organizations, had told me he was a former economist who had an “immense necessity to be able to express what I thought.” He told me neighbors shouted “worm” and “traitor of the homeland” and that his son was denied the right to play in a chess tournament.

In the end, he testified against a man he’d worked with for seven years, Raúl Rivero, whom I’d also interviewed.

Rivero, the former Moscow correspondent for a Cuban state-run news agency, founded an independent news agency, CubaPress, in 1995. He said he’d wanted to be able to speak

his mind.

“Our children have to wave every day with their hands high saying, ‘I want to be like Che Guevara,’” Rivero told me. “I don’t want them to be like Che Guevara. I want them to be who they want to be.”

At the trial, Orrio announced he was really “Agent Miguel” and had worked for the State Security since 1992. Rivero was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

I wondered what Lily and her husband thought that day as we sat in a home decorated with a framed U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights on the wall. Did they feel any pangs of conscience leading Omar on, doing “interviews” for him, giving him names and locations of political prisoners, even gaining his family’s trust so that when Omar was briefly arrested early one morning in 2000, his then-9-year-old son called Lily?

Or were they so convinced they were rooting out the enemies of socialism and those who allegedly would seek to undermine their country that Lily and her husband felt morally justified?

So whom can you trust?

As long as it’s “socialism or death” in Cuba, you may never know.



DAKARAI AARONS

Reporter Sarah Fox plays a hand-clapping game with Cuban children outside the home of a human rights activist. The activist announced during an April crackdown by the Castro government that she was a spy.



SARAH FOX

Yasmany, 15, front and his friend, Jorgito, 8, play marbles in their Havana neighborhood. They were playing a few feet from the home of a spy who posed as a human rights activist for 13 years.

Varela numbers

■ **11,020:** Number of signatures presented to the National Assembly in May 2002 in support of the Varela Project.

■ **30,000:** Number of signatures collected since former President Jimmy Carter spoke about the Varela Project during his May 2002 visit to Cuba.

■ **8.2 million:** Number of signatures in favor of constitutional amendments that declare Cuba's socialist state "irrevocable." The National Assembly approved the amendments in June 2002.

■ **10.9 million:** Number of people who live in Cuba.

Sources: The Miami Herald, Vladimiro Roca, 2002 constitutional amendments



The price to pay for an involvement with Varela

Things were going well for Varela Project supporters in early 2003, if not so well for Fidel Castro. Oswaldo Payá, leader of the project, traveled to France in December 2002 to receive the European Union's top human rights award, the Sakharov Prize. Under prodding from the EU, Castro allowed Payá to leave Cuba for the ceremony.

Before Payá returned to Cuba in February, he took a 48-day tour and met leaders including Pope John Paul, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell and Mexican President Vicente Fox.

The recognition may have kept him safe; many of his supporters are now in prison.

In March, Cuban state security agents started arresting dissidents and independent journalists the day after President George W. Bush gave Iraqi President Saddam Hussein a 48-hour ultimatum.

This ended several years of relative tolerance by the Cuban government toward its opposition movement. Courts tried 75 dissidents and independent journalists for two weeks in the beginning of April. The arrested received one-day trials and sentences of six to 28 years in prison. About half the dissidents were Varela Project supporters.

Government prosecutors said the dissidents were conspiring with U.S. diplomats to undermine Cuba. The U.S. government says the Cuban government is afraid of free speech.

The U.S. Interests Section in Havana, which is technically not an embassy since the United States does not have formal diplomatic relations with Cuba, helps Varela backers in several ways, or at least it did up until the March arrests.

It let Varela supporters use photocopy machines, Internet (which most Cubans are not allowed to have in their homes) and meeting rooms, according to a U.S. official who said it was policy for Interests Section employees not to use their

names in news stories.

"We give support," he said before the arrests happened in March. "They come up with their own strategies. They know what they're doing, and they're sharp enough not to let themselves be used as pawns in the whole battle."

But the section experienced several clashes with Castro in early March, before the arrests. Some came after the top U.S. diplomat in Cuba, James Cason, invited independent journalists to his home for a workshop on ethics and met with dissidents in a dissident's home. Castro called Cason's actions a "shameless and defiant provocation."

"Cuba can easily do without this office, an incubator for counter-revolutionaries and a command post for the most offensive, subversive actions against our country," Castro said in a story reported by Reuters.

Cason said his office in Cuba operates no differently than American embassies in other countries. He said earlier this year Cuban diplomats in Washington, D.C., have more freedom than he does in Havana, according to The Miami Herald and The Associated Press.

The Bush administration announced May 13 it would expel 14 Cuban diplomats in New York and Washington, D.C., for "inappropriate and unacceptable activities."

Cason said U.S. diplomats are not "subversive" or "provocative" and that the arrests show the Cuban government is trying to make people afraid, according to the AP and The Herald.

Wayne Smith, a former chief of the Interests Section, said in January he thought Interests Section support would hurt the Varela Project.

"I don't think it's helpful for the U.S. Interests Section to give the impression that they are behind the dissidents at all," he said. "It's the kiss of death."

— Sarah Fox



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star
Vladimiro Roca, who supports the Varela Project, was a political prisoner in Cuba for almost five years. His father was a founding member of the Cuban Communist Party. Seen here in his Havana home, he sold his car, the family's china, mirrors, silverware and paintings to pay the bills after he was fired from his job in 1992. He went to prison in 1997.

Dissident tries to overcome past

By Sarah Fox

Many Cubans remember summer 1953 as the beginning of Fidel Castro's Revolution.

Vladimiro Roca remembers it as the summer he, his siblings and cousins hit a recycling jackpot at the beach one day.

"There was one Sunday that we gathered 230 bottles," the now 60-year-old Roca said. "It was an incredibly productive day."

Roca's life changed forever that hot July afternoon half a century ago when his father drove to the beach, suddenly took his mother away from the family vacation and disappeared for 15 days. Five-and-a-half years later, it changed again when a new government became sympathetic to the family views, putting the Rocas in high positions.

It changed again when his father's government took the 54-year-old son and imprisoned him for almost five years. And it

changed again when the son embraced Catholicism, which he says helps him forgive the communist government that locked him up.

In some ways, this is a story of two men — both fathers, both sons. Both hoping for a better government for Cuba. Both knowing the fear of living under repressive governments at the opposite political ends. The father went into hiding for five-and-a-half years while the dictator's police visited his family, carrying away food and even bed sheets.

The father helped build a new government — one for the people and by the people. Un Gobierno that one day would send revolutionary police to the son's house to carry away books, computers and a video camera. That would lock up the son in a humid prison filled with common criminals, scorpions and snakes. A father and a son plagued by repression, buscando la libertad. Seeking liberty.

The father is dead now.

"The fact that I think differently from them doesn't mean I'm not Cuban, that we're not brothers born under the same sky."

Vladimiro Roca

The son has been out of prison for a year and is one of the few Cubans left in his Central Havana neighborhood, an area of spacious homes occupied mostly by foreigners. A single light bulb dimly illuminates the dining room.

Grappling with nationwide electricity shortages, Roca — like most Cubans — keeps the house dark at night. It's just him. His 53-year-old wife and 19-year-old son are gone tonight. His 34-year-old daughter is gone for longer. She left Cuba in 2001 and now lives in Florida with her husband and

their young daughters.

Bits of brightness from the bulb reveal religious artwork and photos of the granddaughters in Tampa, just one-and-a-half hours from SeaWorld and Universal Studios and Walt Disney World. Their grandfather's collection of mirrors and artwork are gone, sold to pay the bills after he was fired from his job as an economist in 1992.

He speaks slowly and deliberately and looks stern behind his white beard — formidable — an important political prisoner. He's the president of the Cuban Social Democratic Party. But he patiently answers questions, telling reporters exactly how many bottles he picked up on average that summer and what kind of bugs lived in his prison and how much weight he gained there.

It's in this home he seeks liberty from the past by forgiving his captors.

"I sincerely believe they are mixed up," he said in a copy of an interview obtained through

Vladimiro Roca

- **Dec. 21, 1942:** Born.
- **1953:** Cuban revolution begins, father goes into hiding.
- **Dec. 31, 1958:** Gen. Fulgencio Batista flees Cuba with his supporters.
- **Jan. 1, 1959:** Father comes out of hiding.
- **January 1959:** Fidel Castro and his army march triumphantly into Havana.
- **1961-63:** Trained as a pilot in the Soviet Air Force.
- **1963-71:** Serves in the Cuban Air Force.
- **1968:** Starts re-reading Karl Marx's writings.
- **1987:** Graduates from Raúl Roa Superior Institute of International Relations, licensed in international economic relations.
- **1990:** Declares publicly he disagrees with the government.
- **1992:** Fired from job as an economist.
- **June 17, 1997:** Releases a document with three other dissidents calling for democratic elections, economic liberalization and improvement of human rights.
- **July 16, 1997:** Arrested.
- **September 1998:** Charged with sedition.
- **March 1999:** Tried and convicted of sedition.
- **May 5, 2002:** Released from prison.
- **May 12, 2002:** Jimmy Carter arrives in Cuba. During his five-day visit, he gives Roca an autographed book, "Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President."

his political party. "The fact that I think differently from them doesn't mean I'm not Cuban, that we're not brothers born under the same sky."

■ ■ ■

Vladimiro Roca learned the meaning of "brothers" early in life, growing up in a Havana home of 14 people in four rooms.

"Relationships of common coexistence, of sharing whatever we had among all — even the beds," Roca said.

In July 1953 the family was taking a break from life in bustling Havana, filled with Americans who'd come to gamble and seek black-eyed señoritas amid the rising hotels and small skyscrapers. His father, then a member of Cuba's House of Representatives, was spending a few days in the province of Santiago de Cuba to celebrate his birthday. His mother, a housewife, was at the beach, along with his grandmother, three siblings, an aunt and four cousins — most of the roommates from the Havana home.

On July 26, having finished the birthday celebration, the father was driving to the beach when he heard some disturbing news on the radio: There had been a rebellion against Gen. Fulgencio Batista at a barracks in Santiago de Cuba.

He rushed to the beach and drove away with his wife — forbidding her to tell the children where they were going.

At the time, Roca said he wasn't too worried about his parents' absence.

"I was still very green," he said.

While the parents were gone, the 10 people left on vacation still had to pay weekly rent. So the children went fishing and gathered trash from the beach to recycle — usually 40 to 60 bottles a day on the weekends.

After 15 days, Roca's mother returned. His father wouldn't be back for five-and-a-half years.

"We asked her, 'Why have you been gone so long? Why did we have to stay in the beach house?'"

His mother told her children "there would be very hard years

for us," Roca said. "We understood that the political situation had turned bad."

On July 25, when his father passed in front of a fort in the city of Santiago de Cuba — the Moncada Barracks — someone else had plans for that fort.

A 26-year-old lawyer named Fidel Castro had attacked the barracks with 122 other men early July 26, hoping to spark a general uprising against Batista.

They lost profoundly. The 30-minute battle also put the lives of other opposition leaders in danger. The father, who was involved in the Cuban Communist Party, fled with Roca's mother to a clandestine house the party had prepared. Castro at this time was not a communist, and Roca's father

knew no plans for an attack, but Batista felt threatened by all opposition groups.

In the five-and-a-half years his father was in hiding, the Communist Party gave the family money for rent and

food. When Roca was 13 or 14, he got a job washing windows and cleaning hallways for spending money. He did visit his father in secret, but Batista's police kept a close eye on the family. Police detained his mother, siblings and cousins — even once carrying away bed sheets and food from the house.

"We started to feel the rigor of repression on our family," he said.

The rigor of repression lifted on New Year's Eve 1958, when Batista and his closest supporters fled by plane to the Dominican Republic. Roca's father left hiding. Soon, Castro and his guerrilla army marched triumphantly into Havana.

The Roca family was happy when Castro started working with the communists, then signed a pact with the Soviet Union in 1960. His father became highly esteemed in the new government, helping write

Cuba's 1976 Constitution. As the son of a founder of the Cuban Communist Party, Roca trained as a pilot in the Soviet Air Force, served in the Cuban Air Force and earned a degree in international economic relations.

But while serving in the Cuban Air Force from 1963 to 1971, he chastised himself for not being patriotic.

"I started to doubt the Cuban government, and not only Cuba, rather all the Eastern European governments," Roca said. "The written (constitution) wasn't like that in practice."

Karl Marx defined communism as a society of abundance, a place where the workforce has full liberation, Roca said. But in the 1960s, Cuba had food and clothing shortages worse than

today's, he said.

"In a place where there's such scarcity, it can't be communist," he said.

In 1968, convinced he was misinterpreting Marx's writings, the 25-year-old Roca started re-reading "to see

where I was mistaken so I could rectify myself."

Finally, he decided he didn't believe in his father's government or in Fidel, whom he sometimes encountered in the Roca home.

"(Our government) didn't agree with Marx or with socialism or with communism," said Roca, who said he was not necessarily opposed to communism. "It doesn't permit the economic liberation. It uses production to control people."

Roca worked in a state economic collaboration agency during the 1980s but eventually decided constructive criticism wouldn't change anything.

So in June 1990, during a meeting at his job, he announced he disagreed.

Roca told his co-workers he didn't support Cuba's government, which could be "Fidelism, fascism, totalitarianism — not socialism."

"Since I left prison, I don't have the peace I had when I was in prison. Life is more agitated."

Vladimiro Roca

He said he was the first child of a high revolutionary leader to become a dissident, and he doesn't know of any other cases. His father had died by 1990.

"It was a very, very scandal in Cuba at that time," said Jorge González, a co-worker of Roca's during the '80s. "Everybody was talking about it a lot. You know Vladimiro, he's Blas Roca's son and he declared himself a dissident."

Important Cubans received special privileges, such as a car and extra food and clothes, González said.

"I remember Vladimiro had gas, he had no problem with dressing," said González, who now lives in Hialeah, Fla., and is the manager of a Web maintenance and design company. "To be an important man's son is practically a good way to be safe, to have some privileges. Everybody realized that Vladimiro was getting rid of all those privileges and assuming the risks."

Another risk was losing friends. Some stayed, although they disagreed with Roca's political views, and some didn't.

"They stopped dealing with me and greeting me," Roca said. "It's a right that they have. I respect that, and I don't impose my presence on anyone."

His biological brothers were tolerant of his new beliefs, he said.

"Independent of how we think, we are family," he said.

Although his family still accepted him, Roca was fired in 1992 as a specialist for the economic collaboration committee. He eventually sold his car, the family's china, mirrors, silverware and paintings to pay the bills. His family received money from his wife's family and from U.S. sympathizers, said his daughter, Miladys Castro.

But the worst was yet to come.

On June 17, 1997, Roca and three other dissidents released a document called "The Homeland Belongs to All." It called for the government to hold democratic elections, liberalize the economy and improve human rights.



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Former political prisoner Vladimiro Roca talks to reporter Sarah Fox.

Article 62 of the 1976 Cuban Constitution

■ None of the freedoms which are recognized for citizens can be exercised contrary to what is established in the Constitution and the law, or contrary to the existence and objectives of the socialist State, or contrary to the decision of the Cuban people to build socialism and communism. Violations of this principle can be punished by law.

González said he was impressed but worried.

"When I read the document, I just told to myself the government will not forgive Vladimiro," said González, who by then had moved to Venezuela. "I thought there could be different choices, sending him to jail if he did, or even simulating an accident and killing him, or sending him to prison."

He was right.

Police came at 5 a.m. on July 16, 1997, almost a month to the day of the document's release.

"They arrived with large lights as if he were a murderer or a delinquent," said Miladys Castro, who like her brother, Arian Rodríguez, was at the Roca home at the time. "In the door they were yelling, 'Vladimiro, Vladimiro.'"

The police stayed until 5 p.m. They registered the family and carried away books, at least one computer and a video camera a foreign journalist had given Castro to film her young daughter's birthday, she said.

"I don't like to use the word 'hate' but they really annoyed me," Castro said. "It was a very disagreeable day."

The disagreeable day started

the Roca family on a course lasting almost five years. Roca and the other three dissidents were held for more than a year before they were formally charged with sedition in September 1998.

The prison in Cienfuegos Province, an eight- to 10-hour round-trip bus ride from Havana, was full of flies, bedbugs, cockroaches, scorpions and snakes, Roca said.

"And over all, a grand humidity."

Housed in the same prison as criminals, Roca worried about his health. So did his family. He entered prison with chronic lung problems and received medicine only when it was available. His wife, Magalys de Armas, could visit once a month for two to three hours.

But he misses prison.

"It was the peace, the tranquility that accompanied me," he said. "Since I left prison, I don't have the peace I had when I was in prison. Life is more agitated."

Sitting in prison, Roca had plenty of time to think. He converted to Catholicism the same year he was arrested and was baptized in prison. Roca said he previously was not religious but wasn't an atheist because he

couldn't prove for sure God did not exist.

"He told me that his prayers and that his conversion was very important for him to accept his reality without making him change his mind (about politics)," González said. "I admire him very much to have the courage of living in this without changing his mind."

Roca even gained 13 pounds because he couldn't exercise or go outside. He said his only major medical problem in prison was high blood pressure.

"God helps those who are needy," Roca said. "He doesn't deny them."

He left prison on May 5, 2002, a week before former President Jimmy Carter arrived on a highly publicized first visit to Cuba by a former or sitting U.S. president since 1928.

In the end, the son says he knows his father would still love him if he were alive.

"My relationship with my father was, from infancy, respectful, cordial and trustful," Roca said. "He instilled sufficient confidence in me to talk with him about anything that worried me or that I didn't understand."

Even the son's views on government.

Before the 1976 constitution — which his father helped write — was released, the son told his father he was worried about Article 62. The article states that citizens cannot exercise their freedoms contrary to socialism — and those who do can be punished.

"He said this article was necessary to avoid that enemies use these rights to eliminate socialism," Roca said. "I responded, 'OK, the only right we have is to help socialism although we may not agree with what it's doing.'"

When the constitution came up again in conversation, the son again told his father he didn't agree with it.

"He looked at me tranquilly, without reproach," Roca said.

"Our relationship continued the same, because he always respected my opinions, like I did his."



Dissent can mean jail

Castro jails dissidents, journalists

By Dakarai Aarons

As soon as Odilia “Lily” Collazo Valdés sees Omar Rodríguez Saludes appear in the doorway of her modest home on a January afternoon, she jumps up to greet him.

“Excuse me,” she says to the American journalists she must do a quick interview.

With tape recorder in hand, Rodríguez, one of Cuba’s most well-known independent journalists, asks Collazo, president of the Pro-Human Rights Party of Cuba, about her party’s announcement of the recent release of seven political prisoners. After the interview, Collazo tells Rodríguez how to treat his daughter’s stomach ache and offers him some coffee before he heads out the door to write his story.

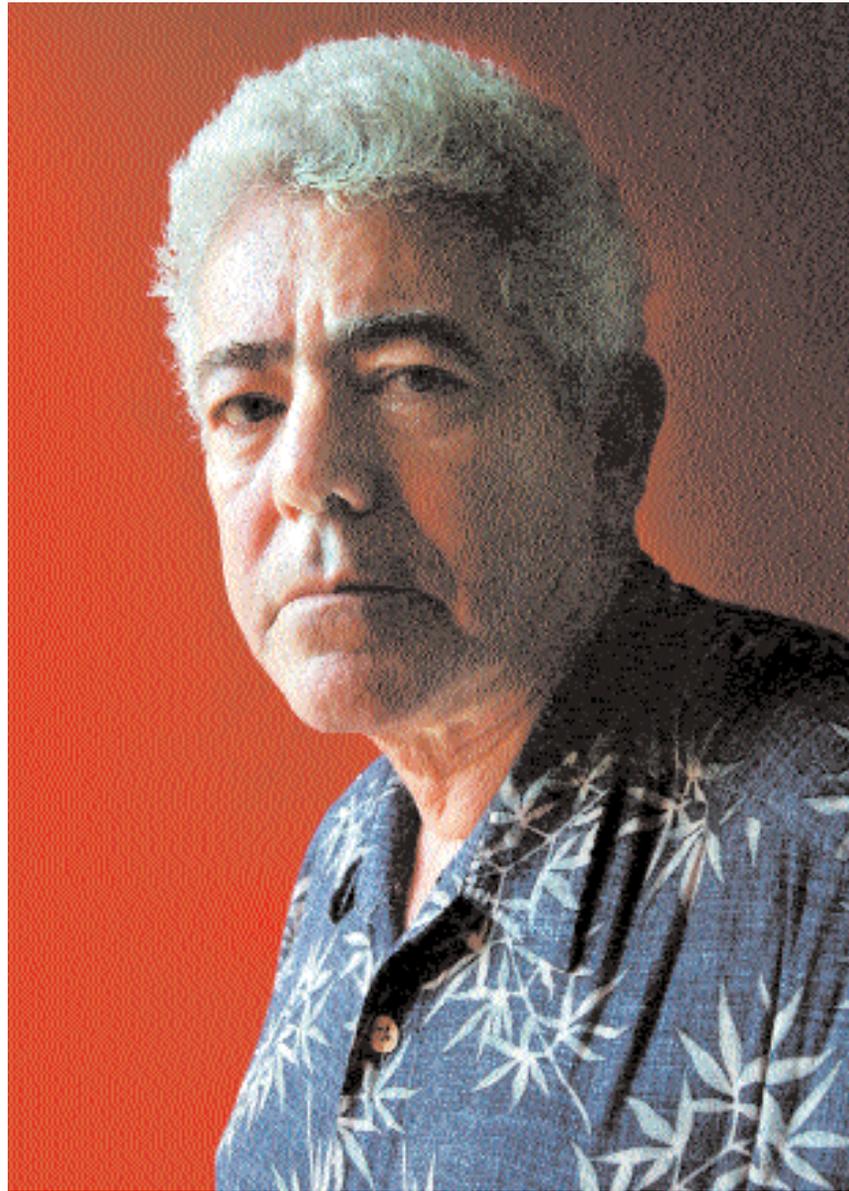
Fast forward three months. The Cuban government starts a massive crackdown on its dissident movement, raiding the homes of nearly 80 independent journalists, human rights activists and opposition leaders.

They are thrown in jail and after a series of trials, none of which lasts more than a day, 75 dissidents are sent to prison. The recipient of the second-longest sentence: Omar Rodríguez Saludes, 27 years.

Collazo was among a group of dissidents the government used as principal witnesses against the accused. At the end of her statement on the witness stand, this exchange took place:

Prosecutor: “Witness, Odilia Collazo Valdés, are you really a dissident? Are you only and exclusively the President of the Cuban Party for Human Rights?”

Collazo: “Well, I’m not really a



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Angel De Fana is a 63-year-old exile who now lives in Miami. He spent 20 years in a Cuban prison after being convicted of conspiracy against the state. De Fana was released in 1983.

dissident. Today, I have the privilege of telling you that I am one of the persons selected by the government of Cuba, by the Interior Ministry; precisely today, I can openly show everyone that I am an agent, Agent Tania.”

Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque showed her videotaped testimony during a press conference after the sentencing.

Roque said the testimony of Collazo and nearly a dozen other Cuban agents who had pretended to be dissidents for more than a decade provided a mere taste of

what the Cuban government knew. The U.S. Interests Section — particularly its leader, James Cason — should take note, he said.

“He should know that there are no stupid people here, and that while he got here only a short time ago, he has to consider the task he has undertaken; or we will have to continue organizing his meetings and attending the cocktail parties he throws,” the Cuban National Information Agency reported Roque as saying.

“Finally as it is apparent, our

legitimate decision to defend ourselves using our laws and our legal institutions, has generated reactions.”

And Omar Rodríguez Saludes now has become what he went to Collazo’s house to interview her about: a prisoner of conscience, a political prisoner.

He joins a long list of others in a similar predicament. In Cuba, human rights activists and dissident journalists are considered counterrevolutionaries.

Additionally, the Cuban government has accused them of being

mercenaries paid by the United States, charges the U.S. government has vehemently denied.

Laida Carro, a human rights activist with the Coalition of Cuban-American Women in Miami, said imprisoning those who disagree with Fidel Castro's government has long been the practice in Cuba.

"Fear has taken hold of a Cuban population trained to be loyal and subservient to a revolution that monopolizes their lives from birth," she said.

Carro has been documenting cases of human rights abuses against political prisoners for more than a decade.

Among the tactics used against them, she says, are the loss of jobs, hospitalization in psychiatric wards and swift, closed trials with stiff jail sentences, like the one that put Rodríguez behind bars.

The only crime they have committed, Carro said, is daring to "be free in a land where the rule of law does not exist.

"My country (Cuba) has been a pawn."

Activist Vladimiro Roca knows well the price of dissenting. He spent five years in a jail cell after being arrested along with three others for writing a book titled "The Homeland Belongs to All of Us."

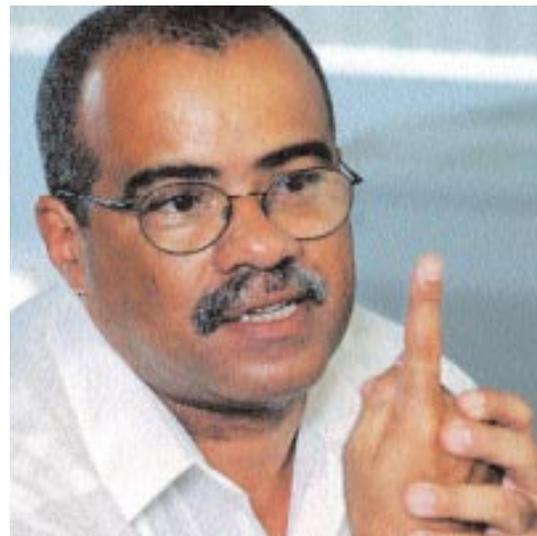
Roca was a member of the Internal Dissidents' Working Group for the Analysis of the Cuban Socio-Economic Situation when he was arrested in 1997.

The other three arrested were released in May 2000, and Roca was released in May 2002, just before former U.S. President Jimmy Carter's visit to Cuba. He remains chairman of the Social Democratic Political Party of Cuba, which he founded in 1996.

Jail in his country is not a place anyone should experience, he said during an interview in his Havana home.

"Cuban prisons are for animals, not for humans. The prisons in the United States are a four-star hotel in comparison."

Roca was in the provincial prison in the town of Ariza in Cienfuegos Province, nearly 125 miles from his home. He said his cell was 4.9 feet in width, 6.6 feet in length and 12.1 feet in height. There was no shower, and the majority of the room was occu-



PHOTOS BY KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star
Marcell Felipe (above left), Laida Carro (above center) and Lida Usategui are Cuban exiles in Miami. Left: Omar Lopez Montenegro lobbies for the freedom of political prisoners.

ried by the bed.

Angel De Fana also knows what it is like to be in prison. The 63-year-old exile now lives in Miami, but spent 20 years of his life on la Isla de Juventud — the Island of Youth — starting in 1962.

The reason for his arrest was simple, he said.

"Because I was not a communist and I tried to change the government in Cuba."

He fought with Fidel Castro's forces against former President Fulgencio Batista, but later became disenchanted with the revolution.

"We knew the revolution that we fought for was not the democratic one announced by Fidel Castro, but a communist one."

In a military trial with no defense, De Fana was convicted of conspiracy against the state.

When he went to prison, De Fana had been married for just 32 days. He later got divorced and has seen the woman he married just once since.

The conditions in prison were terrible, he said. De Fana said he was not allowed any visits from friends or family for the first three years. Food came through a hole in the door of the small cell. And inmates were not given uniforms — they wore only boxer shorts.

After being released from prison in 1983, De Fana was forced to leave Cuba by the government. He spent nine months in Venezuela before going to Miami.

De Fana is not alone in his

The crackdown

- Since March 1, Fidel Castro's government has raided the homes of nearly 80 independent journalists, human rights activists and opposition leaders.
- Three men who tried to hijack a ferry out of Cuba were executed.
- Seventy-five dissidents were sent to prison, some for more than 25 years.

experience, said Omar Lopez Montenegro of the Cuban American National foundation, a Miami-based lobbying organization that tracks the cases of Cuba's political prisoners and lobbies the Cuban government for their freedom.

In some cases, he said, people pay the ultimate price for speaking out. "I have never killed anyone who is against me, but Castro has killed people who are against him."

While the dissident movement is momentarily crippled by the recent crackdown, the people can rise again and fight, Lopez said.

"The greatest power lies inside the minds of the people held in bondage of fear."



Racism no light matter

Cubans disagree over its existence

By Dakarai Aarons

In a section of Habana Vieja, a 20-something man sits at the base of the Catedral de la Habana dressed in red and black. A black knitted hat with "Canada" emblazoned on it covers his fuzzy cornrows. Alan dresses his best to look the part of a tourist. But it doesn't fool the armed policemen who routinely pass by to make sure he isn't talking to tourists.

In the warm January sun, Alan, who asked that his last name not be used, laughs with his friends, who like him, sit outside the cathedral every day after work, looking for tourists with whom they can practice their English.

When the conversation turns to race, however, the black electrical technician stops laughing.

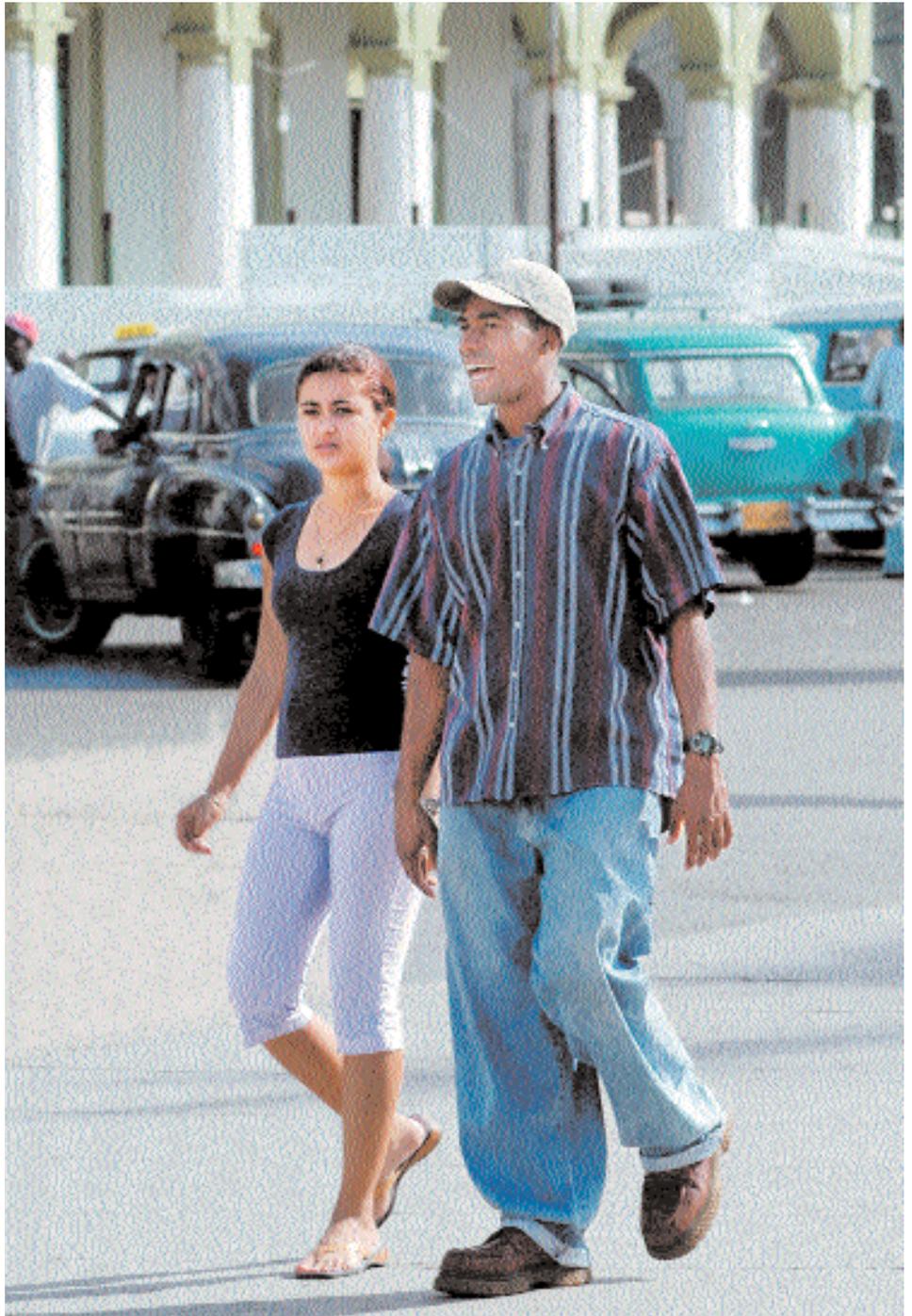
"We are not free," he says. "Listen to me when I tell you that."

When President Fidel Castro's revolutionary regime took over in 1959, the government changed laws to curb Jim Crow-style practices that had kept Cuba's black and mixed populations on the fringes of society. Consequently, said several Cuban officials and citizens, racism in Cuba is an issue of a distant past.

"We don't have problems with racism," said Pedro Alvarez, chairman and CEO of Alimport, Cuba's importing arm.

But others tell a different story. According to them, racism is alive and well in Cuba. They say being black in Cuban society puts them at a disadvantage. Those with darker skin are often singled out for mistreatment, for they are perceived to cause many of the country's problems. Specifically, they say citizens of color in Cuba:

- Encounter more discrimination in access to hotels, restaurants and jobs.
- Receive far fewer remittances from the Cuban exile community in the United States.
- Are less likely to be hired for higher-paying tourism jobs.
- Are more likely to be harassed, ticketed and jailed.
- Are far more likely to be victims of



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Cuba has what many say is one of the most integrated societies in the world.

Point

■ "Blacks and whites are the same here. We don't have that kind of problem."

Pedro Alvarez, CEO of Alimport, Cuba's import agency

Counterpoint

■ "It has gone from blacks being unable to go to exclusive clubs to not being able to enter any hotel in Cuba. Things are worse."

Omar Lopez Montenegro of CANF

racial profiling.

"We have practically apartheid in this country sometimes," said Rogelio Polanco Fuentes, director of the Communist Party-owned Juventud Rebelde newspaper.

Nevertheless, Cuba has what many consider one of the most integrated societies in the world. Interracial marriages are common and not the contentious issue they often are in the United States, according to some Cubans. Indeed, mixed couples mingle freely everywhere in Cuba, on the streets, on the beaches and in parks.

Despite racial equality on some levels, many Cuban citizens were reluctant to discuss the matter. Some government officials also didn't want to address it, or became uncomfortable when pressed.

So what is the truth about racism in Cuba? Like many complex issues involving Cuba, it depends on who is asked.

■ ■ ■

Said Ricardo Alarcón, president of the National Assembly of People's Power, Cuba's parliament: "Unfortunately, these things (disparities in the treatment of blacks and whites) are very common in Cuba."

It is a situation exacerbated, he said, by the introduction of capitalism into Cuba's socialist society by the country's burgeoning tourism industry.

But listen to Alimport CEO Alvarez: "Blacks and whites are the same here. We don't have that kind of problem."

Matilde Skeete Planes agreed. Born in Guantánamo, Planes, 60, who is black, moved to Havana in 1960 to study neurology.

Race, she said, has never been a major issue for her. Planes married a white man and her brother is a mulatto. Her daughter also married a white man.

"There is no difference," she said.

Most of the racism Planes said she had encountered was from European tourists, who make comments about the interracial couples they see on the streets. And since she became a Christian in 1992, Planes said race mattered even less to her.

"Knowing Jesus Christ, that relation is simpler," she said.



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

A man cuts pork for sale in an open market just outside Havana. Interracial couples are common in Cuba.

"Anyone can be invited to go with you anywhere. There are thousands of Cubans who stay in hotels."

Pedro Alvarez

"When you like me, I like you, OK."

Skin color is irrelevant. "It's the soul," she said. "See the spirit, see the soul."

But Fuentes, Juventud Rebelde's director, said racism is deeply rooted in Cuba's history and would not disappear overnight.

"It is not something you can solve by decree," he said.

Years of marginalization of blacks and mulattos had occurred before the revolution, and the National Assembly of People's Power has addressed the issue a number of times in recent years, Fuentes said.

As a newspaper, Juventud Rebelde has also addressed racism. The paper has encouraged sending social workers out into the more impoverished communities to address some of the inequities that exist, including racial profiling, Fuentes said.

■ ■ ■

Some Cubans say there is discrimination not only of race, but of nationality. Hotels are often a place reserved primarily for tourists. While the constitution guarantees Cubans the right to stay in any hotel and be served at any public establishment, several black Cubans said that right exists only on paper.

The reality, they say, is that not only can't Cubans stay in the hotels, but black Cubans don't need to even bother going in to sip a mojito. They won't be served.

"As a policy, we blacks never go to hotels," said Juan, a tourism employee who asked that his real name not be used.

"If I have dollars, they would take it, but not because I am tired and want to go to sleep. It's not the law, but it is unofficially legal."

Alan said even dollars don't guarantee service.

"(Hotel security) don't let you take your break in the hotel," he said. "If you don't have foreign friends, you can't sit down and be waited on."

But Alimport Chairman Alvarez strongly disagreed.

"The information that is aired about us outside of Cuba is completely distorted," he said. "Normally, anyone can go to any hotel here. There is no ban on

going. Anyone can be invited to go with you anywhere. There are thousands of Cubans who stay in hotels."

Not so, said Juan.

"You have two problems," he told a black American reporter. "You look Cuban and you are black, and you know what that means. If I were you, I would have been in big trouble."

■ ■ ■

The discrimination goes beyond the hotels into the streets, where black Cubans say they are constantly asked to show their national identification cards and are generally harassed by police.

Cops do stop white Cubans as well, Alan said, but less frequently than they stop black Cubans.

In one instance, Juan said, he heard a cop refer to a black suspect as "obvious color."

But Cuban officials say such racial profiling is not the norm.

Roberto de Armas, of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said Cuban police are not trained to detain individuals based on race.

"Black people are not being detained on the streets of Havana or any other city just for being black," he said. "If there is someone being detained by police, it is for a reason. It's not because of a policy."

Asked if Cuban police were trained to think of people with darker skin as more prone to be



JOE DUGGAN/Lincoln Journal Star

Tourists sightsee and Cubans work in a square in front of the Catedral de la Habana in the old section of Havana.

problematic, he said: "Usually. And that's something that happens everywhere.

"Usually, there are certain sectors of the population involved in certain practices."

Drug trafficking, illegal trade and prostitution are among the practices that police want to curb, but black people aren't necessarily the ones committing the crimes, de Armas said.

"Particular police can be racially biased. That doesn't exist in the police as a body. They have been taught it is something they have to avoid."

■ ■ ■

Meanwhile, Alan would love to get a job in the tourism industry, but for now is relegated to his low-paying job as an electrical technician. The problem, he said, is not his qualifications — he is university educated — but his skin color.

"The best jobs are in all tourist areas: hotels, restaurants, anywhere that use dollar," he said. "All the good jobs in Cuba go to white people."

White Cubans, Juan said, have better chances at getting jobs than black or mulatto Cubans because they are viewed more positively by society.

"We are thought to be problem bearers — drugs, prostitution, thievery, harassing tourists."

Ethnic groups

According to the 2002 CIA World Fact Book, Cuban ethnic groups are:

- 51 percent: Mulatto
- 37 percent: White
- 11 percent: Black
- 1 percent: Chinese

According to Cuba's Center for Anthropology:

- 80 percent of those in the tourism industry are white
- 5 percent of those in the tourism industry are black

Antonio Díaz, of the Ministry of Tourism, strongly disagreed.

In terms of chances for blacks and whites getting tourism jobs, he said: "There is no difference in Cuba."

Anyone with the right qualifications could get a job in tourism, Díaz said, though he wouldn't specify what those qualifications were.

Meanwhile, according to National Assembly President Alarcón, the U.S. government's embargo on Cuba has serious implications on the socioeconomic equity among races.

"For example, Cuban blacks are not in Miami. That means

that those who send remittances to Cubans are white Cuban Americans."

Remittances are received by 30 percent to 40 percent of whites, compared to 5 percent to 10 percent of blacks, according to an article by Cuban independent journalist Claudia Márquez Linares.

In that same article, according to Cuba's Center for Anthropology, 80 percent of those in the tourism industry are white and 5 percent are black.

Overall, the Cuban population is 51 percent mulatto (of black and white heritage), 37 percent white, 11 percent black and 1 percent Chinese, according to the 2002 CIA World Fact Book.

And those statistics are indicative of the racial division that exists, said Omar Lopez Montenegro of the Miami-based Cuban American National Foundation.

"Black people have a worse condition in Cuba," he said. "Castro says 'You are nothing without me.'"

Castro — "the white superhero" — defends the poor blacks in what Lopez calls a "Tarzan syndrome."

"If you are black and against the regime, you have double repression," he said. "Black people are told they are nothing and not able to progress by themselves so

"Black people are told they are nothing and not able to progress by themselves so they must give in to the regime."

Omar Lopez Montenegro.
Cuban American National Federation

they must give in to the regime."

Things were better for Cuban blacks under the leadership of President Fulgencio Batista because they had the opportunity to move up in society, Lopez said.

But according to Cuba historian Christopher Baker, there were places even Batista was not allowed, simply because he was mulatto.

The Havana Yacht Club, for example, turned out the lights when Batista approached to let the Cuban president know he was not welcome, Baker said.

However, Lopez said, there is a difference between Batista not being able to enter an exclusive club and Cuban blacks today not being able to go to hotels.

"Even all the people who were white weren't allowed in," he said. "It has gone from blacks being unable to go to exclusive clubs to not being able to enter any hotel in Cuba. Things are worse."

Meanwhile, the chance to move ahead in society exists now more than ever before, said Juventud Rebelde Director Fuentes.

Despite the racial issues, Fuentes said, he is optimistic about the nation's future.

Cuba was the second to last country in Latin America to free its slaves, which it did in 1881. Only Brazil had slavery longer, and its effects have yet to leave Cuba, he said.

"(The National Assembly) are the ones pushing free and equal access," Fuentes said. "This is a question that comes from centuries ago, and a revolution is a process of years."

"We are not a perfect society, but we have the willingness to erase these problems."





KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

University of Nebraska-Lincoln student Dakarai Aarons asks a question of National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcón during a meeting in Havana.

One student's experience

By Dakarai Aarons

"You look Cuban."

This was a phrase I was to hear many times during the week I spent in Havana. But the stereotyping started even before then, when security agents at Miami International Airport gave me instructions in Spanish without asking if I spoke Spanish. When I entered the plane, the flight attendant directed me to my seat in Spanish. Meanwhile, my white companions were nearly always addressed in English.

None of these people could have known that I have been studying Spanish for eight years and am semi-fluent in the language. So why would they

address me in a language that is not my native tongue?

What they did know was I look like the 62 percent of Cuba's population that is either black or mulatto — of black and white heritage.

Shortly after arriving in Havana that Saturday afternoon, a part of our delegation went to a restaurant near the Malecón to eat lunch. The waiter approached our table and discovered members of the group speaking English. So he immediately came to me and started speaking Spanish.

Having people speak only Spanish to me would be the least of my experiences as the result of looking like a black Cuban.

One morning, I had just finished checking my e-mail in the

"Each evening, I would enter the elevator lobby to go to my room, and each evening, the hotel security guard would stop me and demand to see proof that I was a guest in the hotel."

Dakarai Aarons

business center of the Habana Libre Hotel and walked across the second floor hall to the elevators in the hotel lobby. The guard grumbled something in Spanish in my direction at first

and then greeted me with a gruff "Excuse me" as I walked past him and pressed the button to return to my room.

The guard told me he couldn't speak English, so I informed him that I spoke Spanish. Now communicating effectively, he told me he needed to see my identification. I was puzzled by this but showed him my electronic room key and said I was a guest at the hotel.

The guard informed me it was not enough, so I asked him what he specifically wanted to see. He did not give a clear answer, so I showed him my Maryland driver's license.

Flustered, he waved me on and I went about my way. I had confused him. The guard assumed I was Cuban, and as I was to learn later, the unwritten

rule in Cuba is that if you are Cuban, you do not go to the good hotels — especially if you are black.

I shrugged off this incident, but it was not to be the last encounter I had during my stay. It was just the beginning.

By Tuesday, the procedure had become familiar — and maddening. Each evening, I would enter the elevator lobby to go to my room, and each evening, hotel security would stop me and demand to see proof that I was a guest in the hotel. I soon learned to carry around the “identification card” we were given with our room assignments. It was a paper card with my name and room number on it — proof I was indeed a guest of the Habana Libre. I am sure most of my colleagues have but a vague recollection of the identification cards, as they were never asked for them.

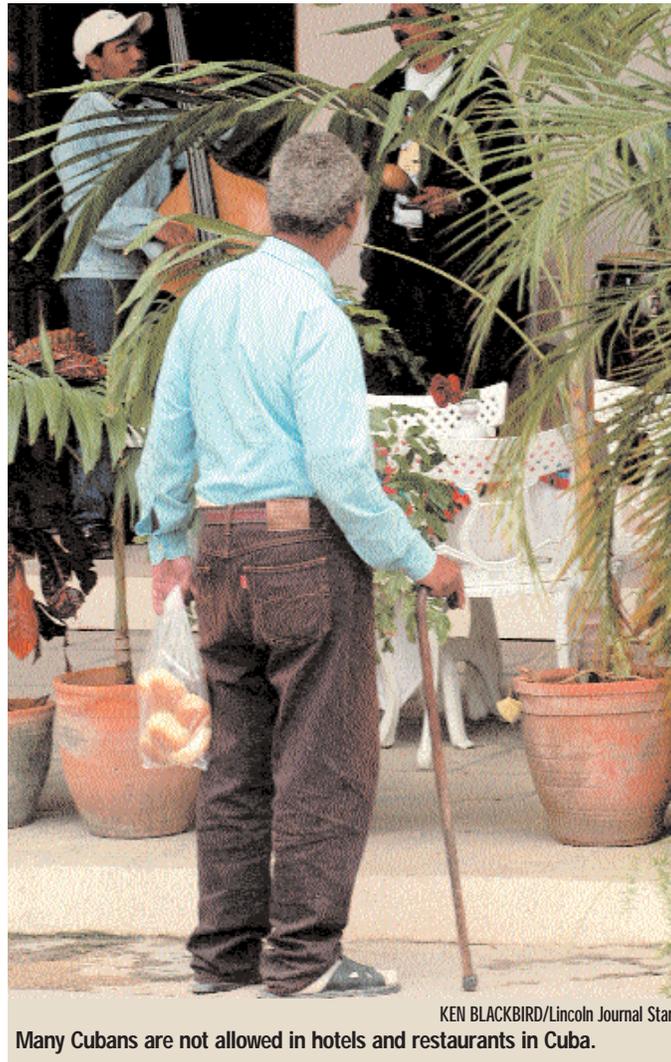
That morning, our group met with Pedro Alvarez, who is in charge of importing for Cuba. I recounted my experiences in the hotel to him and asked what Cuba would do to make sure such treatment would not be the norm if the United States lifted its travel ban on Cuba. Would other black Americans have to face the same treatment?

“I don’t know the reason you have been asked for your ID,” he said. “As a general rule, all of the Americans here are well-treated.”

Such treatment, Alvarez said, was unheard of, and certainly not due to racism. In fact, he found my experience to be unbelievable.

“I think some of these questions are moving into the science fiction area,” Alvarez said. “We don’t have problems with racism here. Blacks and whites are the same here. We don’t have that kind of problem.”

In the hotel later that evening, I underwent the usual security interrogation — but this time with a new feature. One of the security guards rode the elevator for the sole purpose of seeing that I disembarked on the 18th floor, then he went back downstairs.



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Many Cubans are not allowed in hotels and restaurants in Cuba.

The next day, we interviewed Ricardo Alarcón, president of the National Assembly of People’s Power, Cuba’s parliament. His answer was different.

Cuba has an issue with racism, he said, but it is made worse by capitalism and economic disparities between blacks and whites.

That evening, hotel security stopped me twice within the space of three hours. Except the second time, I did something they did not expect. I was being stopped even though the security guard — who was black — had conferred with the white officer who had stopped me just hours earlier. When he asked me if I was a guest, I whipped out my card and proceeded to tell him that I had already been stopped earlier by the other guard he had just spoken with

and that there was no reason to stop me. The guard was surprised by my reaction and began apologizing profusely.

This time was also notable because five of my colleagues were with me when I was stopped. They had listened sympathetically throughout the week as I had relayed my encounters with security. But this time, their reaction was not one of mere sympathy. They were angry and indignant about the way I was being treated. It had become real in their minds. One of my colleagues asked me what it felt like to be the victim of racial profiling. I told him that I would never wish anyone to endure being humiliated, devalued and criminalized for no other reason than the color of his skin.

Later that evening, as I

passed through the lobby once more, the guard who had originally stopped me immediately held up his hands as if preparing to defend himself from a physical attack and said, “No problema.” He then smiled and extended his hand. I accepted his handshake and bade him a good night before continuing.

On another day, I was verbally assaulted and even grabbed by security officials while in a club. That evening, I wrote: “I feel like a marked man, a criminal, and I have committed no crime other than being black and male.”

It was the meeting at the Juventud Rebelde newspaper that made clear for me just how much of an issue racism was in Cuban society. I once again recounted my experiences, this time for Roberto de Armas of Cuba’s Foreign Ministry and Rogelio Polanco Fuentes, the newspaper’s executive director.

During this conversation, de Armas said the words I had heard so many times that week. “You don’t look American. You look Cuban.”

He continued, implying that people who looked like me were often known to be male prostitutes, drug traffickers and thieves in Cuban society, which is why I was being stopped repeatedly.

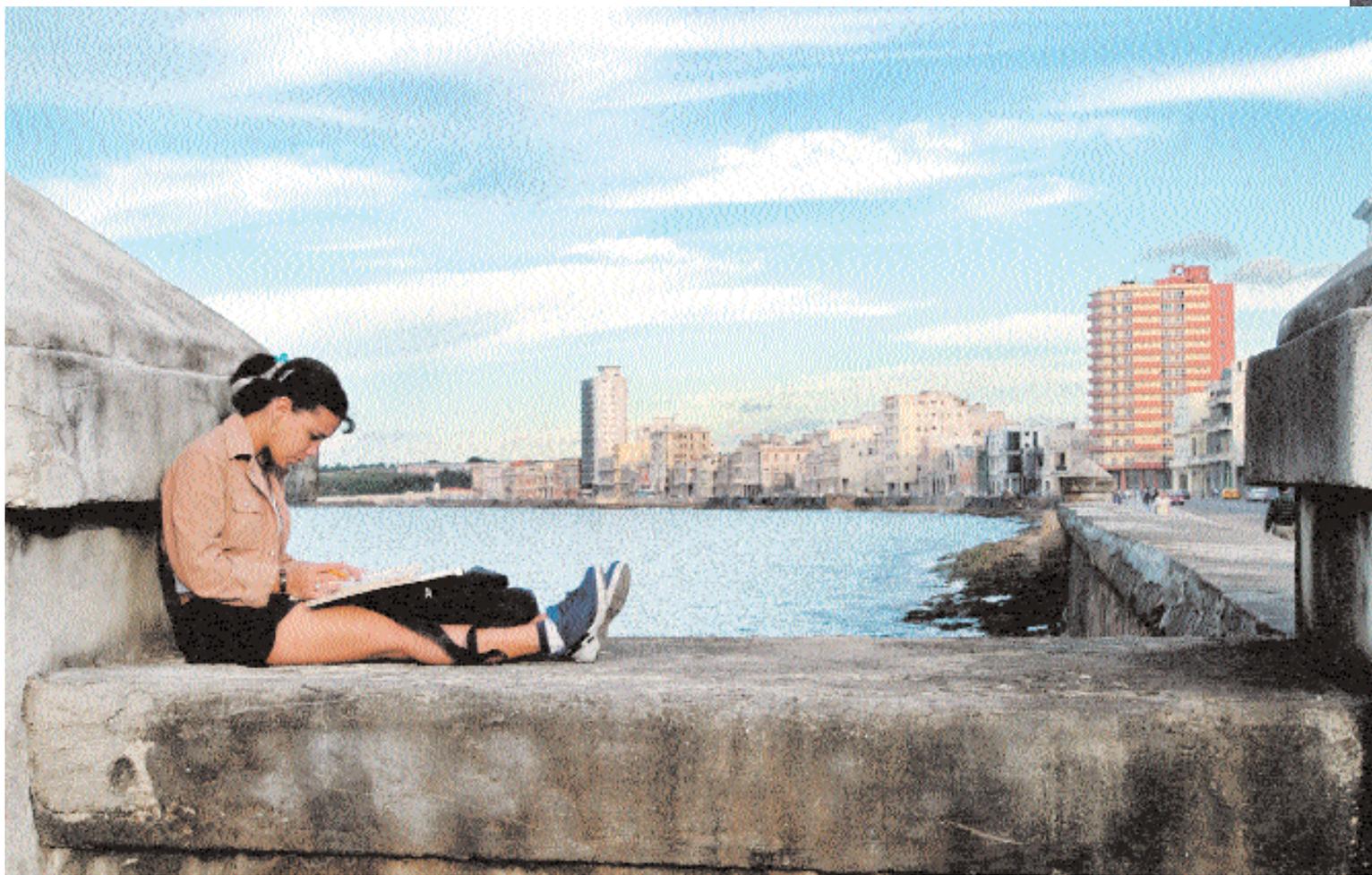
“Black people are not being stopped in this country just for being black,” he later said. “It is something that is simply non-existent.”

This is not true, said one black Cuban I interviewed. There is much he loves about Cuba, but his belief that racism is a non-issue is something that bothers him. “I love my country, and I love my revolution, and I can tell you this because you understand,” he said. “Why are we doing this?”

His question will remain unanswered until everyone can agree on the answer to another question: “Does racism exist in Cuba?”

And the day that occurs seems far away.





KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Women comprise a growing slice of the Cuban workforce, but Cuba remains a machismo society.

Double shifts

Women struggle to balance careers, families

By Melissa Lee

She couldn't leave him in day care for 12-hour stretches. Her maternal instinct said so.

And she couldn't leave a gripping, late-night story. Her journalistic instinct said so.

Margarita Barrio Sánchez could think of only one way out.

"Many times, my son became a special correspondent," the 42-year-old reporter says, laughing.

Indeed, it seems Barrio Sánchez had few options 20 years ago. She was a young, university-educated journalist with lots of spunk and potential, one willing

to work evenings and weekends on a moment's notice. But she was also a young wife and mother, one whose husband expected her to raise the couple's infant son, maintain their small Havana apartment and have dinner ready when he arrived home — a tough juggling act.

"This was my goal: to be the best mother and the best journalist," she says during a brief break from her shift at Granma, the Cuban government-owned daily. "This required much dedication."

Yet her situation grows less uncommon each year. In both the United States and Cuba,

working mothers have long struggled to balance their professional and domestic duties — a dilemma women say men don't always understand. Still, numerous interviews and research show a post-revolutionary Cuba has become one of the world's leaders in gender equity, though women in some cases remain stymied by a male-dominated society.

Specific gender issues in Cuba today reveal a number of trends. They include:

- Cuba has reached salary equity, a right guaranteed by the nation's constitution.

- Women comprise a grow-

What is a machismo society?

- One like Cuba, in which men are the dominant breadwinners and women are expected to maintain the family and home, as well as their careers.

What did the revolution do for Cuban women?

- Gave them better opportunities in education and employment. Now, many Cubans consider men and women to be on equal footing in terms of opportunity.



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Jackie works as a taxi driver in Havana during the tourist season.

ing slice of the Cuban workforce, a trend experts and citizens attribute to more educational opportunities for young women and to girls' higher expectations.

■ Men, however, still occupy most high-ranking positions, which both genders say is partially because many women don't want to abandon families for demanding top jobs.

■ Cuba remains a machismo society — one where the stereotypical male is the family breadwinner and the stereotypical female is a dutiful wife and mother.

Although many agree women have made considerable strides since Fidel Castro took over more than 44 years ago, women also will tell you there's plenty of work left.

"Is Cuba a good place to live? I think so," Barrio Sánchez says. "But I think we should get a new mentality. We have to change minds.

"Women are the ones who have to fight."

■ ■ ■

In Cuba, numbers help tell the story of a woman's experience.

Each, as mandated by the Cuban Constitution, is paid the same as her male counterpart. That's unlike the current wage gap in America, where a woman now makes about 77 cents for each dollar a man earns.

Some say that progress can be linked directly to Castro, who

arguably made gender equality — at least in terms of numbers — an early priority.

"Thank goodness for Fidel, or I would not be in this position I am in today," says Mariela Fernández Moreno, 23, a Havana security officer.

Fernández Moreno is neither a wife nor mother, but she plans on holding both titles. Her job won't be in trouble, she says, because her office established a special day care center specifically for working mothers. The older children there are given "mini-lessons" each day in various subjects, so Fernández Moreno isn't worried they will be neglected.

And she thanks Castro for the fact that she pulls in about 350 pesos a month (around \$14) — the same as the male guard standing opposite her. Gender, Fernández Moreno says, plays no part in her performance evaluations.

"The government doesn't pay because of sex. It's the work you do," adds Karen Brito, 20, a student at the University of Havana. Brito wants to become a journalist, which she knows will earn her a starting wage of 400 pesos a month — not quite \$20.

So it's not about the money. Brito has a generous uncle in Holland. That's why she's wearing \$48 Steve Maddens and \$38 Levi's. It's about having a successful career, doing something she loves.

"I have to be a journalist,"

she says.

But with a college degree — and maybe a marriage proposal — on the way, Brito knows she must start thinking about how the rest of her life is going to play out.

"He doesn't know what I want," she says of her 22-year-old boyfriend, with whom she has made wedding plans. "He thinks women should cook and clean.

"We have fights, because I don't agree with him, of course."

■ ■ ■

Brito and other female college students aren't the first to hope to enter the workforce. They were preceded by a post-revolutionary generation that's nearly balanced out the numbers: Now, 45 percent of the Cuban labor force is female — up from 12 percent in 1950 — according to Federation of Cuban Women data. Cuban women do almost everything: They sew stitches. They teach English to elementary-aged children. They represent Cuba as foreign ambassadors. They carry the Cuban flag at the Olympic Games.

Much of this is because an increasing number of women are looking to earn a college degree, experts and citizens say.

"Women are starting to learn. The Cuban woman today is not the Cuban woman of 40 years ago," says Frank Hernandez, a translator for the government. "Now a Cuban woman may become a prostitute, but a prosti-

tute who has been through 12 grades, maybe university."

But not all the numbers are equal.

According to the federation, women currently hold just over one-quarter of all government positions. That's a jump from 6 percent before Castro took the reins, federation officials said.

Still, consider the Cuban Parliament, the island's supreme governing body. Of 609 members, just 28 are female — about 4.5 percent.

Federation members hope that number will keep growing.

"We don't have to replace men. We want to join them," says Ana Milagros Martínez, the FCW's official for foreign relations. "It's our goal to have more women in decision-making positions."

That goal has yet to be reached. A sampling of institutions around Havana shows women are well-represented in the staff, but when it comes to higher-ups, they're significantly more sparse. For example, the employees at Juventud Rebelde, a government-owned youth newspaper, are 60 percent male, 40 percent female, says Director Rogelio Polanco Fuentes.

But of the paper's editors, just one is a woman.

"Yes, yes, this is a problem," Fuentes says. "We have made a lot of efforts. But still we have to make a lot of discussion. This is a problem of society in general."

And at the Frank País Orthopedic Center, Vice Director Dr. Marilyn Claro estimates 70 percent of her 1,500-member staff is female. Yet of the 200 doctors (most of the rest are nurses and lab technicians), she says very few are women.

That's partly because men have a more acute sense of their "social awareness," Claro says, and work harder to get to the most "important" positions. Women, on the other hand, are content with nursing duties because they tend to be more caring. Also, doctors' hours are hectic; women prefer to have stability so they can care for their children, she says.

But she adds: "We have that link, that inclination, to study medicine."

Still, according to the Federation of Cuban Women, that statistic doesn't necessarily ring true across the entire island. The federation's data say 70 percent of Cuba's doctors and teachers, and 66 percent of technicians, are women.

Says Milagros Martínez: "I think we have gained a lot. Women can study any career in Cuba."

■ ■ ■

Enter the federation.

Founded in 1960, it's now the largest women's group in Cuba, claiming 85 percent of females aged 14 and over. That's 3 million women dedicated to raising awareness of gender issues, says the 45-year-old Milagros Martínez, who herself has been a member since she became eligible.

The group's work begins at the grassroots level, says Milagros Martínez, sitting in the comfortable Havana headquarters. Its walls are coated in soft pink and adorned with real rosebuds, mirrors and Che Guevara posters. Outside, the rose garden is perfectly symmetrical, with a large statue of a nude woman sitting in its center. Women quietly enter and leave as Milagros Martínez sips coffee and discusses the federation.

"Farmers, actresses, sports-women — they can all join," Milagros Martínez says. She displays the group's two monthly publications, "Mujeres" ("Women") and "Muchachas"

("Girls"). Because of a strict budget, the magazines are not the quality they could be, she says, but they're well-read and inspiring to women all over Cuba.

The federation's work is in some areas measurable. For example, before 1992, women could leave their jobs with full pay for only three months after they gave birth. But after heavy lobbying from federation representatives, the government extended maternity leave to one year.

Also following the group's efforts, women now receive free breast and cervical cancer tests every three years. And birth con-

trol is free and available to all women. That shows a commitment to women's health from the government, Milagros Martínez says.

"Those were nice. They were nice times," she says of the victories. "We felt like national machinery those days."

■ ■ ■

And what of Cuban men?

Many still have a firm grasp on their machismo beliefs, women say. But many are also becoming "proud of their outstanding wives," Milagros Martínez says.

"The old mindset still exists.



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Cuban women are paid the same as their male counterparts, an improvement many attribute to Fidel Castro.



But the mind is changing."

Some Cuban men, however, remain confused when asked if men and women stand on equal footing.

Says one: "Do you like men? Well, that is the answer."

Another: "Men and women are together."

Another: "Ah ... Sí."

Orlando Díaz, a 36-year-old Havana taxi driver, gestures casually down the street to a rigid-looking female police officer. "You see," he says, flicking a cigarette to the ground, "women and men, we work the same job. Police, taxi drive, it is all the same."

Presented the same question, a woman offers an exaggerated eye roll and exclaims: "No time. I am off to lunch. I would need to write you long, long essay!"

For her part, Barrios Sánchez thinks she's finally found a solution.

She's old, she insists, and she thinks she may have weaned her husband and son, now 20, from their machismo beliefs.

"They take care of me," she says with a smile. "My son cooks now. My husband helps, too."

"Well ... they are trying to."



An international icon

By Cara Pesek

“... Traigo en el corazón, las doctrinas del maestro ...”

“I bring in the heart, the doctrines of the teacher.”

The words hang above Fidel Castro’s head on a billboard in Havana. Behind him is the image of another man, one much less known in the United States but as well-known as Fidel in Cuba.

The face. Thin and angular, with piercing eyes, a high forehead. And the mustache, the trademark mustache, its ends waxed into points, as distinctive and recognizable as Castro’s beard.

Peering from billboards, carved into granite, painted onto walls, Jose Martí keeps an eye on Cuba. On this billboard, he keeps an eye on Fidel.

In Cuba, Martí is a hero, an icon. During his lifetime, he was a poet, journalist and a nationalist, who fought — mostly with words — for Cuba’s independence from Spain. He died in Cuba in a battle against Spanish soldiers in 1895 at the age of 42.

“He was ahead of his time,” says Daniel Salas González, a 19-year-old journalism student at the University of Havana who views Martí as a role model. González wants to become a journalist, he says, because of the power the press has to improve society.

“Our profession is not exactly what we can change, but you can move the conscience of the people to bring about change.”

That, González says, is what Martí’s words continue to do today.



Across a 90-mile sliver of sea, the Cuban exile community in Miami also claims Martí as a hero. Its members, too, would like to see Cuba free. They, however, are after a different sort of freedom — freedom from Fidel.



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

This bust portrays Jose Martí, a Cuban poet, journalist and nationalist.

Like Martí, they would like to see a democratic Cuba. And Martí’s face, while not as visible as in Cuba, is still prominent in Miami — painted on walls and hanging in frames in the buildings that house organizations advocating these two goals.

Leaders of Miami’s exile community and those of socialist Cuba rarely see eye to eye on anything regarding the welfare of the long, slender island of 11 million people. But Martí, a man who has been dead for more than 100 years and who spent most of his life away from

Cuba, is viewed as a hero, role model and accomplished writer on both sides of the water.

That is significant, says Marilu Del Toro, communications director for the Directorio Democratico Cubano, a Miami-based organization focused on bringing democracy to Cuba.

“He’s a big pride for the Cuban nation in general,” she said. “In Martí, there’s a poet, a thinker, a journalist ... He was like a Renaissance man.”

Martí was born in Havana in a simple yellow house with a terra cotta tile roof in 1853.

Jose Martí

He is perhaps Cuba’s best-known poet and second-best-known orator after Fidel Castro. He spent much of his life fighting — with words — for Cuba’s independence.

Born in Havana in 1853, he began his career as an activist early on, which first got him in trouble in 1870 when he was just 17. He was found guilty of writing a letter considered unpatriotic, and the following year he was deported to Spain. He spent much of the remainder of his life in exile, mostly in New York City.

During the years he spent in exile, he wrote many poems and letters advocating an independent, democratic Cuba. He was killed fighting for these things in a battle with Spanish soldiers in 1895.

Although his parents were middle class, his talent as a writer and thinker allowed him to run with an intellectual, influential crowd.

He became political during the Ten Years War of 1868-1878. In 1870, he and a friend wrote a letter criticizing another friend for attending a pro-Spanish rally. The Spanish government deemed the letter unpatriotic and questioned each about his part in it. Martí was so emphatic that the letter had been his doing that he was sentenced to six years hard labor, while his friend received a more lenient sentence.

After six months in the labor camp, his health failing, some of Martí’s influential friends convinced the government to have him deported. In 1871, when

he was 18, Martí left for Spain. He would spend most of the rest of his life away from Cuba, trying — mostly in vain — to get back in. After attending college in Spain and living briefly in Mexico, Martí ended up in the United States where he split his time between New York and Key West, which then was a center of Cuban exile activity. From these cities, he wrote about his loathing of the corruption within the Spanish leadership in Cuba. He praised democracy. He expressed his fears of imperialism and his distrust of the United States, which, he thought, was trying to gain control of Cuba by manipulating the sugar market. And he wrote about what he wanted Cuba to be.

“... not ... the unjust predomination of one class of citizens over the rest, but the open and sincere equilibrium of all the real forces of the country, and of the free thought and desire of all citizens.”

Martí didn't stay away from Cuba entirely. He returned in 1877, using a falsified passport. He was deported once again, however, after he was found to be conspiring against Spanish officials.

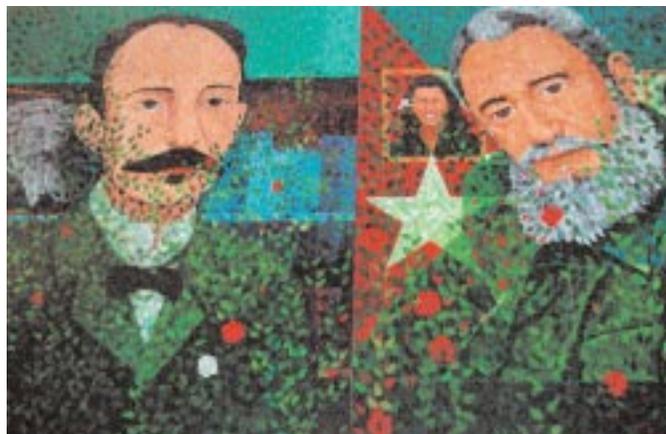
His return had been a risky one. The name printed on this passport was Julian Perez. Julian was Martí's middle name, and Perez was his mother's maiden name. Martí later remarked to a friend that lies should have at least a little truth in them.

But by and large, his fight for Cuba's freedom was one fought from across an ocean.

It is this that Cuban exiles in Miami and elsewhere say they have in common with Martí.

“He lived in New York for years and years and years,” said Orlando Rodríguez, the former director of the information center and media monitoring at TV/Radio Martí in Miami. “He was another exile.”

Like Martí, Rodríguez and others who work at TV/Radio Martí say they are trying to change the political structure of Cuba from outside. Funded by the U.S. government, TV/Radio



JOE DUGGAN/Lincoln Journal Star

Images of José Martí (left and below) are common in Cuba; those of President Fidel Castro are seen less often.



Martí broadcasts alternative programming to the Cuban state-run TV and radio stations. They include, among other things, news, news-analysis and music programs.

The Cuban government has done what it can to block TV and Radio Martí. It has also accused the United States of stealing a national hero and tarnishing his name by broadcasting anti-Cuban propaganda.

Rodríguez, though, believes the Cuban government's claim to Martí is no greater than any other because Martí was a universal figure.

“Nobody limits if (Americans) can use Washington or Lincoln,” he says.

Inside Cuba, there is another group for whom Martí is a sort of patron saint. The nation's political dissidents, citizens who have tried to rally support for human-rights laws and democracy.

“Martí belongs to all Cubans, regardless of where they live.”

Orlando Rodríguez, former director of Radio/TV Martí

These people, like Vladimiro Roca, a member of the Cuban Social Democratic Party and a former political prisoner, feel a kinship with Martí. Like him, they are fighting a revolution with words rather than with weapons.

“War,” Martí wrote, “does not make government impossible but neither is it the proper school to learn the art of governing.”

Roca admires this about Martí.

“He was very peaceful, very tolerant and very open — a complete opposite of the Cuban government,” Roca says.

Just as the Cuban government accuses the United States of tarnishing Martí's reputation as a hero, political dissidents say Castro does the same.

“The Cuban government has manipulated the sayings of Martí,” Roca said. “They use only the parts of Martí that's convenient for them.”

Del Toro, with the Directorio Democrático Cubano, is glad people like Roca are showing a side of Martí the government does not. Cubans,

particularly the young, have become disillusioned with socialism, she says, and tend to view many of the messages the government sends their way — the Martí billboards, for example — with a good deal of skepticism.

“The dissidents are trying to kind of rescue (José Martí) from the Cuban government,” she says.

The government doesn't see it that way.

The stuff on TV/Radio Martí, they say, is propaganda. The voice the political dissidents give Martí doesn't ring true.

The Cuban government's attitude seems to be this: José Martí is a national hero. To associate him with anything that could be perceived as anti-Cuba is a slap in the face, both to Martí and all of Cuba.

Ricardo Alarcón, president of Cuba's National Assembly of People's Power, called the United States' use of Martí's name for an anti-Cuban broadcasting outfit “really insulting.”

TV/Radio Martí is not even taken seriously in Cuba, says Wayne Smith, a former head of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana.

“It's a waste of money now, and now it's just another rambling exile station with all the same crap and bullshit that the exile stations have.”

■ ■ ■

Neither group — those in Miami or those in Cuba — is happy with the way the other side has latched onto Martí, but both, it appears, draw something from him, even if the part of Martí they admire is only a piece of the man, rather than the whole.

Rodríguez of TV/Radio Martí unhesitatingly says he disagrees with the way the Cuban government embraces Martí. But he says it's good the two countries can at least hold something in common.

“Martí belongs to all Cubans, regardless of where they live,” he says.





SHANE PEKNY

New Yorker James Henry Creedon is one of 60 Americans enrolled in Cuba's Latin American School of Medical Sciences, a free school designed to educate students and then send them back to their native countries to practice medicine in poor rural and urban areas.

Medicating political ill will

U.S. students attend Cuban medical school despite controversies

By Matthew Hansen

Twenty-four flags line these walls, one country's pride melting into the next in a blur of patriotic primary colors and powerful black lines.

Twenty-three don't get the pleasure of the outdoors — the host country's flag dances alone in the breeze. And the 22 others don't enjoy the notoriety of the Betsy Ross-designed stars and stripes motif demanding attention inside the visitor's lobby at the Latin American School of Medical Sciences.

Old Glory has long circled the globe. But not here, not for 44 years, and, even now, not without

a tug of war involving history, politics and medicine.

The flag represents the 60 American students included in Cuba's experimental attempt to educate mostly poor Latin American medical students and then return them to their native lands. It's all free, with only one catch: Students must pledge to work with the poor following graduation.

Some say it's a perfect example of the best this socialist government has to offer.

Some say it's just another costly public relations ploy designed to swing Latin American sentiment toward Cuba and away from the United States, even as the country's own population remains sub-

"They're supposed to be this renegade anti-imperialist nation, and they're educating U.S. students and sending them back to where help is needed. Yes, it's a strategy."

James Henry Creedon

merged in poverty.

Those 60 students — a group arguably as diverse as America itself — say they don't understand

the fuss. It is, after all, just a red, white and blue piece of cloth.

"It's strange, that people care so much that we're here," says Jose Eduardo De Leon, a 23-year-old Californian. "Honestly, I just wanted an education."

■ ■ ■

It's finals week, and, all around, students scurry toward last-minute cram sessions or decompress following their latest exam. You're 31 kilometers northwest of Havana, Cuba, but, just like at Berkeley or State College, it isn't hard to tell who's finished and who's just begun.

That similarity may be the last between an American medical school and the education that 6,056 students receive here.



SHANE PEKNY
Two American students, above, and a group representing some of the 24 countries at the school congregate outside during a break from final exams.



The school is distinctly Cuban, from the mandatory uniforms to the emphasis on study groups to the lack of hot water.

"In some ways, it's kind of like being in school in the 1930s," says New Yorker James Henry Creedon. The second-year student leads a tour group around the former Cuban Naval Academy. He points out the half-built track, the cafeteria and the post office, all evidence that this place is palatial compared to an average Cuban school.

Technologically, though, it's still far behind American medicine's ivory towers.

Sometimes they run out of latex gloves during dissections. There are no PowerPoint presentations. "I copy down my biochem notes off the blackboard," Creedon says. The students do have Internet access, albeit limited — just 20 Internet-capable computers in all, one for every 300 students.

And then, there's the absence of hot water, a detail the American media play up in story after story, according to Eduardo Miguel Medua, a 24-year-old New Yorker.

He thinks it's another way the United States demeans its socialist neighbors.

"Our existence here isn't defined by the fact that we don't have hot water," the first-year student says. "It's defined by the fact that we are becoming doctors."

The doctor Medua becomes will be one grounded in a decidedly non-American tradition of medicine and medical education.

The students here live in a structured world where attendance, study groups and office hours are all mandatory. "No skipping class and downloading the notes," Creedon jokes.

They also live in a world where class participation is valued over tests and social interaction becomes more important than independent excellence.

It's a world with grades, except grades aren't that important.

"You know what? It's a number," De Leon says.

The underlying reason for all this, students say, is a simple difference in philosophy. The goal isn't to weed out the weakest students, as it is in the United States. Rather, professors focus on saving everyone and expect the stronger

students to help their struggling classmates.

That line of thinking doesn't sit well with everyone. Some 500 students have left the program since it began in 1998. That number includes at least 10 U.S. students who packed up and left early.

It has worked for De Leon, who struggled with the transition from a comfortable Oakland-area childhood to a medical education, and a life, a long way from home.

The strange food and stress from a heavy workload caused him to lose weight and sleep. His grades slipped. He thought plenty about hopping the next flight back to California. Then the encouragement from his 22-person, 19-country study group started to help. So did the interaction with professors during mandatory office hours.

Now, he wouldn't want his medical education any other way.

Certainly not the American way.

"It's inhumane, trampling on other people on your way to the top. I don't want to be that way."

■ ■ ■

The New Yorker knows inhumanity. He was there by early afternoon, a first responder to a tragedy that prompted countless responses.

He worked as a New York City paramedic. And, really, was there anywhere else to go on September 11?

He searched for the living. He patched the wounded. Mostly, he dug out the dead.

And, 16 months later, he doesn't really want to talk about it.

But he did something else later that week, something he's got words for.

James Henry Creedon met George W. Bush. And the American president and committed socialist shook hands.

Which doesn't mean the medical student buys into the president's hard-line stance on his new home.

"Poor Cuba," he says. "Of-maligned Cuba. Supposedly the producer of chemical weapons. Supposedly this and that."

Creedon shakes his head in disgust, then quickly offers that his viewpoint isn't one shared by many of his U.S. counterparts.

Here, left-wing activists live side by side with the politically uninformed. Some privately criticize Castro's government, De Leon says, although they won't blast the government providing them a free medical education in public.

The only thing everyone can agree on is that living in Cuba changes you in some way.

"I came here with an open mind," says Issac Peralta, a student from Mexico. "Just being here changes it."

Castro's first invitation to American pre-medical students, delivered in a September 2000 speech at New York City's Riverside Church, was filled with the sort of politically charged language that turned an already wary U.S. government and the large Cuban American exile community against the plan.

The Cuban president blasted the American medical system while championing his own, which showcases free universal health care and a Third World-



SHANE PEKNY

Jose Eduardo De Leon, a 23-year-old student from Oakland, Calif., says Cuban ideas about health care education are preferable to the U.S. medical mindset.

leading 6.5 percent infant mortality rate.

Following that speech, the program's supporters, led by the Congressional Black Caucus and two anti-embargo religious groups, fought to let American students go to Cuba. A year later, the first dozen did.

Today, the American students — even staunch Cuban supporters — recognize that their opportunity is fueled at least partially by politics.

Cuba's commitment to the Third World impresses De Leon, who says it's refreshing to know that everything doesn't come down to "how much money you have in your pocket."

But even the New York socialist knows there's more than generosity at work here.

"They're supposed to be this renegade anti-imperialist nation, and they're educating U.S. students and sending them back to where help is needed," Creedon says.

"Yes, it's a strategy. The Cuban government is strategic. It's how they've survived."



In four years the first group will go back.



They will have endured a six-month pre-session highlighted by an intensive Spanish course. They will have survived the first two years at the Latin American School of Medical Sciences and four more at another Cuban medical school. They will have returned home only for summer break.

They will have overcome barriers of language, culture, politics and those pieces of cloth.

The school's ultimate success or failure will be judged by American medical eyes waiting to see how the students perform on their U.S. exams.

But, to Creedon, the program is already successful, even if what is learned has nothing to do with medicine. He has befriended Africans and studied Portuguese with Brazilians. His classmates have found adventure and questioned their beliefs. And the flags have blurred together, one into another, like so many pieces of stained cloth.

"If this isn't an education," he says, flashing a rare finals week grin, "I don't know what is."

Papa's Cuba open to U.S. academics

A 44-year freeze can't be completely thawed by sharing Ernest Hemingway.

Both Cuban and American academics hope, though, that the November agreement to share and preserve Hemingway knowledge will bring cooperation.

"We can link the culture of the Cuban and American people through him. This legacy belongs to both of us," says Gladys Rodríguez Ferrero, Cuba's leading Hemingway expert.

Under the agreement, North American document conservation experts and their Cuban counterparts are mapping out a way to salvage the thousands of archived documents damaged by decades of the hot, humid Cuban climate and a lack of proper preservation materials.

Cuban and U.S. Hemingway experts met again in May as part of an international symposium on all things Papa. U.S. experts like Penn State scholar Sandra Spanier shared their expertise of Hemingway's early life in Illinois, his time in Key West and his last days in Idaho.

Ferrero and Cuba experts, in turn, can fill in blank spots about his time in Cuba.

And, simply, they'll talk.

"There's just a lot of warmth, person to person," Spanier says.

Outside of politics, the joint effort won't unearth anything likely to lead the 6 p.m. news. So far, the scholars have learned that Hemingway was remarkably fluent in Spanish. Notes of instruction to the Cuban servants show the writer had a previously unknown command of the language.

And they've found that Hemingway was heavily involved in those domestic affairs. The bullfighting aficionado also worried about the cats' grooming. He bet on cockfights and he cleaned, or at least told others to.

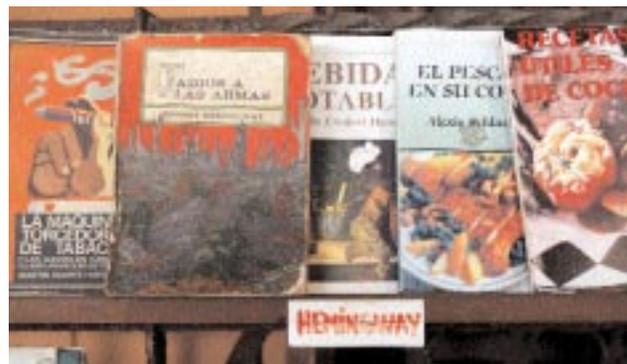
And a more complete Hemingway is the whole point, Spanier says.

Fifty years from now a sophomore English teacher will lecture about one of the greatest 20th century writers. And what she says will be affected by the work happening today at the Finca Vigia, 17 kilometers outside of Havana, Cuba.

"Literature always matters," Spanier says. "It lasts longer than many governments."

"It endures."

— Matthew Hansen



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms" for sale in a Havana bookstore.

Papa blurs borders, time

By Matthew Hansen

That morning, Rodolfo had hooked one. Not just any ordinary one, either, not just the biggest of that Friday or of the entire week. To hear the middle-aged men near the calm Gulf Stream waters chatter as they grilled some of the day's catch, this one was legendary, the kind you talked about deep into the night, the kind you remembered deep into life.

The kind you tell a story about.

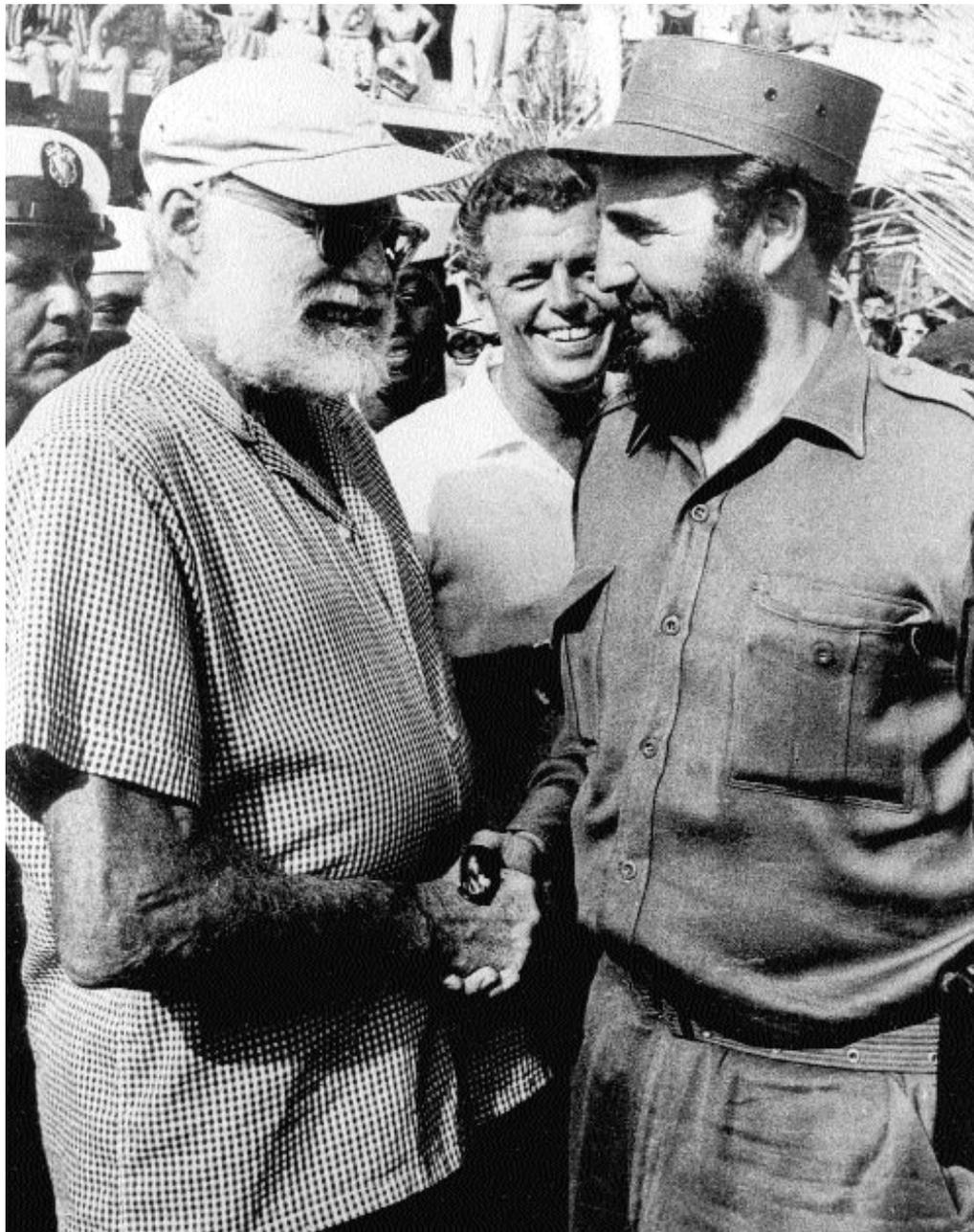
There were 10 inside of it when they cut it open, the bearded one tending the grill tells you. "About 140 libras dry," says the portly man to his right. A third friend, the tallest, senses a visual aid would help, and so he's spreading arms and holding hands apart at an outrageous length. Now, finally, you understand.

This is one big goddamn marlin. A fish — a story — that Papa would've appreciated.

And then the connection's broken and life sneaks on again in the fishing village of Cojimar, on the outskirts of Havana, Cuba, not far from where the Illinois-born and Paris-weened and Spanish Civil War-hardened son of a doctor bought his second house, loved and hated three wives, cemented his legend and slip-slided into a madness ended only by a shotgun blast in Ketchum, Idaho.

Not far from here, on property named Finca Vigia, two countries presently mount an effort to save the writer's past, understand the island's influence on his work, restore his full identity for future generations. Mostly, they share — strange cooperation indeed for Fidel's defiant island and DUBYA's embargo-enforcing empire.

Why the fuss? Because this slice of shore you stand on — yes, the beach littered with trash, yes, the half-dead grass leading a



PHOTOGRAPH BY ALBERTO KORDA, REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION FROM THE KORDA PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION OF GEORGE BURKE HINMAN
In 1960, to honor the famous author Ernest Hemingway, Castro attended Havana's annual Hemingway Marlin Tournament. Hemingway challenged him to enter the contest and at the end of the day congratulated Castro for catching the biggest marlin and winning the competition.

worn path to, of all things, a miniature golf course — this is where he nudged his most famous hero out to sea.

The resulting 93-page Nobel Prize winner is many things.

Mostly, it is a fish story. "Have you read 'Old Man and the Sea?'" asks an old woman named America, sitting only two blocks from the water where the fishermen recount

Rodolfo's prize. "It's not fantasy. It's true."

■ ■ ■

He first loved the Gulf Stream, this sliver of blue that connects Florida's southern



PHOTOS BY KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Above: A view of Hemingway's bedroom, where his famous Royal typewriter sits on a bookcase to the right.
Below: Hemingway reluctantly left his Cuban home, the Finca Vigia, in 1960 to move to Idaho.

shoreline to Cuba's northern edge before heading toward Europe.

It isn't hard to see him out there, crooked cap yanked down low over his bearded face to block the sun's harsh afternoon rays. He's heavier now, older, rigid in movement, suffering from a grab-bag of injuries — bad back, bad eyes, bad kidneys — sustained from a lifetime of hard living and simple bad luck.

It's on the island where he spends half his adult life, and grows to know both the joy Cuba has to offer and the burden of being Ernest Hemingway.

He sometimes mixes work and play beautifully, rising early to write, finishing by lunch, fishing in the afternoon, socializing in the evening before an early bedtime.

Other times, the 'clack, clack' of his Royal typewriter can't block out writers begging to write his biography, critics skewering "Across the River," producers bargaining for the movie rights.

Sometimes he owns this place.

"He stopped to talk to one of



the musicians in fluent Spanish and something about him hit me — enjoyment: God, I thought, how he's enjoying himself!" says "Papa Hemingway" biographer A.E. Hotchner, describing their first meeting in 1948.

Sometimes he does not own himself. He becomes sullen, subdued, even mute. He calls it "the Black Ass." Today's doctors call it depression.

Through it all, he drinks way too much, absinthe to start, straight tequila before he fishes,

daiquiris in the afternoon, wine with meals. Every so often he scales back to only the wine. It never lasts long.

And the waves crest, tumble and roll violently and more violently still, crashing into a perfectly constructed life.

He shoots pigeons with the Brooklyn Dodgers during their spring training. He suffers literary critics worse than before. He starts a youth baseball team in his hometown of San Francisco de Paula. He bashes a dead F. Scott Fitzgerald in angry letters.

He slips sick Cubans money for medicine, he berates fourth wife Mary about the price of cat food, he jokes with boat captain Gregorio Fuentes, he screams at waiters and laughter and slamming doors and Blacker Ass and looser reins and cresting, tumbling and rolling again and again. . . .

But out here, the Gulf Stream drifts calmly.

Captain Fuentes steers toward the day's destination, and the majestic Pilar responds. He's watching the four lines, feet resting against the metal braces, and he's doing what every other fisherman does. He's waiting.

"It's an almost magical connection to the Gulf Stream," says Eduardo González, a Johns Hopkins English professor. "Home, to Hemingway, was about an emotional connection. Maybe the intensity of experience makes it home."

He first visited Cuba in 1928, checking into Havana's Ambos Mundos Hotel with second wife Pauline. The visits increased through the years, coinciding with the pair's estrangement and his budding affair with fellow writer Martha Gellhorn, a close friend of Eleanor Roosevelt's who had won acclaim for a series of short stories about the Depression and her work as a war correspondent.

Gellhorn despised the cramped quarters and constant activity at the hotel. She shopped around for a suitable home, eventually finding a 13-acre plot with a farmhouse, watchtower and swimming pool to rent. Although Hemingway kept the hotel's mailing address (he was still married to Pauline), he moved 17 kilometers outside of town, to the property named Finca Vigia, Spanish for Lookout Farm. In 1940, after divorcing Pauline and marrying Martha, he paid \$18,500 for the property, using earnings from the movie version of "For Whom the Bell Tolls" to buy the home, which he would adorn with a half-dozen cows and 18 varieties of mango trees.

He would always travel. But until the last year of his life, he

would never really leave.

“Character like me, the whole world to choose from, they naturally want to know why here,” Hemingway told Hochner. “Usually don’t try to explain. Too complicated.”

■ ■ ■

The typewriter still sits on a bookshelf in his bedroom, 4 feet from the ground, because its owner insisted on standing when he wrote.

The stuffed heads of cape buffalo, gazelle, impala and kudu he shot in Africa line the walls. A Picasso hangs on one side of the living room, and 900-odd records fill shelves on the other. Out back, behind the pool, grave sites memorialize four of the family dogs.

“It’s quiet,” says Hemingway expert Sandra Spanier, a Penn State English professor and the general editor of the Hemingway Letters project, whose end goal is to produce a multi-volume edition of his letters. “It’s easy to imagine it being a real retreat for someone who courted fame in a way, and was also dogged by it.”

It’s almost as if he “had just stepped down the driveway to pick up his mail,” Jenny Perkins remarked last November.

Perkins, the granddaughter of longtime Hemingway editor Max Perkins, spoke to reporters on Nov. 11, a historic day at the finca. Earlier that Monday, Castro and U.S. Congressman James McGovern, a Massachusetts Democrat, formally agreed to allow American and Cuban academics to work together to restore and preserve thousands of Hemingway documents stored on the property.

For the United States, the collaboration meant first look at 2,000 letters, 3,000 photographs and several pieces of his first drafts. For Cuba, it signified the end of Westerners ignoring the island’s importance in the writer’s life.

And how did that happen?

“No comment,” says Gladys Rodríguez Ferrero, the Hemingway Museum’s former director and the collaboration’s foremost Cuban expert.

Then she comments.



PHOTOS BY SHANE PEKNY

Legend has it that Cojimar fishermen donated their boat propellers to be melted down and formed into Hemingway’s bust at this memorial near the Gulf Stream shore.

Hemingway’s time in Cuba has been minimized by the agendas of power, by two polar governments and their leaders, by a lack of access and by racism, ignorance and spite.

In short, life got in the way. And, now, she’ll say no more, because, finally, it’s stepping aside.

The scholar rises from her seat on the Finca Vigía’s cracked front steps. Before she leaves, though, a series of rapid-fire parting shots, six questions with one answer.

“Where did he win the Nobel Prize? Where is the medal for that Nobel Prize? Where did he finish ‘For Whom the Bell Tolls?’ Where did he write ‘Islands in the Stream?’ In what

country did he spend the most time of his life?”

“Which is most important?”

■ ■ ■

The Papa double dares you. It’s lunch time, and the tourists inside El Floridita goad each other to try the bar’s most famous drink, first ordered more than a half-century ago by its most famous regular.

A daiquiri, double the rum, hold the sugar. In his day the bartender used only Bacardi White Label rum and added the juice of two limes, half a grapefruit and six drops of maraschino cherry.

Legend has it that he once drank 16 and walked out under his own power.

“No way,” says an American



tourist after one sip.

The legend may be just that, but the rest of the place rings authentic — burnt mahogany bar, bartenders in white starched shirts, a decent amount of booze flowing for 1 p.m.

It isn’t hard to see him hunched down at his favorite table. He’s gulping double rum, no sugar. He’s entertaining, maybe Jean Paul Sartre, maybe the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, maybe Ava Gardner or Spencer Tracy.

More likely it’s the deaf Roberto Herrera, Fuentes and the Black Priest, a Catholic clergyman who’d traded his cloak for a Republican Army machine gun during the Spanish Civil War.

He’s holding court while eating shrimp, which he sometimes bites both the heads and tails off of.

Blink, and the past is gone, replaced by a mostly European crowd hitting Hemingway’s haunt between trips to their resort beaches. The only Cubans here wait tables, tend bar or play in the band.

“They don’t drink here,” says the doorman, Juan Francisco. “Too expensive.”

While Papa may be just another tourist hook in a city full of them, he’s much more than that, the academics tell you. Almost every Cuban reads “The Old Man and the Sea” in school, and many relate to the American child who chose to



SHANE PEKNY

The Hemingway memorial and a centuries-old Spanish fortress sit by the Gulf Stream's edge in Cojimar.

call Cuba home.

"He understood the people here, the fisherman," Ferrero says, "And that makes us draw close to him."

Havana University Professor Carmen Fournier traces Cuba's love affair with Hemingway to his acceptance of the 1954 Nobel Prize. During his speech he dedicated the medal to the characters who inspired the book and called himself a "Cubano sato," a slang term meaning half breed.

"He really felt that deep of a bond with his host country," Spanier says.

The bond, to Cubans, could be affected by the history of Hemingway's leftist leanings and also his mixed American and Cuban past.

The author began to embrace socialism, or at least favor it over fascism, during the Spanish Civil War of the late 1930s. Though certainly never as socialist as many of his literary contemporaries — this writer kept a copy of the U.S. Constitution at the Finca Vigia — Hemingway did cover the Loyalist (socialist) cause favorably and even wrote an article for Stalin's Pravda praising the Loyalists while lambasting fascism.

Fidel Castro reportedly took some revolutionary inspiration

"He's a symbol of the connection there ... he's really a bridge between the two cultures. That's important to Cuba."

Sandra Spanier, English professor at Penn State University

from Hemingway's words.

During his November speech at the Finca Vigia, the Cuban president talked at length without notes, wowing academics and journalists with his Hemingway knowledge. He told them about reading "For Whom the Bell Tolls" while he had waited in the mountains, preparing to fight dictator Fulgencio Batista's forces.

Today, as socialism disappears, academics and the Florida's doorman alike are more comfortable talking about how the writer links the United States and Cuba.

Hemingway, unlike many Americans before and since, didn't trivialize the small island just off Florida's coast. He lived in a small Cuban village, not in one of the many wealthy American

enclaves in and around Havana in the 1950s. He honored the country simply by calling it home for more than two decades, Castro said during the Finca Vigia speech. He did so even as he retained his fiercely independent American identity.

Which may be the point.

"He's a symbol of the connection there ... he's really a bridge between the two cultures," scholar Spanier says. "That's important to Cuba."

And then, maybe most importantly, there's the book itself. It chronicles a Cuban fisherman's epic Gulf Stream fight with a marlin. The plot takes place mostly at sea, but the hero Santiago returns to his home. If you take the main character out of Cojimar, part of the essence disappears.

"I have a feeling that if someone told Hemingway that the character Santiago was not Cuba, he would punch them in the face," González says.

No surprise then, that asking random Cubans to name their favorite novel gets the same response over and over.

The doorman is no exception. It's the fish story.

"If you went to Cojimar and asked about Ernest Hemingway, they would tell you beautiful things," Ferrero says.



No one pays much attention to it sitting there near the fishing village's main highway, not far from a roadside stand selling Cristal beer for cheap.

It proclaims him the Nobel Prize-winning author for the book based in this Cojimar, but it does so under layers of grime and through cracks in its base, seeming to spite the fishermen who once donated their boat propellers to build this memorial. Those propellers were melted down and cast into his bust, which sits beside a fort at the water's edge.

No matter. You won't find him there, anyway. He's walking down the shoreline, if you care to join.

The amateurs cast off the rocks as darkness falls. Only a few bites, one man tells you. And then just small fish not suited for dinner. Another man tries to sell Cohiba cigars to the passing tourists, turning back to his rod when they decline.

Keep walking the shoreline, down past the teenaged children searching for bait. The group of four is 20 feet out, floating on makeshift Styrofoam rafts, hoping to catch minnows to sell to the fishermen.

The water curves east, and a small boy and his father come into view. The boy casts erratically, and the man urges him on gently, stepping forward every so often to adjust the boy's hands or offer advice.

Then, you reach the marina. The docked boats bob in the mild waves. Some fishermen stand around, the day's work done. Others idle their motors, preparing to head out once again.

It's not hard to imagine him here, crossing the bridge, opening the gate, entering their world. Today he would hear about Rodolfo's prized catch, listen to wild exaggerations about its size. Today he would look and act like one of them, and America would blur together with Cuba, and the village's past would melt into its present.

Because he'd like to tell a story. And they've got a story to tell.





JOE DUGGAN/Lincoln Journal Star

Inocente del Rio Salazar sings God's praises at a packed Sunday service in a Methodist Church in Havana.

A blessing with a catch

Castro accepts organized religion if politics don't enter the pulpit

By Joe Duggan

The drums provide the rhythm; the people provide the praise.

Every stained glass window of Inglesia Metodista de Universitaria lets in a cool, cloudy Sunday morning to refresh the humanity within. Well-dressed faithful stand, wave a hand skyward, tilt their heads backward and sing to Señor.

At the front of the overflowing church, a woman wearing tight curls, a loose dress and

pink blazer leads the congregation in song. Men on conga and bata drums pulse like royal palms in the wind, children clap, sweat streaks brows, the song ends and dozens of spoken prayers reverberate throughout the chapel.

Church member Pablo Cubela leans forward and says of the woman leading the *cancion de Señor*: "She's a member of the party."

In other words, a communist for Christ.

A decade after Fidel Castro gave his state blessing to organ-

ized religion, those who believe in a higher power still find it all a little novel. Most lived through a time when all communists were officially atheists, when proselytizing was illegal and when Castro cribbed Marx in calling "religion the opiate of the masses."

While strong-arm tactics have failed to silence dissent and end exodus from the island, stationing police in Protestant services, Catholic Masses and Santeria rituals put a kabash on religion. But El Presidente has since reversed himself, seeking a

Fast facts

- Cuba is home to some 1.2 million Catholics and more than 200,000 Protestants.
- African slaves brought to Cuba some 300 years ago created Santeria when they blended Roman Catholic worship with the native religion of the Yoruba African tribes.
- The Jewish community of Havana once supported five synagogues, but after 25 years of state repression, only a couple thousand Jews remain.

peaceful, even mutually beneficial, coexistence — provided pastors don't preach politics from the pulpit.

But isn't there a government risk in allowing the proletariat to put its faith in something bigger? For many years, the state engendered a paternal relationship with the people, feeding, sheltering, teaching and even healing them. Since the cash pipeline from the former Soviet Union shut off in the early 1990s, however, the government struggled to fulfill its role as provider, and the people sought spiritual deliverance from their sufferings.

"Come before the Lord and pray," says the Rev. Lazaro Alvarez in his sermon to the Methodist congregation. "He's your only God. Recognize him! Love him! It doesn't matter what you have done in the past. It doesn't matter if you have failed him. If you repent, he will forgive you."

It's hard to find statistics on the number of practicing faithful in Cuba, but in a country of 11 million, a government survey found more than half are believers of some sort, according to author Christopher Baker in his 2000 book "Cuba." Church officials on the island say there are an estimated 1.2 million Catholics. While Protestant churches count an estimated 200,000 in the fold, they are growing at a more rapid rate than the Church of Rome. And the island still has a few thousand followers of Judaism, a remnant from the days of World War II when Cuba welcomed Jews fleeing the Holocaust.

Outnumbering them all are practitioners of Regla de Osha, an indigenous blend of Catholicism and the Yoruba religion of Africa, started by slaves in Cuba some 300 years ago. The religion is more commonly known as Santeria, or saint worship, and while it has no temples or churches, many Cubans attend to Osha shrines in their homes to beseech the African god, Olodumare, for good fortune, health and love.

Not far from Inglesia Metodista, in the Havana neighborhood of Vedado, Dennis Molina leads five American



PHOTO BY GEORGE BURKE HINMAN (Above), KEN BLACKBIRD (Below)/Lincoln Journal Star
Practitioners of Santeria attend to Osha shrines in their homes to beseech the African god for good fortune, health and love. Below: Cubans carry the casket of a friend during the funeral ritual of the local African Cubans at the Little City of the Dead in Havana.



tourists into a tiny apartment with four cramped rooms. They've come to see an Osha shrine and learn a little about a religion that seems exotic by Christian standards.

Molina, a 33-year-old English teacher at nearby University of Havana, says he's a santero, a teacher who instructs Osha neophytes in the rituals and prayers needed to seek the favor of Yoruba orishas. The orishas are holy beings, each representing a different aspect of Olodumare, and they can inter-

vene on behalf of the humans who appease them.

Molina has guided his American acquaintances to the home of his friend, Joel Quintana, who has just completed his one-year initiation into Osha and is ready to celebrate.

In the corner of a room with a concrete floor stands the shrine, a succession of three saint statues that reach to the low ceiling. Molina explains that each statue represents an orisha. For example, Saint Barbara sym-

bolizes Chango, the orisha of fire and thunder, and Our Lady of Charity (the patron saint of Cuba) correlates with Ochun, the "queen of love and every sweet thing in the world."

Satin, embroidered drapes cover the statues in a color that corresponds with each orisha. Molina instructs the tourists to kneel before the shrine, place money in a nearby bowl and make a wish.

After the offerings, Quintana turns on a tape player that fills the apartment with the pulsating rhythms of Cuban salsa. He mixes Cuba Libres with cola and astringent rum poured from a plastic bottle. Then he dusts his head with cascarilla, a chalky white powder that protects from bad luck and misfortune, and offers the powder to others in the room.

Dressed entirely in white, a requirement for those going through initiation, Quintana downs his drink, then spins a dance in the crowded living room.

Molina explains that while there are many Yoruba orishas, worshippers commonly call upon about two dozen. There are many rituals and symbols to learn, a process that takes a lifetime. And when the lifetime is over, an Osha believer's friends and family hold a special ceremony so their loved one can begin life anew.

Molina recalls the days when the government discouraged Osha, when worshippers had to offer their sacrifices in secret. Those days are only a memory. And what about the Christians who consider Santeria paganism?

"We love the Catholics and the Christians," Molina said.

Father Fernando de la Vega is a tall, thin, priest with sharp features and a soft-spoken manner. Looking at his delicate frame, it's hard to imagine he once opposed the Batista regime and joined the revolutionaries in their struggle to overthrow it.

But after the struggle prevailed, de la Vega returned to his studies in the seminary. By the time he emerged as a priest in 1961, El Presidente was singing a new political song, and this time, de la Vega wasn't about to join the chorus.

“I realized we were on the road to Marxism, and I knew that Marxism is against religion. They have no beliefs,” he says through an interpreter.

The government gave him a choice: Castro or Christ. He chose Jesus and went to jail for six months.

When he got out, Castro had launched his persecution of the Church. The government forced some 800 of the island’s 900 priests to flee the country, de la Vega says. Furthermore, Castro took lands and properties controlled by the Church and closed seminaries and parochial schools. Attendance at Mass plummeted as the Communist Party forbade its members to practice their faith. Those who weren’t party members did not want to risk association with the Church for fear of losing their jobs or being arrested.

“It was very hard. There were mostly old women at Mass,” de la Vega says. “No younger people, no children.”

Although the situation improved after the fall of the Soviet Union, it took the 1998 visit of Pope John Paul II to stage a true Catholic comeback in Cuba. It’s impossible to overstate what the pope’s visit did for the spirits of the faithful — and also among those who believed he toppled communism in Poland and might do it in Cuba, too.

“He said not to be afraid,” de la Vega says. “The pope came here to show us the truth about man. He said there were huge differences between Marxism and Christianity.”

In the pope’s wake, the church pews filled to capacity in many of the 800 Catholic churches spread throughout the island. But not even the pope could undo the harm of a generation raised in a moral vacuum, de la Vega says. Abortion is rampant, child prostitution is common, suicide rates have soared and many Cubans worship false gods, he says.

“We lost that generation.”

And the Catholic Church suffers from an extreme shortage of priests. Few Cubans enter the seminaries and only 200 priests attend a flock of 1.2 million. Their basic needs for food and clothing in such a dysfunctional



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

A Cuban woman prays at the tomb of Señora Amelia Goyri and asks for her help. Goyri died while giving birth and some years later her tomb was unearthed and she was found to be holding the remains of the child in her arms. Believers always keep fresh flowers on her tomb in the Necropolis Cristobal Colon or Little City of the Dead in Havana, Cuba.

economy are often greater than the church can provide. And, when a priest periodically speaks against the government from the pulpit, he finds himself relocated off the island courtesy of the government, de la Vega says. And so, there are still limits to the state’s religious largess.

Of all religions in Cuba, the Catholic Church most frequently butts up against those limits. In some cases, the decision to do so is made within the Church, as in

Pope John Paul’s petitioning of the Castro government to adopt more freedoms for the people. Other forces, meanwhile, continue their attempt to fashion the Church into an opposition party.

The old priest believes the church should resist such efforts. There’s so much to do to fulfill the teachings of Christ. He and other priests minister to those with AIDS, attempt to alleviate hunger and alcoholism and tend to prisoners, political and other-

wise. All this on top of nourishing the spiritual needs of their flocks.

The old priest still has the fire of a revolutionary, but he directs it all toward his ministry now

And, frankly, he’s got all he can handle.

“Sometimes we pay very heavily the consequences. So we have to be careful.”



A single ray of light

By Melissa Lee

If it's true that all Cubans can find humor in anything, then Naty Revuelta and I, on that warm Havana afternoon, may simply have run out of time to say all that could have been said.

We met in the lobby of the bustling Habana Libre Hotel, the mid-afternoon January light drawing tourists past us and onto the streets, and after brief introductions, she immediately requested our interview not be taped.

"You understand, I have just had surgery, and I don't like my voice now. I don't want my voice to be remembered this way."

A joke, maybe, to follow? No. She made no lighthearted crack about the lower, scratchier pitch of her voice, no gentle dig on what years of cigarettes have done to her larynx.

Later, she would weave in and out of American and Cuban politics, and family, and literature, and music, and, of course, the two men whose passage into her life changed everything forever — the one a charismatic revolutionary on the cusp of seizing Cuba, the other a handsome young rebel whose blue-gray eyes pierced hers like an azure stone that long-ago afternoon in Paris.

All this, and still I did not leave believing she was a comedian of any kind. Yet Naty told me, firmly, that laughter lies at the core of each Cuban personality.

"We're good-humored," she said, tapping her cigarette into an ashtray. "We have many similarities among us. We can make a joke out of anything."

Then: "I am so Cuban I don't know how to get away from the description."

Finally, just before the long, slender cigarette is drawn back into her mouth: a brief, beautiful smile.



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Naty Revuelta was Fidel Castro's confidant and lover.

■ ■ ■
It is easy to forget, when you are talking with Naty Revuelta in a spacious, quiet, pre-mojito-hour ballroom cooled by air breezing in from the Malecón and lit only by sunlight pouring in from floor-to-ceiling windows, that she has achieved near-celebrity status in Cuba. That she has climbed higher on the social ladder than she probably ever thought possible when she was a 19-year-old, blonde, green-eyed socialite. That unlike most Cubans, she is allowed to

enter Havana's tourist hotels — and she does so without a glance at the security guards, though their eyes discreetly linger on the woman a bit longer than you'd expect. And that unlike most Cubans, Naty can travel abroad — and she does so frequently, even to the United States, where a 47-year-old daughter born of an affair with the charismatic revolutionary waits for occasional visits, for news of her birthplace, for the end of the regime she so passionately hates.

Unlike most Cubans, too,

Natalia "Naty" Revuelta

- Age: 77
- Birthplace: Havana, Cuba
- Former socialite who had an affair with Fidel Castro during the 1950s and is the mother of his only known daughter, Alina Fernández, who now lives in Miami and regularly blasts her father's regime on a radio show.
- Quote: "If you are too sensitive, life itself will trample over you. I'm not a psychologist. I'm not a philosopher. I just know what life has taught me."

Naty is stylishly dressed, heavily bejeweled. The blonde hair is gone, the green eyes faded, but she remains gracefully beautiful, striking. A petite woman, she wears a patterned dress and heels, bright pink lipstick, gold hoop earrings and gold rings on almost every finger. She uses a gold cigarette holder and holds her coffee cup with only her thumb and index finger.

"It is a very nice and kind life," she says simply.

And why not — it's a life granted in part by her half-century link to El Maximo. They met one day in 1952, the same day he was first arrested as the leader of a secret movement against the hated dictator Batista. Without that day, Naty would have remained a rich, stunning woman with revolutionary sympathies, a woman who enjoyed yacht parties and weekly tournaments at the Vedado Tennis Club provided by a wealthy husband. But now she would become a rich, stunning woman in love — and secretly involved with — a man

whose growing army of supporters was moving ever-closer to spreading Fidelismo to every corner of the island.

The attraction was instant that day. It was the beginning of the end of both of their marriages. It was the beginning of a fiery love affair that would result in the birth of Fidel Castro's only known daughter. It was the beginning of a new purpose in her life.

Naty, as Castro biographer Tad Szulc writes, was "one of an extraordinary contingent of beautiful and/or highly intelligent women who, in effect, dedicated their lives to him and his cause — and without whom he might not have succeeded." She took the first step by lending him a key to the Vedado mansion she shared with her husband in case he needed a safe haven from the police, who had already arrested him numerous times.

In turn, Castro eventually selected her to type and hand-deliver to leading politicians and major newspapers copies of the manifesto he was planning to issue following what he thought would be a successful attack on the Moncada Barracks on July 26, 1953. Naty was the only one outside Fidel's tight circle to know in advance of his bold plot.

Despite the chaos Castro had brought to Cuba, he continued the affair. It was during a brief period in 1956 between prison terms that Alina Fernández was born.

Today, in the deserted ballroom, faint shadows start to appear as talk shifts to Naty's daughter. Alina escaped Cuba in 1993, disguised as a Spanish tourist, and now regularly blasts her father's communist regime on Miami radio. The mother, however, is steadfast in her loyalty to the cause.

Slowly, she lights a fresh cigarette. It's her second during our conversation. She says she smokes six each day, but that she can make an exception today. I don't ask why. For a brief moment, I think Naty might say, "Don't you feel special?" with a laugh or make a joke about how nervous she gets during inter-



JOE DUGGAN/Lincoln Journal Star

Revuelta says although the revolution was far from perfect, Castro will be remembered as a man who tried very hard.

views, but she does not.

Instead, thin wisps of smoke drift around us for several minutes. "I knew she had a life of her own," she says of her daughter. "She had her choices." A pause. "Now, I try to live my life. I try not to be an economic or moral burden."

Another pause, this time a long one. "I couldn't supply for her. I couldn't be a mother to her. "She became a woman too soon."

She takes a long, deep drag on her cigarette, and suddenly it's gone. She snuffs it out in a brimming ashtray. It was the only drag she took.

■ ■ ■
Ninety miles north, a daughter struggles to describe what was, too often, a life without food, without Christmas, without security.

Alina Fernández remembers the beard towering over her, the rough hand stroking her baby-fine hair. "I wanted to bite his hand," she says.

She recalls little else of her father. But the nicks his military actions caused in her young life were sharp: No presents on holi-

days. No TV. No salt with the dry red beans at dinner.

"Everything was turned upside down. The cartoons disappeared ... Mickey Mouse disappeared. Food disappears. Warm and tender, it all disappeared.

"What else can I say, from a child's point of view?"

The poverty eventually became too much, though she did not share any plans with her mother. The worry, Alina says, would have been too heavy a burden. Besides, Naty already knew her daughter was speaking with political dissidents on the island.

Naty heard of Alina's escape from Cuban radio. Weeks later, mother and daughter spoke by telephone. If Naty was upset, she concealed it.

"She's a very strong person," Alina says. "You will never see her failing. Or cry, you know? You could never guess if she was suffering."

The daughter a slender beauty but with dark hair instead of blonde — pauses for some time. There's only the occasional static on the tele-

phone as I wait for her to continue.

"I used to call her 'the sprite' because she was so beautiful and so happy. So well-groomed.

"Such a great smile, you know?"

■ ■ ■
Natalia Revuelta is an only child who was born in December 1925 just across the street from the University of Havana. Her parents divorced when she was very young, and she moved in with grandparents who did most of the child-rearing.

"I was brought up with the idea that you have to be good, because life plays terrible tricks on you," Naty says. "I've had a hard life."

Early on, she learned the value of good people and good books. Her favorite childhood adventure was "Heidi." Now, having recently finished Kahlil Gibran's "The Prophet," she plans to tackle a Castro biography, then the memoirs of her friend Gabriel García Márquez. Her copy of his autobiography is personally signed — Márquez wants the dedications torn out of the book when he dies, Naty says.

She reads history, fiction, biographies, poems — in French, English and Italian, which she learned when she attended high school in Philadelphia at age 13.

Back in Cuba, she entered the labor force at 19 and hasn't looked back. "To me," she says, "work is work." Naty's work in administrative and commercial positions continued through her 1948 marriage to heart surgeon Orlando Fernández and to Castro's revolution. She worked endless hours sewing uniforms from cheap department-store fabric and making military caps — each exactly to Fidel's liking. And she took her service a step further: Naty turned over her 6,000-peso savings and pawned her sapphires, emeralds and diamonds to finance the revolutionary army's cause against the corrupt Batista dictatorship.

Remembers Alina:
"Everything fell apart. We had

nothing.” Her anger, she says, came later, when she realized what kind of revolution had unfolded.

Gently but firmly, Naty points out that was not the revolution she was fighting for. Her ideals included a priority on education and abolishing corruption. She hoped to see reforms, she says.

She doesn't say outright that Castro has failed to follow through on promises of democracy. Instead, she names his successes and commends his bravery in facing both Cuban and U.S. opposition. Castro, she says, will be remembered as “a man who tried very hard.”

Then she adds, “Some love him more, some love him less.”

It's clear where Naty falls.

In 1953, Fidel and a handful of his troops found themselves in an Isle of Pines prison after a failed assault on the Batista government. Trapped in solitary confinement, he received letters of encouragement from all over Cuba — including many from Naty, as well as his wife at the time, Mirta.

Naty sent him sand in an envelope to remind him of the beach. From a concert, she sent a program with the director's signature scrawled across it. She sent him books — Dostoevsky, Freud, Hugo — and then follow-up letters to discuss the readings. She sent photos from a Greek folk-dance performance because the lead dancer reminded her of him.

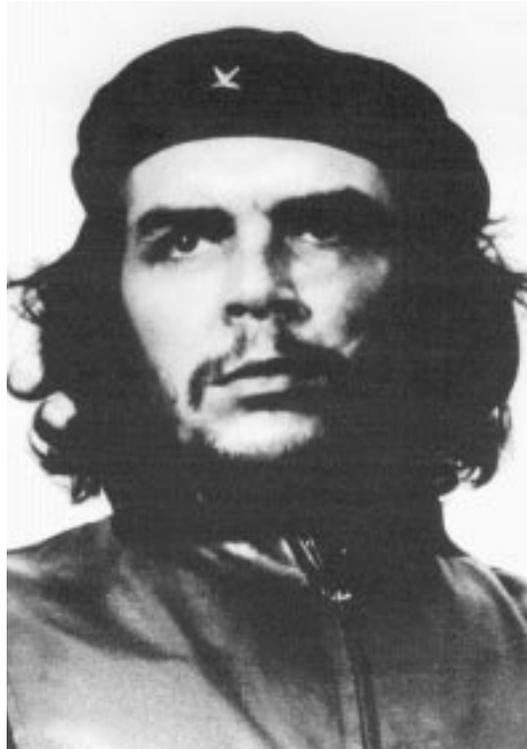
Fidel wrote back with passion. Wendy Gimbel's 1998 novel “Havana Dreams” quotes one love letter to Naty: “I am on fire. Write to me, for I cannot be without your letters. I love you very much.” Another: “There is a type of honey that never satiates. That is the secret of your letters.”

Naty, though, never wanted the affair to become public, and she prefers not to linger on it. The past, she says, should remain exactly that.

“I don't like to talk too much. I like things to stay as they are.”

■ ■ ■

Still, the past cannot be



PHOTOGRAPH BY ALBERTO KORDA, REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION FROM THE KORDA PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION OF GEORGE BURKE HINMAN

Naty Revuelta says Che Guevara was forceful and austere, somber and grim in the days before he rejected Castro's revolution.

silenced completely in the fading light of a second-floor ballroom of the Habana Libre Hotel.

It was during a 1964 trip to Paris that she first came across a dashing young soldier who had been a key player in Batista's ousting. Both had begun to distance themselves from Fidel. In a year, Che Guevara would resign from all his posts and give up his Cuban nationality in front of Castro. In three years, he would be executed in Bolivia.

That afternoon, the pair discussed politics and their youths and the need to motivate the new generation. Che spoke forcefully, intensely, but with a self-discipline she admired.

“He was very austere. He demanded a lot of himself,” she says. “And he had very penetrating eyes. He could look right through you.”

This is what Naty remembers: a somber, grim Che and a dark, quiet Paris. “There,” she says, “all the lights turn off by 9 or 10.”

Her tone carries regret, as if Paris is simply ill-fated, as if it would be such a wonderful place if only the lights were never switched off.

■ ■ ■

In some ways, she is now

“She's a very strong person. You will never see her failing.”

**Alina Fernández,
Revuelta's daughter**

very alone in Havana — she has no family left there, and many of her friends have gone. She and Fernández divorced in 1959 after he discovered the affair, and she's never remarried. She learned to face life with only a few friends. And, over time, she has learned that she must take care of herself.

During our three-hour meeting, Naty makes no use of a handrail on the staircase. When a photographer starts to stack chair cushions so she will appear taller, she waves him aside and does it herself. When a server comes to clear our table, she gathers the garbage for him.

“If you are too sensitive, life itself will trample over you,” she tells me. “I'm not a psychologist. I'm not a philosopher. I just know what life has taught me.”

One lesson: Family is what you have when you have nothing else. Alina is not her only

daughter living in the United States. It was in 1992 that Naty reconciled with Nina, her older child from her marriage, after decades of silence. Now, she says, they maintain regular electronic correspondence.

And suddenly, unexpectedly, a very American-sounding joke: “Thank God for e-mail.”

Looser now, she pulls pictures of her family from a leather wallet and passes them to me. She speaks proudly of Alina's radio show and praises her writing skills. It's possible Alina will return to Cuba when the Castro era is over, Naty says.

But the mother will never leave the island, I think as I listen to her. The United States intrigues her, but it could never be her home — it is too impersonal, too crass, she says. In America, you never know your neighbor's name. In Cuba, that people will be warm and open is a given. Everything in Cuba is familiar, and that is comforting.

“I love the people, I love the climate, I love the light — the transparency of light,” she says, gesturing, as she often does. “And the people are so very nice. Here, I feel very Cuban.”

She is comfortable now, relaxed in her tan wicker chair. The ballroom is dim, the deepening shadows darkening her face. As she stands to leave, she closes another button on her cardigan.

And as she fishes in her faded purse for a business card, she leaves me with one last line — a last reminder of the essence of the Cuban character.

The card is plain, with only her name, phone number and e-mail address printed in small letters on one side, a single palm tree in the lower right-hand corner.

“A lonely palm tree,” she says. “A lonely palm tree — that's what I am.”

Naty hands it over and gives me an eye. Then she slips out the door and into the lengthening shadows of a Havana evening — but not before she smiles and laughs, a sweet, wry laugh at her own very funny joke.



Perception vs. reality

A look at how Americans, Cubans see one another

By Cara Pesek

When Eduardo Miguel Medua, a New York City native and recent graduate of Connecticut Wesleyan University, decided to study medicine in Cuba, he knew what he was doing was something newsworthy.

So he wasn't surprised when the reporters from The New York Times, The Boston Globe, the Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel and the Chicago Tribune showed up at the sprawling Latin American School of Medical Sciences on the outskirts of Havana.

But surprise did come. It came when Medua read the articles about what he was doing.

The stories painted a picture of American students giving up lives of luxury to live in poverty, of the sacrifices students made just to get an education. Every single article, Medua says, lingered on the fact the students stay in dormitories without hot water.

"Our existence here is not defined by the fact that we don't have hot water," he says. "It's defined by the fact that we're becoming doctors."

The reporters' perceptions of the students, Medua says, illustrate how out-of-touch Americans have become with Cubans since Fidel Castro rose to power in 1959 and swiftly kicked out as much American influence as he could. Since then, Castro has worked hard to ensure the number of American vices and virtues allowed into his country remain at a minimum.

And U.S. leaders, saying they don't want to support a country



PHOTOS BY KEN BLACKBIRD AND CATHARINE HUDDLE/Lincoln Journal Star

"Cuba Si, Bloqueo No" echoes the sentiments of many Cubans. Below: Abel Contreras de la Guardia gives a tour.

with Fidel as its leader, have obliged. Today, a travel ban and an embargo keep most U.S. citizens and products out of Cuba.

Despite efforts on the part of both governments, though, imaginations have wandered across the 90-mile slice of ocean separating Florida from Cuba. Over the years, the realities of both countries have blurred and myths have come to be viewed by some as fact. Among the most prevalent misconceptions:

- That America is a near utopia where anyone can live a rich, happy, free life.

- That Cuba is a backward, dangerous country whose citizens harbor a resentment toward the United States.

The truth, of course, lies jumbled somewhere in between, misplaced during the 44 years that Cubans have been without access

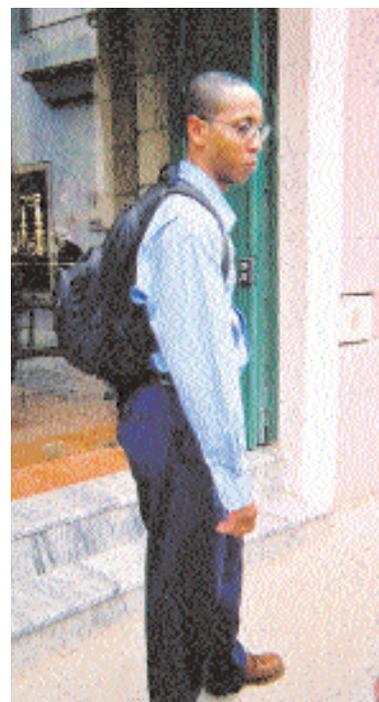
to international television stations, newspapers and magazines, and Americans have seen only restricted media coverage of Cuba and have been, for the most part, unable to visit.

But somehow, in those 44 years since Castro came to power, Americans and Cubans don't seem to have drifted all that much, says Wayne Smith, a former American diplomat who was stationed in Cuba.

"There is almost a mystical bond between Americans and Cubans," he says. "Cubans understand Americans, and Americans, as they get to know Cubans, understand Cubans."

The reasons, Smith says: A shared sense of humor. A love of baseball. And a bond. Something, Smith says, he can't quite explain.

A bond that was apparent to a group of architecture students





KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Once tourists and Cubans meet, stereotypes are likely to fade.

from Auburn University who visited Cuba in January.

They studied up on Cuba before they left. They knew about the pre-1959 American cars, often repainted in sherbet-colored house paint, that rumble down the streets of Havana. They knew about the cigars. About the embargo, the lack of material goods, the shortage of soap. The basics.

But the Cuba they encountered was very different from the impoverished country they had read about back home.

Tracye Tidwell, a 21-year-old student, said she expected Cubans would be hostile toward Americans because of 44 years' worth of hard feelings between the two countries. She thought the impoverished people would be downtrodden.

"I was shocked with how happy everyone was despite their conditions," she said.

Heather Ross, also 21, was similarly surprised.

"I guess I thought I'd have to hold onto my purse a little harder than I had to," she said.

The students were surprised by other things, too: the poor condition of the roads, bad food, beautiful — though disintegrating — old buildings, crummy hotel rooms without the comforts they were used to.

But most puzzling was the relationship Cubans have with Fidel.

"Our tour guide told us that when Fidel speaks, Cubans smoke," Ross said. "They clap when they have to."

"I'm still trying to figure it out."

■ ■ ■

There are no American stores in Cuba. But, on many citizens walking down most any street in Havana, traces of the United States are everywhere. Bandanas printed with the American flag tied over dark Cuban hair.

Sunglasses from Old Navy. Jeans from the Gap. And T-shirts from American concerts, from American fun runs and blood drives. T-shirts with logos of American sports teams, soft drinks and cars.

The vast majority in these

"To be rich in Cuba is like being poor in the United States. And being poor in Cuba is like being really, really, really poor in the United States."

Antonio, a 25-year-old Cuban tour guide

American T-shirts, jeans and hats has never been to the United States. Instead, the clothing was likely given to them by American tourists or relatives living in the United States. But according to Antonio, a 25-year-old Cuban tour guide, the predominance of American clothing reflects more than the generosity of American friends and strangers. It has become a way for Cubans to express their fascination with the United States.

Matina Weeks, another American studying at the medical

school, has noticed this fascination, too. She remembers a conversation she had with a 5-year-old Cuban boy about the world. He could tell her about Cuba, about his family and what he was learning in school. But he could name just two countries.

"The United States and Cuba were the only countries he knew," Weeks said.

According to Antonio, Cubans not only *know* about America, they want to *be* in America. Walking down a dusty road to his home, made partly of corrugated metal in a part of Havana secluded from the tourists, Antonio puts it this way:

"To be rich in Cuba is like being poor in the United States. And being poor in Cuba is like being really, really, really poor in the United States."

■ ■ ■

Daniel Salas González dislikes the United States government. The 19-year-old studying journalism at the University of Havana says he wants to be a journalist to report on global movements

against the spread of imperialism. This, he says, gives Cubans hope that the revolution can continue.

González is an intern at *Juventud Rebelde*, a state-run newspaper geared at roughly the Cuban equivalent of Generation X. There, he works on the international desk. He says he believes in Castro's revolution. The Cuban government is for the people, he says. It takes care of their needs so they can be free from the hassles of survival that plague those who live in capitalist societies.

Although he does not like the American government, he has nothing against Americans in general.

"(Americans) look a lot like us," he says. "In their way of thinking they look a lot like us. As people they are good, as opposed to their government that carries a hostile attitude.

"I have a very good attitude of Americans."

Cecilia García, a 23-year-old Cuban street vendor, says Americans are among her favorite customers.

They don't barter with her like European tourists do, she says.

"They pay full price."

■ ■ ■

In college, Medua majored in Latin American Studies. He was well aware of the stressed relationship between the United States and Cuba. Before he left, he couldn't think of another place in the world where the perception of Americans would be more negative. He was prepared to be disliked.

Former diplomat Smith says Medua's initial fear is a common one among Americans traveling to Cuba.

It's also, he says, an unfounded one.

"I don't think there's another city in the world that Americans could feel quite so comfortable in as they do in Havana," he says. "If you haven't been here, you'd say, 'Anti-Americanism is rampant. Will we be safe down there?' Christ, yes. It's safer than most American cities."

Even Jose, a 27-year-old artist who lives in Havana and doesn't particularly like the hordes of tourists that clog the streets of his city, says Americans are OK.

"The people in the United States like to party," says Jose, whose name also has been



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Many outsiders think poverty and oppression are all there is to life in Cuba. Below, one of many vintage American cars navigates a crowded Havana street.

changed. "They like the music. They like the reggae and the salsa.

"The United States is similar to Cuba."

■ ■ ■

It's similar, the American medical students say, and it's not.

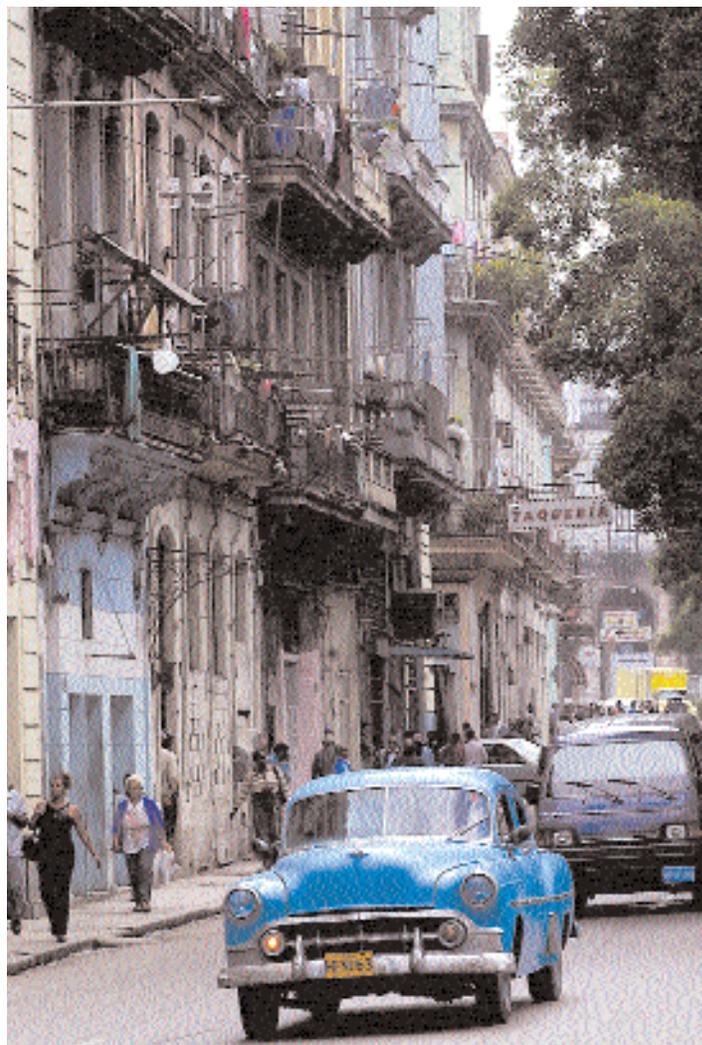
It's true that Cubans and Americans laugh at the same jokes and like to dance to the same music. It's true that some share the same religion and that both value education and tradition.

But it's different, too.

After living in Cuba, Medua says, it becomes apparent that there is more than one way to do everything — get a ride into town, study for an exam, go shopping for food or run a country. None of those ways, he says, is necessarily wrong.

And that, more than any misconception or stereotype he might have had about Cuba before moving there, is what has really surprised him.

"You realize," Medua says, "that whether you're in the United States or in Afghanistan in a cave, you're going to be frustrated. All those material things (in the United States) may make life easier, but not quantitatively better."



Husker haven in Havana

By Joe Duggan

In Nebraska, some paint themselves red, scream themselves hoarse and drink themselves unconscious on game day. Others transform a room, even an entire home, into shrines of Cornhusker memorabilia. Still others commit records and stats to memory and can imagine no higher discourse than debating the greatest gridiron hero ever to wear a red jersey.

Fanatics for sure.

But how many can say they learned to love the Huskers while living in a communist country where few can find Nebraska on a map? Where sports fans risk prison time for watching ESPN through a contraband satellite dish? A place where old timers perpetually argue whether Mantle was better than DiMaggio, but go blank if asked whether Unitas was better than Baugh?

Sí, es verdad. The Huskers have a man, or rather a fan, in Havana.

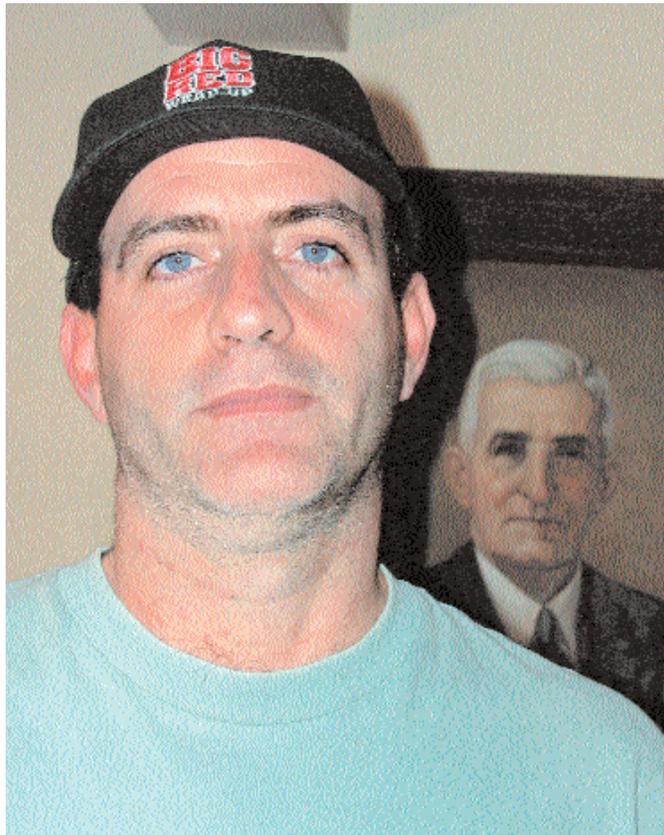
Honest comrade.

His name is Gustavo Rodríguez. He goes by Garrincha.

He's a 40-year-old political and social cartoonist with a popular communist newspaper in Cuba. He lives on an island, isolated from the rest of the world as much by his government as by the blue-green depths that surround it. "Zero" describes the number of international newspapers, U.S. radio broadcasts or satellite TV stations he has access to legally.

Yet American football intrigues him greatly, and of all teams, none intrigues him more than the college powerhouse that plays 1,500 miles away in North America's middle — a place as far from oceans and Caribbean breezes as is possible.

Despite having seen only one Big Red game on TV and having heard only a few more on



JOE DUGGAN/Lincoln Journal Star

Being a fan of Husker football and the blues makes Gustavo Rodríguez an oddity in Cuba.

pirated radio broadcasts, Rodríguez follows the team. In fact, he needs only seconds to identify his paramount Husker moment: the 1996 Fiesta Bowl thrashing of Florida, a game a friend was able to pull in from Miami on a night when atmospheric conditions were radio perfect.

"It was sweet, believe me," he says with a wistful smile, once again hearing Tommie Frazier break so many Gator arm tackles in his memory.

Not only does Rodríguez claim allegiance to a state university he has never seen, his Huskerspeak is remarkably fluent. He deeply admires Tom Osborne. Thinks the Blackshirts need better coaching. Is still puzzled by how Lawrence

Phillips squandered his talent and opportunities. Believes if Eric Crouch deserved the Heisman, so too did Frazier, his favorite Husker of all time. He even grumbled and groaned along with the Husker Nation during the past season of discontent.

"I'm a lucky guy," he said. "I'm afraid I can't say the same about Frank Solich."

He acquired that appreciation despite the fact that futbol Norteamericano isn't played in any organized way in his home country. At least not in his lifetime — the University of Havana once had a team, for a brief period, during the 1950s.

But after the revolution in 1959, biesbol became the national sport, in part because it

Gustavo Rodríguez, also known as "Garrincha"

- Age: 40
- Birthplace: Havana, Cuba
- Job: Editorial cartoonist at Juventud Rebelde, a Communist Party-owned newspaper in Havana.
- Interests: Serious Nebraska Cornhusker fan and lover of the blues.
- Quote: "I'm a lucky guy. I'm afraid I can't say the same about Frank Solich."

already was, and in part because Fidel Castro loved the game. Cubans have excelled at baseball ever since, winning Olympic gold in 1992 and 1996, and several defectors have proven themselves in the major leagues.

But Rodríguez has always felt more attracted to sports played on rectangles than diamonds. And so, through some smuggled Sports Illustrateds and the occasional pirated radio or TV broadcast, he has nurtured a love for American football in the cradle of Caribbean communism.

"You have to go to great lengths to follow football here," he said from his home in Nuevo Vedado, a Havana neighborhood with manicured lawns, tropical shrubs and swanky 1950s houses. "I've never seen a football game alive. Call the Ticketmaster for me when you get back."

The oldest of three sons of a mechanical engineer and school teacher was born in 1962, the third year of the revolution, the first year of the Bob Devaney era and the beginning of the home sellout streak. At a young age, he found himself attracted to soccer, which, unlike the rest of Latin America, was not widely played in Cuba. But Rodríguez

and his friends followed the exploits of international stars like Pele and a humble Brazilian right winger by the name of Manuel Francisco dos Santos. Fans knew Dos Santos by the nickname Garrincha, a nimble bird that darts low over the surface of rainforest rivers.

"It is said that watching him play was a joy for the soul," Rodríguez said.

Besides soccer, Rodríguez loved to draw and while still in college, he began submitting satirical cartoons to various publications around Cuba. After years as a freelancer, he earned a staff position in 1995 with *Palante Magazine*, the oldest humor publication on the island. A couple years later, he landed a job at *Juventud Rebelde*, the journal of the Union of Young Communists, although it should be noted, Rodríguez is not a party member.

Early in his freelance career, he took to signing his works "Garrincha," as a tribute to the working-class soccer hero of his youth.

Well before his art career took off, Rodríguez was exposed to the game the Americans played with helmets and shoulder pads. His interest in American football even helped him learn English, which he speaks and writes fluently. In the 1980s, friends and family in the states got him copies of *Sports Illustrated*. He even once got his hands on a football textbook, which revved his learning curve into warp speed.

Finally, he felt he knew enough to teach his soccer buddies how to play, a challenge considering most had seen little, if any, actual football. For weeks, on Sundays, they played near his home and once attracted the attention of an older man in the neighborhood. He told them he played for the defunct University of Havana team and offered some pointers.

"He was teaching us the T formation," Rodríguez said. "Can you imagine? The T formation. We didn't know anything about the T formation."

Then, in 1993, he was

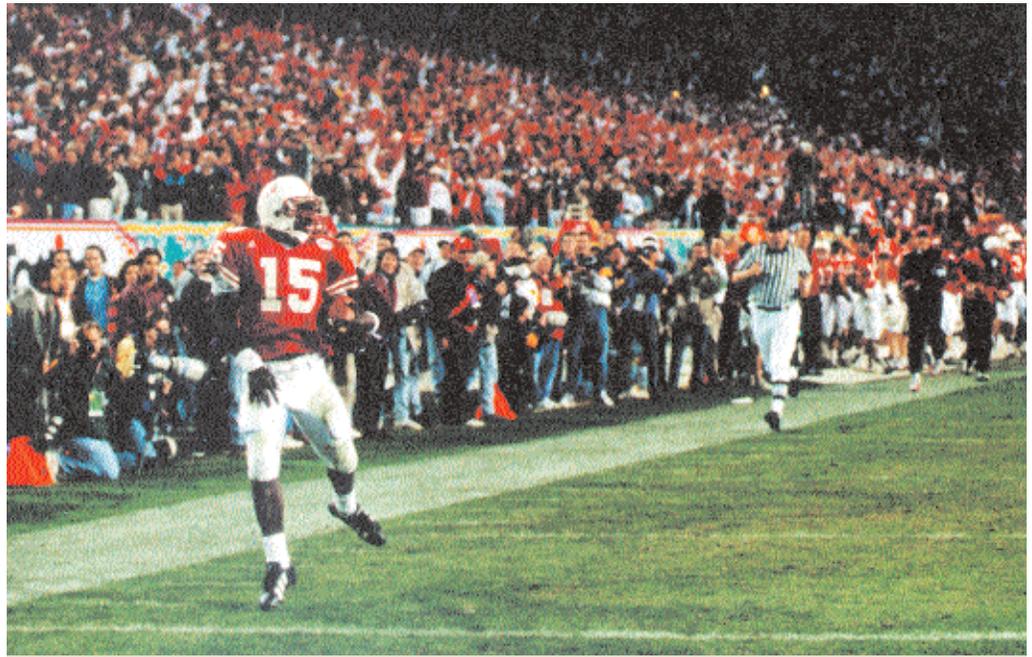


PHOTO COURTESY OF LINCOLN JOURNAL STAR

Tommie Frazier's performance in the 1996 Fiesta Bowl made a fan of Gustavo Rodríguez.

watching a rare game on TV with a picture so clear he still marvels at the memory. Option left, option right, up the middle, quarterback keepers, power football. And this quarterback, the guy *Sports Illustrated* made sound no more able to throw a pass than Castro could hold a free election, this guy was making completions all over the place.

"He went crazy. It was great."

He became a Frazier fan that day. The next season, as best he could, he followed the drama with Frazier's blood clots and his gutsy performance in the Orange Bowl. And gradually, he began to love the team Frazier quarterbacked.

In 1999, a quirk of fate cemented his kinship with the Cornhuskers. At an academic exchange involving American political cartoonists in Havana, he met Paul Fell, the well-known Nebraska editorial cartoonist whose work appears in the *Lincoln Journal Star*.

Fell admired Rodríguez's work and told him so when they met. When Fell mentioned that he lived in Lincoln, Neb., Rodríguez declared his affinity for the Huskers and started pumping Fell for the latest team news.

"That just knocked me

dead," Fell said.

The two developed a fast friendship, strengthened through meeting twice more in Havana and once in Washington, D.C., when Rodríguez was able to get a visa. Fell would love to get him into Memorial Stadium on an October Saturday.

"I've told him he knows more about Husker football than most people who consider themselves fans."

Frazier, now a husband and father living in Omaha, found it incredible that someone in Cuba even knows his name. He felt honored his Big Red found a way to penetrate Castro's big red.

"I think it's special for a person all the way from Cuba to follow Nebraska football because of me," he said. "It just shows you that college football draws fans from all over the world."

Indeed. Last season, fans from nearly two dozen countries logged on to the Internet to listen to Husker radio broadcasts, said Athletic Director Steve Pederson. None were from Cuba, however.

"I think it's really neat," Pederson said when told about the Husker in Havana. "But I'm not shocked. That's what

Husker football is all about."

Nowadays, Rodríguez is one of the relatively few Cubans with legal access to the Internet. It makes following the Huskers a breeze. At times, it's an overdose for a junkie used to getting his fix on nothing but fumes.

He'll be reading closely this fall, asking his radio wizard buddies to ply their skills on a clear night. If the U.S. State Department ever approves another visa request, he'll try to time the trip in the fall so he can see the hallowed ground in downtown Lincoln.

He hopes the new defensive coordinator can right the Blackshirts. Like many Husker fans north, he relishes the thought of meeting and beating Miami, Florida or Florida State in another national championship game, though he's not terribly confident the current head coach can return the Huskers to their former heights.

Asked to identify the greatest triumph of the revolution, most Cubans cite free education and health care. But Garrincha offered a different take:

"Frank Solich isn't in Cuba."





GEORGE BURKE HINMAN

Young Cubans will grow up with free education and health care in a socialist government system.

The jaded generation

Young Cubans disillusioned with revolution

By Cara Pesek

Among his friends, he's known as "the lucky one."

Antonio is a 25-year-old Cuban who lives in Havana with his grandmother. He works for the government as a tour guide, a job that allows him to make, on a good day, \$20 in tips. The average monthly salary in Cuba is between \$8 and \$30, depending on whom you ask.

A lot of people want to work in tourism. So Antonio, whose name has been changed, feels fortunate to have the job. And

his fluency in English allows him to freelance, giving private tours of Havana. His job gives him a social status slightly higher than most in the communist country of 11 million.

Antonio, along with his 40-year-old mother, his 10-month-old brother and millions of other Cubans, has grown up completely within this Cuba, the one created by the Revolution in 1959.

When Cubans like Antonio — those born after 1959 — studied the alphabet, they learned that F was for Fidel and R was for Raúl. They've grown

up with free education and health care. And all their lives, they have been surrounded and watched over by the heroes of the Cuban Revolution: Monuments to Che Guevara, schools and streets named after Jose Martí and giant billboards of Fidel.

But although they've never known anything but socialism, many now have this in common: They've grown restless and disillusioned with post-revolution life. They feel cut off and adrift. And they fear for the future — both their own and that of their country.

Factors like these, says Wayne Smith, a former U.S. government official in Havana, have made young Cubans long for change.

"The younger generation in Cuba is totally disenchanted with communism, with the system," he says. "They don't believe in it."

Among the reasons:

- A lack of material goods, a thriving black market and a visibly crumbling Cuba have showcased the socialist system's shortcomings.

- An influx of tourists, contact with friends and relatives in

the United States and limited access to the Internet have introduced young Cubans to a new world.

■ The reality that unskilled merchants can make more than doctors and engineers has made many question the necessity of a college education.

■ Better markets overseas have lured away many young, educated Cubans with promises of far better salaries and more fulfilling careers.

Not everyone under 44 is completely disenchanted, though. Take Josefina, a journalism student at Havana University, who believes that socialism is working. Cubans, she says, are free as long as they believe in socialism.

And, she says, Cuba takes care of its citizens.

“Nobody will be left alone,” she says.

But even she would like to see some change. She’d like to see higher wages. She’d like a freer press.

And for herself?

“I’d like a cell phone.”

■ ■ ■

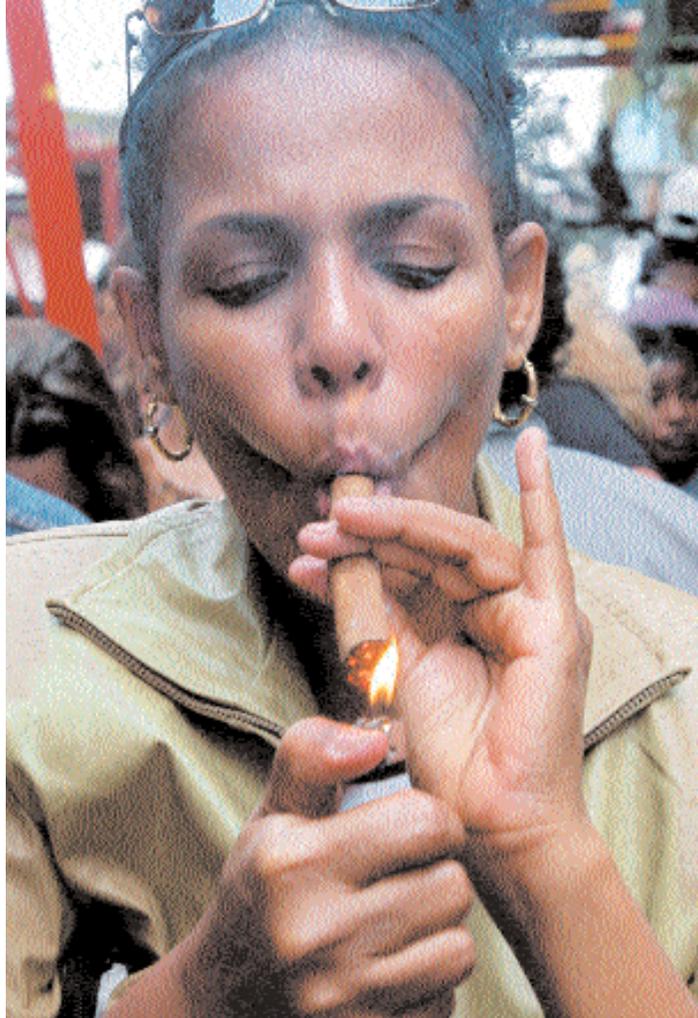
It’s a sunny January afternoon and Antonio is with an American tourist, looking for a way to the beach. He asks a few people on a busy Havana street where he can find a ride. After a few tries, a bent, middle-aged man with leathery skin and several missing teeth tells Antonio and the tourist to wait in front of a pharmacy for a red car. They wait for half an hour. The car never comes.

“That’s how it is here,”

Antonio says. He’s not particularly disappointed. In Cuba, where many things — cars, refrigerators, bicycles, furniture — are at least 44 years old, it’s common for things to break down.

It’s also a reminder of how things in Cuba don’t change. In his lifetime, Antonio says, government rations of beans, rice, coffee and sugar have never increased. When he was 16, he had had it. He left on a raft for the United States.

He made it (another reason his friends call him the lucky one). But after six years in Michigan and Florida, he missed his family. He took



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

A Cuban woman lights a cigar during a rumba festival in a Havana alley. Below: Music stores carry Latin American tunes, but none from U.S. artists.

a small boat back into Cuba to smuggle his mother, grandmother and sister out. But the government caught him, and he is now stuck in Cuba.

What would help keep Antonio and others of his generation in Cuba, Smith says, is to give them a little more opportunity to flex their busi-

ness muscles.

“Cubans are natural entrepreneurs,” Smith says. “Just give them their heads and they can solve a lot of these problems themselves.”

Like finding a way to the beach.

Antonio and the tourist abandon their pharmacy post.



He asks a few more people where he can find a car. No luck. So he and the tourist take a ferry to Old Havana, where they’ll tour a gothic cathedral and wander along cobblestone streets lined with old buildings — some restored by the government and converted into hotels, restaurants and shops for tourists, and others where Cubans live, with laundry strung out on rickety balconies and asterisks of masking tape on the windows to prevent them from breaking during storms.

The day won’t be a bust — far from it.

Cubans are flexible.

■ ■ ■

But as Cubans learn to make do with less and less, they’re seeing more and more. Namely, more European and North American tourists, who bring their cameras and camcorders, designer walking shoes and leatherbound travel journals, sunglasses and cell phones.

In 2000, 44 percent of Cuba’s income was from tourism, says Antonio Díaz, vice director of Havanatur. Canadians make up the biggest group — more than 300,000 visited in 2002, he estimates.

That’s quite a difference from 1990, when Cuba was the 23rd-most-popular vacation spot in the Caribbean. Now it’s number nine. Cuba now boasts six times as many hotel rooms, and employment in the industry has doubled in the past 10 years, Díaz said.

Meanwhile, Castro has done his best to shield Cubans from what he considers bad influences. International newspapers, magazines and television stations are virtually non-existent. Internet access is a little easier to come by but not widely available. And it’s illegal for a Cuban to own a VCR or a satellite dish. But the tourists, while bolstering the Cuban economy, are also walking billboards for what Castro fears.

Jose sees these billboards every day.

The 27-year-old Cuban artist says he doesn’t much care for tourists in general. Jose, whose name also has been changed, knows that Cuba has



Cuban couples sit along the Malecón. Below: A man holds his baby.

KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

A vacation spot

■ In 2000, 44 percent of Cuba's income was from tourism, says Antonio Díaz, vice director of Havantur.

■ More than 300,000 Canadians visited Cuba in 2002, Díaz estimates.

■ Cuba is now the ninth most popular vacation spot in the Caribbean, compared with 1990, when it was ranked number 23.

■ Cuba now boasts six times as many hotel rooms, and employment in the tourism industry has doubled in the past 10 years, Díaz says.

benefits other countries don't — the oft-mentioned free health care, free education through the university level and, most importantly, he says, equality. But tourists, specifically women he's had relationships with from France, Canada and Italy, have opened his eyes to a bigger world.

And then there's the issue of money.

Tourists have it. Cubans don't. And with more tourists traipsing through than ever before, Cubans are more aware of how little they have, Jose says.

"I don't have the money for nada. I don't have the money for new shoes," he says, gesturing toward worn brown boots.

There's also the issue of class. In many parts of Cuba, only tourists can get into a hotel or restaurant. Only tourists can visit the beach.

It angers Antonio that only a faded Florida driver's license gets him into some businesses in his own country. It angers him more that other Cubans — those who haven't lived in the United States and don't have American identification — can't get in at all.

"My friends get mad," he



said. "I get mad."

And lately, he said, the ID has worked less often. Antonio looks more Cuban than when he first returned. His tan is deeper, and his feet have become callused and cracked.

Cubans spend a lot of time in the sun, and they walk more.

■ ■ ■
As tourism grows, so does the number of Cubans who want to work in the booming industry — where American dollars will buy many things that Cuban pesos won't.

Cecilia Garcia, a 23-year-old Cuban, works with her mother

in a large, open-air market in a fixed-up area of Old Havana. There, she sells the sterling silver necklaces, bracelets, earrings and rings her mother makes.

Cecilia attended Havana University, where she studied civil construction. But peddling jewelry is still more profitable, even though her family must pay \$168 each month in rent and another 60 pesos per day in fees to the government.

"The money is still better than other jobs," she said.

Díaz, the vice director of Havantur, said it was common for even educated people to try to break into the tourism industry.

"The pay in tourism is higher," he said. "There is income other than salary."

Cubans — particularly young, resourceful ones — have found all sorts of ways to pick up a few dollars off tourists. Some rent rooms in their homes or draw caricatures of good-natured foreigners. Others turn to prostitution or begging.

So lucrative is tourism that some young Cubans are choosing to become bellhops or waiters over lawyers or teachers, said Jaime Suchlich, director of the Institute for Cuban and Cuban American Studies at the University of Miami.

Enrollment at Havana University, he says, has decreased as the number of tourism jobs has climbed.

"You can do better in tourism," he said.

The result has been the emergence of two classes in Cuba — the tourists and the locals. And within the local class, two more groups have emerged — those with access to tourists and those without.

Díaz acknowledges more cracks have appeared in Cuban society, but he doesn't think the industry is to blame.

"The problem is not tourism. The problem is the economic problem we faced after the collapse of socialism in Russia," he said.

"Tourism is a solution."

■ ■ ■
Tourism is not a solution for everyone, however. Thousands flee Cuba every year and many go to Miami.

That's where Eudel Cepero ended up.

Before he left Cuba in 1999, Cepero, now 41, worked for the Cuban Environmental Agency. But during the 16 years he worked for the government, he grew frustrated realizing his research and recommendations were often futile.

"Cuba is a closed circle," he says. "If an industry is polluting a river, who is responsible? The government."

Now, he works for Florida International University, where, he says, he is more free to pursue his goals.

"I have a lot of challenges here," he says. "I can see what is in front of me and can do what I want."

The allure of challenge, and making big bucks for it, has lured away many smart, young, educated Cubans, Cepero says.

Janisset Rivero is another who left.

Rivero, 34, who now works for the Directorio Democrático Cubano, a Miami-based organization promoting the spread of democracy in Cuba, left with her family when she was 15.

She had become disillusioned with Fidel a few years before she left. Though her parents ardently opposed the revolution, Rivero learned to be a socialist in school and tried to be a good one.

"At the beginning, I thought my parents were crazy," she says. "I believed more in my teachers."

She began to question what she was learning, however, when she got in trouble for writing a letter to her aunt and grandmother, who had fled to Venezuela.

"I said, 'Why is this like a crime? How is it affecting my point of view or my ideology?'"

Despite her protests, she says, the incident could have jeopardized her plans to become a member of the Communist Party and study at the university.

And then there's Antonio, who left once and hopes to leave again.

Is he unusual?

"Everyone wants to leave," he says. "Everyone."



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Brothers Dewis Villa (left), Renaldo Poey and Eric Villa (right) sit in the shadows on the concrete ledge beneath a hole in the ceiling of their apartment. Below: Young Cuban women walk among some bicycle-drawn taxis that carry tourists.

Others want to go back.

Javier de Céspedes is one of those.

At 36, Céspedes has visited Cuba but has never lived there. His parents fled to Mexico before he was born. Now he, like Rivero, works for the Directorio Democrático Cubano. He is the organization's president.

On paper, Céspedes is Mexican and American — he has citizenship in both countries. In his heart he is Cuban.

"My family's been in Cuba 500 years. You can't just unplug that."

Nearly everyone agrees that the day when Cubans and Americans are able to come and go freely is coming soon.

This will present another set of challenges, says Alberto Ibarguen, publisher of *The Miami Herald*.

Making money in the United States is not as easy as commonly believed in Cuba, he says, and the Cuba of 2003 is nothing like the Cuba of 1959, 1975, 1989 or even 2000. With Cuba's humid climate, paint, wood and stone deteriorate quickly. Buildings can erode significantly, or even crumble, in just a few years.



"I don't know which group will be more disappointed," Ibarguen says.



It's late afternoon, and Antonio and the tourist are finishing up their tour of Old Havana. He is telling her how frustrated he is, how impatient he is for change. He wants to go back to the United States but is unsure whether he'll get the chance. Failing that, he'd like to see at least a little capi-

talism and democracy work their way into Cuba. But he can think of only one way for that to happen.

"He's sick, you know," Antonio says. "He got sick after he was bit by a mosquito. His blood sugar is high."

Antonio is hopeful that the end of a 44-year era could come soon.

"He has to die sometime."



What's in store after Fidel?

A question that obsesses Cubans at home, away

By Melissa Lee

The first time you ask, the 40-year-old unemployed Cuban father of three finishes the query for you.

Surprising, you think. He's a smart one.

You ask it again, this time to a 20-year-old University of Havana student. "So, I'm curious" She quickly jumps in.

"Sí ... What do I think will happen when Fidel dies, that is your question, ¿no?"

Yes. That's it. So ... ?

Karen Brito, an aspiring journalist, shakes her head and combs her fingers through brown curls. "Ah, no sé, no sé. We're scared. We don't know. After Fidel, there is going to be great sadness for the Cuban people."

Alonso is a 20-year-old Havana waiter who prefers anonymity. He looks you straight in the eye and says, in carefully practiced English, "Death, it is a bad thing to wish on another person."

"But I tell you a secret: Every day I wish it for Fidel."

Ninety miles and a world away, Heriberto García, a 78-year-old who in 1959 boarded a raft bound for America, lights a cigar and leans heavily on his cane in Miami's Little Havana.

"Before Fidel, I had freedom," he says finally. "When he dies, I'm sure it's going to be better than now. It's going to be easier."

Whether on island or mainland, it's a question that obsesses and haunts 11 million Cubans and Miami's large and powerful exile community. They've heard it a thousand times — around the dinner table, in hushed street conversations and especially in their own thoughts.

And for good reason: Fidel Castro has kept an iron-fisted grip on Cuba for more than 44 years. His presence is felt everywhere — on billboards lauding his leadership, in headlines from



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Fidel Castro and Jose Martí look out from a large sign celebrating the 50th anniversary of Castro's July 26, 1953, attack on the Moncada Army Barracks that failed but brought him national prominence. The sign says, "I carry the doctrines of the teacher in my heart."

government-controlled newspapers, in a stroke of the Cuban chin when his name comes to mind. Castro's most extreme critics say his countrymen are at his mercy 24/7.

But with the coming of his 77th birthday this August, many increasingly ponder what's in store for the isolated socialist island after its leader dies. Some, like Brito, say they will mourn the death of a revered leader.

But others, including anti-Castro Americans dedicated to building a free Cuba, are driven by the hope that his passing will bring democracy and an opportunity to lift the 42-year-old trade and travel embargo between America and its neighbor.

Interviews with numerous Miami exiles, Cuban experts and citizens reveal several significant issues leading the post-Castro debate. Specifically:

- **His successor.** The candidates include a brother, just four years younger, who already controls the military; a Harvard-educated former Cuban ambassador to the United Nations; a young, handsome minister of Foreign Affairs — or an ordinary civilian no one can name.

- **Whether the growing movement within both countries to end the embargo will succeed.**

- **Whether the United States will play a role in Cuba's transition period — and if so, what plans exist for possible reconstruction.**

They are complex issues, and no exact answers can be pinned down. But all agree on one thing: Castro isn't likely to loosen his grip willingly, and when his throne becomes vacant, Cuba could find itself in limbo.

"Something will have to change. I don't know what, but something is going to change," says 69-year-old Erena Peña, a Miami resident who fled Cuba in 1967. "History says that.

"But he's a devil. Devils don't die easily."

■ ■ ■

A post-Castro Cuba cannot be considered until a Castro-controlled Cuba is understood, for his face, his messages, seep into every aspect of Cuban life.

When his rebel troops overthrew dictator Fulgencio Batista in 1959, he delivered promises of



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

A sign with Castro's image reads: "We will know how to be capable of following your example for them. Eternal glory."

The contenders

- **Raúl Castro, Fidel's brother, No. 2 on the Cuban power ladder and leader of the military.** Many used to assume he was the automatic heir to Fidel's throne. But like Fidel, he is in his 70s, and some say he lacks his brother's charisma.

- **Ricardo Alarcón, National Assembly of People's Power, president.**

- **Carlos Lage, vice president.**

- **Felipe Pérez Roque, Castro's former secretary and current minister of foreign affairs.**



Castro



Alarcón



Lage



Roque

free elections and democratic reforms. Cuba was to see new life, he vowed.

But he's not fulfilled those promises. In fact, critics say, Castro has long since taken his "Viva la Revolución" mantra to terrifying extremes. For four decades, he and his government have controlled everything: whether citizens can own a car, what makes its way into the communist-run media, who can enter what establishments.

In January's parliamentary elections, all 609 candidates ran unopposed. Political dissidents refused to participate and encouraged their fellow citizens to follow suit; nevertheless, Castro and other government officials were among millions to cast a ballot that day. To the disgust of many Cuban dissidents, Vice President Carlos Lage told reporters the elections were "truly free and democratic" because candidates spent so little money on their campaigns.

But in a true democracy, there would have been competition for some of those 609 spots, Castro's critics note.

"This is a very evil, repressive system," says Javier de Céspedes, president of the Miami-based Directorio Democrático Cubano, an organization that fights for democracy in Cuba. "Repression happens all your life. There's nothing in your life that's private. It all belongs to the government."

Wonders Florida Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, who left Cuba with her family at age 7: "If it's such a great place, why are people literally dying to come to America?"

"There's no future in Cuba. There's no future in communism."

■ ■ ■

Where, then, can Cuba find a new future?

Many hope it's in Fidel's successor. For although he may seem invincible — he has outlasted 10 U.S. presidents, a number of mili-

Fidel Castro

- **Born:** Aug. 13, 1926, to Spanish farmer Angel Castro y Agriz and the family housemaid, Lina Ruz Gonzalez.

- **Birthplace:** Oriente Province, Cuba.

- **Education:** Catholic schools in Santiago de Cuba; Belen College, a Jesuit high school in Havana, 1941-45; University of Havana Law School, 1946-50.

- **Occupation:** Supreme ruler of the only communist regime in the Western Hemisphere.

- **Political history:** Protested as a law student; worked in Colombia against formation of Organization of American States; ran for election to Cuban Chamber of Deputies in 1952, but Gen. Fulgencio Batista canceled election; became a revolutionary and spent three years in jail after July 26, 1953, attack on Moncada Military Barracks; continued to amass following until Jan. 8, 1959, when he accepted the mantle of power.

- **Quote:** "Very few who meet him are not seduced by his personal charm, even those who violently disagree with him on ideological grounds. He has a special quality shared by few politicians, of giving his undivided attention to anyone speaking to him, no matter how lowly he is or how insignificant his comments. He also has the capacity to pick the brains of his visitors in a way that is flattering to them and at the same time of immense value to him." — Peter Bourne, who met Castro as a representative of the U.S. government in 1979.

tary conflicts and countless assassination attempts — this much is certain: He *will* die.

In a trip around the island in summer 2001, the Cuban leader repeatedly complained of the heat. And in June that same year,

he collapsed from heat exhaustion during a two-hour rally just outside Havana.

Many Cubans panicked, thinking their hero's end was approaching. But Castro quickly allayed those fears, telling citizens he was fine. Later, surrounded by reporters, he hinted at his successor's identity.

"If they tell me tomorrow morning, 'You're having a heart attack,' a sudden death or if I have an accident ... and I go to sleep for eternity, Raúl is the one with the most authority and experience."

So, the first candidate: Fidel's younger brother, Raúl, four years his junior, who runs the country's military and is No. 2 on the Cuban power ladder.

Long hailed by most experts as the one to fill Fidel's combat boots, Raúl is the frontrunner for a variety of reasons — his family lineage, his knowledge of the system and his control of the weapons among them. Also, according to Article 94 of the Cuban Constitution, in case of absence, illness or death of the president, the first vice president assumes responsibility.

But there are doubts. For one, he's not much younger than his older brother. And he's been criticized for drinking and smoking too much and not getting enough sleep — a far cry from Fidel, who exercises regularly and long ago stopped smoking his beloved Cohiba cigars.

There's another problem: Raúl is decidedly less charismatic. Even those who hate Fidel admit he has an uncanny ability to cast people under his spell.

"Fidel, son of a ..." growls García, the Miami Cuban exile. He says fleeing was difficult at first, because it was easy to believe the lofty promises.

"I was under the psychological impression of Fidel," says García, sitting on a bench in Miami's Domino Park, where elderly Cuban Americans gather to smoke, chat and play dominoes. "Fidel is charming. He can trick everybody. Raúl, no."

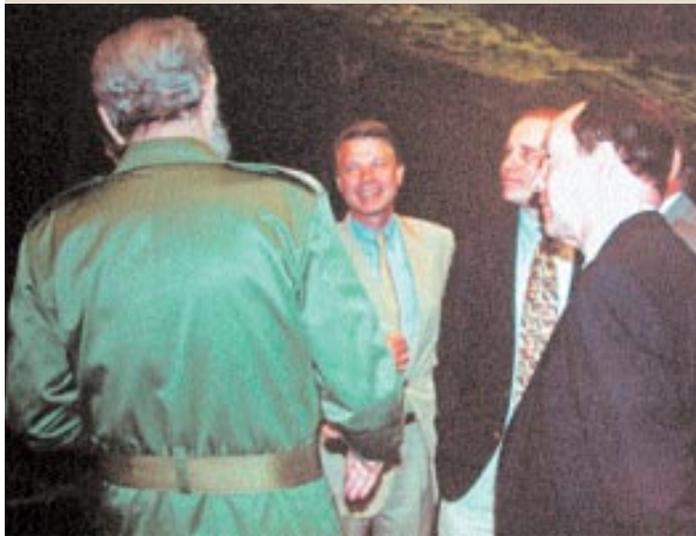
"The only good thing would be if Fidel died ... but we cannot find anybody to take leadership. Who knows?"

Another reason Raúl may not be Cuba's next president: Some



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TOM REIBER

Fidel Castro visits with a group of American businessmen and farmers during an eight-hour dinner in January 2002. Tom Reiber (below far right), a farmer from Gibbon, Neb., was among those invited to accompany a delegation from Minneapolis-based Cargill to meet with Cuban officials and deliver 25,000 metric tons of American corn to the island nation.



experts say he will simply maintain his stronghold on the military and appoint a little-known government figure, or even a civilian, to lead the country.

"He is already running the country," says Jaime Suchlicki, director of the Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies at the University of Miami. "He will continue behind the scenes in control. He'll probably allow some civilian to take over."

Raúl's hat is not alone in the ring of speculation, however.

Another belongs to Ricardo Alarcón, president of the National Assembly of People's Power. The 65-year-old Alarcón is savvy, well-respected and well-educated — he boasts a Harvard degree, has served as Cuba's minister of Foreign Affairs and was Cuban ambassador to the United Nations for nearly 15 years. But many doubt he has the charisma to replace Fidel.

There's also Vice President Lage, 51, who has helped Cuba through tough economic times in

recent years. An experienced worldwide traveler, he was president of the University Student Foundation at the University of Havana, where he earned both medical and law degrees. Yet in a 1999 interview with the Madrid-based Cuban Liberal Union, it was suggested Lage might be the one to follow Fidel. Lage's swift reply: "Frankly, no." Castro's successor, Lage told the reporter, needs to have a bit more "personality."

That makes Felipe Pérez Roque, Cuba's current minister of Foreign Affairs, a definite possibility. Energetic, handsome and, at age 37, significantly younger than other government leaders, Roque is especially popular among younger Cubans. And it was Roque who helped Castro off the podium when he collapsed in 2001.

Most Cubans hesitate to pick one name for the pool.

Alonso, the young Havana waiter, has no idea what will happen when Castro dies. But he

does know what he's crossing his fingers for.

"This is all I have, you know?" he says, gesturing to his denim jacket and jeans. "I have nothing else. This ration system, it is bullshit. I have rice, potatoes, every night. Meat? No. I do not remember the last time I tasted meat."

"The Cuban people, we have to hope, you know? Because this is all we got, we at least got to hope for something better."

But no one's saying Castro's successor will lead Cuba as he has. In fact, most contenders have indicated they'd be open to an idea rapidly gaining support both in America and Cuba: lifting the 42-year-old trade and travel embargo.

President Bush, however, has said repeatedly that he supports the embargo — or, as Cubans call it, the "blockade" — until there are free, democratic elections in Cuba.

His hard-line stance has not gone unchallenged. Members of Congress, including Nebraska Sen. Chuck Hagel, are pressuring Bush to dissolve the embargo. And even Miami's Cuban American exile community, whose support Bush used to count on, is wavering. A February Miami Herald survey showed a majority of Cuban Americans supported lifting the embargo.

And despite current restrictions, more and more Americans are traveling to Cuba. Almost 176,000 of them flew through Mexico, Jamaica or Canada to get to Cuba in 2001, according to the Cuba-U.S. Trade and Economic Council, a New York City-based organization that keeps tabs on the Cuban economy.

In Miami, too, businesses are preparing for the day Castro dies. They're poised for possible trade opportunities, according to Alberto Ibarguen, the Herald's publisher. Ibarguen joins other experts in saying it's only a matter of time now before the embargo disappears.

"When Fidel dies, I think there'll be an attempt ... by commercial Miami to start trading with Cuba," he says. "I have a feeling things will change."

Locally, Nebraska's leaders also have pushed for opening trade

with Cuba. They say the state could reap substantial economic benefits from trading rice, beans, grains, flour and other products. According to a 2001 study by Texas A&M University, America would see \$411 million in Cuban exports if the embargo were lifted — with Nebraska ranking in the top 10 states receiving financial benefits.

Some Miamians are disgusted by those arguments, though. Nebraska is simply singing the song of capitalism, they say, without regard to the welfare of Cuban citizens.

“It’s awful Nebraska wants to trade,” García says. “They are looking for business, for money, not freedom, peace. Nebraska doesn’t care. They only think about marketing.”

Agrees Antonio Jorge, Castro’s former chief economist and now a professor of economics at Florida International University in Miami: “This amazes me. This really I find amazing. Please don’t tell me how Nebraska farmers are losing sleep over the poor undernourished Cuban children.”

Then, later: “Perhaps I was a bit harsh on your Nebraska farmers. Nothing personal.”

■ ■ ■

A final question is whether Cuba will need assistance during its post-Castro transition — and whether the United States will lend a hand.

Suchlicki, of the University of Miami, has led the Cuba Transition Project since he initiated it in 1967 when he came to the United States from Cuba. It’s a series of publications dealing with various Cuban institutions that could falter after Castro’s death — its judicial system, economy, educational system, military and health care. Four booklets have been published, and 21 are forthcoming in the next years.

Depending on Fidel’s successor, Cuba could need plenty of U.S. help, Suchlicki says.

He and Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen say officials in Miami are ready to help Cubans set up sophisticated infrastructure, such as phone lines, fax machines, Internet — none of which today’s average Cuban has access to.

According to Suchlicki, primary goals for U.S. officials aiding a transitioning Cuba are:



- establishing a timetable for holding free, internationally supervised elections.

- legalizing the formation of opposing political parties.

- observing civil liberties and human rights for all Cubans.

- establishing a free, independent press, radio and television.

- opening up Cuba to foreign visitors.

- revising the Cuban Constitution and legal system.

It will be difficult and time-consuming, Suchlicki says,

because Castro’s Revolution runs deep in Cuba. And the people may not be ready for immediate change; most will grieve considerably at Castro’s death.

“It’s not a master plan,” he says. “You can pass beautiful laws, but if the attitude of the people is not there, it’s not going to work.”

“It’s going to take a long time.”

■ ■ ■

For at least one young Cuban, the post-Castro era matters little. Ángel, 22, stops you on a Havana street, eager to show what he’s got.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALBERTO KORDA, REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION FROM THE KORDA PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION OF GEORGE BURKE HINMAN

Above: In 1963, a year after the Cuban Missile Crisis, Castro visited Russia. During a visit to Nikita Khrushchev’s dacha outside Moscow, Castro uses a Polaroid to photograph the Russian premier and his family.

Left: Looking much like your weekend hacker, the socialist revolutionary indulges in capitalist recreation.

He’s been studying English phrases, he says.

“Crux of the matter, you know that one? Once in a blue moon, you heard of that one? I’ve been reading . . .” He pauses to kiss your hand. “You can send me American books when you get back? A dictionary? I want to learn, to learn.”

“I want to be the best when I get to America. When Fidel dies, that is when I will go.”

Near Miami’s Domino Park, Erena Peña fingers her large gold hoop earrings and smooths her metallic-gold pants before speaking of the country she once loved.

She doesn’t care to guess what may come of her homeland when Fidel Castro dies. Other people may know, she says. Not her.

“But I think there is hope,” Peña says, smiling. “Hope is the last thing you lose.”

“You always have to have hope.”



SOURCE LIST

A

Houari Abdelaziz, 49, Cuban man with AIDS in Havana
Ofelia Acevedo, wife of Varela Project leader
Oswaldo Payá
Ricardo Alarcón, president of Cuba's National Assembly of People's Power
Brian Alexander, executive director, Cuba Policy Foundation, Washington, D.D.
Dr. Lazaro Alvarez, head of neurological disorder clinic, CIREN, Havana
The Rev. Lazaro R. Alvarez, pastor of Iglesia Metodista Universitaria, Havana
Pedro Alvarez, chairman of Alimport, Cuba's chief import agency
José Antonio, 44, unemployed bakery worker, Havana
Tessie Aral, vice president of ABC Charters, Miami

B

Dr. Byron Barksdale, North Platte pathologist, head of Cuban AIDS Project
Michael Blake, 22, Auburn University architecture student studying in Havana
Pedro Ugarte Bravo, 31, cook, ourist aide, Havana
Karen Brito, 20, University of Havana journalism student

C

Guillermo Cabrera, director of Jose Martí International Press Institute, Havana
Mario Calzado, 15-year-old boy fishing on the Malecón
Carlos Manuel Cardella, 42-year-old candy-maker fishing on the

Malecón

Dr. José Carro, Cuban Liberty Council, Miami
Laida Carro, Cuban Liberty Council, human rights activist, Miami
Humberto Castello, executive editor, El Nuevo Herald, Miami
Ninoska Pérez Castellón, radio talk show host, Cuban Liberty Council member, Miami
Marta Castillo, elderly woman selling memorabilia in La Plaza de Armas, Havana
Dr. Miladys Castillo, Latin American School of Medicine, Havana
Ramon Humberto Colás Castillo, director of Independent Libraries of Cuba, Miami
Max Castro, University of Miami researcher, Miami Herald columnist
Miladys Castro, 34, daughter of Vladimiro Roca, lives in Tampa, Fla.
J. Cisnero, 22, Havana bank employee
Dr. Marilyn Claro, vice director, Frank País Orthopedic Center, Havana
Abel Contreras de la Guardia, Havana tour guide
Raúl Costoya, 78-year-old Cuban-American in Domino Park, Miami
James Henry Creedon, New Yorker studying medicine in Havana
Pablo Cubela, member of Iglesia Metodista Universitaria, Havana

D

Roberto de Armas, U.S. specialist with Cuba's foreign ministry, Havana
Javier de Céspedes, 36, president of Directorio Democrático Cubano, Miami

Angel De Fana, ex-Cuban political prisoner now with Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), Miami
Father Fernando de la Vega, Montserrate Church AIDS support group, Havana
José Eduardo De Leon, 23, American medical student in Havana
Marilu Del Toro, communications director, Directorio Democrático Cubano, Miami
Antonio Díaz, vice director, Havantur, Havana
Antonio Díaz, Christian Liberation Movement member, Havana, sentenced in April to 20 years in prison
Nidia Díaz, chief of international information, Granma newspaper, Havana
Orlando Díaz, 31, unemployed father of two in Havana
Orlando Díaz, 36, taxi driver, Havana
Ariel Dominguez, 27-year-old man with AIDS, Havana
Felix Dominguez, 43-year-old meatpacking employee, Norfolk, Neb.
Jenny Dominguez, 20-year-old Havana resident, daughter of Felix Dominguez

E

Salvador González Escalona, Cuban artist, Havana

F

Amaury Febles, Havana resident
Marcell Felipe, Cuban-American attorney, Cuban Liberty Council board member, Miami
Alína Fernández, daughter of Fidel Castro, radio personality, Miami

SOURCE LIST

Efrén Fernández, Christian Liberation Movement member, Havana, sentenced in April to 12 years in prison
Gladys Rodríguez Ferrero, Cuban Hemingway scholar in Havana
Susan Fischli, 23, American student in Havana
Juan Fransisco, doorman at Havana's El Floridita
Mike Fuller, New Yorker teaching English at Jose Martí Press Institute, Havana
Rogelio Polanco Fuentes, director, Juventud Rebelde newspaper, Havana

G

Cecilia Garcia, 23, jewelry vendor at Old Havana street market
Heriberto García, 78, Cuban-American in Miami who fled Cuba in 1959
Joe Garcia, president, Cuban American National Foundation, Miami
Salvador Rodríguez Garcia, 19-year-old man with AIDS, Havana
Angel Garrido, psychiatrist, Cuban Liberty Council member, Miami
Nicholas Giacobbe, U.S. Interests Section, Havana
Frank Aguero Gomez, director general, Granma newspaper, Havana
Alicia González, Cuban women's rights activist
Daniel Salas González, 19, Havana University student, intern, Juventud Rebelde
Daniel González, CANF volunteer, Miami
Eduardo González, Hemingway scholar, Johns Hopkins University
Fara González, a nun who volunteers with AIDS patients, Havana

Jorge González, Web design company manager, Hialeah, Fla.
Ricardo González, independent journalist, Havana, sentenced in April to 20 years in prison

H

Liliet Heredero, journalism student, Havana University
Frank Hernandez, Cuban translator in Havana
Jesus Joel Díaz Hernandez, former imprisoned Cuban journalist now in Texas
Ron Hogan, volunteer for Cuba AIDS Project, Cape Coral, Fla.

I

Alberto Ibarguen, publisher, The Miami Herald

J

Raúl Janes, 70, Cuban-American who fled after revolution, Miami
Antonio Jorge, former Castro economist, now at Florida International University

L

Dr. Vicente Lago, gastroenterologist, Miami
Carlos Lauría, Committee to Protect Journalists, New York
Juan León, director of international relations, Cuban Ministry of Agriculture
Nadege Loiseau, medical student in Havana
Jorge Luis, caretaker of Iglesia Catolica Santa Rita de Casia, Havana
Julio Garcia Luis, dean, Havana University communications faculty
Claudia Márquez Linares, director, independent news agency, Havana

M

Jay Mallin, former news director, Radio Martí
Ana Milagros Martínez, Federation of Cuban Women official, Havana
Gerardo Martínez, friend of former political prisoner Vladimiro Roca, Miami
Roberto Martínez, aka Agent Ernesto, Cuban government spy whose testimony helped put independent journalist Omar Rodríguez Saludes in prison
Rene Perez Massola, Jose Martí Press Institute official, Havana
Boris Matos, 67, Cuban-American who fled after revolution, Domino Park, Miami
Eduardo Miguel Medua, 24, American medical student, Havana
Dennys Molina, 33-year-old English teacher who practices Santeria, Havana
Omar López Montenegro, executive director, CANF, Miami
Elsa Morejón, wife of political prisoner Oscar Elías Biscet González, Havana
Mariela Fernández Moreno, 23, Havana security officer

O

Tom Osborne, Nebraska congressman
Manuel David Orrio, aka Agent Miguel, spy posing as independent journalist, Havana; testimony put several Cuban journalists in prison in 2003

P

Erena Peña, 69, Cuban-American who fled Cuba in 1967, Miami
Isaac Peralta, Mexican medical

SOURCE LIST

student, Havana
Emma Calderi Perez, 17, Havana
University student, Juventud
Rebelde intern
Dr. Teresa Romero Perez, assistant
medical school director, Havana
Matilde Skeete Planes, 60-year-old
Havana resident, retired neurologist
Marcos Orlando Villa Poey, 26-
year-old Cuban janitor, Havana
Beatriz Polanco, medical student,
Havana

R

Renato Recio, writer for
Trabajadores, Havana
Nancy Remon, medical school pub-
lic relations official, Havana
Naty Revuelta, mother of Castro's
only known daughter, Havana
Raúl Rivero, independent journal-
ist, Havana, sentenced to 20 years
in prison in April
Janisset Rivero, with Directorio
Democratico Cubano, Miami
Vladimiro Roca, ex-political prison-
er and now a leading dissident,
Havana
Gustavo Rodríguez, Juventud
Rebelde cartoonist, Husker fan,
Havana
Johann Rodríguez, 23-year-old
Miami Cuban
Orlando Rodríguez, former direc-
tor, Radio/TV Martí, Miami
Paul S. Rodríguez, radio
production specialist,
Radio Martí, Miami
Pedro L. Vilches Rodríguez,
Havanatur official, Havana
Sauro González Rodríguez, with
the Committee to Protect
Journalists, New York
Margarita Rojo, Radio Martí news
director, Miami
Roberto Romero, 28, Havana

University computer science student
Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, (R-Fla.),
U.S. congresswoman, Miami
Heather Ross, 21, Auburn
University architecture student in
Havana
Joaquín Roy, professor, University
of Miami
Jose Orlando Ruiz, 70, former
actor, famed Havana street person

S

Hans de Salas-del Valle, researcher,
Cuban Transition Project,
University of Miami
Omar Rodríguez Saludes, inde-
pendent journalist, Havana, sen-
tenced to 27 years in prison
Margarita Barrio Sánchez, 42,
Cuban newspaper reporter, Havana
Tony Santiago, friend of former
political prisoner Vladimiro Roca,
Miami
Wayne Smith, former head of
U.S. Interests Section, Havana
Gene Sosin, former employee,
Radio Free Europe
Sandra Spanier, Hemingway
scholar, Penn State University
Rochelle Spencer, Australian doc-
toral student, Havana
Esther Sterphems, member, Iglesia
Catolica Santa Rita de Casia,
Havana
Jaime Suchlicki, director, Institute
for Cuban and Cuban-American
Studies, Miami
John Suárez, Directorio
Democratico Cubano
official, Miami

T

Baz Talrue, musician, Havana
Tracye Tidwell, 21, Auburn
University architecture student
in Havana

Judy Tjiong, 34, Auburn University
architecture student
in Havana
William Trumbull, professor on the
Cuban economy, West Virginia
University

V

Odilia Collazo "Lily" Valdés, aka
Agent Tania, spy posing as human
rights activist, Havana; her testimo-
ny helped put several journalists in
prison in 2003
Alberto Velaquez, proud owner of
heavily modified four-door '57
Dodge, Havana
Ivan Verez, Cuban-American shop
owner, Miami
Bertha Gomez Vina, member of
Iglesia de Santo Angel Custodio,
Havana

W

Matina Weeks, 22, American med-
ical student, Havana

Z

Yurisander Guevara Zaila, 19,
student, Juventud Rebelde intern,
Havana

SOURCE LIST

The following list represents sources who requested anonymity. In some cases only their first names were used and in other cases the first names were changed.

A

Alan, 20-something electrical technician, Havana
Alberto, 26, Havana street hustler
Alonso, 20, waiter, Havana
Amilcar, AIDS support group volunteer, Havana
Ana, a 19-year-old jinitera on the Malecón
Ángel, 20-year-old waiter, Havana
Ángel, 22-year-old resident, Havana
Anthony, 29-year-old man on the streets, Havana
Anthony, construction worker at Capitol, Havana
Antonio, 25-year-old who offers horse-drawn carriage rides to tourists, Havana
Ariel, 25, Havana native studying tourism service at Havana University
Arturo, 48, sales clerk in a T-shirt shop near El Floridita, Havana

C

Carlos, a 39-year-old artist, Havana
Charly, 22, a university student, Havana

D

David, 57, retired electrical engineer from Holguín

E

Eduardo, 70, psychologist, Havana

F

Fabio, 23-year-old encountered on streets, Havana

Fishermen, Cojimar
Franco, 21-year-old student, Havana

G

Gregorio, 32, artist, Havana
Guillermo (Willy), 58, retired, Rumba Festival patron, Havana

I

Ileana, 44-year-old mother, Havana
Isaías, 25-year-old cashier, Havana

J

Janet, a 19-year-old jinitera on the Prado, Havana
Jean, an 18-year-old jinitera on the Prado, Havana
José, 31, husband of a jinitera, Havana
José, lived in New York as child, now lives in Havana
José, 27, artist and Havana resident
José, self-employed tour guide, pimp, wife is a prostitute, Havana
José, 57, guide, interpreter, taxi driver, Havana
Josefina, journalism student, University of Havana
Juancarlos, 32, employee at a flower shop, tourist guide, Havana

L

Lazario, 29, self-employed tour guide from Santa Clara
Lazario, 49, proprietor of a paladar, professor at a technical school, Havana

M

María, a 20-year-old jinitera on the Malecón, Havana
María, 36, saleswoman, Havana
Marlene, 36-year-old woman, Old Havana

N

Navil, 21, journalism student, University of Havana

O

Omar, 28, earned a degree in hydraulic technology, now a tour guide, Havana

P

Pedro, government employee, Havana
Pedro, 31-year-old cook who hustles tourists, Havana

R

Roberto, 29-year-old cook, Havana
Romero, a school volunteer, Havana
Rosa, an 18-year-old jinitera on the Malecón, Havana

T

Tessie, a 21-year-old jinitera on the Prado, Havana

Credits and thanks

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Courtesy Photos

Tom Reiber
Lincoln Journal
Star
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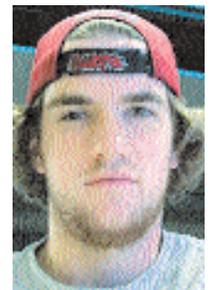
BILL KELLY/Nebraska Educational Television

Front row: Joe Duggan, Cara Pesek and Matthew Hansen, David Pittock. Back row: Professor Jerry Renaud, Professor Joe Starita, Catharine Huddle, Shane Pekny, Jill Zeman, Melissa Lee, Dakarai Aarons, Sarah Fox and Lindsey Kealy.

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Thank you:

Students and faculty at the University of Nebraska Journalism College owe a good deal of gratitude to a number of individuals whose kindness, patience and support made this report possible. That list includes: Alberto Ibarguen, publisher of The Miami Herald; Joe Garcia of the Cuban American National Foundation; Marcell Felipe and Laida Carro of the

Cuban Liberty Council; Max Castro, University of Miami; Guillermo Cabrera, director general of the Jose Martí International Press Institute; Roberto de Armas, with the Cuban Foreign Ministry; Luis Fernández, first secretary, Cuban Interests Section; Father Fernando de la Vega, vice chancellor of the Havana Archdiocese; Maria Aral and Ana Limia, ABC Charters; Allen Beermann, executive

director, Nebraska Press Association; Paul Fell, Lincoln Journal Star; Peter Levitov, University of Nebraska International Affairs; the Lincoln Journal Star; Abel Contreras de la Guardia, official tour guide; George Burke Hinman, unofficial tour guide.

Finally, to the many Cuban people in Miami and Havana who gave us their time, thoughts and passion — muchas gracias.



KEN BLACKBIRD/Lincoln Journal Star

Though not always free to speak their minds, Cubans dance freely throughout the island, as in this Havana restaurant.