

**Richmond, CA – Regla, Cuba
Sister City Delegation 2013**



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Sister City Program

Why do we have sister cities, and why should Richmond participate? The following is from Sister Cities International:

Sister Cities International was created at President Eisenhower's 1956 White House conference on citizen diplomacy. Eisenhower envisioned an organization that could be the hub of peace and prosperity by creating bonds between people from different cities around the world. By forming these relationships, President Eisenhower reasoned that people of different cultures could celebrate and appreciate their differences and build partnerships that would lessen the chance of new conflicts.

Sister Cities International creates relationships based on cultural, educational, information and trade exchanges, creating lifelong friendships that provide prosperity and peace through person-to-person "citizen diplomacy." Since then, Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Reagan, Bush, Clinton, Bush, and now President Barack Obama have served as the Honorary Chairman of Sister Cities International.

Since its inception, Sister Cities International has played a key role in renewing and strengthening important global relationships. Early partnerships included a trading relationship between Seattle, Washington and Tokyo, Japan, repairing post-WWII tensions by creating cultural and educational exchanges and, subsequently, lasting friendships. A 1974 study found that many early sister city relationships formed out of the post WWII aid programs to Western Europe. The relationships that endured, however, were based on cultural or educational reasons that developed lasting friendships. Sister Cities International improved diplomatic relationships at watershed moments over the past 50 years, including partnerships with China in the 1970s.

In the new millennium, Sister Cities International continues to expand its reach to new and emerging regions of the world. Today, it dedicates a special focus on areas with significant opportunities for cultural and educational exchanges, economic partnerships, and humanitarian assistance.¹

Sister City relationships are not investments with expected or quantifiable monetary returns. The benefits are often intangible but still highly valuable.

Each Council member or employee of the City who used his or her travel allowance for the trip exercised discretion to choose the Sister City program just as they exercise discretion to attend other programs and conferences that provide information and contacts useful in managing a city.

Each of us has our own "take-aways" from these exercises, and here are some of mine:

¹ <http://www.sister-cities.org/mission-and-history>

1. I was very impressed with how Cuba is embracing historic preservation as an economic engine. For them, it is critical, and it is working. We can't use exactly the same mechanisms as the city historian of Havana, because we are not a socialist state that controls property, but we can think out of the box, just as he did, to find innovative ways to use our historic resources to create jobs and economic development. I was also impressed with the branch of Havana University, Colegio Universitario San Geronimo de la Habana, that teaches a broad curriculum of preservation in four tracks: urban management, museum management, archeology and socio-cultural. I don't think anything like that exists in the U.S. We were also told that every municipality is required to have and maintain a museum to preserve the historic and cultural heritage of the region.
2. No one has guns in Cuba except the police and the armed forces. We saw armed police, but they were few and subtle, unlike what we have seen in many other countries, including Western Europe. I did not see a single armed soldier. Our 45-year old guide he had never seen a gun (I assume he meant other than cops and soldiers). Cuba is one of the safest places on earth to visit. Cuba is poor, but crime is rare.
3. Cuba is clean. Other than some rural areas where trash was sometimes visible along streets and in one instance, a railroad track, it is remarkably clean for a poor country, certainly cleaner than Richmond. I saw only a few instances of graffiti during the entire trip.
4. Although perhaps not sustainable in its current form, the Cubans have shown that universal medical care and free education through the college level with world class outcomes is possible. What is equally important is a set of cultural values that support these accomplishments. If Cuba can do it, the richest country in the world can do it. We have no excuse.
5. Finally, I was impressed by such a poor country having an attitude that "we are all in this together" rather than each person trying to get as much as possible from a limited amount of resources and fighting over scraps. The acceptance of low wages is clearly changing, and our guides are a good example of people making critical personal choices to increase their income. How Cuba handles these changes without creating an economic divide will be interesting to watch.

A good assessment of the political situation and embargo can be found at <http://www.tampabay.com/news/perspective/what-i-learned-in-cuba/2121361>

Introduction

Perceptions

When I started telling people about the upcoming trip to Cuba, virtually all of the responses included some reference to 1950s cars and cigars. I think this is about the extent of most Americans' knowledge and interest in Cuba. They also know that it is difficult to get there but are hazy on the details. I have to admit that I didn't know much more. I went on this trip because it seemed like an extraordinary opportunity to see and learn about Cuba, and I had few preconceptions.

Sister City Relationship

On September 14, 1999, the Richmond City Council by unanimous vote passed [resolution #147-99](#) establishing the relationship with Regla, Cuba. An official delegation presided by then Vice Mayor Irma L. Anderson traveled to Regla to sign the agreement with Regla officials on December 16, 1999. Regla celebrated its 300th birthday in 1987. Regla is a blue collar town with a long history of struggle. Regla has a large Afro-Cuban population and is an important cultural and religious center of Santeria and Yoruba. Click here for [First Official Delegation to Regla, Cuba in 1999](#). [Officials from Regla visited Richmond in December 2001](#).

The Delegation

Shirley and I were invited by the [Richmond Regla Sister City Committee](#) to join the group making the 2013 visit. Shirley and I joined eight others, making a total of ten. The group was friendly and compatible but consisted of individuals of diverse and interesting backgrounds and interests. Several had already been to Cuba one or more times, and several speak Spanish, which was very helpful. The other eight are:

- Richmond Mayor **Gayle McLaughlin**, who has a special interest in Cuba culture and politics. Gayle participated in the [Venceremos Brigade](#)² in 1986, and in 2009, she introduced a [resolution supporting the Cuban Five](#) and visitation rights for their families that was passed unanimously by the Richmond City Council. It turns out that Gayle is actually surprisingly well-known in Cuba. At one public building, we saw a photo of her posted on a wall of heroes right next to Abraham Lincoln.
- **Paul Kilkenny**, Gayle's husband and a social justice activist.
- **Tarnel Abbot**, a retired Richmond librarian, who speaks Spanish and has been to Cuba several times. Tarnel served in the first Venceremos



Figure 1- Miami Airport



Figure 2-Cubans returning from Florida. To guard against theft, passengers pay around \$15 to get bags and parcels wrapped in plastic.



Figure 3 - Final ticketing



Figure 4 - Outside Restaurant Fabio

Brigade in 1969 when she was only 16 years old and visited Cuba in 1999 with the first Richmond-Regla Sister City delegation.

- **Marilyn Langlois**, formerly on Mayor McLaughlin's staff before retiring and running unsuccessfully for City Council in 2012.; currently active as a volunteer community organizer.
- **Willie Thompson**, Professor of Sociology, Emeritus, City College of San Francisco, who speaks Spanish and has been to Cuba several Times. Willie is particularly interested in the [Afro-Cuban experience](#) and the Yoruba/[Santeria religion](#) that has African origins and is closely connected with Regla.
- **Trina Jackson**, who the City Council staff with the title Liaison to the City Council. Trina was part of the 1999 delegation and played a role in helping to organize the trip.
- **Nicole Valentino**, who is on Mayor McLaughlin's staff with the title, Community Advocate in the Mayor's Office. Nicole has a Mexican heritage and speaks Spanish Fluently.
- **Suzanne ("Shukuru") Sanders**, a retired emergency room nurse.

I think the group loosely consisted of two subgroups. The first are those for whom this trip was a highly committed exercise in solidarity³ with Cuba and Cubans. The rest of us were just curious and eager to learn.

Technically, this trip was a "people to people" exchange, one of the purposes allowed under the U.S. travel restrictions.

Organizations and Terminology

There were a lot of moving parts for this trip, and it took me a while to sort them out and understand the logistical role of each person and organization. Below are the principal players:

² In 1969, a coalition of young people formed the Venceremos ("We Shall Overcome") Brigade, as a means of showing solidarity with the Cuban Revolution by working side by side with Cuban workers and challenging U.S. policies towards Cuba, including the economic blockade and our government's ban on travel to the island. The first Brigades participated in sugar harvests and subsequent Brigades have done agricultural and construction work in many parts of the island. Over the last four and half decades, the V.B. has given over 8,000 people from the U.S. the opportunity for a life-changing experience. While the trip has evolved over time, the Venceremos Brigade has always kept its format of work, educational activities, and travel. In addition, we remain committed to organizing the most diverse contingents possible; Brigadistas are young and older, of many races, nationalities, socio-economic classes, and sexual orientations.

³ <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/24431-political-solidarity/>. Scholz defines political solidarity as a unity of individuals who have made a conscious commitment to challenge a situation of injustice, oppression, tyranny, or social vulnerability. Political solidarity is fundamentally oppositional: it seeks to abolish an unjust practice or institution. A political solidarity is unified not by shared characteristics, as in social and civic solidarity, but rather by a shared commitment to a social justice cause. This commitment entails positive collective moral obligations. The content of these obligations is shaped by the particular cause, but they typically involve some form of social activism. Importantly, the moral obligations entailed by political solidarity, along with the initial commitment that establishes them, are the source of social unity within the solidarity. Thus, political solidarity reverses the ordering between social bonds and moral obligations found in civic and social solidarity: in political solidarity, moral obligations precede social bonds.



Figure 5 - Lunch at Restaurant Fabio on December 5



Figure 6 - Wives and mothers of the Cuban 5



Figure 7 - Gayle presenting proclamation to Adriana Perez, wife of Gerardo Hernandez

- [DISARM](#) – Holds the travel license issued by the U.S. Treasury Department for Cuba travel. According to its website, “Disarm promotes peace and social justice by forming strategic partnerships—bolstered by humanitarian and technical aid—with popular social movements in developing countries, and through advocacy in the United States for a foreign policy focused on human rights and human needs.”
- [Common Ground Education & Travel Service](#) – Provided the travel service for the trip, booking charter flights, hotels, transportation and guide services. Common Ground arranged for guides and transportation in Cuba with Amistur. According to its website, “Common Ground provides travel services for all those eligible under the U.S. regulations including travel for professional research, internationally organized conferences, family visits, and others. - See more at: <http://www.commongroundtravel.com/#sthash.CkBWkIGq.dpuf>.”
- [Amistur Cuba, SA](#) – A state-owned Cuban travel service that provided our guides and subcontracted for our tour bus transportation and driver. Both Amistur and the transportation company are state-owned businesses.
- [ICAP \(Cuba Institute of Friendship\)](#) – According to an article in the *London Progressive Journal*⁴:

Founded in 1960, the *Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos*, (The Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples, ICAP) is an NGO established soon after the early successes of the Cuban revolution. Following the overthrow of the US backed dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, Cuba found itself isolated on the world stage and threatened by an irate military superpower, less than 100 miles off its shores. The purpose of ICAP therefore, was to reach out to the international community and form ties of friendship between Cuba and citizens of other countries who were either sympathetic to, or open minded about, Cuba’s post-revolutionary ambitions. After Batista’s departure, a deluge of anti-Castro propaganda hit the world media, spread by exiles who had benefited under the regime of Batista and supported by a US government displeased at Cuba’s unwillingness to allow foreign companies to exploit its population and natural resources.

ICAP representatives met us at almost every stop and facilitated contact with local officials. I presume that Gayle’s previous interest in



Figure 8- Gayle with Rene Gonzales and Olga Salanueva



Figure 9 - Outside the Plaza Hotel



Figure 10 - Walking tour, Hotel Plaza in background



Figure 11 - Capitol Building, modeled after the U.S. Capitol but 1 meter higher

⁴ <http://londonprogressivejournal.com/article/view/1138>

Cuban affairs and her advocacy attracted unusual attention from ICAP compared to other typical groups.

Day by Day

Day One – Wednesday-Thursday December 4-5 (Havana)

We left San Francisco on an American Airlines “red-eye” Wednesday night and arrived in Miami before dawn on Thursday. We met up briefly with a representative from Common Ground, who chastised us for arriving so late. We would have missed our plane to Havana if it had not been late. Also in Miami, Liz Kelner joined our group. Liz works as a contractor for DISARM and apparently had the responsibility of documenting our “people to people” contacts for the purpose of justifying proper exercise of the travel license.

After a short flight of less than an hour, we were welcomed at the Havana airport by our guide, Arturo Mesa and an intern guide, Bianca Villesante Gomez, both employees of Amistur, as well as two representatives of ICAP, Esperanza and Odalys. We had lunch at a local restaurant, Fabio, and then made our way to the local ICAP office for a meeting with the wives and mothers of the [Cuban 5](#) (actually, Cuban 4, because Rene Gonzalez was released October 7, 2011, and subsequently returned to Cuba).

I sense that this meeting with the wives and mothers as well as Rene Gonzalez and his wife, was an opportunity of importance significant enough to bring these individuals of Cuban national fame together in one place to meet with us. Supporting the Cuban 5 and advocating for their release has been a personal crusade of Gayle, and she is scheduled to go to meet with one of the remaining four, Gerardo Hernández Nordelo, at a Federal prison in Victorville, CA, next week.

Later that afternoon, we checked in to the Hotel Plaza and took a walking tour with our guides.

We also got a lesson in money from our guides and changed our “dollars into [“convertible pesos,”](#) or CUCs. The convertible peso (sometimes given as CUC\$) (informally called a *cuc'* or “*chavito*”), is one of two official currencies in [Cuba](#), the other being the [peso](#). The exchange rate is about 87 CUCs for \$100 U.S.

The other currency, which we did not need, is the [Cuban Peso](#), which converts at about 25 to one CUC.

Cuban state workers receive a portion of their wages in convertible pesos, the rest in national pesos. Shops selling basics, like fruit and



Figure 12 - Driving to ICAP on December 6, highrises date from the 1950s



Figure 13 - ICAP in Havana, December 6



Figure 14 - Political briefing at ICAP, December 6. ICAP officials on left, guide Arturo Mesa on right

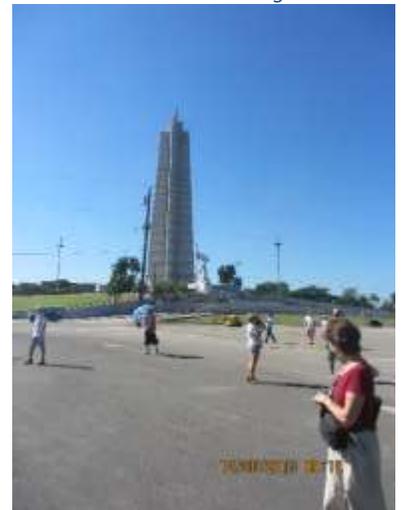


Figure 15 - Revolution Square, December 6

vegetables, generally accept only the normal peso, while "dollar shops" sell the rest. The word "pesos" may refer to both non-convertible and convertible money. Cuban convertible pesos are 25 times more valuable, but this does not completely eliminate the confusion for tourists: since goods bought in national pesos have controlled prices, tourists are sometimes confused by prices perceived as "too cheap."

We were warned of a common scam to offer to trade tourists a 3 Peso note with Che Gueverra's likeness on it for multiple CUCs. We were made this offer more than once.

The [Hotel Plaza](#) is a Nineteenth Century building converted to a hotel in 1909. It is located in the heart of the historical center of the city and on the edge of Habana Vieja (Old Havana). It is within easy walking distance of the entire Habana Vieja district and the waterfront. It was a great choice and very comfortable with great ambiance, but not a 5-star hotel by any means. Like all of our hotels, it was air conditioned. It had Internet access (6 CUCs/hour) but no wifi. For wifi (8 CUCs/hour) when working, Shirley and I went across the street to the upscale Hotel [Parque Central](#).

The one annoying thing about all these hotels is that smoking is allowed in hotel lobbies in Cuba, and particularly The Plaza reeked of tobacco smoke.

Day Two – Friday December 6 (Havana and Regla)

Breakfast was served buffet style in the penthouse and roof plaza of the hotel (formerly a casino) and included a large selection of breads, fruits, sweets, cooked vegetables, meats and omelets made to order.

We spent much of the morning meeting with ICAP at their Havana headquarters. I guess you would call this a political orientation, the theme being promotion of solidarity with Cuba, condemnation of the [Cuba Blockade](#), plea for release of the remaining four of the Cuba 5 and a defense of the Cuban political system.

ICAP speakers emphasized that ownership is possible within the Cuban economic system but that working is the only acceptable pathway to accumulating wealth.

We made a quick stop at [Plaza de la Revolución](#), which is now the government center of Havana and the location of the [José Martí Memorial](#). We also stopped at a park, famous for its life-size statue of [John Lennon sitting on a park bench](#).



Figure 16 - The Group at Revolution Square



Figure 17 - A typical taxi



Figure 18 - Shirley and John Lennon



Figure 19- Lunch December 6 at Parrillada

Lunch was at [Parrillada](#), where we began our first lesson in Cuban lunches. There is no such thing as a “light lunch” in Cuba, and no such thing as a quick lunch.

Suitably indoctrinated politically and inspired with solidarity, we finally arrived in [Regla](#) (Spanish pronunciation: [[ˈreyla](#)]), one of the 15 municipalities or boroughs (*municipios* in Spanish) in the city of [Havana, Cuba](#). It comprises the town of Regla, located on the east side of [Havana Bay](#) on a peninsula dividing Marimelena from Guasabacoa inlets and the village of [Casablanca](#), located at the entry of the Havana Bay.

Regla traces its founding to 1687, and its current population is 42,800, taking up 10 square kilometers. Regla was always the industrial suburb of Havana, initially the home of maintenance facilities and warehouses for the Spanish fleet and now the location for shipyards, a port and a refinery.

In the 19th Century, freed slaves settled in Regla and established a strong Afro-Cuban culture that endures today.

We assembled at the City Hall (*Asamblea Municipal Poder Popular Presidencia*), for introductions to the town’s elected and administrative officials. We also dropped off our collective loads of prescription medicines we had brought for the local clinic.

We were told that 67% of the municipal budget goes to health and education, and we were briefed by the directors of health and education. Regla has 29 education centers from pre-school to higher education, nine day care centers, nine elementary schools, one polytechnical school, one high school and one specialized school. All are free, as is all education in Cuba.

Regla has a network of health clinics consisting of 41 family (primary care) physicians in residence. Doctors live on the second floor of their neighborhood clinics. There is also a network of drugstores. Specialty medical services are provided by traveling physicians. The main role of primary care is (1) promotion (health), (2) prevention, (3) medical, and (4) rehabilitation. Life expectancy, up from only 50 in 1959, is 78 for men and 80 for women (U.S. is 78.64 years). Infant mortality is 5/1,000, lower than the U.S. with 6.14.⁵

In an exchange, the meaning of which continued to be debated the remainder of our trip, Gayle offered the Regla mayor an updated sister city agreement, which he declined to sign, citing no need for a formal agreement. We knew



Figure 20 - Welcome to Regla



Figure 21 - Regla street scene



Figure 22-Meeting at Regla City Hall



Figure 23-Juan Blandino School

⁵ The United States may be one of the richest countries in the world, but has a very high rate of infant mortality compared to other wealthy countries — and compared even to some not-so-rich countries. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) consistently finds the U.S. [near the bottom](#) of its list of 34-member countries on this measure.

that ICAP support of the sister city program was being phased out, but we never understood if this action was connected to the phase out or was the result of some other government directive or concern.

Leaving City Hall, we visited the Juan Blandino elementary school where we were entertained with songs and dances and got to see the classrooms. We left some books with the school, including copies of [Richmond Tales: Lost Secrets of the Iron Triangle](#). All Cuban students wear uniforms, with distinctive colors for elementary, middle and high school.

Dinner was at the home of an old friend of Willie Thompson, Ernesto Valdez, who is a [Yoruba](#)⁶ ([Santeria](#)) priest. To quote Willie:

....the food prepared in Regla by Ernesto Valdez Janet and his family and included roast chicken, roast pork and fish plus arroz blanco, black beans, bananas from their farm, loads of salads (our vegetarians were well-pleased.) plus wine and rum, a short lecture on Yoruba culture in Cuba, an explanation of the altar and a song praising the Orishas by Ernesto's niece Janet, a rising star in Cuban and American music. (Janet's album with a U.S. musician featuring praise songs for the Orishas will soon be released.)

After returning to the hotel, Shirley and I wandered around Habana Vieja until bedtime, but not before having a Mojito at the Floridita, Hemingway's favorite bar, where he still sits, frozen in bronze and eager to have his photo taken with a parade of tourists.

Day Three – Saturday December 7 (Regla and Alamar)

After breakfast, it's off to Regla again, this time via a short ferry ride across the bay and a walking tour.

We first stopped at the church of Nuestra Senora de la [Virgen de Regla](#) dating from 1687, where the community was assembled for baptismal ceremonies. The next stop was the studio of the late artist [Antonio Canet](#), whose prints were exhibited earlier this year at the Richmond Art Center. His studio was bequeathed to the City of Regla where it is now open to the public.

We visited the Museum of Regla where we were entertained by the group Nsila Cheche, a troupe of professional musicians and dancers specializing in



Figure 24-Dinner at Ernesto's



Figure 25-Hanging with Ernest at La Floridita



Figure 26-Hotel Plaza lobby



Figure 27-Nuestra Senora de la Virgen de Regla

⁶ Santeria (Way of the Saints) is an Afro-Caribbean religion based on Yoruba beliefs and traditions, with some Roman Catholic elements added. The religion is also known as *La Regla Lucumi* and *the Rule of Osha*. Santeria is a syncretic religion that grew out of the slave trade in Cuba.

Afro-Cuban traditions linked to the City of Regla and the Santeria religion. In the process, they pulled several of us into the frenzied performance.

Last stop before lunch was another Regla gallery and studio of an artist and art school (*Galeria, Taller y Escuela de Artes Plasticas de Cesar Leal*). For lunch, we went to a restaurant in nearby [Cojimar](#), a small [fishing village](#) east of [Havana](#), forming a ward (*consejo popular*) part of the [Habana del Este](#) municipality. It was an inspiration for [Ernest Hemingway's](#) [The Old Man and the Sea](#) and the location where Hemingway kept his boat.

After lunch was a visit to an organic urban farm, [Organoponico Vivero Alamar](#), near [Alamar](#), a sprawling and ugly public housing project built in the Soviet style. The farm employs 162 workers and operates as a cooperative on 800 square meters. Its enthusiastic manager, Isis, explained how it was carved from an area that served as debris disposal from the housing project that houses over 50,000 people. The farm specializes in vegetables that once weren't so popular as the traditional rice and beans, lettuce, tomatoes and cucumbers.

The animals on the farm include cattle used solely to produce fertilizer, work horses and hogs. Isis introduced us to a plant called [Maringa](#) that is highly nutritious and can be used to feed humans and animals as well as to make biodiesel.

Back at the hotel, we settled in for a late afternoon lecture from [Esteban Morales](#), who gave us a history of the Cuban economy from the days of the Spanish colony to modern times, with particular emphasis on the Afro-Cuban role. Early in the 15th Century, the Spanish, after killing off the indigenous population, lost interest in colonizing Cuba because it had no gold. Havana became the rendezvous for the Spanish fleet, and the "fleet economy" (water, food and repairs) became the most important economic activity.

The first black slaves came not from Africa but from Spain and were more like indentured servants than American slaves. In 1791, a revolution in Haiti ended its dominance in the sugar market, and Cuba took the lead. In the 19th Century, Cuba became a sugar, tobacco and coffee economy, with the U.S. dominating as trading partner. About a million African slaves were brought to Cuba in the late 18th and early 19th Century, and Cuba led the world in sugar production. In 1869, slavery was abolished, but sugar continued to boom. U.S. influence in Cuba grew in the 19th Century and then spiked with the end of Spanish domination with the Spanish-American war in 1898.

Cuba became a "sugar" republic in 1902, and U.S. influence continued. Sugar was highly profitable for those controlling the industry, but the country was unable to diversify.



Figure 28-Nsila Cheche dance troupe



Figure 29-Organoponico Vivero Alamar



Figure 30-Isis, the Doria Robinson of Cuba



Figure 31-Estaban Morales lectures on the Cuban economy

The revolution that concluded in January 1959 resulted in nationalizing almost everything economic, and relations with the U.S. soured. Cuba then turned to the USSR and traded sugar for food and oil. When the USSR disintegrated, Cuba no longer had a market for its products. After several years of extremely hard times ([*Periodo Especial*](#)), the government began to diversify the economy, investing in and partnering with others for tourism development and allowing foreign investment and private enterprise. In addition to tourism, export of doctors and pharmaceutical manufacturing are cited as key sources of hard currency. One important source the government doesn't tout is money sent from relatives abroad.

That night, Shirley and I went to dinner at [Paladar Los Mercaderes in Habana Vieja](#) at the recommendation of Berkeley Mayor Tom Bates, who visited earlier this year. *Paladars* are privately-owned and operated restaurants.

Day Four – Sunday December 8 (Havana)

We spent the morning at the [Museum of the Revolution](#), which is self-explanatory and then took a walking tour through Habana Vieja, led by employees of the City Historian.

I had been extremely impressed with both the quality and quantity of historic preservation in Habana Vieja, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and curious how such an economically challenged country could have pulled it off. Gretel Valledores, our guide for the morning, explained it.

In the *Periodo Especial*, the state granted to the City Historian's Office (*historiador de la ciudad*), responsibility for all the hotels and restaurants in Habana Vieja, and the Historian, [Eusebio Leal Spengler](#), used the profits to rehabilitate the district, plaza by plaza, then the connecting streets. Privately operated businesses in the area are similarly taxed. The program has been so successful that now half the profits are allocated to social programs, including housing, schools and clinics. Unlike many U.S. urban cores that become gentrified when successful, ordinary people still live in the upper stories of Habana Vieja historic buildings, and their children go to neighborhood schools. The Historian's Office has 13,000 employees overseeing this massive rehabilitation effort which continues and expands every day.

Part of the Historian's operation, which has satellite functions scattered all over, is a massive scale model of Havana.

We lunched at a sidewalk café in Habana Viejo and then were cut loose for our first free time since we arrived. Most of the group went shopping, but I



Figure 32- Dinner at Paladar Los Mercaderes



Figure 33-Daiquiris in Havana Vieja



Figure 34-American presidents at Museum of the Revolution



Figure 35-The boat "Granma" that carried Castro back to Cuba to start the Revolution

took advantage of the break to do my first sketch at Plaza de la Catedral and to start a second at the Plaza de San Francisco de Asis.

Day Five – Monday December 9 (Havana)

We got up early to take up an offer from Gretel of the Historian’s Office to tour a branch of Havana University located in Habana Vieja that teaches at a college level all of the skills needed for historic preservation. The modern building takes up a whole block and appears somewhat out of place among its ancient neighbors. We thought we would meet students and professors, but that apparently was not on the agenda, but we did visit laboratories in the basement where books and maps were being restored.

This was a day that consisted mostly of lectures and presentations. At [Alas por la vida](#), we got a presentation on a breast cancer support group, and at someone’s request, we stopped at a memorial for [Julius and Ethel Rosenberg](#).

Another big Cuban lunch at El Idilio, and we moved on to MINREX, the [Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) for a presentation from an English speaking diplomat. He gave another booster presentation touting Cuba’s health and education achievements and talked about Cuba’s goal of normalizing relations with the U.S.

Cuba already had 400 health specialists in Haiti when the earthquake occurred and increased that number to 1,000 afterwards. There are 29,000 foreign students in Cuba, mostly studying medicine.

Cuba is working on improving its economy while preserving the achievements of the Revolution.

I asked him what Cuba and the U.S. each wanted to normalize relations. He said that ending the blockade, release of the remaining four of the Cuba 5 and restoring Guantanamo to Cuba were Cuba’s priorities. He said there has been no response by the U.S. as to what its agenda is.

Cuba and the U.S. each maintain “[interest sections](#)” in Washington, D.C. and Havana, respectively, and engage in discussion of subjects of mutual interest, such as terrorism and human trafficking, but there are not normal diplomatic relations.

We took a drive through the Miramar section of Havana, built in the 40s and 50s with large homes popular among American mobsters and businessmen and now home of many consulates and embassies. The Russian Embassy,



Figure 36-Shirley with Fidel in the Sierra Maestre



Figure 37-Habana Vieja



Figure 38- Plaza San Francisco de Asis



Figure 39-Document restoration Havana University historic preservation school in Habana Vieja

built by the Soviets is remarkably ugly and sticks out like a sore thumb in an otherwise pleasing neighborhood.

The final destination was a surprise visit to [La Colmenita](#), an after-school program for kids that emphasizes the performing arts. The troupe made a U.S. visit in 2011, including a performance at the East Bay Center for Performing Arts in Richmond.

Shirley and I took a walk on the Prado (think Barcelona La Rambla) down to the legendary Malacon (seawall) then dined back in Plaza de la Catedral at a restaurant on the second floor overlooking the plaza. A band played below.

Day Six – Tuesday December 10 (Cienfuegos)

We hit the road on Tuesday, driving about four hours across the island to the seaside city, [Cienfuegos](#), another UNESCO World heritage site. We ate lunch and headed to our briefing at the local ICAP office. Much to our surprise, we spotted a poster featuring Gayle McLaughlin just under one of Abraham Lincoln.

Everyone was watching the memorial services for Nelson Mandela, who was significantly supported by Cuba in the struggle against apartheid. Cienfuegos, with a current population of 400,000 has a French heritage, not from France, but from Louisiana. The current economy is based on sugar, fishing and one of Cuba's two refineries (65,000 bbl/day). Cienfuegos has 200 schools, three universities (medical, humanities, geological) with over 1,000 foreign students. Cienfuegos has a historic restoration center that is supported by NGOs in France.

We delved into the political system of Cuba, but it is just too complicated for me to understand. I have a feeling that obfuscation is intentional to cover up an admission that Cuba is far from being a democracy. At the local level, there are elections and secret ballots but campaigning is not allowed. There are a lot of local elected officials, one for each of 587 wards in the province. The mayor and deputy mayor are the only elected officials who are paid.

After a short walking tour, we checked in at [Hotel Pasacaballos](#), several miles out of town. The Soviet era hotel is starkly modern and described in some tour guides as ugly, but I found it quite striking. This was the only hotel where Shirley and I had no hot water in the shower.

Dinner was in the hotel banquet room and quite nice. After dinner, we went back into town for an event put on by a local [Committee for Defense of the Revolution](#) (CDR), or in Spanish, *Comités de Defensa de la Revolución*, If you



Figure 40-Hotel Nacional



Figure 41-Lunch at el Idilio



Figure 42-La Colmenita

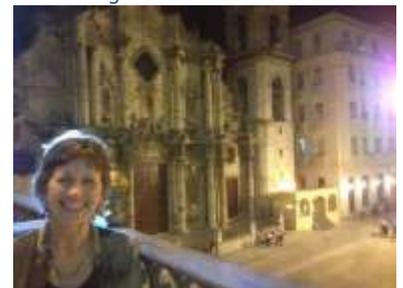


Figure 43-Dinner at Plaza de la Catedral



Figure 44-Cienfuego street scene

were in Richmond instead of Cuba, you would swear it was August 1 and National Night Out.

Each block, and sometimes a single large apartment building has a CDR. Although our guides assured us that CDRs were essentially the same as what we know as neighborhood councils in Richmond, they were originally established to root out dissidents and potential counter-revolutionaries. According to Wikipedia, as of 2010, 8.4 million Cubans of the national population of 11.2 million were registered as CDR members.

The CDR system was formed by [Fidel Castro](#) on September 28, 1960, following the 1959 [Cuban Revolution](#), which overthrew the dictator [Fulgencio Batista](#). The slogan of the CDR is, "¡En cada [barrio](#), Revolución!" ("In every neighborhood, Revolution!"). Fidel Castro proclaimed it "a collective system of revolutionary vigilance," established "so that everybody knows who lives on every block, what they do on every block, what relations they have had with the tyranny, in what activities are they involved, and with whom they meet.

CDR officials have the duty to monitor the activities of every person on their respective blocks. There is an individual file kept on each block resident, some of which reveal the internal dynamics of each household. Even after its 54-year existence, CDR activity remains contentious.

Strong critics such as A. Rivera Caro, a journalist for [El Nuevo Herald](#), trace Fidel Castro's CDR system's origin to the similarly named and directed "committees of territorial vigilance" established by [Adolf Hitler](#) in 1935. Other CDR opponents further indict Cuba's CDR system of informants with an accompanying control of individual freedom, a breakdown of the Cuban family unit, widespread human alienation, and a pervasive interpersonal mistrust, at all levels of Cuban society.

CDR defenders counter that it has important additional responsibilities beyond monitoring individuals' political and moral background; these include arranging community festivals, administrating voluntary community projects, and organizing community attendance to mass rallies. Proponents further emphasize that CDRs have helped to put medical, educational, or other campaigns into national effect and that, being organized on a geographical basis, they also act as centers for many who do not work in farms or factories, and hence include a large proportion of female membership. The CDRs also take an active role in vaccination campaigns, blood banks, recycling, practicing



Figure 45-Central plaza in Cienfuegos



Figure 46- Cienfuegos, Wall of Heroes



Figure 47-Gayle McLaughlin with the Cuban 5 just below Abraham Lincoln



Figure 48-Cienfuegos street

evacuations for hurricanes, and backing up the government in its fight against corruption.

However, a 2006 [Amnesty International](#) report noted CDR involvement in repeated human rights violations that included verbal as well as physical violence. Critics also contend that the CDRs are a repressive tool, giving the government a heads-up about dissident activities on the micro-local level, by tattling on the non-compliant. They further identify CDRs as "one of the lead entities responsible for the wave of repression sweeping through Cuba," most recently, the brutal beatings and detention of 75 members of the [Ladies in White](#) in Havana in 2011 and 2012.

[Elizardo Sanchez](#), a Cuban [dissident](#), described the CDR as "a tool for the systematic and mass violation of human rights, for ideological and repressive discrimination. They assist the police and the secret service," whereas [Lazaro Sanchez](#), a CDR supporter, says of the CDR that "the (U.S.) Enemy as well as Cuban sellouts take advantage of confusion to sow doubts. If we have to act, we are going to act. Our streets cannot belong to criminals, or to counterrevolutionaries. The U.S. Empire has the [FBI](#); the Revolution has its CDRs."⁷

Day Seven – Wednesday, December 11 (Trinidad and Cayo Santa Maria)

Another UNESCO World Heritage site, [Trinidad](#), celebrates its 500th anniversary in 2014.

We first visited a local ceramics studio, Ranchon Santander – Ceramista, and made a quick stop at the local ICAP office to meet local officials and had a Q & A session about how local government works. I don't think any of us really understand it, although I gleaned that there are 105 delegates in the municipal assembly, which nominates delegates to the provincial assembly. With so many, it's hard to imagine how they get anything done.

From ICAP, we walked up to the historical center of the town, which is distinguished by Spanish Colonial architecture and some of the oldest buildings in Cuba. I did a sketch, and ate lunch at an outdoor café.

After lunch, we drove back northward up and over the mountains known as [Sierra del Escambray](#). At one time, the road was so steep, we all had to get out and walk so the bus could make the grade. We passed through several small towns before taking the 40 kilometer causeway (*Collar de Piedras*) completed in 1989 to provide tourist access to [Cayo Santa Maria](#), where we



Figure 49-A CDR member shows off his apartment in Cienfuegos



Figure 50-Cienfuegos waterfront



Figure 51-Dinner at the hotel, Cienfuegos



Figure 52-Ranchon Santander-Ceramista



Figure 53-The Escambray mountains

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Committees_for_the_Defense_of_the_Revolution

entered another world at the [Hotel Memories](#), an all-inclusive (think Club Med) resort that is a joint venture of the Canadian Company Blue Diamond and the Cuban government.

Exclusive and distinct product offerings elevate Memories Resorts above the rest. As a subsidiary of hotel management company, Blue Diamond Hotel & Resorts, Memories Resorts excel in their design of unforgettable vacation experiences for every type of guest – from the inquisitive child in search of daily activities, and the exhausted parents in need of a little R&R, to the couple looking to reconnect and rekindle their union. Committed to providing the highest quality service, each Memories Resort offers:

- A variety of room categories and suites
- Buffet style and à la carte dining
- A host of restaurants and bars, serving both local fare and international cuisine
- Daily activities, both indoor and outdoor
- Kids Club for our younger guests (age 2-12)
- Nightly entertainment for all ages

Most of the other guests we met were Canadian. It was long day, and we just made the buffet before it closed.

Day Eight – Thursday, December 12 (Caibarien, Remedios and Santa Clara)

We spent the morning on the exquisite white beach at Hotel Memories (drinks included) and headed back to the mainland after lunch.

First stop was the seaside town of [Caibarien](#) and a meeting with the local ICAP at what looked like a former yacht club. I slept through most of the presentation.

Next was a big hit, a former sugar mill, now a museum, where we made a short excursion on an antique sugar train from Caibarien to Remedios..

At [Remedios](#), the eighth oldest city in Cuba, we toured the local museum and watched a dance performance put on for us.

We walked around the main plaza and the [Church of San Juan Bautista](#), which dates from the 16th Century, and watched another performance by local musicians.

A surprise ending of the day was a visit to a large shop where floats were being made for the upcoming festival "Las Parrandas de Remedios", one of



Figure 54-We had to get out and walk because our bus couldn't pull the grade



Figure 55-The bar at Memories Resort



Figure 56-The beach at Memories



Figure 57-The pool at Memories



Figure 58-Sugar mill museum

the most popular events of the region that takes place between the 16th to the 26th of December every year.

Considered the oldest festivities in Cuba, the "[parrandas](#)" were initially promoted by Father Francisco Vigil de Quiñones, who used to officiate at the Iglesia Mayor of San Juan Bautista de los Remedios. The priest, who was concerned about the absence of parishioners at the "Misa de Gallo" (midnight mass), had the idea of encouraging children to take to the streets and wake up the citizens using whistles, horns and tin cans, so that they had no other choice than get up and attend mass.

That singular and noisy initiative got deeply rooted among the population, resulting in the most attractive festivity in the country. In 1871, the "parrandas" adopted a structure that has survived the passage of time. According to tradition, when the bells of the Iglesia Parroquial Mayor (Major Parochial Church) toll at 9 o'clock on the night of December 24, two neighborhoods make public their creativeness and efforts made during the entire year to participate in the competition. During the "parrandas", a "fierce" competition takes place between the neighborhoods of San Salvador, represented by the colors red and blue, and a rooster as a symbol, and El Carmen, represented by the color brown and a globe. The memory of those celebrations is compiled at the Museum of Parrandas, which opened in a 19th-century building in Remedios, where photos, documents and hand-made objects linked to the festivities are preserved.

Dinner was at the [Hotel La Granjita in Santa Clara](#).

Day Nine – Friday, December 13 (Santa Clara and Havana)

First stop was at the "[armored train](#)" in Santa Clara. The Cuban Revolution concluded in Santa Clara in the last days of December 1958, when Che Guevara pulled up the rails and derailed an 18-car train loaded with munitions and 400 Batista soldiers headed for the front. The city surrendered shortly after without a single death on either side. On New Year's eve, Batista fled Havana, and the rest is history.

Because of Che's association with the [Battle of Santa Clara](#), the City adopted him and built the Che Memorial and Mausoleum., a site of great national importance and the only place we were not allowed to photograph from the inside.

Mayor McLaughlin was given a bouquet of flowers to lay at Che's niche, and several of our group were overcome with emotion.



Figure 59-Sugar train



Figure 60-Parranda float assembly



Figure 61-Parranda float assembly



Figure 62-Our hotel in Santa Clara



I was a little surprised at the admiration and devotion some of our group had for Che. He is a Cuban hero for his role in the Revolution, and his [iconic photograph](#) may be one of world's most reproduced images.

On the other hand, Che Guevara was a violent person who ordered thousands of executions.

A company that sponsors tours to Cuba touts La Cabaña Fortress prison as the place where "Che helped consolidate the victory of the revolution." Historians estimate Che "consolidated" the lives of as many as 2,000 people.

Che Guevara was a rebel in search of a cause when he met Fidel and Raul Castro in 1955, in Mexico. As an anxious soldier fighting Castro's cause, he distinguished himself quickly and was promoted to comandante; in the Sierra Maestra mountains he enforced a zero tolerance policy toward deserters by sending execution squads to hunt them down.

Once in power, Che Guevara was appointed head of La Cabaña, where he ran one of the century's more modest — if no less shameful — kangaroo courts. He did his part to purge Cuba of Batista loyalists by playing judge, jury and executioner in a manner reminiscent of Stalin's Great Terror of the 1930s. It was here he earned the name The Butcher of La Cabaña.

His population "consolidation" continued the following year, when he oversaw the establishment of the Guanahacabibes concentration camp. As noted by Alvaro Vargas Llosa in The New Republic, Guanahacabibes set the groundwork for the Nazi-inspired confinement of undesirables in the province of Camagüey from 1965 onward.

Lunch was at another ICAP office (Instituto Cubano de Armistad con Los Pueblos, Delegation Provincial, ICAP).

We learned that Santa Clara hosts 1,700 students from 76 mostly poor countries. The province, Villa Clara, has a population of 800,000. Santa Clara, the capital, has population of 230,000. Cubans like to brag on their life expectancy, in this case 78 for men and 80 for women.

A university economics professor, Hector Morales, talked about the Cuban economy. He equivocated about Cuba's new experiments with capitalism, that this is an "update," not a "reform." They are not changing the foundation, but updates are required, the primary reason being that salaries are not sufficient to meet peoples' needs. The state has been providing production and services, but this needs to become more efficient.

Figure 63-Armored train exhibit in Santa Clara



Figure 64-Bulldozer that ripped up the tracks



Figure 65-Horse drawn bus in Santa Clara



Figure 66- Che Memorial, Santa Clara



Figure 67-Che statue

This readjustment will focus on socialist enterprises, and cooperatives will be encouraged because they are closest to the socialist model. People are now being trained to work in cooperatives, and parliament has approved non-agricultural cooperative enterprises. Important sectors that need improvement are construction materials to meet housing demands and services, which suffer from poor quality.

In the private sector, small enterprises are being promoted, particularly in accommodations, food and transportation.

Cuba partners with foreign entities to manage hotels, and a percent of income goes to the state.

Gross domestic product is growing at 3.5%, but that is not enough, 7% is required.

Cuba depends too much on foreign imports, particularly agricultural products. Only 4% of Cuba's GDP comes from agriculture, and substantial food imports are required. New potential export markets are in bio-technology. Cuba has some unique vaccines.

Exports of Nickel and bio-tech products would increase without the embargo. Cuba also exports human resources – doctors, athletes and experts in cultural matters.

Cuba also carries a substantial foreign debt to China, Spain, Canada and Japan, but for now, Russia has frozen its share of Cuba's foreign debt.

The current economy is a complex situation with economic disparity growing. One source is money from relatives abroad.

Computation of state salaries is under revision, and in the future compensation will be based on contribution. For examples, professors will be compensated according to hours spent in the classroom and number of students taught. Doctors' salaries are scheduled to be doubled next year.

In response to a question asked about racial discrimination, Morales replied, "There is no discrimination in our province." "My best friends (some heard "students") are black." Our group was a little taken aback, and the ICAP representative jumped in to acknowledge that racism, while unconstitutional, did exist and was a continuing challenge.

After lunch, per a request from someone, we visited a storefront synagogue and the local Jewish cemetery. The thing remarkable about this was a couple



Figure 68-Our bus at ICAP in Santa Clara



Figure 69-Synagogue in Santa Clara



Figure 70-back in Havana, dinner at Mama Ines



Figure 71-Christ and the Regla refinery flare



Figure 72-San Carlos de la Cabana

of our party querying the lay director of the synagogue and cemetery about whether or not he was critical of Israel for voting to support the Cuba embargo in the UN and for its treatment of the Palestinians. He responded that he fully supported Israel but that both sides had issues.

It was a long ride back to Havana, and we arrived back after dark. Shirley and I had our best dinner of the trip that night at [Mama Ines](#) back in Habana Vieja.

Day Ten – Saturday, December 14 (Havana)

We had the day free, so Shirley and I took a taxi across the bay (through a tunnel) to the fortresses that have guarded Havana since the 16th Century.

First was [San Carlos de La Cabana](#), the larger and newer of the forts dating from the late 18th Century. There were big crowds there for a market festival, and I did a sketch before moving on to the older [Castillo del Morro](#). There was also nearby an exhibition of Cuban Missile Crisis era military hardware.

Back across the bay, Shirley and I went back to Plaza de San Francisco so I could finish a sketch I started earlier in the week, then we headed back to the hotel for a debriefing with our ICAP and Amistur representatives. Our farewell dinner was at El Aljibe, courtesy of ICAP.

Day Eleven – Sunday December 15

We checked out of the hotel and headed for the airport at 7:30 to catch an 11:00 AM flight back to Miami. Unfortunately, our plane broke down on the tarmac, and we sat in the departure lounge until 11:00 PM, when another plane finally arrived. By the time we got through customs in Miami, it was almost 2:00 AM

About Cuba

Everyone wants to know your impressions of Cuba. Here are mine.

Government and Politics

Despite several engagements with local officials about the Cuban political system and similar discussions with our guides, I can only conclude that it is complex and complicated, at least compared to the U.S. I have a sense of the broad outlines, but I could not fully explain it to anyone, including myself. It is certainly not a democracy the way we understand it, but at the lower level, it has democratic elements.



Figure 73-San Carlos de la Cabana



Figure 74-Farewell dinner



Figure 75-Our guides and driver



Figure 76-15 hours in the Havana departure lounge



Figure 77-ICAP Office in Havana

For a decent description of the Cuban political system, see [Elections in Cuba](#) and [Politics of Cuba](#).

What seems clear is that it is better than the system that preceded it prior to the Revolution, and it continues to evolve, almost daily, towards more openness, economic opportunity, private enterprise and public participation.

I differ from several of those in our group who found much to admire in Cuba government and politics, comparing it not only favorably with the US but in some cases superior. I think we all were impressed with the government's successful programs that provide free universal medical care and free education for all as well as a place to live, a job and basic food rations. Tossing land-owning corporations and gangsters out of Cuba after the Revolution also earns big points from Cubanophiles.

Sympathy for Cubans as victims before the Revolution of U.S. economic imperialism and now victims of an anachronistic embargo rooted in Cold War politics and perpetuated by the political powers of the U.S. "Cuban democracy" lobby, is easy to accept.

But the flip side is that those same Cubanophiles would never accept Cuban style government in the U.S. There would be no freedom of the press, little allowance for dissent and no opportunity for any ordinary citizen to run for local, state or federal office. The opportunity to start a business and compete with the state would be extremely limited, and the opportunity to strike for higher wages would be non-existent.

Neither, of course, is U.S. democracy perfect. Simple and egalitarian on the surface, it is considerably skewed by corporate money and influence. In Cuba, however, there is only one corporation – the state, and it is a monopoly.

What I have perceived is that Cubanophiles hold U.S. corporations and their control of government in such poor regard and that they would prefer the socialist state model.

There was a lot of talk about separating the American people from the policies of our government. You may not like our government policies towards Cuba, but there is no escaping that in America the government is us. There is an embargo simply because a majority in Congress, elected directly by the American people, have legislated the embargo.

Much of the information cited by our group's Cuban government and political admirers came from ICAP, whose mission it is to portray Cuba in a favorable light and from guides, who as good as they were, are also employees of the Cuban government. I am skeptical of some of the things they told us.



Figure 78-Havana Cathedral Plaza at night



Figure 79-Ferry to Regla



Figure 80-Regla waterfront



Figure 81-Regla in Spanish Colonial times



Figure 82-Sister City delagtion at Canet Gallery in Regla

The Cuban Economy

Post-Revolution, Cuba became a socialist country with almost all economic activity owned by the government. People who stayed were allowed to keep their homes, and if they had them, their cars. Otherwise, the state became the sole employer.

Free universal health care and free education became possible because doctors and professors were paid almost nothing.

That system worked to a point until the collapse of the USSR, which had propped up Cuba economically by purchasing the entire sugar production at inflated prices.

With the Soviets gone, the Cuban government had to find hard cash to purchase oil, food and other items on the world market. Tourism, export of doctors working under contract in other countries and a pharmaceutical industry have been cited as the key sources of hard cash.

In what is called the [“oil for doctors”](#) arrangement, Cuba imports Venezuelan oil at below market prices in exchange for 30,000 to 50,000 Cuban technical personnel, including physicians, sport coaches, teachers, and arts instructors who offer social services, often in poverty-stricken regions. Under the programme *Convenio de Atención a Pacientes* implemented in 2000, Venezuela sends patients and their relatives for medical treatment in Cuba where the Government of Venezuela pays the transportation costs, and Cuba bears all other expenses.

Cuba is joint venturing with international companies to develop and manage tourist resorts and is opening up tourist services, including taxis, lodging and restaurants, to private enterprise on a limited basis.

This burgeoning tourist trade brings international currencies into Cuba that are upsetting the existing dual currency economic order. Cuban professionals are abandoning their low paid jobs with the state to take advantage of the tourist economy which pays in tips many times what state jobs in teaching and health care pay. Both of our guides abandoned such careers in favor of income from tourist tips. Rural schools are turning to televised instruction because of a teacher shortage.

The Cuban education and health model that depends on extremely low wages is probably not sustainable over the long run, and it remains to be seen how it will evolve.



Figure 83-The wheels literally fell off this 1950s era taxi



Figure 84-A poster in Havana decrying Chevron's Ecuador crimes



Figure 85-Solar clothes dryer



Figure 86-part of the Havana taxi fleet



Figure 87-Horse drawn bus in Cienfuegos

Transportation

There are few cars in Cuba. Those left in Cuba in 1959 have become icons, especially in Havana. There is also a substantial collection of Russian models left over from the Soviet period. The few newer cars you see come from China, Japan, Korea and Europe, and they are typically state-owned. I even saw one late model BMW in Havana.

But transportation in Cuba is as diverse as anywhere in the world, and includes:

- Walking
- Hitch-hiking. Women ride free; men are expected to pay a nominal amount. It's not unusual to see a women in a business suit and heels hitch-hiking in Havana.
- Motorcycles. Motorcycles are seen, and sidecars are common.
- Taxis. There are both privately-owned and state-owned taxis. The privately owned taxis are likely to be 1950's U.S. made cars. Pedicabs are very common, particularly in cities. Horse-drawn wagons, acting as taxis or buses, are very common in outlying areas but seldom seen in Havana except as tourist carriages.
- Buses range from the antique to the modern, but the most unusual, mostly seen in rural areas, are made from dump trucks and old Soviet army trucks.

Architecture

Buildings in Cuba date from the 16th Century Colonial Period to late 20th Century Soviet style crumbing monoliths that challenge the term "ugly."

For hundreds of years, Cuba was awash in money, and the buildings show it. Lavish detailing of 18th 19th and early 20th Century facades has resulted in an incredibly rich collection of buildings and urban spaces characterized by courtyards and street colonnades and arcades. The Moorish influence on Spanish Colonial architecture is especially interesting.

Earlier buildings were constructed of local limestone and later buildings of reinforced concrete clad in plaster. The salt laden sea air has taken a toll on the concrete buildings resulting in widespread concrete spalling and structural failure.

The collections of buildings, plazas and streets are so vast that UNESCO World Heritage designations abound all over Cuba.

The Embargo



Figure 88-Horse drawn cart



Figure 89-Bus fashioned from old Soviet army truck



Figure 90-Truck to bus conversion



Figure 91-Soviet style apartment building



Figure 92-Our taxi from the forts

For a good explanation of the embargo, see Wikipedia, [United States Embargo Against Cuba](#). It's hard to find a supporter of the embargo that seems to be perpetuated almost solely by the [pro-embargo Cuban-American exiles](#), whose votes are crucial in [Florida](#) and have swayed many politicians to also adopt similar views.

Even our congressman George Miller, who has come out in favor of free travel by Americans to Cuba, voted "Yes" in 2001 for keeping Cuba travel ban until political prisoners released. (Stop enforcing travel restrictions on US citizens to Cuba, only after the president has certified that Cuba has released all political prisoners, and extradited all individuals sought by the US on charges of air piracy, drug trafficking and murder. Bill [HR 2590](#) ; vote number [2001-270](#) on Jul 25, 2001) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuban_Democracy_Act.

Miller, however, made the following statement related to the Cuban 5:

Not all terrorists are treated the same. Clearly, those that are favored by the administration can operate with impunity inside the United States. People who went to partake in violent acts against Cuba are protected. And yet you see individuals who were trying to stop those acts of terrorists, to try to make American law enforcement aware of these activities, are the people who end up being prosecuted—I mean, people who end up in jail. And those who blow up airliners, those who blow up hotels, those who conduct acts of violence are free—they're the toast of the town—because the administration is paralyzed by their own policy with respect to Cuba, with their own policy with respect to the war on terror. And what you see is a level of duplicity that is incredible.⁸

⁸ http://www.democracynow.org/2013/10/24/exclusive_rene_gonzalez_lone_cuban_5

I ran into George Miller on Christmas Day, 2013, and we talked about Cuba. Miller said that the president should swap Gross for the remaining Cuban 5, lift the embargo and resume normal relations with Cuba. Cost The trip cost about \$3,500 each, which did not include air fare to Miami but did include air fare from Miami to Cuba, hotels, transportation, guides and honoraria to performers and speakers. Breakfast was included with hotels, and two dinners were included.

In addition, Shirley and I spend about \$100 a day between us for meals, drinks, admissions, tips and a few gifts.

We tipped the guides and the bus driver well because it was their only significant income for their services.



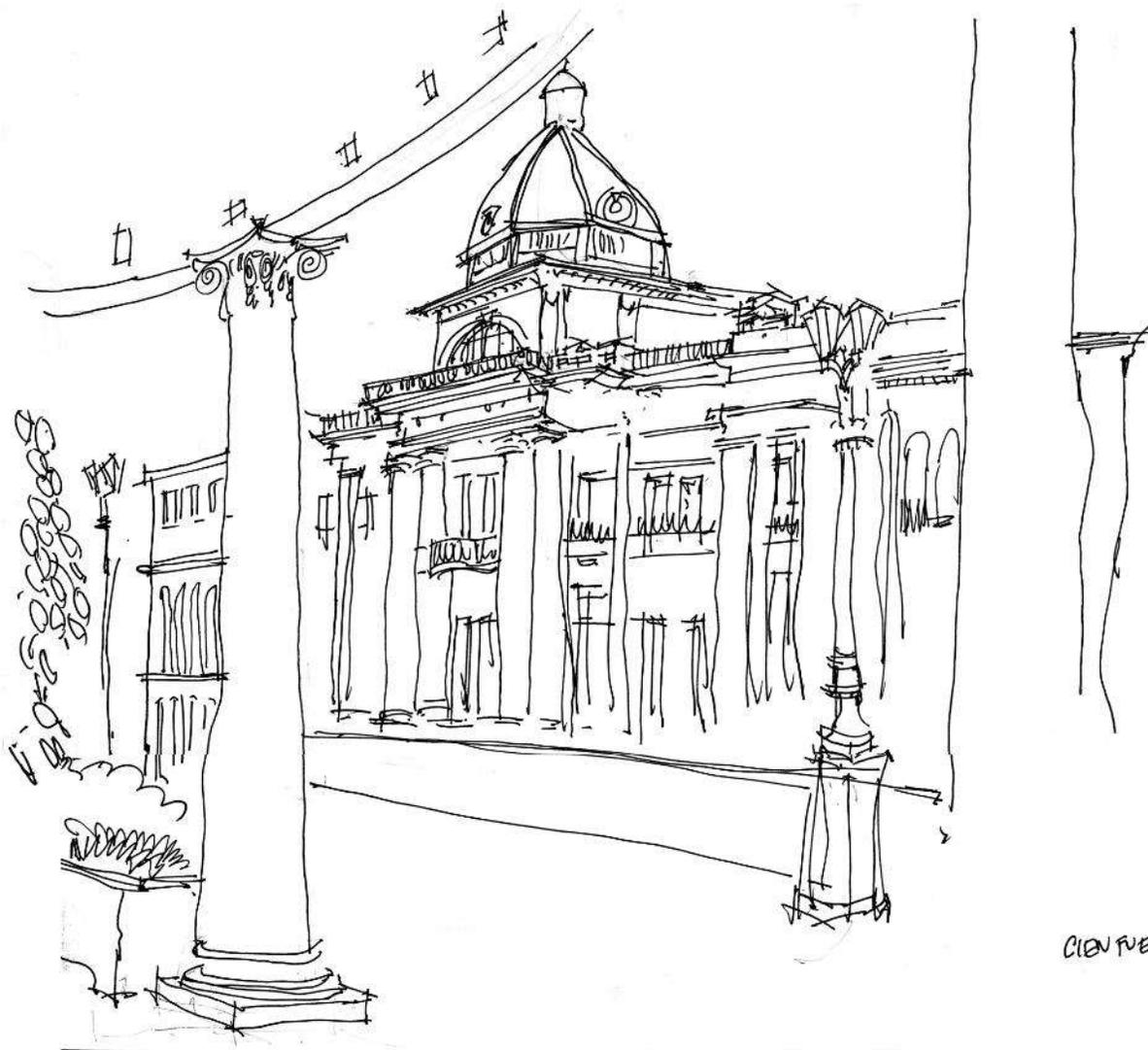
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[League of California Cities](#) Environmental Quality Policy Committee

Alternate, [Local Agency Formation Commission](#) (LAFCO)
Alternate, [San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission](#) (BCDC)
[West Contra Costa Transportation Advisory Committee](#) (WCCTAC) City of Richmond Representative
[Contra Costa Transportation Authority](#) Commissioner
[Marin Energy Authority](#) Board Richmond Representative
East Bay Regional Park District Liaison Committee Richmond Representative
City Council Liaison to Design Review Board and Historic Preservation Commission
City Council Ad-hoc Committee for Chevron Energy Renewal Project

Appendix 1 – Sketches

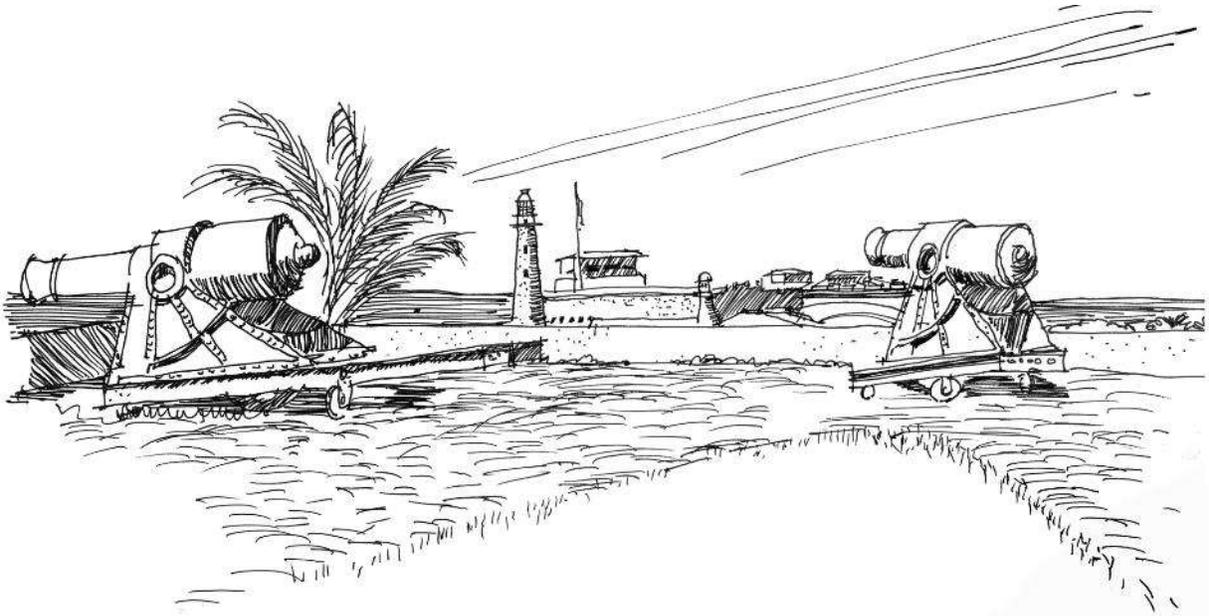








TRINIDAD, CUBA
12/11/2013
TRM



FORTALEZA de SAN CARLOS
de la CROAÑA
HABANA, CUBA
12/14/2013 TKZMA

