



Life in Contemporary Cuba

by Georgia Kilpatrick
updated by Liam R. O'Fallon

Editor (1990): L. Curcio-Nagy
Editor (1998): Valerie McGinley Marshall
Associate Editor (1998): Laura Barbas Rhoden

published by the

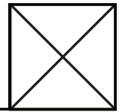
Latin American Curriculum Resource Center
The Roger Thayer Stone Center for Latin American Studies

Slide packet No. 8
1990; revised 1996, 1998

Tulane

New Orleans, Louisiana

Life in Contemporary Cuba



Cuban History

Several indigenous groups known generally as the Arawak first inhabited Cuba. They originally migrated from South America to Cuba and included the Ciboney and the Guanahacabib tribes (3500 BC to 1200 CE). When the first Europeans arrived, the Tainos inhabited the island (1100 to 1600 CE). It is the Taino name for the island - Cuba - that survives today.

According to historical sources, on October 27, 1492, Christopher Columbus landed on the southeastern part of the island in what is today Holguin province. Cuba soon became an important stopover point for Spanish fleets as Spain sought to conquer many other territories in South America. By 1515 there were at least seven settlements on the island; these later became important commercial centers.

The Spanish forced Native Americans to provide them labor, and many died from harsh conditions and from diseases introduced by the Europeans. The indigenous population in 1512 was estimated to be 100,000, and by 1540 this figure had dropped to 40,000. A Taino chief, Hatuey, led a failed rebellion against the Spanish. Chief Hatuey was captured and burned at the stake for his participation in the revolt. The story is told that when Hatuey was facing his death the Spanish executioners asked him to embrace the Christian god so that he could go to heaven. The chief asked if the Spanish went there, and when they replied in the affirmative, he said he would be happier outside the gates.

Victims of cruelty, disease, overwork, and culture shock, by 1570 the Tainos had

disappeared as coherent cultural group. Because of the decimation of the Indians and the need for labor, the African slave trade became a fact of Cuban life. The Spanish brought many Africans to Cuba, just as the English did to Jamaica, the French to Haiti, and the North Americans to the southern part of the United States. Cuba's original timber, tobacco, and ranching industries were joined by sugar production in the 16th and 17th centuries. Slaves provided virtually all of the labor for the sugar plantation.

English forces captured Havana in 1762 and held it for eleven months, during which time some 700 merchant ships entered Havana to trade sugar, not only with Europe but also with the thirteen North American colonies. In contrast, the Spanish previously had only 15 merchant ships a year enter Havana for trade. The English soon ceded Cuba back to Spain in exchange for trading rights. At the same time, the Haitian sugar production collapsed when a successful Haitian independence movement outlawed slavery on that island. A wave of white French landowners migrated to Cuba, and Cuba became the Caribbean sugar king.

By 1800 the sugar industry was the foundation of the Cuban economy, and slaves were the foundation of the sugar industry. Slaves cut, carried, and boiled cane products, and the 19th century saw more slaves imported than any other period of Cuban history. The slave population, estimated between 30,000 and 45,000 in 1774, jumped to 470,000 by 1860. Sporadic, isolated slave rebellions began in 1533 and continued until slavery was abolished in 1886. However, these rebellions never grew into a major revolt as in the case of Haiti. Legislation passed in Spain in 1789 that intended to improve slave conditions was largely ignored.

Growing resentment of Spanish rule over the colonies characterized the early 19th century. In many areas this resentment eventually led to armed struggle between royal forces and pro-Independence colonists. By 1826 all of Latin America had achieved independence except Cuba and Puerto Rico. Cuba's wealthy plantation owners withheld support from Simón Bolívar, who led the revolt that won independence for many of Spain's South American colonies. The reason for Cuban reluctance to realize independence was because these South American movements often led to the abolition of slavery in the new nations. The extremely lucrative Cuban sugar trade was dependent on slave labor. The wealthy planters wanted to avoid any disruption in their economic situation and any attempt to abolish slavery. These planters also counted on the United States to help insulate Cuba from the abolitionist movement popular in Europe. The United States was an important trading partner, buying 40% of Cuban sugar in 1848, and slavery still thrived in the U.S. prior to 1860.

In 1868 fighting broke out in Cuba in an attempt both to reform the institution of slavery and to gain nominal independence from Spain. This struggle became known as the Ten Years' War. By 1878 Spain had successfully defeated the pro-independence forces and regained effective control of the colony. The Ten Years' War did not accomplish the abolition of slavery, nor did it succeed in achieving independence for the island. It did, however, greatly increase the animosity between many of the colonists and the Spanish Crown. Slavery was eventually abolished in 1886.

After the Ten Years' War, the Cuban economy became increasingly tied to U.S. investment. The U.S. business interests built railroads and large mills and created what were called "centrals" or self-contained sugar cities. By 1895 the U.S. had invested

\$30 million in Cuba and virtually controlled the island's economy.

In 1895 the Maceo brothers, heroes of the Ten Years' War, and writer José Martí, led a second independence movement. They landed on the southern tip of Oriente province in April and enlisted the help of a group of rebels the Spanish referred to as "Mambises." This African word means "children of vultures." The Mambises included landowners, blacks, workers, and peasants.

Martí wanted Cuba to be free from both Spanish and U.S. control, saying, "To change masters is not to be free." His dream for Cuba was self-determination, respect for the dignity of all people, and truth and justice among all. He died in battle in 1895.

However, the battles raged on after Martí's death, and the U.S. observed with great interest. Theodore Roosevelt, then Secretary of the Navy, urged U.S. intervention, but President McKinley initially took a wait-and-watch policy. Anti-Spanish feelings were stirred up by the Hearst newspapers' reports of Spanish atrocities against Cubans, and rumors of danger to U.S. citizens led McKinley to send the battleship *U.S.S. Maine* to Havana harbor.

On February 15, 1898, the *Maine* mysteriously exploded. There were several theories about the explosion. Although at the time Spain was blamed, some felt it was actually done by the U.S. to force entry into the war or by Cubans who sought the same goal. McKinley offered to buy Cuba from Spain to avoid a confrontation, but Spain refused. The U.S. Congress declared war on Spain on April 25, 1898.

Legends abound about San Juan Hill and Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders, but in general the war was neither glorious nor glamorous. Men died of malaria and yellow fever as

well as in battle. Spain surrendered on July 17, 1898, but it was a hollow victory for the Cuban independence fighters. They were denied the right to attend the surrender ceremony, and after the war the American flag, not the Cuban flag, flew over the island. The U.S. occupied the territory and Cubans were asked to sign declarations renouncing the King of Spain, pledging allegiance to the United States, and recognizing U.S. supremacy until a stable government was established on the island. Congress passed the Platt Amendment stating that the U.S. would “reserve and retain the right of intervention for the preservation of Cuban independence and the maintenance of stable government.” Under the Platt Amendment the U.S. military intervened directly in Cuba in 1906-1909, 1912, and 1917. The will of the U.S. government and private investors virtually dictated Cuban policies in the years following independence.

By the late 1920s, Cuba had a monoculture economy, that is, the economy was completely dependent upon the income received from a single product, sugar. Sugar production was fast becoming a highly mechanized industry, and U.S. companies provided the costly machinery. U.S. capital investment in Cuba at this time was valued at \$1.5 billion, a 700% increase from 1909. Several middle class political movements began to form to push for Cuban autonomy and an end to U.S. interference in Cuban politics.

In 1928 the United States found itself in the uncomfortable position of supporting General Machado, a dictator who favored the status quo and thus preserved U.S. economic interests. Machado had served as president since 1924 but refused to leave office when his term ended. Political opposition to Machado mounted and turned violent, and finally U.S. Ambassador to Cuba Sumner Welles persuaded Machado to step down in

order to avoid total chaos. In the political upheaval that followed Machado’s departure, a young army officer named Fulgencio Batista led a coup and instituted a five-man ruling junta to govern until elections were held in 1933. From this time forward, Batista continued to be increasingly involved in Cuban politics.

In 1933 a progressive and nationalistic government came to power. Ramón Grau’s administration instituted a series of reforms including an eight-hour workday and limits on land purchases by foreigners. It also mandated that Cuban nationals own at least 50% of industry and commerce. However, the period of political reformism under Grau was cut short by a U.S.-backed coup by Batista in 1934, and the years of Grau’s government became known as the “truncated revolution.”

Under Batista, the Platt Amendment was abrogated and replaced by a reciprocal trade agreement. As part of the broader policies of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s “Good Neighbor Policy,” the U.S. stated that it would not intervene militarily in Cuba. Though Batista had political opponents, they were unable to create a viable alternative to the dictatorship. Batista instituted new social programs and stabilized the sugar industry, which had been suffering from the worldwide Depression. Batista’s policies were popular and led to his election as president in 1940. From 1940-1944 Batista governed within the confines of the Cuban Constitution of 1939. He continued his social reform policies, and at the end of his term stepped down, providing a smooth, democratic transition of power.

For the next eight years Cuba was governed by administrations associated with the truncated revolution of 1933. Political leaders attempted to revive the reformist policies and created state agencies to promote economic growth and diversification of

the economy. Unfortunately, charges of corruption, misuse of public funds, and political patronage plagued these administrations. Opposition groups quickly formed, and the political unrest became increasingly violent.

In 1952 Batista intervened once again in Cuban politics, staging a coup and ending the democratic and constitutional transition of power which he had himself set in motion in 1940. Although many welcomed Batista's intervention and the resulting political stability of the dictatorship, Batista was never really able to legitimize his usurpation of power. Immediately, opposition arose to counter the dictator. His administration was besieged with charges of corruption, ties with U.S. mafia kingpins, and increasing violations of human rights.

Several radicalized middle class opposition parties and university student groups formed a system of urban guerrilla warfare. Known as the Revolutionary Directorate, this group was pro-democracy, anti-Communist, anti-imperialist, and anti-Batista. Reformist groups attempted to persuade Batista to return the government to democracy but failed. Insurrection gained legitimacy as a necessary political option, and armed conflict became inevitable.

Fidel Castro came on the scene in 1952. A law student at the University of Havana and member of the Revolutionary Directorate, Castro condemned Batista's actions. He became a political activist, demonstrating and striking out against the inequities evident in Cuban society.

The Cuban Revolution officially began on July 28, 1953, with an unsuccessful attack by the Revolutionary Directorate on the Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba. Sixty-eight rebels were arrested and jailed, among them Fidel Castro. At his trial, Castro

delivered his famous "History will absolve me" speech, in which he exposed the inequities in Cuba to international scrutiny.

In 1955, Castro and his followers were released from the prison on the Isle of Pines under a general amnesty. Castro went to Mexico where he met Ernesto "Ché" Guevarra from Argentina, and together they created the 26th of July Movement. They trained a guerilla force and planned to return to Cuba to aid their fellow revolutionaries who had continued the struggle against Batista in the urban areas. With donated funds, including some from U.S. supporters, Castro returned to Cuba with 83 men on a tiny boat called the *Granma*. This attack proved as disastrous as the first. Batista's forces were aware of the expedition, and only fifteen of the rebels survived. They fled to the hills of the Sierra Maestra to regroup and continue the fight.

At this point the revolutionary movement was divided. Castro and the 26th of July Movement concentrated their efforts in the rural areas and the Revolutionary Directorate continued its activities in the urban areas, primarily Havana. However, many of the founding leaders were killed in the course of the struggle, opening the way for Castro to direct the insurrection and allowing the movement to create and strengthen ties to the Communist party.

By 1959 it was clear that the majority of the Cuban population, particularly the middle class, did not support Batista. The United States withdrew support from the failing regime, and the revolutionary forces triumphed.

The new revolutionary government immediately instituted a massive series of reforms they believed would correct social inequities. In March 1959, the government reduced rents by 50%, declared all beaches

public, and confiscated all land owned by Batista supporters. The government instituted free universal education and began a massive nationwide literacy campaign. Transportation costs were lowered, and state-organized childcare for workers began. In addition, a land reform program was initiated to correct inequities in land distribution, since at the time of the revolution, 8% of the farms comprised 71% of the arable land. Wealthy Cubans began to leave the island rather than surrender land, businesses, and investments.

Relations between the U.S. and the new Cuban government became strained almost immediately. In July of 1959 Cuba and the Soviet Union reestablished diplomatic ties severed under Batista. In response, the U.S. refused Cuba's sugar quota, dealing a devastating blow to the Cuban economy. The Soviet Union then agreed to buy the same amount that the U.S. had bought in the past. U.S. properties, including refineries, factories, and utilities, were nationalized, and Cuba denounced the U.S. for its open intervention in the Cuban economy. Diplomatic relations between Cuba and the U.S. were suspended in 1960.

The final blow to U.S.-Cuban relations was the infamous Bay of Pigs attack on April 17, 1961. Some 1500 U.S.-trained mercenaries and Cuban exiles landed at Playa Girón on the south coast of Cuba, expecting to win the support of the locals. Instead, they encountered strong resistance and the invasion was repelled within 72 hours. The U.S. declared a total embargo on all trade with Cuba on April 25, 1961.

Tensions between the Soviet Union and the U.S. further complicated the situation. On December 2, 1961, Castro made it public that he espoused Marxist and Leninist theories. Perhaps in an attempt to discourage further U.S. invasions of the island, the

Soviets installed missiles in Cuba. These were purported to have nuclear capabilities, and the U.S. imposed a military blockade against the island, demanding that the missiles be removed. Relations between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. were already strained, and the tension escalated to crisis proportions. Many people feared that the two superpowers would go to war, and many political scientists still agree that the Cuban Missile Crisis of October of 1962 was the closest the two nations ever came to nuclear conflict. Finally, however, the missiles were withdrawn, and the U.S. agreed to cease military aggression against Cuba.

In recent years, the Cuban government has had to adapt to the fall of the Soviet Union and Eastern European communist block countries, with which Cuba had maintained important trade links. Though the revolution has changed and adapted, even permitting a papal visit in 1998, Castro has remained in power for decades. There have been efforts to resume talks and diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba, but these have met with resistance from Cuban exile groups and others opposed to Castro's regime. Even in this post-Cold War era, U.S. citizens may travel to Cuba only for humanitarian, educational, or journalistic reasons.

Society and Culture

The population of Cuba is about 10 million. The people are predominantly of African and European ancestry, and racial discrimination does not appear to be common in revolutionary Cuba. Life expectancy is 74.2 years for men and 78 years for women, and infant mortality is 4.3 per 10,000, one of the lowest rates in the Americas.

About 3-4,000,000 people live in Havana, the capital city. Havana is divided into four major sections: Old Havana, Central

Havana, Vedado, and Revolutionary Square. Its architecture includes everything from 16th-century Spanish fortifications to modern skyscrapers.

Old Havana consists mainly of 18th and 19th-century European-style buildings, 70% of which were declared national monuments after the revolution. Central Havana, directly west of Old Havana, is bordered on the north by the Malecón, a road which runs for miles along the coast. The Malecón was infamous for its seamy nightlife before the revolution and now suffers from urban decay, though it still reflects the architecture and beauty of the past. The Vedado, where most of the hotels are located, also boasts the site of the University of Havana. Revolutionary Square is the political and administrative center of the city, surrounded by government ministries and national cultural centers, including the Central Planning Board and the National Library.

Education is free and compulsory for grades K - 12, and students may then attend pre-university for three years and complete college in five. Males are required to join the Army for one year after pre-university, and women may volunteer for military service. Attempts are made to make higher education available to as many citizens as possible. According to Cubatur, the national bureau of tourism, one out of every three Cubans is currently studying at some level. There is a national curriculum for all schools, and the Ministry of Education prints school texts.

Special education laws provide special schools for the mentally retarded, gifted students, and those who are considered to have discipline problems. Day care for small children is available, and its cost depends on a family's ability to pay. Although there is special emphasis on teacher education, with three teacher training institutes and two primary schools for practice teaching, the

average teacher's salary is 148 pesos per month, compared to a national average salary of 189 pesos per month. A particularly well-qualified and experienced teacher may earn up to 200 pesos per month.

Foreign language education is emphasized. Most Cubans have a working knowledge of English, and those employed in the tourism industry usually speak French, Portuguese, German, or Russian.

The arts are also very important to the Cubans. According to government statistics, in Havana there are 166 cinemas with a total of 100,000 seats; 25 museums; 26 theaters; 16 art galleries; 15 public libraries; and 22 houses of culture. Many Cuban artists have become world-famous, including ballerina Alicia Alonso, singers Pablo Milanés and Silvio Rodríguez, painters Wilfredo Lam and Amelia Peláez, and a number of writers. Cuban cinema is at the forefront of Latin American filmmaking and is world-renowned for its complexity, style, and avant-garde approach to cinematic theory. The Havana Film Festival, held every December, is a major international gathering of film scholars and enthusiasts, particularly from the Third World. ICAIC, the Cuban government film agency (Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry) maintains an archive, library, lecture series and film school. It has become an important center for students of Latin American film.

Television and radio are largely government-controlled. Partly because of the Cuban government's desire to control these media, a mini-conflict has erupted between the U.S. and Cuban governments over the airwaves. The U.S. broadcasts Radio and TV Martí, Spanish-language programming directed specifically at Cubans and beamed to the island from Florida via various types of high-power transmitters. The higher quality of programming that makes the transmis-

sions popular with many Cuban citizens is interspersed with U.S. government propaganda. So far Castro has been successful in jamming the signals of these U.S. broadcasts and has threatened further retaliatory actions.

Religious groups are generally allowed to practice their faiths, although some groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, who take a vocal stand against the government are persecuted, and at times imprisoned. A serious problem for most religious groups is a severe shortage of clergy. For example, before the revolution there were at least 35 Dominican priests on the island, and today only four or five remain. At least one of the three Jewish synagogues on the island has no rabbi, which means that many important sacraments cannot be administered.

Political Organization

The Cuban government consists of four basic units. The first, called the Council of Ministers (CM), is the highest-ranking executive and administrative organ. The council is comprised of the head of state and government, several vice-presidents, the president of the Central Planning Board, and ministers. The formal head of state and government and president of the council is Fidel Castro. Raúl Castro, his brother, who is head of the army and is expected to become Fidel's successor, is first vice-president. The CM's Executive Committee controls and coordinates the work of ministries and other central organizations. The Central Planning Board (JUCEPLAN), the formal ministries (education, defense, domestic trade) and institutes such as the Cuban Institute of Friendship with Peoples (ICAP) fall under its jurisdiction.

The second unit of government is the National Assembly of People's Power which is invested with legislative authority. Members are elected for a five-year period but the

Assembly holds only two brief annual sessions. It is comprised of deputies, one for every 20,000 inhabitants, not directly elected by the people. Some consider the composition of the Assembly to be elitist, with peasants, workers, and women remaining underrepresented. It does not make policy but can make suggestions to modify legislation and programs. The National Assembly does not, however, have the authority to veto a policy.

The third branch of government is the Council of State which functions as the Executive Committee of the National Assembly between the assembly's sessions. The Council's president, currently Fidel Castro, is the head of state and government, the highest representative of the government in international matters. The Council can decree laws, call for general mobilization, replace ministers, and issue general instructions to the courts. The president can assume direct control of the body plus the Revolutionary Armed Forces, thus making himself commander-in-chief.

The last division of government consists of each province and municipality's individual Assembly of Delegates of Peoples Power, which are local organs of state power. These assemblies work in close connection with the social and mass organizations and manage local services, as well as recreational, cultural, and educational activities. The assemblies are burdened with responsibilities and are sometimes targets of popular dissatisfaction due to a lack of resources to solve local problems.

Another important part of the political system is the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR) which came into being in 1960. This network of neighborhood committees was designed to protect the revolutionary government from its internal

enemies and to emphasize vigilance or punishment of suspected counterrevolutionaries.

The Cuban courts do not make up an independent branch of government. There is no judicial control over executive, legislative, or Communist Party authority. There are 169 municipal courts exercising jurisdiction over criminal and civil matters, and the 14 provincial courts act as appellate courts. The foremost judicial unit where decisions are final is the People's Supreme Court.

Economy

The Cuban economy is still heavily dependent on sugar and tobacco exports. However, tourism is also an important industry. Although U.S. citizens are generally unable to travel to Cuba, the island is an increasingly popular destination for tourists from other regions, particularly Europe and Canada. To encourage the tourism industry, Old Havana and the hotels in the Vedado section of the city are undergoing extensive refurbishment. Tourists are encouraged to use the dollar rather than the Cuban peso.

The economic situation of the individual is difficult to define. Those whose families were wealthy before the revolution tend to be unhappy because they lost the power, money, and property which their families had accumulated. The poor are happy because they now share in what the rich had. Visitors often get an impression of poverty because of the apparent lack of food, but rationing assures that all get food to maintain nutrition, and government statistics report that the diet consists of an average of 2800 calories a day. The average salary is 189 pesos per month, and the minimum salary by law is 95-98 pesos. In cities, 38% of income is spent on food, 11% on clothing, 11% on cigars and liquor, and 6-10% for rent. Education and medical care are free for all Cubans, and public transportation in the

cities is good and inexpensive. Manufactured goods are often scarce; U.S. visitors are generally not allowed to visit appliance or clothing stores, and bicycles, motor scooters, and pedestrians outnumber automobiles.

Slide Descriptions



1. *MAP OF CUBA*. Before 1976, Cuba was divided into 6 provinces. Today there are 14. The new divisions were made so that a new system of government called “People’s Power” could be introduced. This system is based on locally-elected representatives who are responsible for a wide range of services in their areas. This photo was taken at the travel agency in the Habana Libre Hotel, formerly the Havana Hilton, in Vedado.
2. *THE POPULAR BEACH AT SANTA MARIA DEL MAR*. There are some 137 beaches on this largest island in the Caribbean. Cuba lies at the edge of the Tropics and experiences a “border tropical” climate. November through April, the dry season known as La Seca, has an average temperature of 80° F. May through October is the rainy season with tropical showers and changeable skies. The hurricane season is early fall, and summer temperatures in June through August average 90° F.
3. *MOUNTAIN LANDSCAPE*. There are four main mountain ranges in Cuba, the Sierra de los Organos and Sierra del Rosario in the West (2300 ft); the Escambray mountains in the south (3700 ft); and the Sierra Maestra in the east. The highest point is Pico Turquino at 6500 ft. Cuba has about 8000 species of flowers, plants, and trees. One very characteristic tree is the “belly palm,” so named for the bulge in the middle of the trunk.
4. *VIEW FROM HEMINGWAY’S ESTATE IN SAN FRANCISCO DE PAULA, LOOKING TOWARD HAVANA*. “Papa,” as Hemingway was affectionately called, spent more than 20 years in Cuba, initially as an occasional hotel guest and later as resident and owner of this property on the outskirts of Havana. Here he completed *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and wrote *The Old Man and the Sea*, a short novel for which he won the Nobel Prize.
5. *HEMINGWAY MUSEUM*. The Cubans and Papa had a love affair that lasted beyond his death. His estate is now a museum, open to the public. The house is closed, but each room can be seen through a window or door. Here we see the dining room exactly as it was the day Hemingway left, down to the magazines that he left around, now yellowed with age.
6. *SCHOOLCHILDREN*. Education is free and compulsory through high school. Pre-primary classes are given at day care centers. This is a primary school serving grades 1-6 at the commune Los Naranjos. Los Naranjos, located about 40 minutes from Havana, was founded in 1972. Classes at this school are from 8:10 to 12:30 and 2:30 to 5:00 each day. Grades 5 and 6 spend Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoons working in the gardens rather than in regular classes. Parents work 40 hours two weeks of the month and 48 hours the other two weeks, so children attend school on the “long Saturday.” These children will attend urban secondary schools when they are 12-14 years old, pre-university at ages 15-17, and university when they are 18-22.

7. *AGRICULTURAL VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL*. One alternative to the regular secondary school is the agricultural-vocational school. This particular school is located at Batabano on the southwestern coast. This senior high houses grades 10 -12. It is a boarding school with 618 students. Students attend classes that include physical education and the arts as well as military training, and they also raise produce and livestock. These products are sold in local markets and the money is used to help cover the school's expenses. Students come from as far away as Havana to attend this school.
8. *STUDENTS AT THE PIONEER PALACE*. The Pioneer Palace, which bears the name of Che Guevarra, also offers vocational activities. This differs from the curriculum of the secondary schools. 32,000 children come here by bus once a week, often as a reward. There are 234 specialties with 304 teachers, including watch repair, shoemaking, glass ware, ceramics, cooking, sugar production, electrical wiring, dairy farming, radio and TV production, salesmanship, and net weaving.
9. *SLOGAN AT PIONEER PALACE*. Students are guided by inspirational sayings like this one at the Pioneer Palace: "If we want to say how we wish our children to be educated, we must say without vacillation: we want them to be educated in the spirit of 'Che.'"
10. *QUOTES ON A RESIDENCE WALL NEAR OLD HAVANA*. The entire population is constantly reminded of the sayings of Che Guevarra and Fidel Castro. These particular quotes associate the political philosophies of Che with those the hero of the Cuban independence struggle, José Martí. (Translation: "Revolution should be carried in the soul to live for, not merely in words to live from." And "This type of struggle gives us the opportunity to turn ourselves into revolutionaries, the highest step of the human species.")
11. *TANKER TRUCKS AND STATUE PEDESTAL*. This slide tells us two very important facts about Cuba. First, water is in short supply and is pumped to the hotels as seen here at the hotel El Presidente near the Malecon. Also, after the revolution, all political traitors to Cuba paid a price, some with their lives and some with their statues. Here only the shoes remain of the statue of the former president Estrada de Palma, who was considered inept and a traitor. His statue was one of the many that line the famous Avenida de los Presidentes, but after the revolution it was cut down and taken to the "political graveyard," a room in the Municipal Palace museum which houses this type of memento. They are on display to remind the populace of the corruption that existed prior to the revolution.
12. *PLAZA WITH MONUMENTS*. Across from the 200-year-old University of Havana in Vedado is the monument in honor of Julio Antonio Mella, the founder of Cuba's Communist Party. The inscription reads, "To fight for social revolution in the Americas is not the utopia of crazy people or fanatics. It is to fight for the next step forward in history." To the left of the plaza, there is still graffiti representative of the overthrow of Batista — "Abajo Batista, el asesino" ("*Down with Batista, the assassin*"). In the background the statue points to the church of the Parroquia Nuestra Señora del Carmen, which was formerly a Carmelite monastery. Today only one or two priests are left to minister to a declining but dedicated congregation.

13. *BUILDINGS UNDER RENOVATION*. Castro's plan to restore Old Havana is an ambitious one. Here on Obispo Street the two stages of the project can be seen.
14. *ROOFTOP VISTA*. This is the view from the Hotel Presidente, near the Malecón. One can see the contrast of the architecture and its state of disrepair. Las Casas de las Américas, a very famous library for scholarly research and literary awards, is located 2 blocks from this hotel. In this particular neighborhood, old mansions are now shared by as many as 5 families.
15. *AVENIDA DE LOS PRESIDENTES*. Notice the lack of traffic on such a wide thoroughfare in a large city. Most people use public transportation, ride bikes or motorscooters, or walk. Very few Cubans use cabs as they are at a premium for tourists. Some special government cabs take U.S. currency, which Cubans are forbidden to have.
16. *MANSION AND SPORTS COMPLEX*. This sugar plantation owner's mansion dates from the 19th century. Today it houses a government ministry office. In the left background are the Malecón and a sports complex. The cars are likely to be LADAS from the Soviet Union.
17. *RATION AND PRICE LIST*. Food rationing is relatively common in Cuba. Grocery stores are usually small. Shoppers use small brown ration books (passport size) to purchase what is available. Items are sold by bar, ounce, can, or package per family member. Next door to this store is a poultry, meat, and eggs store which was closed at the time the photo was taken, with no indication of how often it was open.
18. *GROCERY STORE*. On the shelf in this store one finds unwrapped soap and toilet paper. Eggs are on the counter in open boxes, bottles of wine line the shelves, and sugar, rice, detergent, etc., are sold loose. Cigars here cost triple what a tourist pays. The women in the store this day were happy because they had received word that their sons serving in the military had arrived safely in Angola. Note that there is no fresh produce here.
19. *WOMAN MAKING CIGARS*. The tourist stores run by Intur, which are off limits to Cubans, encourage the use of the dollar rather than the Cuban peso. These stores, located in hotels or Central Havana, sell Cuban crafts including dolls, copper drawings, paintings, pottery, and musical instruments such as maracas. Cuban cigars are made before the buyer's eyes. Cuban rum is also available and is cheaper in the Intur stores than at hotel bars or dining rooms. A semi-dark beer called "Hatuey" after the Arawak king is also very popular.
20. *NEWLYWEDS*. The Código de Familia (Family Code) was passed in February 1975. It gave men and women equal rights in marriage and equal responsibility in raising their children. Here we see a couple from Los Naranjos on their wedding day. People came out of their homes or out on their balconies to the tune of the three-note horn from this well-preserved vintage Cadillac.

21. *MODEL HOME*. The homes at Los Naranjos Comunidad Rural, an example commune, are either single-story one-family dwellings or apartments. Peasants sold small parcels of land to the state in exchange for a place to live for life, and each family receives a dwelling and furniture for free. The residents all work together in this enterprise. There are 175 residential units with 700 inhabitants.
22. *KITCHEN*. This model one-family unit at Los Naranjos is shown to tourists. The elderly woman who lives here has one small bedroom, living room, half-bath and this kitchen.
23. *HOUSING PROJECT*. Lack of housing continues to be a problem, especially in Havana. Castro has planned and is in the process of completing Alamar, a housing project that will hold 150,000 inhabitants. The individual dwellings in the foreground were originally built to house the Soviet designers and builders who began the project.
24. *COLUMBUS CEMETERY*. In 1872 the Columbus Cemetery was on the outskirts of Havana, but the city has since grown southward and westward, passing the cemetery. Today this property is maintained even though the living descendants of most of the families buried here live outside of Cuba. Funerals are conducted here in a small chapel presided over by a retired priest.
25. *SYNAGOGUE*. The plight of the Jewish community is not unlike that of other faiths on the island. There are 3 synagogues, one Sephardic, one Orthodox, and one Conservative, to serve the 1000 Jewish people on the island. At the *Gran Sinagoga de la Comunidad Hebrea*, shown here, there are 150 members, but there is no rabbi. Therefore, there are no Bat Mitzvahs or Bar Mitzvahs. The congregation is awaiting a rabbi from Argentina or Mexico.
26. *CDR MEETING*. All neighborhood activities are monitored by the CDR's, instituted Sept. 28, 1960. The first task of the CDR (Committee for the Defense of the Revolution) is defense and vigilance against those who would try to overthrow Castro. Each neighborhood CDR meets every 2 months. People come here to solve local problems. One must be 14 years old to qualify as a member. Pioneers and Communist youth are considered good candidates, but supposedly a person need not be a Communist to belong to a CDR.
27. *OPEN AIR RESTAURANT IN LENIN PARK*. Lenin Park consists of 1,650 acres, located on the southwestern edge of Havana. There are many activities here for people to enjoy such as concerts, an international doll museum, a train museum, horseback riding, picnicking, dining in restaurants, pottery-making, or just enjoying the lush green park. The park was designed in 1970 and inaugurated in 1972 as a recreation area away from the bustle of the city.

28. *MUSICIANS*. There is a wide range of Cuban music. The famous Tropicana show is a glimpse of the 50's with a Vegas look. The production includes Cuban rhythms, Indian music, African chants, and European melodies. The "son," a musical style introduced in the 1920's, now has a salsa beat and is definitely Afro-Cuban. Since the revolution, poetic lyrics of the "nueva trova" tell of everyday life, of the pain and joy of love, and of the successes and hardships of the revolution. The most popular of the singer/lyricists are Silvio Rodríguez and Pablo Milanés. The most famous song associated with Cuba is the José Martí poem set to music, "Guantanamera." Some consider it the anthem of the revolution.
29. *HOSPITAL DINING ROOM*. These people are patients at the Psychiatric Hospital of Havana. The Cuban health system has three levels: National, including national clinics, maternity hospitals, and a system with 1 family doctor for every 120 families. The second level includes local, municipal, and provincial hospitals, and the third is institutions for research and transplants. Twelve percent of the national budget is spent on health care. Geriatric care is of great concern since currently 11% of the population is over 60 years of age.
30. *LA PLAZA DE LA REVOLUCION (Revolutionary Square)*. This is the political center of Cuba in Havana, where large rallies are held. This obelisk, honoring José Martí, is 350 feet high. Surrounding the plaza are a number of government ministries, the National Library and the National Theatre. The facade of one of the ministry buildings has a huge portrait of Che Guevarra. Fidel Castro is noted for keeping the multitudes mesmerized for hours with his speeches.

Questions and Activities



Discussion Topics

1. What were the causes and effects of slavery in Cuba? How does Cuban slavery compare to slavery in the U.S. or in any other country you know about?
2. Discuss Martí's statement, "To change masters is not to be free." What did he mean? What "masters" was he referring to?
3. What has been the U.S. role in Cuban history? What about the Soviet Union?
4. How is the Cuban Revolution similar to or different from the American Revolution? How does it compare to the Nicaraguan Revolution?
5. From what you have learned from this slide packet and anything else you know about history and politics, what do you think Cuba's future will be like?

Activities

1. View and discuss the documentaries *Nobody Listened* by Nestor Almendros and Jorge Ulloa and *An Uncompromising Revolution* by Saul Landau. These videos are 60 minutes each and represent two opposing views of contemporary Cuba. The first deals with political prisoners and the abuses they have suffered under the Cuban judicial system without the world community policing the situation. The second is an interview with Fidel Castro interspersed with the commentary of common people. While neither film is an objective view of the country, presenting both provides a fairly balanced picture of Cuba today. Information regarding videocassettes of these documentaries can be obtained from the following:
2. After viewing the documentaries mentioned in the previous question or a similar resource, divide students into two groups for a debate. One group will represent a pro-revolutionary sentiment, while the other will be anti-revolution. Give students at least one classroom period to research and prepare, and then conduct a formal debate in which issues such as social welfare, individual freedoms, and international relations are discussed. The instructor may serve as moderator, or a third group of students may be assigned to play the role of television political reporters and draft questions that deliberately challenge both sides of the issues.
3. Discuss the concept of "revolution" in general. What does revolution mean to the students? How many Latin American revolutions can they name? What is the difference between a revolution and a rebellion? What are some of the causes and effects of revolution? (If your school owns a copy of the Latin American Curriculum Resource Center's publication *Latin America: Land of Diversity*, refer to "Twentieth-Century Latin American Revolutions," for background information, discussion questions, and additional classroom activities.)

4. Have students research the life and work of José Martí. Why was he associated with the Cuban revolution? Have students learn either the poem or, if possible, the song “Guantanamera.” Why do some people think of it as an anthem of the Cuban Revolution? (The song is available on the Sandpipers album in Spanish, recorded under the A&M Records label, SP 4159.)
5. After viewing the slides that accompany this unit, have students pretend they are on a trip to Cuba and write a letter home giving their impressions of Cuba and its people today.
6. This slide packet was up-to-date when it was published in October of 1990. Have students research and report on any changes which might have occurred in Cuban politics, economics, society, or international relations since this unit was produced. What were the reasons for any changes? Has the US government position regarding Cuba changed recently? What has happened to Cuba’s relationship with the Soviet Union? With the rest of Latin America? The world community?

Additional Readings and References



Aguila, Juan M. del. *Cuba: Dilemmas of a Revolution*. Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1984.

Chanan, Michael. *The Cuban Image: Cinema and Cultural Politics in Cuba*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.

Garcia, Cristina. *Dreaming in Cuban*. NY: Ballantine Books, 1993.

Perez, Louis A. *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*. NY: Oxford UP, 1995.

Suchlicki, Jamie. *Cuba: From Columbus to Castro*. 2nd edition. Washington: Pergamon-Brassey, 1986.

This packet is made possible through the generous funding of the Tinker Foundation, Inc. and the Roger Thayer Stone Center for Latin American Studies, Tulane University.

© 1990, 1996, 1998 by the Roger Thayer Stone Center for Latin American Studies, Tulane University. Permission is granted for the reproduction of this packet for classroom use only.