In 2016, journalism students from Central Connecticut State University traveled to Cuba to investigate and explore a country closed to many American travelers for decades.
The main airport in Havana is named for José Martí, a 19th-century poet, novelist, journalist and intellectual who inspired Cubans in their fight to oust Spain from the island before dying in battle for that cause. Martí has been invoked by revolutionaries since, and a pilgrimage to the country, to Cienfuegos and Trinidad, allowing the students to talk with everyday Cubans. The students, who did research on their topics, from art to food rationings to the status of women, prior to our departure from Connecticut, seemed to find stories and people to talk with wherever they went. Not all exchanges were free flowing. Cubans, who face arrest for critical speech against the government, looked over their shoulders and often did not give their full names, and the students did not push. Also making reporting difficult was the language barrier. Through our ace in the hole was sophomore journalist major Kimberly Peña, a native Spanish speaker who won a Sigrid Schultz Scholarship that paid her way as our official translator. "Where’s Kim?" was a cry one would hear often during the week.

The stories in this issue reflect some of our challenges, but they also reflect some of the spirit of everyday life in Cuba and the students’ initiative. One has to be careful about reading too much into these moments. Already Fidel and Raúl Castro have pushed back from some of the euphoria with which Obama was met, reaffirming their desire to continue with communism. But for a moment in time we were there and offer some of what we saw.

Aware of the limited wifi and Internet, as well as some of the restrictions on reporting, especially without journalism visas, we initially planned to gather material for more leisurely projects when we returned. But Obama upped the ante. When we learned that we would be in Cuba the same week as the President, my colleague Darren Sweeney and I knew we needed to ramp up our ambitions. That meant Twitter and Instagram when technology permitted on the road, and the project you are reading in print and digital.

The trip abroad to Cuba was to explore the live-in-studio interview with a student during the 5 o’clock news or the reporters from the many local papers writing about it, the Central Connecticut State University 2016 spring break study abroad trip to Cuba ended up making local headlines. Study abroad trips at CCSU are usually proposed and planned one to two years in advance. The course abroad to Cuba was accepted during the spring of 2015. CCSU has been sending groups to Cuba for a decade, including groups during the summer of 2014 and 2015. Still, the buzz increased among the students, faculty and community over the prospect of visiting a country that most Americans were restricted to visit for more than 50 years.

Most people don’t know anyone who has traveled there. This fact alone garnered interest in the trip. When it appeared, by sheer coincidence, that the first visiting United States president since 1928 was going to visit at the same time as the faculty-led group, interest from local media began to escalate. Add in another coincidental historic performance planned in Cuba by the Rolling Stones during the same week and the study abroad made headlines in the local media.

When the group was relocated out of Havana because of the president’s visit, students and faculty took to social media, reaching out to the White House or local representatives to try and gain access to the president’s speech event. They also tweeted and wrote to the Tampa Bay Rays, a Major League baseball team that was set to play the Cuban National Team in Havana (another history-making coincidence of the week). Local papers like the Hartford Courant, New Britain Herald and the Record-Journal reported on different angles of the trip. All of the local television stations carried some form of coverage.

Besides local media attention, this was the type of trip that had many people waiting for pictures to be posted on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. Deb Manzione is a Facebook friend of one of the trip’s faculty advisors. She has family in Cuba, and he has to rely on stories and pictures brought back to satisfy her curiosity about their Cuban way of life.

“It’s like the forbidden fruit. [The few] people who have ventured there come back and say it’s like a time warp. They speak of the beauty of the island and its friendly people. For now, those stories have to satisfy our curiosity,” said Manzione.

Many of the trip’s participants commented on similar reactions from faculty and friends when returning home from the journey. Many followed via social media comment on how interesting it was to see a place that has been so “off limits” before.

“I want to know all the details so I can have a picture of this forbidden paradise,” Manzione said. “I feel I have family somewhere on that island, and so look forward to connect with them. I am so looking forward to seeing your pictures and hearing about your experience there.”

Darlene Gable, administrative assistant in the English department at CCSU, said Cuba has always fascinated her. It is a country so close yet still so foreign “because of travel restrictions.” The updates with pictures of the Obamas watching baseball, the Rolling Stones playing a free concert, the gorgeous white sand beaches, the classic ‘50s taxis and the joy of the Cuban people, gave me a window into the country. As a CCSU employee and an alumna, I felt partnered in this historical trip through the real-time social media posts," Gable said.

The trip abroad to Cuba was to explore and document different aspects of Cuban culture, and to see how the country is adapting to change. Instead, the timing of historic visits from the president and others, turned the CCSU reporting class into a local news story.
Cuban stars have left everything behind for the simple reason that there is no money to be made in Cuba, and millions await in the U.S. For many ballplayers, the incentives to stay in Cuba are simply no match for the potential success that lies in America.

Mike Alvarez, a local Cuban baseball fan, expressed the difficulties of trying to develop a career in Cuba’s biggest sport. “The government won’t pay them anything,” Alvarez said. “They only make 40 CUCs (about $40) per month. If they’re lucky, they have a small house, but it’s not good. So they go to America and make millions.”

Hector Oliva, another Cuban fan, was hopeful that the two countries can reconcile. “This game is important because America has not helped the relationship up until now,” he said. “But now there is more love. You keep repeating you are a friendly country. I hope that we can continue to work together.”

The Rays won the game 4-1, fueled by a two-run home run from first baseman James Loney. But it was obvious from the first pitch that this game meant much more than a win or loss.

Guillermo Aviles Difurno, an outfielder for the Cuban national team, had plenty to share about his experience. “I am very happy to have been able to play in front of so many people,” Difurno said. “This is an important time and this should open the door for Cuba.”

What happens now is still yet to be determined. After the game, Fidel Castro quickly spoke out against America, saying, “We don’t need the empire to give us anything.”

It isn’t clear how much Raul Castro shares his brother’s beliefs, as both governments are looking to maintain a positive relationship moving forward.

Cuba has already stated publicly that it would be happy to host future games, even as early as next year. The MLB has yet to say whether or not it would agree. But as we have seen in the past, anything is possible with baseball. It may just be the one thing that brings Cuba back to life.
Education For All
And It’s Free

By MITZIE MARTIN

Cuba allocates 13 percent its budget to education making it the No. 1 nation in the category of highest investment contributing to education. Its literacy rate is 99.8 percent, ranking No. 9 of 215 countries. All of Cuba’s education system is run by the Ministry of Higher Education, which is responsible for not only managing the schools and regulating teaching methods and courses, but also establishing educational policies and ensuring that all the schools comply with government standards.

With this compliance, primary education is compulsory for children ages 6 to 14. Teachers are required to teach material that supports socialism. During Cuba’s revolution Fidel Castro used education as a way to propel his revolution. Children would attend school and also be sent to farms to do agricultural work or factories to fulfill industrial needs. This combination of work and study became the standard.

Cuban education revolved around the needs of the state and patriotic orthodoxy. Education became universal under Castro’s reign, and it was required that all who went through the education system actively support and promote government policies before and after schooling.

Students are required to be a part of political organizations such as the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR). It is evident that these beliefs have been instilled in the Cuban people and the cycle continues from generation to generation.

“Everything we teach here is about the revolution. I have no reason to teach anything that has nothing to do with the revolution,” said Barbara, a teacher at the Clodomira Acosta Primary School in Trinidad. She did not give her surname.

Barbara’s been teaching at the same school for more than 30 years and says the curriculum has not changed much since.

“That’s how I was raised to be and that is how I matured,” she said. “I can teach the class however I like to, but always with the morals of the revolution.”

Education serves as a tool to foster social equality, an important part of Castro’s revolution. Marxism ideology was the basis of a curriculum that stresses that the well-being of the state takes precedence over the individual. These principles continue to maintain the foreground to what is taught in schools, and as a result many private institutions have been shut down.

Yet, despite the restrictions on education policy, the revolution did create a tremendous progressive change for the country. Martin Carnoy, professor of education and economics at Stanford University, found that Cuban schools use a European curriculum in math that, according to experts, is better than the variety of math curricula used in U.S. schools.

“Cuban teachers were much more likely to have students solve math problems from worksheets during class, then analyze their solutions in full-class discussion, Carnoy wrote. “Cuban pupils…were fully involved and seemed to be getting the concepts being taught.”

Teachers stay with the same group of students for four years. Therefore, teachers know each student well. The average school day for children can start at 8:30 a.m. and end at 6:30 p.m. The academic year is extended as well, running from September to July on all levels including university.

This may not be the most conventional system, but it’s working for Cuba. Since Cuba nationalized education in 1959, it has become the best education system in Latin America and the Caribbean and is the only country on the continent to have a high-level teaching faculty, according to a 2014 report by The World Bank.

The Cuban children have dreams that are not unlike those of young people elsewhere. Raul, 13, likes school because, he says, the professors are good. His dream is to become a professional soccer player. “I want to be a masseuse therapist or tour guide…to help my mom and family,” says 14-year-old Alina.

While Cuba does not have top-of-the-line facilities, the most up-to-date technology, or many of the liberties in the United States, it manages to educate its people.
Art Supplies Food
For Many Families

By LAURA HASPESLAGH
AND SINTIA ARELLUS

Art is one of the oldest and most universal forms of expression that can bridge cultures and people. For many Cuban artists, art is also what feeds their families. Streets are lined with shops full of artwork that, if sold, will buy the next meal. There's a consistency and style that is applied to the art being sold on the streets. Cubans have limited access to many things, including art supplies. This is reflected in the similarities found in most of the artwork. Because of the high cost of brushes, canvases and paint, many artists are forced to get their supplies through unorthodox and somewhat dangerous channels.

According to a Cienfuegos artist, Louis Munoz, supplies can be purchased on the black-market. Considering that the average Cuban salary is low, Munoz says any break he can get is worth it for him to do what he loves.

Because of the slim selection of supplies available, most Cuban artists paint with oils on canvases. Paint is stored in plastic water bottles and mixing pallets are usually cardboard top pieces and storage-bin lids. Like the rest of the population, artists must also find a way to stretch out every last bit of what they have.

Munoz helps run a shop in Cienfuegos where he sells his own art. The prices for his pieces range from seven to about 30 CUCs (about $30) for small- to medium-sized paintings. He takes pride in his landscape paintings that mirror photographs. While describing a painting, Munoz, with a proud grin, said, "It looks like a picture, but it's not a picture. It's hand-painted." His favorite model is his pregnant dog, Luna.

Unlike other artists, Munoz graduated first with degree in law but because college is free in Cuba, he went back to school for a degree in art. And his art is his sole source of income. "It's a freedom to myself," he said. "Mi alma, " while placing an open palm on his chest to signify his love for what he does.

On the easel in the back of the small shop stand two identically-sized, unfinished paintings. Both are boldly-colored renditions of famous people: Compad Segundo, a famous Cuban musician, and Che Guevara, the revolutionary. People and landscapes are a common theme in Cuban art; still life and realism seem to be scarcely used.

Much like Munoz, Trinidad artist Eliberto Vega faces similar challenges with getting enough supplies to create art and make a living. Vega owns the shop that offers a selection from paintings to carved souvenirs. The paintings and crafted wooden pieces are created by him and several members of his family. The small shop is covered with oil-based paintings of landscapes and cigar holders carved by his nieces and nephews. Vega said not many Cubans buy pieces in the shop.

"We run a business solely dependent on tourists and, with more people being able to come to Cuba, we hope that means more money for us," he said.

The prices of the paintings and souvenirs range from 2 CUCs for a small item to 200 CUCs for large paintings. In an average week the family will make around 35 CUCs, a little more than average.

In the same way that buildings and cars appear to be stopped in time, the Cuba style of art also seems suspended. The use of bright vivid colors in portraits is much like the pop art movement of the mid 1950s. A popular tourist shopping warehouse contained walls covered in art consisting of celebrities and people painted in complimentary colors, reminiscent of Andy Warhol's "Marilyn Diptych."

In the Havana Market, selling the artwork is usually a family business. The children of the artists sit patiently by layers of art and negotiate prices. In a more competitive layout much like an outlet where there are large numbers of shops under one roof, the artist is less likely to be found.

Nicolas Valentina sells his father's artwork, most of which are on large pieces of canvases depicting Afro-Cuban influences, dark skin and Afros.

"My father painted these," he said. "I come in every day with my mother to sell them. We're lucky to sell one, maybe two paintings every few weeks." A large canvas would go for 200 CUCs, Valentina said, but he was willing to lower the price after consulting with his mother.

The Valentina family has a spot right next to the door so he is one of the people tourists may see upon entering. The farther a visitor travels into the building the tighter the maze, which can be off-putting to those looking to buy. Competition is even stronger in the thick of the market, filled with Cubans forced to aggressively get the attention of tourists to make any sort of profit for the day. It may be scary for a tourist, but it's even worse for the artist trying to make a living.

"Every day we come out here because this is how we eat," says Valentina. "No hay otra opcion para nosotros," which means, "There is no choice."
A Nation Of Varied Religions

By CHRISTOPHER MARINELLI

Cuba hosts the practices of a diverse landscape of religions, spread from the more tradition- al faiths of Christianity and Judaism to the aboriginal groups of Afro-Cubano, Santeria, Yoruba and Palo-Monte. Despite the close proximity of each faith in respective house of worship in the urban and impoverished areas where people ask for not money but T-shirts, toilet paper and toothpaste, these religions have founded a special community of living in solidarity and abstaining from religious exclusivity as they show respect for the Gods to whom their neighbors send their prayers.

It was in the streets of Trinidad that we met Rancy Calilen Sanchez, a middle-aged man who approached us after seeing us speaking with an elementary school teacher through the steel bars of the school house where children were enjoying nap time on a spread of cots. The teacher was telling us that the children attended a separate Chris- tian Sunday school when Sanchez came up, curious about where we were from as well as eager to chat.

We spoke about religion briefly as he mentioned his beliefs in God and his emphasis on going to church each Sunday. After we parted ways after giving him some toilet- paper, we looked around for us in Trinidad and, once he found us, he had found two religion professors who practice some of the Afro-Cuban religions.

We ended up in the humble abode and restaurant called “El Palo Monte,” which uses icons from Christianity such as the cross while maintaining its roots from the Congo in ritual practices involving coconut shells, sticks and animal parts. While not in Gonzales’ or Vegás case, others practice with human remains, they said.

Yoruba came to Cuba through the African slave trade, and has since found a home on the island and is part of the co-existence and fusion with the other religious groups. “Cuba is very religious,” said Gonzales. “It maintains itself religiousness through the congruence of various religions. There is Catholicism, Protestantism, and Christianity. Many religions converge. But all of them derive from the Catholic Church. In the case of the Trinidad, the Trinitar- ian is Catholic. However, they also practice different types of these religions. It’s a mix.”

“There is a religious syncretism,” Gonzales continued. “It is called religious syncretism to all those religions in which the Catholic Church inserts itself in the Afro-Cuban church. Santa Barbara, La Virgen de la Caridad, San Anne, San Lazaro…” From the Catholic Church, there is also La Virgen de Las Mercedes, San Lazaro, San Judas. They all have their explanation in the African religion.

Other Cubans from Trinidad also gave high praise to Santa Barbara, and how they pray to her as a god. Alesandrea Alsim Manes, 28, works in a restaurant called Paladar, which is considered an ancient house and is ornate with religious symbols such as crosses, pictures of Jesus, and a statue of San- ta Barbara. While she doesn’t go to church, Manez spoke about her individual faith, and said, “I pray to Santa Barbara, as she gives me hope.”

Not all people have faith in God, however, and prefer to place their belief in their coun- try. On the streets of Trinidad, 58-year-old Lasaro Calderon Quartez sells symbolic reli- gious wear and jewelry as a form of income, but places his faith in the hands of Cuba and not a God.

“I’m communist,” said Quartez, as he lowered his voice and spoke from hardship and profound life experiences that guided him to his spirituality. “What kills a man is ambition. I know a lot of men who have gone to Puerto Rico and were killed.”

Quartez spoke about how, because of a lack of opportunity in Cuba, some friends decided to travel to Puerto Rico for work and a better life. They found themselves in illegal trade activities, of which he did not feel com- fortable sharing the specifics, and through their work were killed. Quartez holds this as an affirmation of his faith in Cuba, and while there is struggle for food and business, he at least still has his life.

As for worship, around 100 people will go to a temple, such as the home of Santa Barba- ra in El Templo de Changó. Others practice and pray to San Lazaro in places where there are communities of people educated on the saint, and congregations the size of a typical classroom of 15-20 people will move worship locations from house to house.

Vega and Gonzales said the visit in Sep- tember by Pope Francis helped bring these religions together and helped create a unity between the different faiths and how it affects the week of Good Friday and Easter.

“This week is Holy Week,” said Gonzas- les, the professor. “This Friday there will be a procession. They walk six blocks. That is the Catholic religion. Everyone goes there to pray to the Cristo of the Vera Cruz (Jesus Christ).”

In Trinidad, Holy Week is celebrated with a procession on Friday where all the town, believers and non-believers, Catholics and non-Catholics, accompany them on the walk.

Gonzales said the pope’s visit was symbol- ic and helped create a unity between the dif- ferent theologies. “This week, the Afro-Cu- ban religions have their saints covered. The pope, when he came, said Good Friday is a recess from work, that Friday is a holiday and we do not work, no matter what religion.”
A Taste Of Hospitality

By BRENNAH DALLAIRE

After almost 24 hours of travel from Connecticut, we had finally landed in Cuba. I shuffled across the tarmac into the airport; an hour and half later I had been through customs and collected my luggage. I was free to venture outside into the muggy but fresh Havana air.

A coach bus awaited our group of 21 in the parking lot of José Marti International Airport fueled and ready to drive us to a resort in Varadero another two hours away. I chose a seat, plopped into the muggy but fresh Havana air.

We got off the bus in Varadero early that morning. Rain and clouds didn’t help fight the ever-vigilant sun. I felt on our drive into the mountains. We got off the bus in Pinar del Río and ran from the rain down a flight of stairs passing a residence and landing in a small café overlooking the cloudy, overcast hills of Las Terrazas.

Café de María was a small coffee bar with a few bench seats and small wooden tables. María, the founder of the café and the barista, explained how coffee grown in the area was brewed and blended with a sweet rum made from guava named “Guaytaba del Pinar” and crowned with milk foam to make her signature beverage “Café de María.”

The menu included the usual “café con leche,” which is coffee with milk and other espresso beverages, but what caught my attention was a drink I wouldn’t find in a Starbucks back home, “Café Latte.”

The creamy blended concoction came out served in an eclectic ceramic mug plated with a small chocolate creme cookie.

The experience at Café de María inspired an obsession and dependence on Cuban coffee. At every meal and stop along our trip to Las Terrazas, a small community and nature reserve about 55 miles west of Havana, I wasn’t aware of it at the time but a day’s worth of travel read, “refreshing cocktail, has a few distinct measures that make it stand out. It will most often contain Havana Club rum, cola, added sugar and a little lime.

The most unique of cocktails found in Cuba originates in the historic city of Trinidad. The Canchánchara consists of rum, lime, honey and soda water. Before strolling the colorful streets of Trinidad and shopping the artisan markets for souvenirs I sat down to a three-course meal at Restaurant La Nueva Era. The dining room was hoarse. I felt as though I had been invited in by the owners personally. Wedding photos of the man and woman serving our group were displayed on the walls of the restaurant. A soft breeze filled the room as performers set up, and waiters brought out trays of Canchánchara. The beverage was strong but refreshing.

With the heat and having little in my stomach at this point I had to limit myself to one, but I surely enjoyed the cocktail, a staple of Trinidad.

With the U.S. embargo still active import dollars are scarce and expensive. Restaurante owners in Havana and Trinidad said that their produce was grown locally and they only purchase it from local markets for reasonable prices. The ingredients they need are accessible and affordable. The warm climate in Cuba makes for ripe fruits all year.

Walking around Trinidad in the sun I came across a juice shop, La Cecilia. Store manager, Thussendia Duffey Vaga, 43, of Trinidad, boasted of their most popular juices including orange, mango and tamarind. I saw that the shop sign listed “plátanos.” I had never tried plantain juice so with the help of translator Kimberly Pena I asked Vaga how they make it.

“You take it from the branch, peel it, put it in the blender, break it down, put sugar if you want it with sugar, honey if you wish, depending on the person,” Vega said. From her enthusiasm I knew it must be good but after a sample of the mango I played it safe and ordered a glass. She began pouring and didn’t stop until she had filled a 16-ounce glass. For only 1 CUC you couldn’t go wrong. After chugging this glass of mango juice I felt as though I had just drunk from the fountain of youth. I had more energy than coffee or a red bull could promise.

A restaurant is creating a place where people can “talk about important topics such as culture, economics, politics, philosophy, any subject matter,” Gonzalez said.

I can say that my conversations left me with many conversations at the dinner table and spent much time pouring over the elaborate dishes and beverages we had just consumed. How could we ever go back to eating off of dollar menus and ordering takeout?

12 CUBA IN TRANSITION

CUBA IN TRANSITION 13
In the south central region of Cuba is Cienfuegos, a city known as the Perla del Sur or Pearl of The South. The buildings that surround Cienfuegos are the last remaining remnants of the Spanish and French settlers who founded the city. Within these hollow buildings everyday people work to help the city of a hundred fires flourish. The people of Cienfuegos are shop owners, mechanics, cooks, teachers, fathers, mothers, daughters and sons. The parents of the children in this small province want only the best for them.

“All I want is for her to study, and in the future that she is happy and helps me out. All I want is for her to be good, nothing bad to happen to her,” Nena says of her daughter.

Cienfuegos is beautiful, but it also is a city filled with poverty and struggles. Past the decapitated houses that many call home, a door remains ajar as a means of a survival. Maria sells tiny amounts of hotel soaps and shampoos that her neighbor steals from her job at a hotel. She is locked out of attaining any employment with any state-run enterprises that control the vast majority of household income in Cuba.

“She points to her small supply of hotel amenities and said, “My business is this, and my friends bring me what they can, so I can more or less survive. I have two daughters, one of 10 and the other of 8 years. It’s been five years since I was sanctioned and because of this I receive no government help, no assistance. I live solely on this.”

She said she was sanctioned by the government for speaking out to the media on behalf of her brother, who she says was wrongfully accused of child molestation. Cuba owns all of its media outlets, including the radio stations and in its constitution it allows for the arrest of any who “publicly defames, denigrates, or scorns the Republic’s institutions, the political, mass, or social organizations of the country, or the heroes or martyrs of the nation.”

For those who can work at the state-owned enterprises, it’s business as usual. In the afternoon many are returning home from work or preparing to close down their shops. Ferman, still wearing his mechanics uniform, stopped by a local shop to catch up with his friend. Julieta runs and operates a TRD Caribe kiosk by the name of “La California.”

This shop sells products such as rum, canned fish and soda. It also has toiletries such as nail polish and shampoo, which are items hard to find in Cienfuegos. As Julieta counts her shop’s earnings of the day, Ferman says, “Mucho dinero” with a smile on his face. It was good day for this business.

Around this time of day children are returning home from school. Andrea, a 10 year-old, who had just gotten out of class, grabs her scooter. She wants to be a marine biologist when she is older. Perhaps she will grow up seeing a different Cuba than the one her mother and grandmother grew up in, as relations with the United States begin to develop.
Personal Economy In Cuba: Past, Present And Future

By JOEL ANNABALINI

Living under a strict Communist regime, the Cuban people face many adversities in their daily lives, none more prominent than the struggle for economic freedom. After Fidel Castro came to power in 1959, he began nationalizing businesses and seizing assets from upper and middle-class business owners. These assets ranged from large alcohol distributors to farmlands. Eventually the Cuban people were left with few economic opportunities outside of government employment. In its modern state, however, Cuba has reached an economic crossroad.

The failures of a completely regulated market have become evident in the poverty of the Cuban people, the lack of resources and outdated technologies. In the last few years alone, the administration of Raúl Castro, who succeeded his brother Fidel, has started to loosen its trade restrictions and allow more room for the Cuban population to thrive in the private sector. Taking a look at three specific economic outlooks from different areas of Cuba helps explain the difficulties of the past, present and near future.

NOEL

A 51-year-old lifetime resident of Trinidad, Noel, has adapted to the socio-economic paradigm of their time. The historic and colorful town of Trinidad sits a giant radio tower, branded with a faded sign reading “Radio Cuba.” Operating the radio station is a man named Noel. The station is a vital lifeline to Cuba, providing the only source of foreign news and entertainment. Noel, a longtime employee of Cuba Radio, explained the history of Trinidad and its economic woes.

The barren fields surrounding the radio tower were once home to sugar cane plantations. The fields have been abandoned, and the area is now used for agricultural purposes. Noel points out that these fields have not been cultivated since the sugar industry collapsed in the early 1990s. The lack of agriculture has left the area with few resources, and the people of Trinidad are forced to rely on the government for their basic needs.

In his only trip to the United States, he recalled his experiences with huge chain corporations such as McDonald’s and Burger King as positive ones, for the cheap prices and availability of food. In Cuba too many people have to rely on government ration cards that cannot adequately provide their families with enough food, residents say.

Lester stressed that Cuba needs these sort of fast-food businesses, not only for the access (though he doesn’t discuss health concerns), but for more private sector jobs for the Cuban people.

He also said that these businesses would not affect the success of paladares, since they attract tourists for the most part, and tourists would still want to eat at authentic Cuban eateries. And although currently employed by a government hotel, Lester was adamant that he would leave his job for a private one as soon as the opportunity arose. Yet even with his current job, he still feels forced to illegally sell goods on the streets of Cienfuegos to keep a roof over his head.

Along with American businesses, Lester sees the easing of travel restrictions as a purely positive force for Cuba’s economic future. “There is no money here,” he said, “so we have to hope for people like the Americans to come and spend their money. The government doesn’t allow us to make money, so we all suffer.”

Brian said that reaching the United States would still be much better than here, “for the Cuban freedoms, Cuban oppression and the struggle to this day in competition with the American economy.”

In Miami International Airport recently, large groups of Cubans gathered in line forChartwick flights back home, many with huge plastic-wrapped packages weighing down their baggage carts. Televisions, computers, stereo and other electronics, were all tightly compacted in a circular web of plastic and branded with a family name. Naturally, this gained the attention of non-Cubans in the airport.

Brian, a young Cuban-American at the airport, also explained the reason for these packages as he gathered four of his own plastic-wrapped bundles from the baggage belt. Brian had been living in Miami for a few years, making constant trips back and forth, since most of his family resides in Cuba. His packages contained mostly electronic goods, which he said he bought at cheap prices in Miami, for the main purpose of the purchase of these items: resale.

Brian said that reaching the United States as a young Cuban adult was not as hard as one might expect. “You just need to know the system,” he said.

In Cuba and many of his peers, this means signing up for short-term construction work in southern Florida and obtaining a work visa to do so. Receiving permission from the Cuban government proves a much more difficult task than United States approval. As throughout history the United States has admitted Cuban migrants through a “special parole power” used by the attorney general’s office — granting Cuban migrants full legal status.

Brian described how people like himself would fulfill their work contracts, and proceed to spend most of their earnings on electronics and other goods — most notably “the cheap stuff in Chinatown.” This includes clothing and basic commodities as well, but electronics provide the biggest score for entrepreneurs such as Brian. Pointing to a Samsung flat-screen television within one of his bundles, Brian said that while the product only cost him $150 in Miami, he could resell it for $380 in Cuba.

When asked how the easing of trade restrictions with the United States would affect his business, Brian answers confidently that he’d expect more Cubans to immigrate to the United States, including his own family. He admits that there would be no need to bring goods from Miami once American companies started shipping products to Cuba, but from Brian’s point of view, “Life in America would still be much better than here,” for the economic and political freedoms alone.

Another man – energetic about American freedoms, Cuban oppression and the future relations between the two nations – is Lester, a 30-year-old hotel worker at the historic hotel in Cienfuegos. Lester, a 30-something hotel-worker and future relations between the two nations — is one thing becomes clear: the Communist-run economy of Cuba has failed its people. Although Brian, Noel, and Lester are far from economic experts, each was born into the struggle and has adapted in his own way to the economic strife of his time.

Noel, the Radio Cuba employee, literally saw the economy of Trinidad fall apart with the destruction of its most profitable revenue source — with little to no government aid in the aftermath. Brian, the young opportunist, presently makes his living from construction contracts in Florida, while transporting American goods back to his homeland to provide for his island-locked family.

Then there’s Lester, the rebellious government worker who relies on pushing street products on the side, just to survive — but looks forward with optimism to the possibility that the opening of Cuba’s borders to Americans and their businesses would give Cuba a long-awaited economic boost. What lies ahead for the personal economics of the average Cuban is uncertain, but the clash of American free market principles with the old Communist economy would be interesting to watch.
**Why Cuban Women Marry Italian Men**

By LORENZO BURGIO

...rrowing up the son of two parents who were born and raised in Italy and studying Italian for the past two years, I never thought it would be useful in Cuba for reasons that go beyond the shared roots of the Spanish and Italian languages. A little white plaque with "Elvira" written in black hung from the side of the booth. When approaching Muñoz I spoke a combination of Italian and broken Spanish and she quickly distinguished the sister side of the booth. I had made one local walk in "her" said the clerk. Italian also proved to be an effective way to communicate with locals in Cienfuegos.

Muñoz explained learning conversation was uninformal. Having been raised in a Spanish-speaking household simplified the process. "It's as if I learned more verbs with slightly different conjugations [than Spanish]," said Muñoz, and after a slight pause, added, "And it's been there ever since."

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Sickle And Sound: Cuban Music In The 21st Century

By JOHN RAKE

Within the confines of music, and especially of Cuba, the political, social, and economic art and society that are blended together over the course of history. The island nation of Cuba boasts musical influences and countries that are a real system, where music is an essential part of daily life.

Cuba is far to the bottom of the list ranking of countries across the globe based on the independent pluralism. It is only a few years since the country was ranked at the bottom of the list ranking for repressed speech such as China and North Korea. Despite a degree in mechanical engineering, Yasnady has been working as a bellhop because it brings in more income. He explained that most employment in Cuba is government jobs at low pay.

Two years ago, Yasnady left his job in engineering to work at the resort. Now he works three shifts, loading baggage on the back of a mobilized gold cart and delivering the bags, and the bag’s owners, to their luxurious hotel suites.

Cuba boasts a strong music presence out of place. From the soft, claustrophobic sound of its urban areas, to the initial conquest and subjugation of the island, to the initial conquest and subjugation of the island, to the initial conquest and subjugation of the island, Cuba has been ruled by the government. The approval process for music is a clear example of this. It is a process that is controlled by the government and is subject to the government’s approval.

The Traveling Stones played Ciudad Deportiva in Havana on March 25, they co-sponsored a charity facilitated by the Latin Grammy Cultural Foundation to distribute the necessary funding in the tips of tourists. One of the most prominent works of the Rolling Stones, “It’s a Shame,” was released in 1971.

I went to college and my major is in music, said Marisleidy Arias, “I studied it as soon as they saw my face,” he said in a lowered voice as we waited for our plane back to Miami. “I don’t know how they knew it was me, I was wearing no identification. This government is always watching.”

The guarded atmosphere was palpable in Havana, but out of the earshot and the views of the policemen, Cubans were more inclined to share their viewpoints.

“Until the new age of information is set to take effect. The number of flash drives filled with music present in taxis and cars appears to have supported his statement. The number of flash drives filled with music present in taxis and cars appears to have supported his statement. The number of flash drives filled with music present in taxis and cars appears to have supported his statement.
Obama Visit: A View From The Streets

By JACQUELINE STOUTGTON

Typically a lively scene, the streets of Old Havana were quiet, the center, usually filled with vendor carts, was cleared out. Locals and tourists sat in the square, basking in the hot sun, as a group of vendors set up cameras around the perimeter of the square preparing for one of the biggest events to happen in recent Cuban history – a visit from President Barack Obama.

"Of all the things that are in our country, hopefully Obama can take off the blockade and that way we can have better relationships and maintain this relationship between our two countries," said Hedil Matos Almagun, 33, of Central Havana. "The whole world is watching what is happening with Obama vis-à-vis Cuba in the hot sun while enjoying the rustic scenery and the atmosphere.

Almagun explained the excitement that filled the Cuban people as they gathered to greet the president. They anticipated seeing his interaction with the local communities. The Cubans – looking greener and happy with Obama’s visit, hoping that it will not only bring the start of a better future for their country but for their own lives as well. The visit brought them great pleasure to be able to show off the beauty of their country and culture to not only Obama but all of America.

"We all were good with it [President Obama’s visit with President Raúl Castro] when they agreed to meet and I’m happy they agreed so he can have memories of us,” said Meamandis, 14, of Cienfuegos. “I’m happy they got together, whatever is good for this country.

-ending the blockade and gaining more internet access throughout the country is a top priority for most Cubans. Currently, luxurious resorts and hotels are the only places on the island with such a high-end amenity as the Internet.

“Everyone has their own thought, we’re happy about it [Obama visiting] and we hope that it happens again and we hope that things positively change,” said Almagun. “We’re hoping firstly, that the blockade is cancelled and that Guantánamo Bay (detention center) is closed because it’s here illegally. We desire to have Internet, because the Internet here is very limited.”

During his three-day visit, Obama met with and addressed Raúl Castro and the Cuban people at the Grand Theater of Havana, explored the city and interacted with its people in their own communities. He also sat with Castro at the historic game between the Tampa Bay Rays and the Cuban national baseball team.

“I have come here to bury the last remnant of the Cold War in the Americas. I have come here to extend the hand of friendship to the Cuban people,” Obama said in his speech at the Grand Theater. "I want you to know I believe my visit here demonstrates that you need not fear the different sovereignty and self-determination, I’m also confident that you need not fear the different countries.

The government-supplied rations once covered most of what a family needed, but today, after years of reductions, it’s barely enough. "Every month the government gives 5 kilograms of rice, 5 kilograms of sugar, salt, oil, milk for the child," says Guillermo Enríquez, a man who goes by William on the recommendation of his English teacher.

The stores where Cubans go to buy the steeply discounted food supplied on their ration cards appear barren by American standards. An egg shop displays only a few dozen pallets of eggs, doled out by a government worker from behind the counter.

"It's not enough," Enrique said. Adán Fernandez said that for each person in the family, five of the “small eggs” can be bought. "You die with that. Without money you can’t live like this," he said of the ration cards. So, to get the food he needs for his family, Fernández, like many other Cubans, has to turn to the black market.

To buy some powdered milk for his daughter, Fernandez went outside a food store, which was closed for the day, and whistled to a few people on a balcony across the street. "Hey friend, are you there?" he asked in Spanish. After a quick exchange, he leaned up against the wall and waited. A few minutes later a woman walked up the street, stopping next to Fernandez. "Do you have milk?" he asked.

Money Is Scarce, Food Is Scarce, Life Is …

By DEVIN LEITH-YESSIAN

HAVANA — It’s said that in Cuba nobody goes hungry, but that doesn’t mean food is plentiful.

The government-supplied rations once covered most of what a family needed, but today, after years of reductions, it’s barely enough. “Every month the government gives 5 kilograms of rice, 5 kilograms of sugar, salt, oil, milk for the child,” says Guillermo Enríquez, a man who goes by William on the recommendation of his English teacher.

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A few minutes later a woman walked up the street, stopping next to Fernandez. “Do you have milk?” he asked.

She looked around skittishly before quickly reaching her hand into her purse and pulling out a package of powdered milk. Once she had been paid, she quickly vanished back down the street.

The package, which Fernandez said is enough to last three months, cost 15 CUCs, yet his monthly salary is approximately 22.

“I don’t know,” he said when asked where he thinks the woman obtained the milk. “Cuban people live on black market.” Fernández, however, disagrees. He has tried to leave by boat but the authorities have stopped him.

In the city of Trinidad, food stands are nearly ubiquitous in poor, urban neighborhoods. Vendors set up a table or a basket outside their homes or on a street corner to sell their neighbors fruits and vegetables, much of which is locally grown on the island. For the vendors, this is a livelihood that allows them to feed themselves and their families.

A more free-market, option-oriented food source than the government shops, the food stands offer the affordability of food depending on what one wants.

Regardless, income varies day to day, and the government takes its cut through “contributions” vendors pay. As such, for some this isn’t a full-time job, one vendor in Trinidad doubles as a stone mason.

To get a meal in Cuba is a struggle through government bureaucracy, price retailers and a not-so-hidden black market. To Americans, it may seem a byzantine scenario, yet for Cubans, it’s their life, with some even taking great pride in being able to navigate it.

Fernández, however, disagrees. He has tried to leave by boat three times, each a failure. “I want to go to the United States,” he said. “We have no future.”
Made In Cuba

By KILEY KRZYZEK
AND LORENZO BURGIO

O

ff one of the main roads filled with tourists in Old Havana, down a cobblestone street, was a little boutique owned by a young Cuban man, his wife and his grandmother, who crochet clothing upstairs in the grandmother’s studio.

The elderly woman sat patiently crocheting a new article of clothing one afternoon. With a ball of yarn placed in a bowl next to her chair, she continued to create a dress to be made right on the rack for customers. She said she has been crafting garments for 49 years and the boutique has been in her family for 57 years.

To her right sat a mannequin perfectly displayed in a dressing room resembling an under-the-stairs closet with a simple curtain for privacy just created. Various dresses and open cardigans seemingly left for 57 years.

She agreed to be filmed, but declined to be named and explained in Italian the small shop she works in at a tourist shop on the main road. A large portion of the clothing displayed was purchased from locals who handmade new articles of clothing to showcase their work in this apparently more visited shop.

The shopkeeper, who declined to be named or photographed, has worked there for 13 years. She said the majority of the customers are “all tourists, I’ve almost never seen locals here.” The store also sold lots of souvenirs such as postcards, ‘Cuba’ T-shirts, handmade wood figurines and ashtrays.

Crocheted clothing was also sold down the alley in the grandmother’s studio. Just down the street at a tourist shop on the main road.

One vendor was Elvira Reynaldo Muñoz, a self-described textile artisan who had a rack of hand-crocheted clothes, including a pink, open cardigan with the word ‘Cuba’ hidden in the stitches.

She spoke Italian, which she learned from watching opera all of her life. When she was quite young, her mother handed down the family knitting needles to her.

“My mom said: ‘You work! You work’,” when I was 10,” said Muñoz. Now 69, she has since taken over the business after her mother died.

The flea market was very selective on who can show products. Muñoz said representatives from the government come to this flea market to speak about how to work in the marketplace, especially in tourist areas. The representatives deem who is able to sell merchandise in this sectioned off flea-market, so they can document who purchases which items.

Muñoz was thrilled to speak to Americans, referring to them as her neighbors.

“Is this how it is, this is how it’s been.”

Getting Around Cuba

By ANDRE EARLY

To outsiders, one of the images of Cuba that comes to mind, besides cigars and rum, is the classic American cars that gracefully roam the streets. But the transportation system in Cuba is much more complex than that and the most popular method of travel focuses on feet rather than wheels.

To get back and forth, many people rely on hitchhiking, or coger botella (grabbing the bottle), which involves potential passengers standing on the street trying to catch the attention of passing vehicles in order to get to their next location.

People living in Cuba rely on this method of travel so much so that there is a system monitored by government officials insuring that hitchhikers get rides from passersby. That’s right, the law of the land states that those with vehicles have a responsibility to pick up those in need of passage. The government officials that regulate this law are known as “El Amarillo” and can be easily identified by their beige-yellow uniforms. People do not always stop, especially if the enforcers are not around. But if they do, the common courtesy is to tip the drivers.

The reality is that few people can afford cars, most of which are either passed down through generations or are purchased with funds sent from family members living abroad. The cars often have newer parts under the hood, which also come from abroad.

“Paying for a car is too much, it’s not for you, and it’s for people,” explained Daniel, a young bicyclist in Havana. What he was insinuating was that purchasing a car is usually a collective effort from multiple Cubans, and that people don’t usually just purchase one for themselves.

There are taxi services, which are used mostly by tourists, and these are new Asian/European vehicles. The taxis for the Cubans resemble the classic American car models the country is known so well for. Inside these vehicles there is usually no meter, and the price is most likely agreed on before leaving.

Those fortunate enough to have bicycles often use them for personal travel — and to make money.

Daniel, the young man mentioned earlier, is actually a tour guide in Havana who relies on his bike, which is affixed to a cart, to make a living. He said it took him a month to earn enough money to pay for the bike.

Without a car, bikes may prove to be the most efficient way of getting around, yet they are still relatively expensive for the average Cuban. Those who lack the necessary funds still have to rely on public transportation such as city buses. The problem with this method of transportation is that the buses involved are often humid, overcrowded and undependable.

“Id rather hitchhike than catch a bus,” one young woman said. She explained that buses, although inexpensive, (costing less than 1 CUC, under a dollar), are very dirty and uncomfortable, yet the main appeal is often the cost.

There is one mode of transportation not often seen in many of the cities: horseback. Horses, which may run around 500 CUCs, are faster and can adapt to more terrain than bikes. In Cienfuegos and Trinidad, I observed this dated technology first-hand.

In Cienfuegos I met a man willing to charge me only 10 CUCs (about $9) for a ride anywhere I wanted to go in his horse-drawn cart. While this was moderately expensive, I couldn’t deny that his taxi service could be a good deal, but there were limitations.

“I have to split the cart with two other guys,” he said.

He meant he owns the operation with two other men. The struggle here was the same for anyone with plans to afford their own transportation. It took saving and sharing, which seems to be the Cuban way.
‘There Is No Obstacle We Cannot Overcome’

By RUTH BRUNO, ANALISA NOVAK AND KIMBERLY PEÑA

I
n the city of Cienfuegos Esther watches as her grand-
children share a scooter and run up and down the side-
walk outside of their rustic home. She stands in the doorway, her arms crossed and a satisfied smirk on her face.

Shouts and laughter can be heard from the plaza in the center of the city, where young teenage boys scuffle with one another over a friendly game of soccer. The evening hours set over the city, children from all over the neighborhood have come out to soak up the last couple hours of sunshine for the day.

The practice seems routine. Peaceful, even in the midst of poverty.

“The future of my kids is here in Cuba. This is where I raised them,” says Esther, through a translator, as she gestures towards her young grandson and his older sister. She brings out a picture of her daughter and explains that her daughter left for Houston two years ago.

“My children have always grown up in Cuba; they’ve always gone to school here. The schools here are good, the medical…all is good,” says Esther. “If she wants to come back…come back,” says Esther as she gazes at the picture of her daughter.

Her other daughter, Jamilani, who is six months pregnant, has joined her side and nods her head in agreement as she runs her hands through her young son’s hair. Jamilani, 28, works as a nurse at the local hospital. She is one of the women who make up 69 percent of the healthcare workforce, including doctors. Like her mother, she says she is content with the opportunities Cuba has provided her as a woman though she says she is not one to take an interest in politics.

In Havana, Alia Fernandez, who runs a tourist shop for the visitor shop) she takes a break from showing cus-
tomers the small buttons and zippers sold at her boutique.

“In our country they don’t support” discrimination against women, says Fernan-
dez. “Completing the opposite. Every day the women are in the leadership roles. Every day the men help us a little more.”

Fernandez, who has worked in the shop since 1996, feels that among the goals of the communist government, the push to ensure equality between men and women has been a priority.

In 2010, 48 delegates from the American Association of University Women’s Interna-
tional Series on Culture and Gender Roles visited Cuba to research the rights allotted to women in the country. The team of delegates visited Havana to meet with female leaders in the areas of politics, law, arts and education. In total, the delegates met with 27 different Cuban women to gain insight into the opin-
ions on gender equality in the home, in the workplace, in politics and in education.

Research by the team concluded that women in Cuba are mostly faced with similar problems encountered by women in the United States. For instance, just as in the U.S., while a high percentage of women earn col-
lege degrees, they are outranked and outnumber-
bered by men in the departments of math and sciences.

In the fields of education from grade schools to universities, the number of women working is quite prevalent, though again, as in the United States, the number of men in top education positions far outnumber the women.

While there are striking similarities to the struggles faced by U.S. women, the po-
itical dynamics of Cuba allow for some key differences as well. In some ways, the rights of women are more progressive than they have been in the U.S. For example, women are given mandatory paid maternal leave.

There are laws requiring the equal division of household chores and responsibilities, though some say these laws are not always obeyed. Furthermore, in stark contrast to the only recent legalization of abortion in some states of the U.S., abortion has been legal in Cuba since 1965.

And while the amount of equality Cuban women enjoy is debatable, women make up 80 percent of the education workforce and two-thirds of the lawyers and judges in the country.

Cuban women have also made their way into the political spotlight. Liana Hernandez Martinez made Cuban history when she was elected to Parliament in March of 2008 as the youngest member to ever serve. She was just 18. Mari-
ela Castro Espin, daughter of Raul Castro, has been an advocate for LGBT rights and has served as a member of the Cuban Parliament.

She made headlines across the world in 2014 when she voted “No” to a workers’ rights bill that she said did not go far enough in protect-
ing the rights for HIV-positive citizens and those with unconventional gender identities.

Cuban women still remain a minority in the country’s National Assembly making up 43.6 percent of the 614 member unicam-
eral legislature. However, this is substantially greater than women’s representation in the U.S. Congress, where women make up about 17 percent of the members in the House and Senate.

“The politics of our country” promotes gender equality, says Fernandez. “Each day the women help a little to advance ourselves. There is machismo in some people, more than anything in other generations. Not ours, but the ones before us.”

“My grandfather—I never saw him clean or cook a meal,” Fernandez says shaking her head. “Nothing. He didn’t know. My grand-
mother, just a little, didn’t raise him well. But other than that, my generation is not like that.”

If there is a sense of sexism it is difficult to detect right away. Vivadice has worked at a coffee shop in Las Terrazas for the past two years. She is the mother of two children – a 14-year-old daughter and a 4-year-old son. Scurrying about a small open kitchen to serve coffee to tourists, Vivadice kept her answer short when asked about discrimination: “Everyone has problems, but there is no obstacle we cannot overcome.”