

Hasta La Victoria Siempre

Cuba in transition

Jonathan Fink

The following experiences, interviews, presentations, and conversations took place in Cuba during November 2012. While all of the characters are based on real people, the names used in this essay are pseudonyms. Photographs accompanying this essay can be found at newhavenreview.com.

Havana and the Cuban Economy

1. Outside of Havana

There are no streetlights in Cuba. The darkness mutes the bright colors of the small cement buildings. Headlights appear intermittently in the distance and materialize into Ford Fairlanes, Russian Ladas, and motorcycles with sidecars. The streets are quiet, though many people are walking. A man's feet propped on a coffee table are visible through an apartment window as a woman on the street looks through the window to the man's television. Faces flicker in the passing cars. A woman lights a cigarette, and the small flame of the match illuminates her laughter before she shakes the match out. A man in a convertible sings to the woman in the passenger seat as he steers with one hand and lightly keeps time with his other hand on her knee.

2. Introduction: Arturo Suarez

Arturo Suarez is a Cuban translator and educator. He has lived in Cuba his entire life. Professionally, he has worked as an elementary school teacher and a supervisor of schools. He currently teaches on the university level, training future diplomats. As a guide and translator, he has worked for U.S. news organizations, as well as individual professional groups in Cuba.

3. Arturo Suarez: Automobiles in Cuba

Cuba is a car museum. All of the American cars are from before 1960. We call the American cars, “Yank tanks.” They’re only American on the outside. Inside they are mostly Russian parts. Sometimes you will see a muffler made out of a tomato can. The Russian cars are Ladas, and the models here run up until about 1990—when the Soviet Union collapsed and the Special Period began. The contemporary cars are Korean or Japanese. Most mechanics like the Russian cars because they are simple to work on and build parts for.

4. Hotel Copacabana at Night

A band plays in the lobby. Two provocatively dressed women smoke in the hotel bar. The elevator is out of order, and the tile steps on the stairs are chipped and broken in places. Three rows of deckchairs line the long pool. Beyond the pool, the sound of the ocean rises and falls as waves repeatedly strike the coast and the seawall.

5. Introduction: Madison

Madison is an American woman in her early thirties who has traveled to Cuba several times both legally and illegally.

6. Madison: The Hotels

Cubans cannot enter the hotels. The only Cubans who can enter the hotels are the female prostitutes. Did you know that? It’s crazy. It makes no sense. My boyfriend—he’s kind of my boyfriend—works in one of the government ministries here, and he cannot enter the hotels. He’s an important person. He’s high up. It’s hard to date someone when you are American, and he lives in Cuba. We both have kids by other people. I had my first child when I was a freshman in college, and then I had my second when I was a senior. Because I don’t drink or smoke, everyone asks me if my parents were missionaries, which is far from the case. I’ve become more and more religious as

I have gotten older, though. Noah keeps calling me, “George Bush.” He thinks it’s hilarious.

But back to my friend. Whenever he walks me home, he cannot enter the hotel. Mostly, we stay at “casa particulares,” which are homes that are approved to function as hotels. He can stay there. I brought my children to Cuba recently, but you are technically not allowed to do that. Did my children meet my boyfriend? No, they will never meet him. That’s what love is, though. It’s not about being practical. It’s about patience and hoping that things will work out.

7. Introduction: David Price

David Price works as an economic correspondent for an international news agency. He has lived and worked in Cuba for over thirty years.

8. David Price: Prostitution in Cuba

There are about 600,000 women in Havana. Let’s say that there are about 300,000 between eighteen and thirty-five. So arbitrarily take one percent of that number, and you are still looking at 3,000 prostitutes. The thing is that they are concentrated in high-traffic tourist areas, which makes them seem more pervasive. There are also no laws against prostitution in Cuba because, remember, the Revolution allegedly “cured” the economic need for women to be prostitutes. There are big laws against pimps, though. The charge doesn’t use the word “pimp”—it says something like “social degradation”—but the pimps can get twenty years in jail. The police don’t ever go after the johns, either. Arresting the johns would help clean up prostitution in Cuba.

9. Hotel Copacabana in Daylight

A repeated thump, thwack, thump sound rises from an outdoor, three-sided court. Four men play doubles, moving gracefully together, swinging their rackets as if rehearsing a scene from a

play instead of competing against each other. At the Copacabana pool, two men in Speedo swimsuits stride quickly around the pool deck. One man scoops a muscular woman upward in a lift, as the other man practices dance steps alone, his arms around an invisible partner. "Again," the choreographer calls out. A fading, painted toucan—his bill is approximately ten feet long—undulates on the bottom of the pool as synchronized swimmers come up for air and the surface ripples.

10. Arturo Suarez: Two Cuban Currencies

There are two currencies in Cuba: the Cuban peso and the Cuban convertible peso. We call these the CUP and the CUC. Most Cubans use both. Foreigners can only use CUCs. The CUC was introduced in 2004, and it is basically equal to a U.S. dollar. U.S. dollars were accepted throughout Cuba before 2004, but they are no longer accepted in circulation. There is a ten percent charge to convert dollars to CUCs.

11. David Price: Overview of Cuban Economics

Right now, Cuba is going through what I would call the two phases of the "weaning of Fidel from Cuba," or the "weaning of Cuba from Fidel." You could look at it either way. The first phase was when Fidel got sick in 2006. The second phase was when Fidel recently stopped writing his daily bulletins. Raul is overturning much of what Fidel stood for in the economy. Cuba is moving more towards Asian market-type socialism. It's not reform, but kind of a grand modernization. For example, Cuban citizens can now lease land from the government. This is a big step. They can't own the land, but they can lease it and develop it. This has psychological as well as economic effects.

The first step for Cuba was recognizing it had to change. A Latin American diplomat friend of mine likes to say that "Cubans have an ideological problem, and it's not communism. It's nationalism." Here's a telling fact: Cuba has the least amount of Chinese invest-

ment of any country in the Caribbean. As Cuban businesses grow, the relationship between Cubans and the government will change. Cubans have traditionally had a paternalistic relationship with government—the government gives and provides—and soon they will potentially have an antagonistic relationship with government. For example, the previous tax laws comprised fourteen pages. The new tax laws comprise 450 pages. The state wants to hang on to what was most important in the Revolution: healthcare, education, civil defense, and culture. The state doesn't want to have to micromanage every hotdog stand.

12. Old Havana

A horse brays and stamps his feet as a boy, frightened, darts behind his parents. The carriage driver strikes the horse on the neck, but when the boy looks back, the carriage driver is stroking the horse's mane and cooing in the horse's ear. Another man draws unflattering caricatures of two tourists—one tourist with a prodigious Adam's apple and nose, and the other tourist with elongated, sagging breasts. Standing beside the guitarist in a three-piece band, a percussionist rhythmically scrapes the teeth of a cow's jawbone with a stick. Vendors circulate through the crowd. Booksellers, hot dog cart entrepreneurs, and women with elaborate flowers in their hair call out to tourists. A young woman in a hoop skirt poses for pictures. Between performances, dancers on stilts attempt to shoo away three costumed dogs who have escaped their handler.

13. David Price: Cuba's Top Industries

Here are our top industries, which will give you a sense of Cuba's future growth and investment possibility. If you notice, sugar is nowhere near the top:

Export of services. Cuba sends healthcare and teachers to Venezuela in exchange for oil. This is about six billion a year. And how is this different than Cuba's relationship with the Soviet Union

in the past? Venezuela is an exchange where the Soviet Union was a subsidy.

Tourism, which brings in about two-and-a-half billion.

Remittances. This is the money sent to Cubans by family members in other countries.

Nickel production.

Medical equipment and pharmaceuticals, which bring in about five hundred million.

Cigars and sugar, which bring in about two hundred million each.

14. Introduction: Noah

Noah works as a union organizer for nurses in New Zealand. He has visited Cuba several times, both for personal reasons and to study agricultural sustainability and healthcare.

15. Noah: Trabajadores para Cuenta Proposita in Old Havana

The Trabajadores shops are over here. You would probably just walk right past these without noticing them in the States, but these are some of the little businesses that Cubans are now able to open. They are usually small sections of homes that have been turned into storefronts. “Joyerero” is a jeweler. “Relojero” is watches. One of the main problems these little businesses face is a lack of consistency. Laws change, and the business owners frequently face closure.

This guy drives a “Bici taxi”—a bicycle taxi. He has to pay five CUPs a day to park and store the Bici taxi here. Maybe he owns it. Maybe he rents it. Over here, these Trabajadores shops are pretty new. They’re basically like small cubicles and booths where Cubans can sell things like rugs and clothes. There is a makeshift dressing room there with a curtain over a railing for a door. The shop owners have to take everything down and pack up every day when they leave. That guy over there gets maybe one CUC to pack up all the bags.

16. David Price: A Story about Current Economic Dysfunction

One of my friends is a surgeon, and let's say he receives 600 bottles of whiskey a year from grateful patients. In order to convert this to currency, the surgeon gives the bottles to a bartender, and, from each bottle, the bartender makes thirty or so drinks that he then sells. The surgeon and the bartender split the drink money over the course of the year as the bottles run out. There's got to be more efficient ways to do this, no?

The Aristocracy

17. Arturo Suarez: Casa de la Amistad

At the beginning of the twentieth century in Havana, a wealthy widower named Juan Pedro Baro and a married socialite/beauty queen named Catalina Lasa fell in love. Divorce was not legal in Cuba at the time, and the affair was the scandal of Havana. When Catalina and Juan Pedro went to the theater together, everyone in the audience left. The actors continued the play and performed for Catalina and Juan Pedro alone. Catalina threw her jewelry on the stage at the end of the performance to show her appreciation. Juan Pedro and Catalina went to Paris where French law allowed them to marry. The Pope even blessed their union. Most likely, Catalina and Juan Pedro made a financial donation for the Pope's blessing. They returned to Cuba in 1917 when divorce was legalized. Their home, Casa de la Amistad, was a palace. Sand was brought in from the Nile. The cement came from the United States. Marble was imported from Europe. When Juan Pedro and Catalina officially married in Cuba, people who had left the theater years earlier came to the wedding. Before her death, Catalina requested that stained glass flowers should reflect on her grave. Juan Pedro was buried beside her in a vertical tomb. He wanted to stand beside her and guard her through eternity.

Hasta la Victoria Siempre

18. Arturo Suarez: Revolution Square

In 1959, Civic Square was renamed Revolution Square. The José Martí monument went up in 1958. It's 139 meters tall—the highest point in Havana. The inscription on the Camilo Cienfuegos image reads, “Vas bien Fidel”—“You are doing well Fidel.” Camilo said this to Fidel when Fidel asked him, “Am I doing all right, Camilo?” The inscription on the Che Guevara image reads, “Hasta la victoria siempre”—“until the victory always.” Both of these images are on government buildings. Camilo is on the Ministry of Information and Communications. Che is on the Ministry of the Interior. A common phrase Cubans will use in signs, graffiti, or when closing letters is “Hasta la victoria siempre.”

19. Madison: The Bus System

The bus system is a good example of the current post-Revolution community in Cuba. After the Revolution, people would wait in line for the bus, and when it would arrive, someone would say “ultimo,” and people would mark where the line ended. It was all very orderly. Now, no one follows the “ultimo” system. People push and shove. Also, the system used to be a way for people to show their fidelity to the Revolution. Are you a true supporter of the Revolution? Are you willing to stand in line, to be organized and disciplined? These kinds of small things showed your participation and your sympathy for the Revolution.

Arturo Suarez on the Special Period

20. The Beginning of the Special Period

Cuba was scheduled to host the Pan American games in 1991 right as the Soviet Union collapsed, which set the Special Period in motion. As a point of pride, Cuba went ahead with the games and used their financial reserves to build the infrastructure needed for

the games. After the games, everything collapsed in a domino effect. I was fifteen years old when the Special Period began. I remember food slowly starting to disappear. When the buses stopped running, I had to walk everywhere. There was almost no electricity. Elevators didn't run in the buildings. If you lived on the eighth floor, that's a long climb.

21. Absence of Gasoline

There was no petrol. You could sit in the middle of the street for twenty minutes, and no car would run you over.

22. The Russian Embassy

The Russian Embassy, which is still functioning, was built in 1988. Before the embassy, a church tower was the highest point on Fifth Avenue in Havana. Fifth Avenue in Havana is modeled on Fifth Avenue in New York. After the Special Period, many Cubans see the Russian Embassy as a symbol of Russian imposition. Some Cubans say the building looks like a sword or a robot or a Transformer. Other Cubans think it looks like a fist with a raised middle finger.

23. Vegetables

Before 1990, most Cubans thought that eating vegetables like bok choy or parsley was for goats. The meals were very Spanish: rice, beans, and meat. Now, the meals are more international. Ninety percent of Cubans still think, though, that if there is no meat at a meal, it is a sin.

24. Bicycles

China donated one million bicycles to Cuba during the Special Period. Each bike weighed seventy-five pounds. Most of them are still on the roads. People were not fed well enough for bicycling during the Special Period. There was not enough water for people to stay hydrated. Smell was a problem with people biking twenty kilometers to work in the heat and having no place to shower or

change once they arrived. One lane of the tunnel under Havana Bay was opened specifically for the bicycles. The air was hard to breathe in the mile-long tunnel—especially at the low point in the middle. A large truck was used to transport the bicycles from one side of the tunnel to the other. No one in Cuba rides bicycles for fun. Cubans associate bicycles with the Special Period. Cubans remain traumatized by bicycles.

25. Camel Transports

In the Special Period, there were these long tractor-trailers called “camel transports.” They were called this because of a hump in the middle of the tractor-trailers. The camel transports would carry people to the provinces. The camel transports were massive, and they would be packed with people. Now, there are similar buses that transport people to the provinces, though nothing has ever been as large as the camel transports.

26. The End of the Special Period

The Special Period ended around 1998. There wasn’t one event that brought about the end. Things just very slowly got better.

The Antonio Núñez Jiménez Foundation and Permaculture Community

27. Introduction: The Antonio Núñez Jiménez Foundation

The Antonio Núñez Jiménez Foundation is a nongovernmental foundation dedicated to the work of Antonio Núñez Jiménez and to solving environment problems through cultural sustainability. The Jiménez Foundation also sponsors a permaculture community in Havana.

28. Director of the Antonio Núñez Jiménez Foundation: Agriculture in Cuba

To understand where we are today, you must understand the past. When the Spanish first arrived, Cuba was ninety-eight percent forest. By 1959, Cuba was fifteen percent forest. The Spanish planted three things: sugarcane, sugarcane, and sugarcane. In 1972, Cuba entered into a mutual assistance agreement with the Soviet Union. Basically, we provided the sugar for the system. Understand, this was the only way for us to survive because of the blockade. We still produced some rice, milk, and eggs, but much was imported. We sent sugar to the Soviet Union and received agrochemicals, fuel, and fertilizer. When the Soviet Union collapsed, we were up in the air. We were falling. There were no more canned tomatoes. There was no more canned cabbage. We had nothing. We had to relearn everything.

Right now, the land in Cuba is classified as 5.4% Very Productive, 17.8% Productive, 30% Moderately Productive, and 48% Minimally Productive. Remember, fertilizer did not exist until the 1950s. The depletion of the land comes primarily from monocropping, not fertilizer. Look at Argentina and the problems they are having from monocropping soybeans to feed cattle. There are also other aspects that contributed to our struggles. We are a long island. I always say, “We have an east and a west, but not a north and south.” We are vulnerable to winds because of our long coastlines. We have droughts and the rainy season. We have seismic zones. We have earthquakes.

Most of all, our greatest losses were our agricultural traditions. We lost our agricultural traditions because farmers had to be involved in industrial production. They lost their history. The new model we are working towards is sustainable and cultural. We’re not there yet, but we are making process. It is not easy, but we are transitioning.

29. Introduction: The Jiménez Foundation Permaculture Community

The members in the permaculture community subscribe to the

cultural and ecological practices of sustainability and peace. In their homes, the members of the community attempt to develop agricultural systems that are modeled on natural ecosystems.

30. The Permaculture Community Welcoming Committee

There are no dogs on leashes in Cuba. Most of the female dogs look like they are either currently nursing a litter or that they have previously nursed so many litters that their bodies have altered permanently. The male dogs move quickly, marking territory on the gravel roads or the small bushes growing through the crumbling sidewalks. Virtually all of the dogs seem affable. True to her name, "Floppy," who looks like a corgi/dachshund mix, flops on her back to initiate a belly rub. A shirtless young man scratches a pup behind the ears as a man stands up from the barber chair on the young man's lawn and shakes the hair clippings from the white sheet around his neck. The light reflects off the blue paint of the porch and house, making the scene seem iridescent, as if it is rising from Caribbean waters, and the sheet is a sail snapping in the wind. Greeting the visitors in the small park at the center of the community, the dogs sniff one person's hand after the next and wag their tails.

31. Permaculture Community Member One: Benches in the Park

The tops of the benches in our park were destroyed or stolen not long ago, and the park was ruined. Each of the permaculture members was given a bench to repair, and we rebuilt the benches with thrown-away materials and tile. Each bench theme is important to the individual who repaired it. A taxi driver created this taxi-themed bench. A sports fan created this Nike bench. On other benches, some of the themes include the saints of the African religions, broken chains, a flower basket, and rabbits. This is my bench, which is two roses and the AIDS symbol. The two roses represent the man and the woman and the struggle against AIDS. There are many

romances in this park, and this bench is a reminder of how AIDS can affect the family. Now, people can come here and sit down and fall in love.

32. Permaculture Community Member One: Her Home and Garden

I began this garden to relieve stress. I have had a family loss. I'm planning to plant lettuce in the winter. This garden keeps me cool in the summer. I have fish here in this small cinderblock tank. My husband passed away not long ago, and this garden used to be a garage space. The ground was compacted from my husband's truck. I had to carry the soil here. Now I have leeks and chives, bok choy, beets, and parsley. I give healthy food to my grandchildren. Here, I have planted a banana tree. I feed my grandchildren with healthy bananas. This is where I compost. This is turmeric, which is good for soup and stops cancer. The water is filtered from the house. Soon, I will have a three-part filter. You are welcome to take all the photographs you would like, but I would prefer not to smile in the photographs. I don't like to smile in photographs.

33. Photograph: Permaculture Community Member One

In a tank top and jeans, the woman stands at the end of what used to be the driveway. A banana tree leans into the left side of the frame. A hibiscus rises from a rusted-out oil drum. Old computer monitors have been gutted and converted into planters. The woman doesn't smile, but she doesn't frown either. Arms straight at her sides, she looks past the photographer, past the camera, to a spot she alone can see.

34. Permaculture Community Member Two: People Who Don't Like Plants Don't Like Anything

Hola! Hola! Besos para Todos! Kisses for everyone! Welcome to my home! Wave to Grandma. Do you see her there in the window? Hello, Grandma! Dear guests, I hope you are enjoying our commu-

nity? I don't know if you know this, but there used to be two rivers on each side of the community that always flooded the houses. When the rivers were dredged, we asked the trucks to drop the dirt from the river bottoms off at people's houses. That is where the soil comes from for my gardens. All of the raised planting beds are made out of used beer and wine bottles. See how I invert them in the ground to make the frames for the beds? People bring me their empty bottles.

There are three simple things achieved through my gardens: grow healthy food, save money, and save energy. This tree here produced 241 bananas last year. The garden is for my family, but I also help the school across the street. The kids from the school come here and ask for things—this vegetable and that vegetable. I don't charge anyone for medicinal seeds or plants. We are starting to build these permaculture gardens all over the island. You want to know about the doghouse on the roof? Yes, one of my dogs loves the roof. His house is up there. He's a grey pit bull, and he kind of looks like a gargoyle up there, but look how quick he moves! It's a flat roof, so he loves it. A guard dog is a very important part of a permaculture house. Would you like some tea? Here, try this. It's made with anise seeds and honey. "Plants are love," I always say. People who don't like plants don't like anything.

35. Images: The Permaculture Community

A television antenna has been welded to a metal ladder that leans against one of the flat roofs. Several stuffed animals, including Sonic the Hedgehog, Santa Claus, and Mickey Mouse, sway back and forth on a metal clothesline. A construction crew works on a home next to the school. Scaffolding abuts the house's facade, and a cement tumbler rotates in the street as two of the workers sit on the curb and eat sandwiches.

36. Permaculture Community Member Three: El Capitán

The most important components of permaculture are the house

and the family. Everything here grows from that awareness. For example, this is a solar drying box I use for bread to feed the rabbits. This is a teepee with squash. I'm preparing the roof to make a roof garden. This is a goldfish tank. This is the compost toilet, and I have painted a picture on the side. There are three boxes underneath to process the fertilizer. Urine is another system. One liter of urine mixes with ten liters of water for fertilizer. My goal is to convince people this is something normal, that it's not an outhouse. The door has to be facing the sun all the time.

In 2009, I began preparing this place, and I also took courses on gender equality. Permaculture people have to be peaceful and patient. Can you imagine if you come out and see the slugs have eaten everything you have worked so hard on? We have lots of slugs. They are our main gardening problem. You can't overreact. Previously, I had made a fishpond next door, and I had to give it up so that someone could build a house there. You have to be patient and accepting.

Before I retired, I was a captain in the armed forces. I was a chemist. When I retired, I became a delegate for the people's power. I am a poet and painter also. I didn't intend to be a poet. A woman asked me to write something in a small space on her flyer. I wrote, "In the earth there are many riches we can develop but if there is no love in what we do, we can never achieve it." I wrote this in five minutes, and it just came out. In Spanish, it rhymes. The woman told me I was a poet.

You have to love something to achieve it. I believe that. You feel so proud when you plant the seed. You see how the seed is growing, and when it is the moment to eat it, you feel pleased in the task. Now, I give anti-violence talks to children, and they tell me, "Antonio, I don't kill lizards anymore!"

Permaculture is against violence. I put signs outside my house about violence against women. Many men say, "I do this and that to my wife." After they read my sign, they say, "Oh, I never realized that. I will think about what I do now." You want to know where the

word “permaculture” came from? It is your word. I learned it in this book. Here, it’s by an Australian named Bill Madison.

37. Painting: The Compost Toilet

Pants around his ankles, a cartoon man sits on a white commode. His disproportionately long arms transform into a book he reads as he sits. An arrow proceeds from the man to a brown bucket filled above the brim with brown material. The next arrow points to a plant, which points to a bushel, which points to a bowl filled with green material that is being pierced by a fork. So there is no confusion about the completion of the cycle, the final arrow points from the bowl back to the man reading on the commode.

38. Arturo Sanchez: Translation of the “Violencia de Género” Sign Outside the Third Permaculture House

He begins with a definition of violence: “An act or omission based on inequality of gender that brings about physical, psychological, or heritage damages. Please respect the rights of other people.” And then the sign goes on to say, “Men and women have roles of victims and/or perpetrators, but the ones more affected by violence are women. It is a matter of social justice to recognize and attend to and prevent violence against women.”

HIV/AIDS

39. Arturo Suarez: HIV/AIDS in Cuba

Cubans didn’t know what to do when they first started to encounter AIDS, and the government quarantined AIDS patients in a sanatorium. This was a shameful time in Cuba’s past. They did this, though, because they did not know what the disease would do. They received many human rights objections on this. Experts were sent to France and South Africa to study the disease. Once they understood it, the sanatoriums were opened and people were allowed to

return to their jobs. The presence of AIDS in Cuba is much lower than in many other Caribbean cultures, but people in Cuba still think the rate is too high. You should read the book, “Confessions to a Doctor.” This changed many people’s thinking about AIDS. The author was a doctor in Cuba, and he wrote the book full of individual people’s stories. People would come to him and say, “I have two wives, and both of them have AIDS, and I don’t know what to do,” that sort of thing.

Social Life

40. Arturo Suarez: Dating

In Cuba, dating is different than what you probably do in the States. Here, everyone goes out together in groups. You need to have your friends and family approve of the person. If they don’t approve of the person, and you really like the person, then you have to persuade your friends and family to like the person. We don’t have any of those online dating websites. Here, we have the bus stop. We have the Malecon. You walk the Malecon. You talk to people. You say, “Hey you...”

41. Noah: Nightlife and Advertising in Cuba

Do you know how in the States—they do this in New Zealand, so I’m sure they do this in the States as well—people on the streets will be handing out flyers about upcoming events, and people will just walk past or drop the flyers? In Cuba, people will come over and want to know what’s on the flyer. They’ll say, “What do you got?” Remember, there is no advertising here in newspapers or on television. The phrase for word-of-mouth information, I think, is “radio bemba,” which literally means, “radio lips.” They also pass info around on flash drives when there is a show or a concert. Internet is basically nonexistent across the country. There is nothing faster than old dial-up.

42. The Malecon

The Malecon runs along the coastline in Havana. Designed originally as a seawall, it has become the main thoroughfare for young people, streetwalkers, and fishermen. At night, romances bloom along the seawall. The roads of the Malecon trace the curves of the coastline. Weaving in and out of each other, the taxis rake their headlights across the crowds. The lovers appear then disappear into the darkness. Not quite invisible, they are little more than entwined silhouettes. The ocean bears down again and again at the base of the wall, projecting vertical plumes of sea foam that hover like fountain spouts in the air behind the lovers before falling back to the ocean.

The Literacy Campaign and the Bay of Pigs

43. Images: Traveling through the Provinces

In a single-file line on the shoulder of a two-lane road, three bicyclists lean forward into the wind, their legs pumping like pistons. Behind the bicyclists, a riderless horse gallops smoothly, his bridle attached with a rope to the third bicycle. A fieldstone wall extends for miles. Men clear grass with machetes. White smoke covers the road where overgrowth is being burned back. A horse and farmer appear through the haze. Lifting his hat as a greeting, the driver bounces on his makeshift buggy, which is an upholstered seat welded to a car's rear axel and wheels. A dirt road leads to an abandoned stone house. Only the walls remain. Trees grow in what was once the living room. They spread through the windows and the doorways. A small shrub has even sprouted from the stone chimney like a green top hat.

44. Arturo Suarez: The Bay of Pigs

In Cuban literature, we call the invaders the “mercenaries.” The conditions in this part of Cuba at the time weren’t good. There were

no roads. It was the Zapata Swamp. The population here was very poor—mostly farmers and some teachers from the literacy campaign. This area also produced charcoal, and Fidel had previously met with the workers. The literacy campaign began here. There were already thirteen teachers here at the time of the invasion. The Revolution had married unmarried couples—common law couples. Once the couples were married, they registered for benefits. They weren't forced to marry, though.

The invasion showed that Cubans would follow Fidel no matter what. The CIA-backed group bombed some of the airfields, but planes were hidden away, so there was little effect. The attackers' plan was that once they were here for seventy-two hours, the U.S. would support a provisional government. But the struggle was lost at sixty hours. The Cuban military was limited, but the mercenaries underestimated the human intelligence system and the people's support for the Revolution. The U.S. thought there would be more support for the invaders. 1,300 mercenaries were caught, and Fidel exchanged them for baby food for the people. We don't call it the "Bay of Pigs." We call it "Playa Giron." That's what we know it by. There's a billboard marking where the invaders were stopped. It reads, "Hasta aqui llegaron los mercenaries" – "the mercenaries got to this point."

45. Images: Playa Giron

If not for the thin coastline on the other side of the bay, there would be little to differentiate the water from the sky. A row of huts lines the shoreline. Each hut is identical, except for varied pastel colors. "Pizza" is spray-painted on the side of one of the huts. The "Octopus Club"—a rickety "Internacional Diving Center"—offers lessons and tours. Painted on the side of an old sailboat is the advertisement, "Visit the Indian Village in Guama. Don't Miss It!" Beside the advertisement, the entrepreneurs have drawn a naked man wrestling an alligator. Straddling the alligator, the man

grasps the tip of the alligator's tail with one hand and, with the other hand, binds a rope around the alligator's mouth.

46. Introduction: Mariela Luis

Mariela Luis is the director of Cuba's Literary Museum in Cuba. As a professor and educator, she is an expert on the history of literacy in Cuba.

47. Mariela Luis: History of the Literacy Campaign

After the Revolution, Fidel Castro decided that he would implement a program to eliminate illiteracy in Cuba. In January of 1961, 100,000 teachers were sent to the rural areas and farms to teach people to read. These teachers weren't like your traditional teachers. Because so many teachers were needed, many young people were recruited for this task. Most teachers were between nine and fifteen years old. They wore special uniforms so that they could be identified as teachers. The youngest teacher was eight years old. The oldest person who learned to read was 106. Most of the farmers learned to read in three to six months, depending on the teachers, although some of the teachers stayed eight to ten months. To help the teachers, there were gifts from other countries. There was no power in the countryside, and China sent gas-powered metal lamps. Lessons were at night, and many of the farmers had never seen these types of lamps before. The lamps became the symbol of the literacy campaign. Other socialist countries sent lenses for glasses. Cuba was declared free of illiteracy at the end of 1961.

48. Photographs: The Literacy Campaign

A young teacher who appears to be fourteen or fifteen years old brushes her hair while using the polished metal lamp as a mirror. Perhaps she leans in close and her image ripples, or she leans back and her image inverts on the curve of the lamp. To commemorate the completion of the campaign, a parade was held, and the two young women leading the parade carry a giant pencil between

them. The youngest teacher—an eight-year-old boy—poses in his uniform for an official portrait. He wears his backpack in the photograph, and his small beret is rolled and buttoned under his left epaulette.

49. Mariela Luis: Resistance to Literacy Campaign

At the beginning of the campaign, many of the farmers didn't want to be taught. Some farmers didn't want the teachers in their homes. Some families did not want to send their children to rural areas. Being a teacher was voluntary. No one was required to be a teacher. In Cuba, there was a movie made about the young teachers in the farmers' homes. The film starts with someone getting all of the farmers together and telling them that they're going to be introduced to the teacher. The farmers put on their nicest clothes and go to meet the teacher, but when he walks into the room, he is a fifteen-year-old boy. The teacher and the farmers argue. When the teacher tries to correct the farmers, they tell him not to speak when older people are talking. The teacher has never been in the countryside before, and he is afraid of animals—frogs, spiders, etc. The first time he lifts an ax he almost falls. But by the end of the movie, the farmers do not want the teacher to go home.

50. Mariela Luis: Teachers and the Bay of Pigs Invasion

There were many painful moments, though. Counterrevolutionaries sponsored by the CIA killed ten of our people during the Bay of Pigs invasion. There were thirty teachers working in that area during the invasion. Two teenagers, ages fifteen and nineteen, were captured. Conrado Benitez Garcia, one of the teachers, was killed. He was eighteen years old.

51. Document: Medical Examiner's Report for Conrado Benitez Garcia

The report is one page long and consists of six sketches of a human figure on which the medical examiner has recorded the evi-

dence of trauma. The sketches show a figure facing forward, back, left, right. In one set of the left-and-right-facing sketches, the arms are raised. In the other set, they are down. The medical examiner has marked sixteen puncture wounds across Conrado's back. The red marks span across the figure's shoulders, shoulder blades, and waist. On the front of the figure, there are nine marks on his abdomen. One is below his right bicep. With a black pen, the medical examiner has circled Conrado's left knee and has marked the placement of the noose around Conrado's throat.

Committees for the Defense of the Revolution

52. Introduction: Committees for the Defense of the Revolution

Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) are interconnected neighborhood organizations across Cuba. The CDRs focus their activities on promoting social welfare and protecting the values of the Revolution. In a speech establishing the CDRs in 1960, Fidel Castro said, "In the face of the imperialist aggression, we're going to implement a system of collective vigilance so that everybody knows who lives on the block, what they do, and what relations they have with the tyranny, and with whom they meet" (CNN Wire Staff).

53. CDR Meeting

The power has gone out at the six-floor apartment complex, but the members of the CDR carry on their meeting in a walkway between the two buildings. One member of the CDR says that the darkness reminds him of the Special Period. Another member corrects the other member and says that during the Special Period all the lights would have been out, not just the lights of the apartment buildings. The members seem tense, anxious. One man operates a hand-cranked flashlight, which produces a constant high-pitched whirring sound. Before speaking, a middle-aged CDR member unfolds a piece of paper in his hands. Even in November, the night is still humid, yet the speaker wears a sweatshirt and jeans. On his

sweatshirt is the image of a sailboat above the words, "San Francisco," and there is perspiration on his forehead as he begins to read.

54. CDR Speaker One: Prepared Remarks

Distinguished guests, we would like to give you the warmest welcome especially from the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution. All of us have a profound respect for the people of the United States and the desire of peace we all dream of. These exchanges contribute quite a bit to these purposes. We receive you today with a big hug and our arms open to friendship.

55. CDR Speaker Two: History and Tasks of the CDR

After the triumph, the Revolution began organizing itself around the leaders of the rebel army, and the people organized. Revolutionary laws began and the process was supported in 1959. In September 1960, Fidel gave a speech at what is now the Museum of the Revolution. As Fidel spoke, some noise bombs went off. In that moment, Fidel said, "It doesn't matter. We will organize the committees and watch the achievements." The CDRs were charged with watching out for what went against the Revolution. The first task of a CDR is revolutionary surveillance. The CDR works towards mass organization. Anyone past ten years of age can join. Black, white, young, old, armed forces or not—it doesn't matter. The organization defends, protects and watches over the Revolution. It is the eyes and ears of the Revolution.

Our logo is a shield, a farmer's hat and a machete. We began as surveillance, but now we are more ideological. We do tasks related to healthcare, production, the Cuban people, and the mitigation of natural disasters. The CDRs also watch out for criminals, work with vaccinations, and organize volunteer blood donations. For example, there was a campaign against mosquitoes that produce yellow fever. Also, there is a children's CDR.

In Santiago de Cuba, CDRs went out and worked after Hur-

ricane Sandy. We are involved in elections to confirm municipal elections. No political party should intimidate anyone, so the elections are done with the CDRs. CDRs are the engines that move the country. They move the wheels to move along. You cannot talk about the Revolution if you do not mention the CDRs.

56. A Garbage Truck and a Tense Question

In the parking lot behind the apartment building someone slams the lid of a metal garbage bin and everyone jumps. A garbage truck beeps while moving in reverse, and the speaker looks over his shoulder but does not stop speaking. When asked about the ways in which the CDRs act as enforcers of the values of the Revolution, instead of just surveyors of the community, the speaker defers to a heavysset, gray-haired CDR member. The gray-haired CDR member steadies himself with his cane and lifts his hand for quiet before speaking.

57. CDR Speaker Three: Surveillance and the Damas del Blanco

If there is a criminal problem, we work with national police. If a crime has been committed, and the victim has not reported it, CDRs will become a way to report it. Police work with CDRs for info. CDRs know the neighborhoods. We know who has income not connected to a specific job. The people who don't agree with the CDR can express their opinions. They have the same rights as other people. They can be elected. They enjoy the same rights as other people, unless they break the law.

There is a group of women that goes out to demonstrate. They do not have the people's support, but they are not suppressed. The main problem is that these groups of dissidents have financial support from other countries, specifically the United States. They are offered communication, courses, technology, and publicity. In their activities, dissidents commit crimes. That is when there is a call for subversion. Some of their activities have been tried in cases.

In terms of criminality—the prevention of criminality—we have a talk with potential criminals. In the neighborhood, we all know who the criminals are. I have been in those meetings, those interventions. They are preventative, political, and also prophylactic. We do not oppress these people. A big part of the Cuban people does not like the dissidents. The Ladies in White, they know who they are. What they receive in money doesn't fit with the fact that they don't have jobs. It is hard to see a person who does not contribute to the country act against that country.

58. The First Female CDR Speaker

Finished, the heavy-set CDR member rocks back on his heels and folds his arms, his cane held against his chest. In the darkness of the walkway, a female CDR member lights a cigarette before beginning to speak. She exhales smoke over the heads of the crowd and then ashes her cigarette at her waist.

59. CDR Female Speaker: Dissidents, Children and Education

Dissidents don't work, and they live better than doctors and lawyers. In the Revolution, we learned that our children are the main treasures we have. Marti said, "Be educated to be free." CDR members go to the family and work with the family when there is a problem. It's not political. There are three pillars of the Revolution: support ideological work, defend the Revolution, and educate the people. Even though we have a blockade—and we experience the effects of that blockade every day—education is required. CDRs work with natural disasters. During Hurricane Sandy, all the actions were taken down to the level of every block. We're reconstructing things that were destroyed. The government will provide materials, but the people and the CDRs do the work to rebuild.

Work was done before, during, and after the disaster. With the flooding from the sea, we told people about the situation that was coming, and then evacuated the people that were in danger. We had

to convince them to leave because they didn't want to leave. After the last flood, I had three families in my home. Families help government find the right channels.

60. Image: The Three Pillars

When the female CDR speaker states the three pillar of the Revolution, she lifts her hand. Holding the cigarette between her index finger and thumb, she enumerates the pillars by grasping, in sequence, her middle, ring and pinky finger.

61. CDR Speaker Two: On Being Asked If He Has Any Questions about Americans

No. One thing we know is the U.S. people. Fidel has always taught us to differentiate the U.S. people from the U.S. government. Many of us have relatives living in the United States. The Cuban people are always open. Those who left in 1959 are not around much anymore. It is a younger generation. So we know the Americans. The ones who love the Revolution know the United States.

62. CDR Speaker One: On Whether or Not He Believes the Embargo Will Be Lifted Based on Changes of Political Power in the United States

We have a famous journalist who always said, "There is nothing more similar to a Republican than a Democrat."

63. The Lights

As if in agreement, the lights in the walkway and the buildings flicker to life. The CDR members cheer and the high-pitched whine of the hand-cranked flashlight subsides. With the light, the tensions also diminish. Someone asks the woman with the cigarette if she has children and what are their names, and she blushes and produces photographs from her purse. The CDR member in the San Francisco sweatshirt discusses fishing and a recent catch. The gray-haired CDR member steadies himself on his cane, smiles

politely, and says, “mucho gusto” to several visitors before retiring to his apartment.

64. Arturo Suarez: After Exiting CDR Meeting

In the past, many things were done too quickly and too passionately. Reports were often to the CDRs instead of the police. This is not so much the case anymore. The needs of the CDR are changing. Now they are more about social pressure. They are more open. They are about community. If a family does not support a child, the CDR will help. A comrade will knock on your door and say, “I have heard your child is having a problem. What’s up?”

The Media

65. David Price: His History as a Journalist

Fidel always liked to interact with the foreign press. He liked to attempt to manipulate the foreign press. Raul is not interested in talking to us or attempting to manipulate us. Access is almost zero, though it is opening up a bit more. Raul is more pragmatic than Fidel, although Raul is not as charismatic.

So how do I, as a journalist, cover Cuba? Here’s a story. Let’s say you are a cub reporter covering the police beat and you run into police brutality. You have two choices. Choice one is to cover the story and potentially lose your job and/or your access to the police. Choice two is not to cover the story and sweep it under the rug. With choice two, you retain your job, but the story goes uncovered. Neither option is a good option. The only way you can do both is to swallow your ego and give the story to someone else who is a little more protected. That’s the only way that the information actually gets out.

66. David Price: Freedom of the Press in Cuba

They don’t check your stuff here. I’ve never had an editor refuse to print something. They’ve definitely yelled at me if they didn’t like

it, but they never refused to print it. It's kind of like covering a war. It's a pressure cooker. I came here with an American wife, and now I have a Cuban wife, but I should say that she's old. She's my age. She's an appropriate age.

Dissidents and the Cuban Five

67. Arturo Suarez: The Damas del Blanco

During the Special Period, the dissidents became stronger. It was proved that they were receiving salaries from Miami. This is the biggest problem: that they are paid salaries from abroad. Remember, Polish dissidents overthrew socialism without foreign financial support. Cuban law says you can go against the Revolution, but you cannot be paid from abroad to do so.

If you are a "Lady in White," the U.S. will grant you a visa. The Damas del Blanco have become a business. Originally, they were the wives and the other female relatives of jailed dissidents. They dress all in white, and they protest by attending mass each Sunday in silence. You will also see them walking around Havana, mostly in the tourist areas. As I said, they have become a kind of business to get a visa. Many of the current Damas del Blanco aren't connected to jailed dissidents at all.

68. Introduction: The Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP)

Founded in 1960 after the Revolution, ICAP is a non-governmental organization dedicated to increasing Cuba's international relationships. The primary goal of ICAP is to work towards freeing the Cuban Five.

69. Speaker at ICAP: The Cuban Five

For fifty years Cuba has been the victim of terrorist activities, especially from Miami. There are many terrorist groups: Alpha 66, Omega 4, Brothers to the Rescue, and the Cuban American National

Foundation, to name a few. We consider these to be terrorist organizations. There have been 3,000 lives lost because of these groups. There have also been 3,000 people who have been injured or handicapped. In 1976, there was a Cuban flight from Barbados to Jamaica that was sabotaged. A bomb went off, killing all seventy-eight people aboard the plane. The terrorist is now living in Miami—you can look this up. Terrorism also escalated during the Special Period. These groups paid mercenaries to place bombs in tourist areas. One terrorist died in the Copacabana Hotel.

In 1998, the Cuban Five were arrested and tried in Miami. They were charged with conspiracy to commit espionage, though evidence has never been proved. During the trials, the U.S. government paid journalists to write against the Cuban Five. The atmosphere pressured the jury. Evidence that would have helped the Cuban Five was never presented.

70. Arturo Suarez: The Cuban Five

I know one thing—that you are not the U.S. government. We know the difference between the U.S. people and the U.S. government, especially after Elian Gonzalez. We saw Americans carrying signs, protesting, all of them wanting Elian Gonzalez to be able to return to his father in Cuba. Elian Gonzales is now a second-year engineering student here in Cuba, by the way. Fidel has always repeated that the U.S. government is one thing, and the people are another.

Before I get into the Cuban Five, you should know that the Cuban Intelligence System is not based on paid agents. It's made up of people who go abroad and send back information. In the early nineties, there were lots of actions against Cuba. After the Cold War, there was lots of U.S. focus on Cuba. I remember as a kid seeing planes coming to Cuba from Miami and watching the planes drop flyers that said things like, "Down with Fidel" or "Down with the Revolution."

There are many Cubans against the Revolution who live in Miami. When the Cuban Five were caught, the issue for us was not

whether or not they were spies, but the issue was the lengths of the sentences. There were some Israeli spies who were captured at the same time, and they only received two years. The Cuban Five got life sentences.

In Cuba, the Cuban Five have become a symbol of what courageous people do for their country. There have also been many CIA aggressions against Cuba. The Cuban Five were also tried in Miami. It's been proven that the media was against them. There is no way they could have received a fair trial there. All I am saying is that you should go behind the information you are given. You should try and look below the surface.

Coda: The Future

71. David Price: The Future of Cuba

The toughest card to play is who will lead the country once Raul and Fidel are gone. Fidel and Raul are legit. They're the real deal. But if you put Joe Schmo in there who is just parroting their ideas, the country will collapse. Raul Castro's daughter can't take over. Her number one agenda is LGBT rights, and sex-change rights, and, to resonate with the Cuban people, she couldn't have picked a worse position. But maybe that's her point—she's chosen something she's genuinely passionate about because she doesn't have any political ambition. There were some young guys who were up-and-comers, but they were run out of their jobs because they were caught talking bad about Castro. They weren't run out of the country, though. They're still around. They know too much to be let out. Right now, no one knows what the future holds. The question of who will take over once Raul and Fidel are gone is stamped like a great big question mark right on Cuba's forehead.

