

**#InstaCuba: Viewing Cuban Identity through the Tourist Filter**

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**Abstract**

Throughout history, Western tourists have fetishized the people and cultures of their non-Western destinations. Tourists have traveled to Latin America imagining scenes of tropical beaches and “exotic-looking” women. Although tourism in Cuba has its specific history and complexities, it is a part of this broader narrative of tourism across Latin America. Prior to 1959, Cuba attracted more tourists than any other Caribbean island, as the Cuban government and travel agencies presented the island as a paradise for tourists’ self-indulgent pleasures. However, the Cuban Revolution in 1959 put an end to the gambling and prostitution that attracted many tourists. After several marginally successful attempts to harbor a tourism industry within the constraints of the socialist ideals, it was not until the fall of the Soviet bloc in the 1990s that the government returned to tourism as a main economic pillar to generate capital and attract hard currency quickly. Realizing tourists’ desires to see a romanticized ideal of the “last socialist country”, the Cuban government promotes celebratory images of the Revolution alongside the capitalist excesses of sex from the 1950s and tropical paradise that once characterized the tourist attractions on the island. American cars and street murals of Che Guevara are common appearances in the images that tourists post on the social media platform, Instagram. While tourists post pictures of destinations throughout Latin America on social media, the case of tourist social media in Cuba is vastly different from other destinations. A lack of infrastructure and government restrictions makes consistent access to the Internet difficult for Cubans. On the island, tourist hotels have Internet service available for purchase, but the service is too costly for the majority of Cuban nationals. Most Cubans remain without the ability to use and contribute to new interactive web spaces, such as Instagram. Therefore, foreigners and the State control the Cuban presence on this social media platform. The images that tourists choose to share

perpetuate the idea of Cuba as the last socialist paradise: a representation the Cuban state desires in order to continue to attract tourists and to preserve the image of the survival of socialist ideals, despite an increasingly capitalistic reality. There is an abundance of research regarding tourism and its images, as well as investigation of social networks like Twitter and Facebook's impact on the tourist industry, but the role of Instagram in the industry has not had the same attention. This paper will explore the intricacies of the identity of Cuba and its people on Instagram.

## **Introduction**

At different moments in the twentieth century, Cuba has captured the attention of outsiders, but by the 1950s civil unrest and the Revolution propelled a distinct idea of Cuba onto the international stage. The Cold War polarized Cuba as a socialist power and foreigners lacked much knowledge of Cuba, other than its socialist alignment. However, the fall of the Soviet bloc brought economic desperation with an image of Cuba as a third-world island held captive by time and strong ideologies. With new leadership and changing policies, the possibility for changing outside perspective of Cuba exists, especially with the explosion of social media that has allowed for a broad amount of people to share their perspectives on daily life from nearly any location in the world. While tourist photography has long been a way of sharing vantage points of different places, social and mobile media have vastly expanded the ability to quickly take these pictures and share them with not just friends and family at home, but strangers across the world. Many tourists choose to share their journeys on Instagram, a mobile phone application for editing and sharing snapshot style pictures.

As Cuba has increasingly become a popular destination since the government's "return" to a tourism economy in the 1990s, photos of the island frequently appear on Instagram. Part of the widespread diffusion of images of Cuba could be attributed to the way in which outsiders

have seen the island as “forbidden” since the Revolution, specifically in the United States. From a scarcity of images between the 1960s to the 1990s, a mystique surmounted about what life in the socialist nation was like. Although the government may have once coveted this privacy surrounding the island, diffusion of images now aim to attract foreign attention for visitors or investors. Currently, in 2015, openings to Cuba combined with convenient technology have burgeoned images of the island.

Despite a larger quantity of images, the content of the shared images does not necessarily contain anything new or distinct, from past images of Cuba in the media or travel advertisements. The images that tourists choose to share perpetuate the idea of Cuba as the last socialist paradise: a representation the Cuban government desires in order to continue to attract tourists and to preserve the image of the survival of socialist ideals, despite an increasingly capitalistic reality. Old cars, Revolutionary murals and colonial Spanish architecture make up an abundance of what tourists and the Cuban government choose to call #cuba on Instagram. In this proliferation of images, Cubans remain excluded from contributing their own perspective to the collective, as a result of poor Internet access. The national perspective of Cuba on Instagram is nearly nonexistent with the exception of a few dissidents that use the application to amplify the messages of their blog writings. From this exclusion of Cubans from Instagram, the State and foreigners are free to project any image of the island, no matter how incomplete it may be.

In this paper, I will detail the trajectory of the relationship between images and the tourism industry in Cuba, as both have been critical in forming lasting perceptions of the island. Furthermore, I will investigate the impact of this trajectory by analyzing how it manifests in Instagram posts created by the Cuban government, Cuban dissidents and foreign tourists. Previous research examines social networks like Twitter and Facebook’s impact on the tourist

industry in Cuba, but the role of Instagram in the industry has not had the same attention. As technology continues to develop, the role of images will also continue to grow. Thus, it is important to assess the impact of social media's contribution to forming collective images and forging identities. This is especially important for those who cannot participate in forming their online image or identity, but rather outsiders or the State form it for them, such as it is in Cuba.

### **Tourism's Beginnings**

Twenty-first century tourism in Cuba is not a new phenomenon, but is part of a long historical trajectory throughout the twentieth century. Tourism proved to be a pillar of the Cuban economy beginning in 1920. Cuba turned its attention toward fostering a tourist industry to help support the economy as the main export, sugar, faced falling prices. From the beginning of the 1900s to 1920, the production of sugar for export had grown from one million tons a year to five million tons (Pérez-López 4). However, in May of 1920, sugar prices fell from twenty-two cents a pound to three cents a pound (Pérez 170). Due to the heavy reliance on sugar for capital, the sudden price reduction threatened the Cuban economy. Therefore, the Cuban government needed to find new ways to generate capital quickly. With white sand beaches readily available without much initial investment necessary, the government looked to tourism to make up for the faltering sugar based economy. The United States provided an easy foundation for the tourist industry to grow in Cuba, in part because of the close proximity, but also because of a long history of US presence on the island.

The US's presence in Cuba formally began with the intervention in the war for Cuban independence against Spain. The US entered the conflict to fight against the Spanish on behalf of Cuba, but their motivation was not to liberate Cuba. Instead, the motivations were much more self-serving. Spain conceded Cuba to the US, but independence was only an illusion. Shortly

after the war, in 1903, Cuba adopted the Platt Amendment into its constitution. The treaty gave the US powers to intervene in domestic affairs of Cuba, prohibited treaties with other nations and granted the US permission to have a naval base on the island. While the US framed these powers as a way to protect Cuban independence, the Platt Amendment protected its opportunity for imperial influence over Cuba. The provisions set forth in this amendment had lasting impact for the island. From this point until the early 1930s, the Platt Amendment allowed for US goods to have preference in the Cuban market, while Cuban sugar had preference in the US market. However, with low sugar prices, Cuba relied upon tourists from the US as a means to generate capital by luring them to travel to the island.

The Havana Hotel Association, a hotel interest group in Cuba, began to travel to Florida and place advertisements in US newspapers in order to attract tourists. Initiatives like this grew the tourist industry rapidly, and by the end of the 1920s, eighty thousand tourists came in to Cuba each year, the majority of whom were from the US (Schwartz, *Pleasure Island* 4). To the island's advantage, the US had entered the Prohibition era at the same time that Cuba was trying to develop its tourist industry. Prohibition spurred an increase in creative ways to consume alcohol. While some bought the vice illegally, the wealthy took advantage of travel opportunities to find their fix. Due to small and expensive flights, tourism in the 1920s was a privilege only the wealthiest could enjoy. To satiate the bourgeois tastes of traveling elites, entities of the Cuban tourism industry, including Cuban and US entrepreneurs, marketed Havana as "Paris of the Western Hemisphere" (Schwartz, "Invasion" 245). For the wealthy, a vacation in Cuba was promoted as an encounter with the tropical, full of self-indulgence and pleasure. Part of the allure

of Cuba was to demonstrate the island's "otherness"<sup>1</sup>: an image of Cuba as a "primitive" place that contrasted with the high-class status of those traveling to the island from the US. Images of Cuba and the pleasures the island began to appear throughout US culture. Irving Berlin's song from 1920 "(I'll See You in) C-U-B-A" describes Cuba as a place "where wine is flowing and where dark-eyed stellas, light their fellers' panatellas". The song reinforces ideas of Cuba as an exotic escape from the US filled with alcohol and women, which served as enticement for tourists to travel to the island.

Although tourists came to Cuba looking for exotic pleasures they allegedly could not obtain in the US, sources of entertainment on the island included golfing, gambling and horseracing, all of which were activities readily available in the US. Leaving the country to partake in the same leisure that people could partake in at home automatically gave the activities a connotation of relaxation. Relaxation to US tourists meant enjoying the pastimes that they did not have time for at home in a different location. Aware of this, tourist entities in Cuba did not make an exploration of Cuban culture a part of the tourist experience. Instead, they merely used a trivialized, exoticized image of the island and its people to attract tourists.

Opportunities in Cuba for the wealthy did not end with travel. The influx of tourists brought money to business elites in Cuba and the US, as they invested in building new resorts and hotels. After John McEntee Bowman spread an entire hotel chain empire across major US cities, like New York and Atlanta, he stretched his business to Cuba. With the outlaw of alcohol sales, Bowman quickly purchased Hotel Sevilla in Havana and a turn toward tourism development in Cuba began amongst US hotel entrepreneurs (Schwartz, *Pleasure Island* 45).

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<sup>1</sup> In line with Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin's definition of other, otherness refers to the perception of Cuba as a place of cultural and social difference that positions the nation as primitive from the view of people in the Western hemisphere.



Those wealthy enough to move their business ventures offshore could take full advantage of burgeoning opportunities in Cuba. However, the stimulus was short-lived. In 1929, the US stock market crashed and the Great Depression began. The wealthy no longer had the money or leisure time to travel, so tourist activity in Cuba largely declined. At the end of 1932, the income from tourists was only \$9.5 million, whereas four years prior tourism brought in \$26 million (Schwartz, *Pleasure Island* 88). Like the rest of the world during this time period, Cuba found its economy struggling.

### **The Second Tourist Boom**

World War II began the economic recovery process, and many nations achieved stability in the post war period. Cuba's economy continued to struggle because sugar remained the most important export on the island and the prices of sugar were low in the 1950s. In response, Cuba turned to tourism again to support its economy. Similar to the first wave of tourism, US citizens were the primary market for the Cuban tourism industry. However this second wave of tourism was different from the first because a new culture of consumerism prevailed in the US. Likewise, technological advancements made during war time created larger, more efficient airplanes that could hold more passengers at a lower price (Schwartz, "Invasion" 251). These factors meant that luxuries formerly reserved for the wealthy were now available to the middle and working classes in the US. Vacations became attainable for a larger portion of US society; thus Cuba had a larger market.

The Cuban government, entrepreneurs and US business interests developed more resorts, hotels and casinos to serve the influx of foreigners. Refurbishing and updating tourism infrastructure was necessary to meet the greater demands for gambling and entertainment. Formerly Cuban hotels changed ownership to foreign hands. In 1955, the Hotel Nacional was

removed from the control of the Cuban government and transferred to the control of Intercontinental Hotels Corporation, a part of the PanAmerican World Airways Company (Moruzzi 175). Reorganization and changes of ownership allowed for the industry to grow faster. Rather than small Cuban companies developing the industry, larger foreign corporations could build and restore hotels much more quickly; thus, bringing profits in to the island faster for the Cuban government and business elites, as well as US developers and business interests.

Cuba did not only present opportunities for legitimate businesses, but mafia-run businesses also found success in the thriving tourist industry. In coalition with the government, the mafia brought a large amount of corruption and hoarded wealth, while the majority of society's well being declined significantly (Schwartz, *Pleasure Island* 88). Crime families from the US and Cuba owned and operated many of the casinos across Havana. The ruler of Cuba at the time, Fulgencio Batista<sup>2</sup>, used profits from his mafia connections to fund a large personal pension (Schwartz, *Pleasure Island* 184). Moreover, the mafia ran numerous prostitution rings



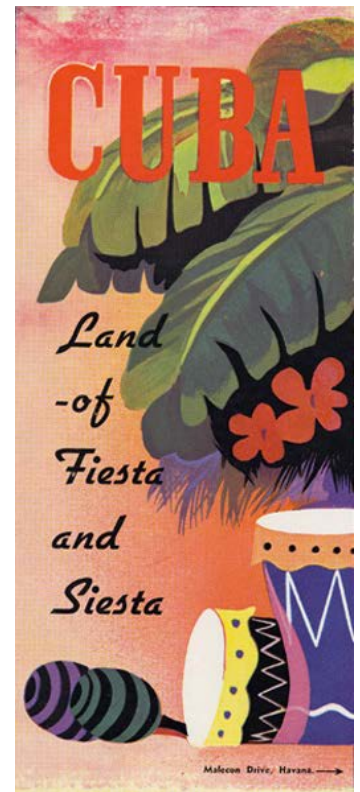
and operated these businesses out of their casinos and hotels throughout Havana. Women lacking education and legal economic opportunities found prostitution to make enough money to survive. Prostitution rings served to meet the demands for sex that tourists came with, as a result of the sexual imagery that filled advertisements for travel to Cuba.

Sexually charged images of the island advertised a Cuba abound with opportunities for encountering women in the tropical paradise. The image to the left, featured in a 1951 tour guide published by the Cuban

<sup>2</sup> After a coup in 1952, Fulgencio Batista came to power in Cuba. Batista had first ruled Cuba from 1933 to 1944 after overthrowing the authoritarian ruler at the time, Gerardo Machado (Domínguez, "The Batista Regime" 115). Batista came back in to power in 1952. Although he ran for president, Batista staged a coup and seized power before the election. The illegitimacy of his power set the tone for the subsequent six years of his rule.

Tourist Commission, places a female body as the focus of the poster. The woman's open legs straddle the tiny island beneath her, inviting tourists to explore the "ideal vacation land". The only other feature of the poster that is pronounced as the highlighted woman is the word "Cuba" in bold, capitalized letters. Thus, Cuba was automatically equated with the female body, ready to be exploited. Despite the illegality of the mafia's prostitution rings, they served to meet a demand that the State and travel agencies in Cuba and the US had advertised to foreigners

Although the lure of sex and gambling brought tourists on a grander scale than the tourism boom of the 1920s, Cuba's tourist industry repeated history in many aspects. A passage in time and a broader audience made no difference in how travel agencies in the US and in Cuba portrayed the island: the sun and beaches were still there, so the idea of a near, yet exotic paradise remained in US imaginations. Advertisers and travel agencies exaggerated the promises of paradise waiting in Cuba to give those in the US the desire to explore their familiar, but foreign neighbor. The advertisement to the right, published in 1950 by the Cuban Tourist Commission, declared Cuba a destination for "fiesta and siesta"



that contrasted with the demands of life in the US. The palms and instruments frame Cuba as a destination of light-hearted fun, contrasting with the US's work-focused culture.

### **Trouble in Paradise**

While the island was seemingly thriving with investment in new business projects, the development was uneven and wealth distribution remained concentrated to specific holders. By 1950, the top richest 1 million Cubans possessed 43% of the entire nation's wealth, while the

bottom 1.5 million worked as sugar harvesters lived in highly underdeveloped rural areas lacking food and proper shelter (Chomsky 33). Scant resources were reserved for this struggling sector of the population, whose work in the sugar industry was just as crucial to the economy as the tourist industry. Likewise, access to social services such as education and healthcare were extremely limited in the impoverished areas. Drastic poverty in the countryside went largely unnoticed in Havana, where most of the wealth was concentrated. Elite families who made money from tobacco and sugar empires lived in massive estates in and around the city. Disparities in the quality of life worsened divisions amongst Cubans while tourists continued to flock to the island, oblivious to the conditions of society.

Societal tensions not only stemmed from wealth inequalities, but a corrupt government provoked strains further. Batista's policies focused on serving the interests of himself and those in his regime. Even the national lottery was reorganized so that earnings would not reach the treasury, but instead, Batista gave the profits to groups who would support his regime, such as journalists and the Catholic Church (Domíniguez, "Batista Regime 123). Sentiments of anger with the malfeasance of Batista's rule and the condition of society created a climate ripe for citizen action. One group emerged to unite the marginalized members of Cuban society and fight the oppressive policies of the Batista regime. The group, including Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, planned an attack on the military quarters in eastern Cuba, the Moncada Barracks. Due to the strength and numbers of Batista's army, the Moncada attack failed, on July 26, 1953. The failure of the attack resulted in the July 26 Movement's leaders' imprisonment and exile to Mexico. While the July 26 Movement's lead figures were not in Cuba, the revolutionary effort did not end.

As the guerillas in exile collected weapons and planned for their eventual return to the island, rebels in Cuba tried to gain more widespread attention for their cause. International journalists and writers already had a significant presence on the island, because of the size of the tourist industry. Rebels committed acts of terrorism in spaces visible to international eyes, such as small bombings in hotels and disrupting sporting events (Schwartz, *Pleasure Island* 169). The rebels wanted attention for their cause, but they did not want to disrupt the tourism industry so much that Cuban nationals would lose their jobs and, consequently, hold a negative view of the rebel forces.

In 1956, the exiled members of the July 26 Movement returned from Mexico on a small yacht and landed on the eastern coast of Cuba, attacking the Cuban army. Once again, Batista's forces ended the attack swiftly, killing most of the exiles (Chomsky 38). However, the survivors fled to the mountains of eastern Cuba and strengthened their forces, recruiting the rural poor to their cause. As rebel forces worked to bring down the government, Batista continued to encourage more economic growth through tourism, cultivating a positive image within the international community.

### **Tourism's Peak**

Cuba experienced the largest boom to the tourism industry in 1957, just as tensions between the July 26 Movement and the government were heightening. New investments and construction projects cropped up across the island. Tourism was a tool for Batista to manipulate his image and uphold his honor to the outside, industry expansion provided revolutionaries with a perfect stage for acts against his regime. Most notably, the US hotel mogul Conrad Hilton expanded his empire into Cuba and agreed to construct the Habana Hilton. Likewise, the Cuban tourist commission hosted the first ever Gran Premio car racing event. The race attracted tourists

from across the world to see the famous Argentinean driver Juan Manuel Fangio. However, the New York Times released Herbert Matthews's in-depth interview with Fidel Castro from the guerilla camps in the countryside the same day as the race. Therefore, Batista did not receive the publicity he hoped for with the event (Schwartz, *Pleasure Island* 10).

The three part feature on Fidel Castro in the New York Times set out to give people in the United States the insurrectionary group's side of the events that had unfolded in Cuba. When the Granma arrived in Cuba, Batista claimed that Castro had not been seen with the other returning exiles (Matthews 1). Denying Castro's presence publically quelled the threat of the July 26 Movement to his regime. Matthews's interview shed light on the elusive leader and movement trying to overthrow Batista's regime. The articles detailed some of the attacks committed by the 26 of July Movement; however, Batista's counter-terrorism efforts and repression were given much more attention. Batista had taken to subduing the attacks by having his "police kill someone virtually every time a bomb is exploded in Havana, riddle his body with bullets, put a bomb in his hand and call the press photographers to come and take photographs", as Matthews detailed (11). Instead of showing photos of damage that the July 26 Movement had created with their attacks, the New York Times presented images of the public reaction to Batista's repression. The image to the right showed Cubans protesting the murder of a fifteen-year-old boy committed by the Batista regime. Such an image presented the movement as more popularly based, rather than driven by an extremist rebel faction. Despite Batista's military power, Matthews's series



The New York Times  
 "STOP KILLING OUR SONS," reads banner being carried by mourners during demonstration in Santiago, Cuba. Eight hundred women marched last Jan. 4 to protest the torture and killing of a 15-year-old boy, whose mother is shown in center in white jacket.

gave Castro a clearly more favorable depiction than Batista in the conflict.

By 1958, revolutionary insurgents had declared a full war with the Cuban government. Guerilla rebels in the rural east of Cuba fought the majority of the war against the Batista regime. However, part of this war played out in the capital city in front of tourists. Once again, the Cuban tourist commission heavily promoted the hosting of the second Gran Premio car-racing event, in hopes that it would gain greater attention than the previous year. Before the race, rebels held Juan Manuel Fangio hostage until the race ended with several of the drivers crashing. Batista cancelled the remaining races and, upon release, Fangio told the press of the lavish and welcoming treatment that his kidnappers provided for him (Schwartz, *Pleasure Island* 188). With this, the 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement achieved their goals: Batista had to cancel the races and was humiliated, while the rebels received accolades. The focus of the press from this moment gave Castro's forces the morale boost needed to secure a victory over Batista by the end of the year.

After six years of resistance, the revolutionary movement triumphed when Batista fled Cuba on January 1, 1959. Civil war on the island had caused a severe decrease in tourists, but some did continue to spend their winters in Cuba. However, at the moment the revolutionary government took power, the US ordered for all tourists to be evacuated from Cuba (Schwartz, *Pleasure Island* 195). Emergency ships and planes boarded tourists to return home as quickly as possible to avoid chaos in Havana.

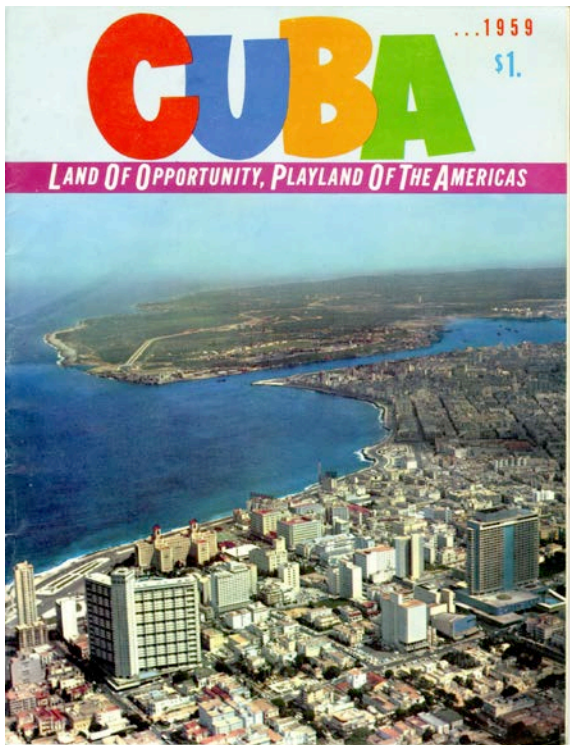
## **A New Era**

The triumph of the Revolution meant that the leaders of the 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement were now the leaders of the Cuban government, but they had power to change society more fully, not just the political sphere. The revolutionary government realized the economic importance that tourism had for Cuba. Castro envisioned a more moral industry with less US business influence,

based on attracting tourists to the “natural beaches of the country”, rather than gambling in casinos (F. Castro “Speech to the Revolutionary CTC”). At first, he allowed US businesses to continue operating in Cuba, but wanted to decrease their influence. During a speech in February of 1959, Castro declared that foreign interests could remain in Cuba “only as long as it benefit[ed] the country” (Castro “Speech to 15,000 Listeners”). He ordered that the corrupt mafia families who ran casinos end their operations. Gambling was not outright illegal, but it suppressed it to a point where it no longer proved as profitable as before (Schwartz, *Pleasure Island* 198). Moreover, prostitution rings were shut down and the women who had worked in them received education and training to work in the service industry or trade labor. With reformed gambling and the disappearance of prostitution, the government needed to ensure that foreigners still viewed Cuba as a viable destination for their vacations. In 1959, travel agencies and service businesses from across the world, particularly from the United States, came to Cuba for a trade show (Schwartz, *Pleasure Island* 201). The trade show provided the government with an opportunity to present the changes the Revolution had made to tourism, attract more visitors

and encourage new foreign investments.

To accompany the conference, the Cuban Tourist Commission published a 100 page magazine entitled “Cuba: Land of Opportunity Playland of the Americas” filled with advertisements for services and details of the changes to tourism industry. While the title clearly drew from the historical trajectory of Cuba as a light-hearted escape for US travelers, the cover of the magazine did not feature the usual sun, sand and women as previous advertisements had.





Instead, the cover simply showed an aerial view of Havana and the coast. To show the development opportunities for investors and the recreation available for travelers, the images throughout the magazine were mostly of the cities, landscapes, hotels and entertainment. However, the language used in marketing the island fell in line with previous portrayals. The magazine claimed that tourists could look forward to “unsophisticated Afro-Cuban torso twisting *muchachas* of every hue and color [that are] found in cabarets less than a block from swanky night clubs featuring, tail-coated artists fresh from applause in Europe and the United States” (“Cuba: Land of Opportunity” 12). Appealing to an encounter with the “unsophisticated” exotic and the more “swanky” sensibilities of foreigners, the Tourist Commission wanted to show foreigners that Cuba could be an intermediary between the two. Such descriptions make a caricature of cultural elements and position the people and nation as inferior to the foreigner visitors and their homelands. The Revolution may have changed the operations of tourism within the island, but it continued to feed into widely held foreign notions in order to sell itself.

Cuba’s moment of more conscious photographic depiction of the island proved to be a fleeting as the advertising attempts to US African-Americans called upon the old themes of sun, fun and women. Conventions and pamphlets spread the word that tourism was still a business in Cuba, but the government still needed to tap into a specific market to gain people willing to visit, in spite of the changes. Aware of the racial tensions in the US at the time, the Cuban Tourist Commission aimed their advertising efforts at African-Americans, promising a vacation destination that would give them the equal treatment that they did not receive at home. A special committee in the Cuban Tourist Commission formed to recruit African-American boxer Joe Louis to visit Cuba for the New Year’s holiday in 1960, which was also the one-year anniversary of the triumph of the Revolution. Through a black-owned public relations firm in the US, the

Cuban Tourist Commission placed advertisements, such as the following one, in black newspapers across the US (Benson 250). The advertisements stated that in Cuba African-Americans would find treatment “as a first class citizen”. While the messages were tailored to the US African-American audience, the images of Cuba that the advertisements showed did not vary much from previous advertisements. Tourist promotions after the revolutionary government came to power endorsed the affable nature of Cubans, stating that Cuba was a place of friendliness “from the cop on the beat to the people on the streets”, as the advertisement above reads. Photos in the advertisements almost exclusively featured women sunbathing and enjoying golfing and swimming. While the advertisements show that Cuba was trying to attract a new kind of tourist, the images used to sell the destination were no different than what had previously been used.



After publically supporting African-American tourism to Cuba, Joe Louis was criticized greatly in the US because of his close ties to Fidel Castro and the revolutionary government. Opinion of Fidel Castro in the US turned negative compared to earlier sentiment visible in Herbert Matthews’s coverage of Castro for the *New York Times*, positive depictions of him after he actively curbed influenced of private businesses in Cuba. In 1960, Castro began appropriating formerly private land and nationalizing US companies in the sugar and oil industries. In reaction

to the possibility of the strengthening of socialism, the Eisenhower administration imposed the first trade embargo on exports coming in to Cuba. From this point, relations with the US officially ended. He attracted attention of critics calling him a communist and traitor because of his willingness to conduct business with Fidel Castro. The negative attention caused Joe Louis to sever his contract with the US public relations firm and Cuban Tourist Commission by June 1960 (Benson 266). However, the commission continued to try to attract black US tourists, but from smaller, more radical groups, such as the Black Panthers. The efforts to keep tourism alive in the beginning of the revolutionary government were marginally successful, but the industry was never as fruitful as it had been before the Revolution. Any last hopes for a tourist economy officially ended in 1963 when the Kennedy administration expanded the embargo against Cuba to include the prohibition of travel (Chomsky 81).

### **Changing Directions**

By the early 1960s, the revolutionary government had established their presence as a force unwilling to compromise on their objectives of resisting imperialism to the US. However, the government sought to institute a specific image within Cuban society. José Martí had been a national figure in Cuba, but the July 26 Movement wanted to infuse their own figures into the pantheon of heroes. The Revolution was widely documented through art and photographs; thus, it was not difficult to propel new images of the movement's leaders as national heroes, not just successful insurgents. In 1960, Cuban photographer Alberto Korda, who had documented much of the Revolution, took the photograph of Guevara to the right.



The famous image did not circulate the world until 1967 when Italian publisher Gian-Giacomo Feltrinelli began to make posters with the image, which Korda had gifted to Feltrinelli (Memou 1). Since that moment, the image has been reproduced continually, most times in a manner contradictory with Guevara's own ideologies. While the Cuban government continues to use the image as a symbol of triumph and endurance of the Revolution, it is simultaneously used to sell shirts, posters and souvenirs<sup>3</sup>. The unavoidable nature of the image in Cuba made it a symbol of Cuba to the outside world. As the Cold War created a stark dichotomy amongst nations, capitalist onlookers in the US saw Guevara and knew the image meant socialism, yet this idea withstands.

Creating new national heroes was only the beginning of changes in Cuban society. Close ties to the Soviet Union and the implementation of economic embargo pushed the government toward socialism. However, how socialism would take shape in Cuba remained uncertain (Chomsky 49). In the "great debate" over the economy, some parties believed in a market socialism that would operate similar to socialism in the Soviet Union, yet continue to trade in the open markets. The other faction of the debate argued for a more closed, centrally planned economy. Che Guevara, the newly appointed President of the National Bank of Cuba, oversaw the transition of the economy. He did not want to follow the USSR's economic plan or ideas of "market socialism". Instead, Guevara believed that socialism was a phase of transition to prepare society to operate in a fully communist society. People and society would work to communally contribute to improving society (Yaffe 16). To compensate for people's contribution and work, the government would provide basic necessities for all (Chomsky 54). In Guevara's plan, socialism was not the final state of the economy, but a mode of mobilizing and preparing society

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<sup>3</sup> Likewise, the image has captivated the capitalist world just as much, as it appears frequently on consumer goods, advertisements and Internet memes

to work and live outside of a market economy. In the end, the transitional socialism plan was implemented in the 1960s, but, by the early 1970s, Cuba began to follow the Soviet economic model. Although transitional socialist policies did not endure for long, the social impacts of Guevara's ideas did have longevity, affecting citizen participation and government ideals in the years to come.

The major economic effort of the 1960s was to mobilize the population to harvest ten million tons of sugar. While thousands of volunteers did help harvest the sugar, the plan placed too much emphasis on sugar, and the rest of the economy suffered consequently (Chomsky 54). The economic failure of the sugar harvest highlighted the problems with such an ideological economic plan. In 1970, Fidel Castro announced that ties with the Soviet Union would be strengthened and sugar would be used as a manner of diversifying the economy, but not the sole pillar of the economy ("Speech on FMC 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary"). The announcement signaled a change in Cuba once again, less ideological and more oriented toward the Soviet Union's socialism.

In 1972, Cuba joined the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, or Comecon. The alliance ensured that Cuba would receive economic aid from the USSR in order to finance industrial infrastructure projects on the island (Chomsky 58). Cuba's economic alliances solidified its alignment with the Eastern bloc and commitment to socialism. The photos to the right, taken in the same year Cuba signed onto the Comecon, feature Castro alongside



Soviet leaders in East Germany, dressed in their respective military commander outfits and receiving welcoming receptions in Romania presented two starkly different images for the capitalist and socialist spheres of the Cold War. For the socialist world, Fidel Castro's alliance was a symbol of strength and solidarity. The small, Caribbean island had resisted US imperialism and found alliances outside the hegemonic forces of capitalism. However, to the US and the rest of the Western allies, these images were threatening. Socialism was still at large in the world and such images made it appear to be relatively successful.

With official alliances to the Eastern bloc, Cuba was economically stronger. Not only did the USSR provide Cuba with credit, also they were a guaranteed trading partner, importing sugar and nickel. However, the alliance with the Soviet Union was not enough to fully support the economy. By the mid-1970s, the government introduced some capitalist measures. Food coops and small markets emerged to alleviate some of the State's burden as the sole provider for such basic necessities (Chomsky 59). Small market-oriented solutions to economic problems helped grow the economy, but Fidel Castro remained dissatisfied with the results. Dependence on market reforms, disorganization and a lack of citizen discipline created a Cuba that Fidel Castro felt had deviated too far from the Revolution's goals and foundation (Domínguez, "Cuba in the 1980s" 121). To "rectify errors and negative tendencies", the government would change its economic and political directions (F. Castro "Closing Session of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Communist Party"). Recentralized decision-making was a critical part of the Rectification campaign's efforts. Fidel Castro dismissed three government officials in economic sectors that were not functioning as Castro felt that they should be, such as the Ministry of the Interior, which was facing an increase of crime (Domínguez, "Cuba in the 1980s" 119). New officials were to act more in line with the

Revolution's traditional goals and recommit their sectors to motivating society for increased efficiency and production.

The decision to redirect Cuban society was not only based on Castro's dissatisfaction, but economic problems for the Soviet Union became apparent during the 1980s as well. Fidel Castro saw the USSR's struggles and wanted to turn Cuba away from the once praised Soviet model. While Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev implemented measures to distance the USSR's economy from socialism and more toward capitalist measures, Fidel Castro's measures signaled a distancing from all markets, similar to the 1960s (Chomsky 61). However, Cuba had accumulated a large amount of debt since the 1960s. Low sugar prices mixed with new non-market policies would not be able to alleviate the debt situation.

As the economy was burdened with high debt and poor sugar prices, Caribbean islands surrounding Cuba were growing their tourism industries during the 1970s and 1980s. Countries such as the Bahamas and the Dominican Republic attracted a large increase in the number of tourists from the 1970s to 1980s. Approximately 42% of every dollar spent in the Caribbean was retained in the local economy (Caribbean Tourism Research and Development Centre 157). Tourists meant profit for local economies and Cuba needed this economic boost. Fidel Castro acknowledged the potential of the economic benefits of tourism, yet tourism did not seem to fit within a non-market economic realignment. However, Castro framed the economic necessity of tourism within the Rectification campaign: Cuba had "no other alternative but to use that currency, the international currency" and that tourism was the way to go about capturing it, but "[Cuba] cannot not develop tourism without this rectification process" (F. Castro "Havana PCC Assessment Meeting"). As a result, the Cuban government poured economic resources into restoring the industry to its earlier prime. In 1982, Cuba held a tourism convention that resulted

in twenty new contracts with travel agents across the world (Schwartz, *Pleasure Island* 205).

This new stimulus was short-lived, due to economic devastation caused by the dissolution of the Soviet bloc.

### **The Special Period**

In 1991, the Soviet bloc dissolved; subsequently, Cuba lost their economic lifeline. Fidel Castro's policies and changes of the 1980s had not brought Cuba the desired economic independence; thus, when the Soviet Union disbanded, Cuba lost their largest investor and main source of economic aid. From 1990 to 1993, the island experienced the most difficult times as the GDP fell 35 percent and imports shrunk 88 percent (Carranza Valdés and Valdés Paz 179). Fidel Castro declared the years of economic hardship that followed the dissolution of the Soviet bloc a "special period in peacetime", or Special Period (F. Castro "16<sup>th</sup> Workers Federation Congress").

Prior to the economic collapse, the Soviet Union provided Cuba with nearly all of their oil supply. Once the Soviet bloc disbanded, nearly every item and service on the island had to endure rationing or outright disappearance, due to the loss of an oil supplier. Public transportation and car operation became nearly impossible. In order to create some sort of mobility for people, the government imported over one million bicycles from China in 1990. Through schools and workplaces, bikes were distributed to those willing to pay for them in incremental installments over several years (C. Baker 2). A lack of oil not only effected daily mobility, but it complicated agricultural production greatly. Without fuel, machinery used on farms became useless. Animal power took the place of fuel guzzling machines to harvest crops (Steagall 98). While animal power helped to produce some agricultural products, there was no way of distributing crops from farms in the rural areas throughout the country without trucks for



transportation. Foremost, food became strictly rationed, but even with rations in place, goods were still largely missing at times. Moreover, Food production and consumption was localized. In response to the challenges of moving food from centralized state farms, the government legalized food cooperatives and farmers markets in 1993 to increase ease of access (Chomsky 156).

Continuing the process of adapting to the economic and social disturbances of the time, in 1992, the government reformed the constitution. In the new constitution, municipality governments received more power and ability to govern and provide services directly. Likewise, changes to the constitution added direct elections for seats in parliament, the ability to form nongovernmental organizations and guaranteed religious rights (Chomsky 172). Strained resources made the provision of social welfare programs difficult for the State; thus, constitutional reforms shifted some of the duties of providing for citizens away from the State.

In addition to a redraft of the constitution, Fidel Castro announced a collection of policies to restructure the economy and society, in 1993. Changes included an opening to foreign investment paired with strict austerity measures in an attempt to continue social welfare programs as best as the government could under the circumstances (Chomsky 155). Furthermore, the government legalized the US dollar. Cubans could now receive remittances from family in the US. In order to obtain the dollars on the island, the government created dollar stores with specialty items for tourists and Cubans with remittance money to purchase (Chomsky 155). Dollar stores were an alternative to the black market that had grown substantially in the beginning of the 1990s. If dollars were spent in government stores, the government could use this money to fund programs and continue the process of economic stabilization. The changes to economic policy were drastic, fast and seemingly contradictory to Castro's earlier hopes of re-

orienting Cuba toward non-market economy ideals. However, it seemed as though the government needed to sacrifice some ideals to ensure that the social programs continue as signatures of the impact of the Revolution. To attract hard currency, the government needed to



bring attention to Cuba as a desirable destination for tourists, in spite of the economic hardship.

Attracting large numbers of foreigners back into Cuba required active promotion of the island, similar to the previous advertisement strategies. One of the first major efforts to attract international attention to the tourism possibilities in Cuba was an eight-page feature in *Playboy Magazine*. The Cuban Ministry of Tourism permitted columnist Jeff Cohen and photographer Patrick

Magaud to visit on the condition that the article covered the tourist facilities available (Berg 52). Praises of warm beaches, an abundance of rum and cigars and a lively nightlife scene, alongside photos of naked women, gave no indication of the extreme economic hardship that was occurring at the time of the magazine's publication in 1991 (Cohen 77-8, 157). The article invoked the longstanding portrayals of Cuba as a sexual, exotic paradise. Seemingly, the only difference in

the 1990s was that this paradise was now distinctly forbidden for people in the US, *Playboy's* audience. In spite of the government's claims that the Revolution had "moralized" the island, the government relied on a sexualized image of the island's women to attract tourists in the Special Period. Fidel had wanted to capitalize on Cuba's "natural resources" to revive the economy, and thus, women implicitly became a part of those natural resources.

Cohen described Cuba as a "land of dark, sensuous women, who at one moment can be



proudly aloof, the next a giddy as schoolgirls".

Such ideas of Cuban women as simple and juvenile frame them as submissive to male tourists. Moreover, the photos and text of the feature reinforce the exotic other image of Cuba in the imaginations of the US. The photo of the body of a dark-skinned woman, holding a pineapple behind her back encompasses nearly every stereotype of Cuba throughout time all at once. Featuring a known tropical fruit, alongside the body of a dark and "exotic" woman feeds viewers imaginations of Cuba as the "forbidden fruit", filled with tropical, sexual fantasies, yet deemed unobtainable by conflicting political forces.

Although *Playboy's* feature had no goals

of showing the "real Cuba", many other journalistic endeavors of the 1990s aimed to shed light on the realities of daily life in the Special Period. *Playboy's* visit was unprecedented for the

Revolutionary government, but it was only the first in a series of international journalist visits to the island throughout the 1990s. After three decades of being relatively closed off from contact with foreigners, a sizable array of photo collections, documentaries and travelogues resulted from the resurgence of an international presence on the island (Dopico 463). Images of a previously little-photographed nation diffused and allowed people across the world, but particularly in the US, to gain a voyeuristic window into the island as economic distress caused it to crumble, yet endure. From the perspective of the Cuban government, the diffusion of photographs of Cuba into the international community would attract attention that had the potential to turn in to direct investments and more tourists, which ultimately meant more foreign dollars. Although money from the US would not be through investments or tourism, having the nation's attention held the possibility for harboring changed relations.

While the *Playboy* feature gained international attention by making a sexual appeal, many international photojournalists presented a different Cuba, featuring photos of the daily struggles on the



third world, socialist island. Although the two different depictions contrast, both were viable means of attracting international attention. One specific example of the increased circulation of images of Cuba as a nation caught in third world suffering was *National Geographic* photographer David Alan Harvey's book *Cuba*, published in 1999. According to the book's description, Harvey's "soul-baring photographs [that] pulse with a high spirit that is seemingly a

national trait” aim to create “ a sympathetic understanding of Cuba's contemporary way of life” (Harvey “Cuba”). However, the photos of Harvey’s collection relied on the clichéd notions of a decaying Third-World and the Revolution. The photo above shows a young boy, in his school uniform, painting amongst a collapsing building. The boy’s youth and his face turned upward toward the light peeking through give a sense of hope, constructed for first-world viewers in the US holding notions of Cuba as a land in need of rescue from communism. Romanticized rubble, 1950s cars and celebrations of the Revolution were showcased as the daily life in Cuba through Harvey’s lens. Harvey’s book was one amongst similar productions to emerge during the 1990s that aimed to show the “real Cuba” to an outside world, largely oblivious to the realities of life within the country.

Paradoxically, as foreign tourists and investors began to reenter the islands throughout the early 1990s, Cubans fled in large numbers to escape the desperation and struggle of the Special Period (Chomsky 168). Thousands of people built rafts and attempted to make the 90-mile journey from Cuba to Miami by sea, or *balseiros* as Cubans referred to them. Prior to 1994, the Cuban military returned anyone found leaving by sea back to the island and the US openly accepted those who made it to Miami and granted them refugee classification. However, in 1994, Castro declared that any who desired to leave by rafting could and would not be stopped by the Cuban government (Castro “Speech to FEEM Congress”). Following this, 34,000 people set out to the sea by raft for south Florida (Campisi 378). The governor of Florida pled to President Bill Clinton to curb the income of Cubans, because the state of Florida could not financially support the drastic influx of people. Therefore, President Clinton responded with a policy that stated any Cubans found at sea would be returned to Cuba and held on the Guantánamo military base (Chomsky 169).

As international attention grew from the spread of photos and emigrants, the 1995 Foreign Investment Act attracted further attention for its more capitalist leaning. Foreign capital could be invested through joint ventures in partnership with the Cuban government. While foreign companies could develop and own land in Cuba, they were mostly heavily taxed and the Cuban government oversaw who was hired to work in the companies. Workers' salaries were paid to the government and then the government paid the workers. Occasionally, the Cuban government would approve for foreign companies to exist freely on the island without the interference of the government, but this was uncommon and rarely approved (Travieso-Díaz and Trumbull 912-3). Opportunities for self-employment expanded with the Foreign Investment Act as well. Cubans could work in a list of qualifying jobs for self-employment that the government set forth. Many were tourism related jobs, such as owning private restaurants, *paladares*, or renting rooms in their homes for tourists, *casas particulares* (Carty 172). Outside investments and the ability for Cubans to directly provide services to tourists helped to grow the industry quickly. The spur in tourism after 1995 caused the Cuban economy to grow 2.5 percent that year (Honey 192). It appeared that Cuba was no longer only surviving, but beginning the economic recovery process, due to the opening in possibilities for tourism.

With the economy relatively more stable, in part due to the sun and sand tourism promotion, the creation of more unconventional attractions such as ecotourism gained increased attention, by the mid 1990s. Cuba's lush greenery across the island made it a competitor amongst the ecotourism destinations in the region, such as Costa Rica. The Minister of Tourism at the time, Osmany Cienfuegos, implemented a plan to partner increased tourism growth with community involvement and environmental initiatives. One of these ecotourism destinations that surfaced in the 1990s was Las Terrazas, a small community to the west of Havana. The profits



from hotels in Las Terranzas were placed in to a fund shared by the community for community development and welfare programs (Honey 183). Las Terranzas provided an example of a more responsible and sustainable type of tourism development, which benefitted a community directly. However, this style of resort took more time to establish and was not suitable for all locations on the island and never would proliferate as widely as sun and sand tourism, despite its economic benefits for the community.

### **The Aftermath of Special Period Measures**

Although tourism provided a relatively quick solution to the problems of the 1990s, social inequalities grew as a result. Resources such as food and medicine were reserved for foreign visitors to ensure their stay was pleasurable (Werlau 57). In addition, Cubans were barred from interacting with tourists or entering tourist facilities, in order to not taint their morals, according to the government (Chomsky 166). Thus, apartheid was not only informally promoted by government stores offering items too highly priced for locals, but formally institutionalized with laws keeping Cubans out of spaces of tourism. Special privileges reserved only for tourists made Cubans second class citizens to the foreigners the government wanted to appease in order to access their dollars.

Divisions between Cubans and foreigners were not only apparent, but within Cuba inequalities were increasingly problematic. Remittances threatened the economic equality that the Revolution had created and undermined the racial equality that it had allegedly created, because they only benefitted those with family outside of Cuba. Most of those who immigrated to Miami during the early 1960s were wealthy, predominantly white elites (Chomsky 159). Therefore, those receiving remittances were mainly white as well. Foreign companies had hiring preferences for white Cubans occurred as the government felt that foreign tourists would be more

comfortable with white people serving them during their stay, rather than black (Facio, Roschelle and Toro-Morn 125). Market-based solutions resulted in those working in the tourism industry, predominantly white Cubans, with access to salaries and tips in hard currency achieved wealth inexorably higher than those only working for state salaries.

Outside of official jobs with state or international tourism entities, ways of earning money in the informal tourist economy rose. With Special Period tourism came the spread of *jineterismo*. *Jineterismo* refers to illegal or semi-legal activities surrounding the procurement of money, material objects or special privileges by engaging in illegal or semi-legal activities with tourists including sexual relations (Alcázar Campos 312). The activities of *jineterismo* can range from providing directions or acting as an informal tour guide, selling classically Cuban goods to tourists, such as cigars, to providing tourists with romantic company or sex. Although men and women can engage in *jineterismo*, the term has different connotations when used in reference to either gender. As Ana Alcázar Campos detailed, *jineteras* or females who engage in the practice are typically depicted as prostitutes, while *jineteros* or males are viewed as fighters trying to survive the economic conditions. Traditionally, males' place is as providers; therefore, their engagement with *jineterismo* is regarded as doing anything possible to make money within the opening of opportunities that tourism has brought. Women who may engage in *jineterismo* are defying traditional roles of women as matriarchs in the home by using their bodies in the street to assert their position in the economic openings. Thus, resulting in the stigmatization of *jineteras* as prostitutes, even though their activities may not vary greatly from that of males (322).

Despite *jineteras'* categorization as prostitutes, post-1990s prostitution is presented as distinctly different than the prostitution that occurred before the Revolution. Once viewed as an effect of the large presence of immoral US capitalists, the resurgence of prostitution since the



Special Period has prompted the State to respond with allegations that those involved are attempting to fulfill a craving for lavish goods, influenced by consumer capitalism (Berg 51).

While the government could choose to frame the resurgence of prostitution as a moral deficiency of those tourists from capitalist countries that purchase prostitutes the blame is placed on *jineteras*. Attacking *jineteras*' lack of morality shifts blame away from the possibility of failed state policies and away from the foreign tourists, whom the State desires to attract to the island.

Gender is not the only contentious component of *jineterismo*, but race complicates the phenomenon further. Hotel hiring preferences and higher levels of remittances received by white Cubans left black Cubans struggling without the same opportunities to make money legally. As a result, more black Cubans than white found their place in the tourist economy through *jineterismo* (Garcia 181). Within Cuba, such disparity in opportunities between races has resulted in a stark racialization of *jineterismo*. For dark-skinned Cubans, particularly women, being publically seen with light-skinned people perceived as "tourists" is enough to be labeled a *jinetero/a* and questioned. For foreigners, the resurgence of sex workers on the island, particularly black women reinforces the objectification and fetishization of women in Cuba.

As *jineterismo*, prostitution and inequalities rose, changing policies sparked more political tensions between the US and Cuba resurfaced in the mid 1990s. In 1996, the Cuban military shot down two planes that flew over Cuba flown by an activist group of Cuban emigrants from Miami, Brothers to the Rescue, dropping leaflets with anti-Castro messages (Chomsky 158). The CIA had assisted the emigrants in order to spark societal unrest. In reaction, President Clinton tightened the embargo against Cuba by ending humanitarian aid, family visits and remittances and passing the Helms-Burton Act<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> The Helms-Burton Act had two major components. First, it declared that only Congress could end the Cuban embargo, not the executive branch. Secondly, it allowed Cubans, nationals and emigrants, to bring lawsuits against

US supported efforts to harbor anti-Castro sentiment on the island did not end with one failed attempt to drop pamphlets of information on Cubans though. Tourism was a major target for creating sentiment of political dissatisfaction and chaos. Throughout 1997, a dozen small bombings and attacks occurred in tourist hotels and shops in Havana (“More Cuba Bombs Target Hotels”). The CIA aided anti-Castro radicals from the Miami-based exile community to carry out the attacks in order to create fear and disrupt the growth of the tourist industry. The bombings and resulting injuries damaged the perception of Cuba as a safe destination and were possibly connected to a slight stall in growth of the industry during 1997 (Honey 187). In order to gather intelligence about the planned attacks, Castro sent five covert officers in to Miami (Chomsky 170). The officers’ true identities were discovered and they were arrested. After a lengthy trial process, they received several life sentences in prison. While two members of the Cuban Five were released prior, three of the members remained imprisoned until December of 2014.

During the duration of their imprisonment, the Cuban government used images of the Cuban Five as an example of patriotism, placing them alongside José Martí and Che Guevara in the cannon of national heroes. Billboards, such as the one to the right, are visible throughout the island, celebrating the bravery of the men and condemning the US government’s injustice. Support for the Cuban Five was not isolated to Cuba though. Nonprofit organizations emerged in the US and throughout the international community, partnering with celebrities




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foreign companies who had invested in expropriated lands to US courts (Honey 189). The additional measures threatened flourishing foreign investment that aided Cuba in recovering their economy, but the law did not seem to actually deter companies from conducting business in Cuba. Foreign companies continued to invest, specifically in the tourism industry.

like Pete Seeger and Danny Glover, in attempt to spread public awareness of the case and lobby US government for the release of the men. In 2012, the International Committee for the Freedom of the Cuban Five released for the liberation of the Cuban Five with the “Obama... Give Me Five” campaign. The following poster circulated throughout Cuba, as well as in the US, Europe



and Latin America. Clearly, the nationalism that the Cuban government used in their billboards and posters was absent from the “Obama... Give Me Five” campaign, but it showed solidarity with Cuba in confrontation with the US, even from within the US.

### **Cuba into the New Millennium**

With effective efforts to increase tourism, the Cuban economy still remained in a state of recovery by the turn of the twenty-first century, but had gained considerable stability since the crisis began. Newfound international alliances and relations

helped Cuba find a new economic path in the post-Soviet era. The election of Hugo Chávez to president of Venezuela in 1999 brought Cuba an ally in the new leader. Similar to Castro’s goals, Chávez aimed to reduce poverty, provide social welfare services and promote citizen participation. In the year 2000, Chávez and Castro developed a program in which Venezuela would sell Cuba oil at a low cost, in exchange for Cuban doctors in order to establish the free healthcare system that Chávez envisioned in his new government (Chomsky 190). The program gave Cuba a new, consistent source of oil that had vanished when the Soviet bloc collapsed, a critical step in the recovery process.

During the same year, the US House of Representatives passed the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act of 2000 (TSRA). Although diplomatic relations had not improved between the US and Cuba, the US opened the opportunity for the sale of agricultural goods and limited amounts of medicines (Adcock and Rosson 1). The US agriculture lobby pressured Congress to make an exception to the embargo against Cuba in order to allow for the sale of food as a way to open new market opportunities. Since the creation of TSRA, the US has become Cuba's largest food supplier (Adcock and Rosson 1). Imported food from the US helped to relieve some of the food shortages on the island. However, most of the US goods stocked the shelves of the government dollar stores and tourist hotels in order to bring a higher quality of service.

With more steady food and oil supply, Castro began to turn his efforts toward the process of recentralizing the Cuban economy and society. The recentralization process was a reaction to the inequalities that materialized from the market openings and jobs outside of the State. In order to recentralize society and the economy to be more state-centered, taxes were raised on the self-employed, state spending was tightened and a convertible currency replaced the US dollar (Sweig 46). Such reforms curbed the openings in the market economy and re-emphasized the State's role in the economy.

To further the processes of recentralizing Cuba back to a more traditionally socialist position, Cuba and Venezuela formed the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) in 2004. The purpose of ALBA is to encourage "fair trade, not free trade" in a unified, reciprocal manner (Burbach, Fox and Fuentes 3). The trade pact began with Cuba and Venezuela, but has since gained other members in Latin America and the Caribbean. Castro and Chávez formed ALBA in an effort to increase trade in development, without what they feel is influence and

pressure of US imperialism that exists in other regional trade agreements, like the Free Trade Area of the Americas agreement, a proposed trade treaty that aims to reduce trade restriction across the Western hemisphere (Suárez Salazar 28).

Furthering recentralization process, Castro employed new measures directly affecting the tourism industry to realign the industry more toward socialist values. In 2005, the government forbade Cubans who worked in direct contact with tourists from accepting gifts or receiving special benefits as a result of their services (Chomsky 178). Other measures included higher taxation on the self-employed and owners of small businesses. Restrictions on tourist industry occupations appeared to function as a way of taming the wealth inequalities that emerged from the opening of remittances and market opportunities, similar to the measures taken to attempt to decrease wealth inequality in the late 1990s.

Recentralization measures and the Cuba- Venezuela partnership made for the perception of a renewed socialist threat causing President George W. Bush to tighten restrictions on remittances and Cuban-American travel to visit family in 2004. Restricting remittances was a means of discontinuing aid the capital flow to the island. In response, Castro made the US dollar illegal (Kimer 24). A dual currency system emerged in its place in which one Cuban peso, or CUC, would circulate with equal value to the dollar<sup>5</sup>. Within the new system, converting US dollars to Cuban convertible pesos, a ten percent tax would be applied. Other currencies, such as the euro, would not have any tax applied to them. The new measures encouraged a more widespread income from remittances from emigrants across the world, not just concentrated to Miami and the US. The new law encouraged a more diverse range of currencies to enter the

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<sup>5</sup> The CUC has roughly the same value as the US dollar and was implemented mainly for tourists. The other currency, the CUP, is used by Cuban nationals and has significantly less value than the CUC. To prepare for phasing out the CUC, the exchange rate between the CUC and the CUP has increased from CUC 1: CUP 1 to CUP 10: CUC 1 between 2012 and 2013 (*Cuba Economy* 1).

Cuban economy from tourists across the world. Likewise, with greater restrictions on visits to Cuba from Cuban-Americans, US visitors to the island became much more infrequent.

In spite of a desire to encourage a more diverse range of tourists, by the year 2006, it appeared as though the importance of the tourism sector had declined. The arrival of foreigners peaked in 2005, and dropped 4.2 percent in 2006 and continued to drop in each subsequent year until 2008 (Enríquez 103). While Cuba had continued to grow its economy and attract foreign dollars through trade and investment, tourism became a facet of the economic landscape, not the focus. The stagnation of the tourism industry stemmed from numerous factors. According to Laura Enríquez, the government turned the focus of development away from tourism because its rehabilitative role had been filled. Lackluster services and infrastructure could not compete with other Caribbean islands offering similar standard sun and sand (103-4).

### **Raúl's Regime**

Reviving the declining tourism industry began with a historic change in government leadership in 2006. As a result of his poor health, Fidel Castro resigned from leadership and appointed his brother Raúl Castro to the presidency. In the beginning of his presidency, Raúl Castro wanted to reduce the leakages <sup>6</sup> and create a stronger agricultural sector to lessen the dependence on imports. During the initial promotion of tourism in the 1990s, Cuba did not have nearly enough agricultural production to provide for the incoming foreigners, expecting decent food service. Most food was imported in order to meet the demands of quantity and quality. Therefore, "leakages" occurred in the economy, or the government was losing money because of

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<sup>6</sup> Reducing leakages was a major part of the energy and agriculture initiatives of Raúl's first two years as president. He focused on creating reforms that addressed the "struggle for efficiency" that Cuba faced (R. Castro "Speech at the 54th Anniversary of the Attack on Moncada"). With increased efficiency, costs usage of resources would be lower. The government distributed updated appliances to reduce energy use and began a promotional campaign to encourage energy conservation (Chomsky 180).

the cost of importing food, rather than using locally produced foods (Enríquez 94). Some of the first steps he took in order to strengthen agriculture in Cuba was settling debts owed to farmers and adjusting the price of meats and milk to increase farmers' pay (Wylie 664).

In 2008, Raúl was elected to president after his acting presidency had ended. After his election to presidency, he continued to reform Cuban law. The second wave of reforms granted Cubans more freedoms. The possession and purchase of cellphones and other mobile technologies, such as video recorders, was legalized. Likewise, the tourist apartheid ended and Cubans were permitted entrance into tourist hotels and resorts (Chomsky 190). Both of these reforms were relative steps of progress in Cuban society. The reforms may appear to be major, but their real effects have been less impactful than imagined. Although Cubans may technically be permitted to access cellphones or hotels, a lack of financial means to do so prevents many from having access in reality. Therefore, apartheid continues to some degree, even though it is no longer institutionalized.

Some of Castro's largest changes occurred in 2011. Cubans could now have more full ownership of homes and cars, which allowed people to buy and sell them on a market, not through informal exchange, as it had previously been done. A small system of loans was put in place to encourage more farmers, business owners and the self-employed to grow their businesses (Wylie 664). While new opportunities exist in Cuba, many who do not receive remittances or work in tourist industry jobs, struggle to obtain fundamental commodities, such as food for their families other than the basic rationed amount. To address this problem and other issues with the wealth inequalities that circulating two currencies has caused in Cuba, in 2013, the government announced that it would unify the two currencies in the coming years. The increase was to encourage purchase of local products and increase exports, but, ultimately, the

goal is for the CUC to be eliminated from circulation. Furthermore, In the opening of the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party, Raúl Castro announced that the new market-oriented reforms were means “to update the economic and social model in order to secure the continuity and irreversibility of socialism as well as the economic development of the country and the improvement of the living standard[s]” (“Central Report”). “Updating” the model does not mean a full opening toward capitalism, as many speculate. From the perspective of the State, economic policy changes have occurred frequently to meet the moment’s demands. Markets to Cuba are continuing to open, but the State frames this as small changes in a long history of continuous

change to see fit.

Closer orientation to the capitalist world was not solely through policy though. When popular music artists Beyoncé and Jay-Z attracted the attention of those in both countries when the two traveled to the island, photos of contact between the once distant dichotomies emerged across the news in the US and Cuba. Although the travel embargo has kept Cuba legally out of reach for the majority of people in the US, Jay-Z and Beyoncé’s visit showed that travel might not be so unattainable for some. Photos circulated news sources of crowds of Cubans surrounding the two and questions of the legality of the



trip arose quickly, as US onlookers saw their pop cultural figures in an island marked as “forbidden”. The photo of Beyoncé amongst elementary school children presents a stark contrast between the capitalist and socialist world. The kids, dressed in their obligatory uniforms,



represent the standardization of socialism, whereas Beyoncé stands out amongst them with ostentatious earrings and sunglasses, representing the grandiose of the capitalist world. In the photo of the two strolling the streets of Havana, Jay-Z is adorned with straw fedora and cigar in hand, classic symbols of Cuba in the minds of tourists. While the couple's trip was fodder for bloggers and tabloids, it was reminiscent of Cuba's tourism heydays, when the wealthy would use the island as their tropical escape. Seeing celebrities as widely known as Beyoncé and Jay-Z furthers the common sentiments of desire and curiosity about Cuba in the US.

With manifestations of increased contact between the US and Cuba and continued reforms from Raúl Castro's regime, speculations of how the Cuban political, economic and social spheres will change continue. Notably, Barack Obama and Raúl Castro announced a restoration of diplomatic ties in December 2014. Part of the negotiations involved freeing the remaining three imprisoned members of the Cuban Five, in exchange for the USAID worker Alan Gross, imprisoned in Cuba for distributing telecommunications devices. The US will loosen economic restrictions on remittances and banking, as well as ease travel constraints. On Cuba's end of the negotiation, the government is said to increase Internet access and release political prisoners as identified by the US (P. Baker "U.S. to Restore Full Relations"). It is possible these negotiations could not come to fruition, due to either government's failure to meet the terms of negotiation, or changes in political power. However, the negotiation remains a significant turning point after decades of politicking.

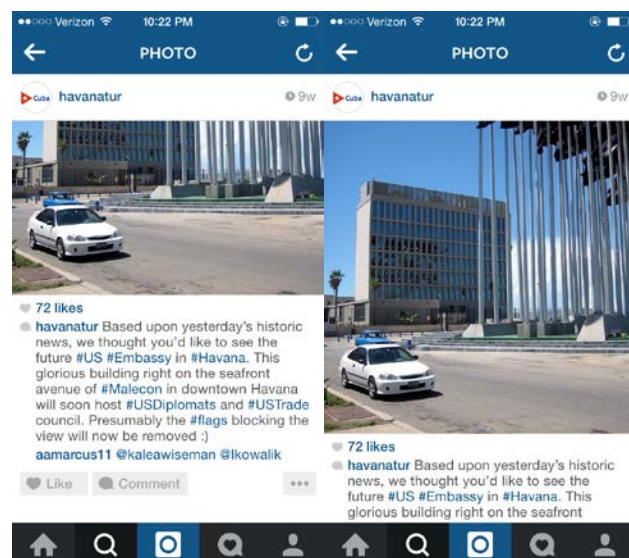
The announcement of the restored diplomacy between the two did not occur without an explosion of news coverage and political commentary from all sides of debate. Although official outlets contributed to the debate, opinion and discussion on the Internet exploded amongst journalists, public figures and everyday people. Similar to the other major moments in society,

people take to the Internet to share their thoughts, feelings and opinions on such events. Thus, the announcement of restored ties between the US and Cuba was no different. Any person with his or her own personal Cuba tale to tell could contribute to the conversation. Statements of approval, anger and excitement filled the Internet on the day of the announcement. It appeared as though images of Cuba sprung back into the public focus, reminiscent of the image propagation of the Special Period.

Those who had traveled to Cuba, posted their images in commemoration for the event or

as testament to their experiences on the island and the need for changed relations, or not. Journalist Mariana van Zeller posted the Instagram to the left, as evidence how “no one saw this coming” in Cuba. The photo shows a standard Revolutionary billboard, but the post makes public acknowledgment of the event and makes her personal contribution to the sphere of online discussion, while not necessarily adding any new or particularly original sentiment. In spite of a precarious Internet situation in Cuba, opinion from within the island made its way into the online discussion

as well. Havanatur, a travel agency of the Cuban government, applauded the turn in relations with their Instagram post of the US Interests Section in Havana, stating hope for future visits from US diplomats. As an online conversation through various Internet mediums exploded on the day of the announcement, images of Cuba flew across the Internet; however, Cubans largely remained excluded from



contributing to this conversation, as a result of the lack of web connection.

### **The Online Conversation**

As the announcement of the US-Cuba relations' deal exemplifies, the online conversation has become an increasingly important space in society since the mid 2000s. Current events and pop culture trends become more than just news one hears about. People everywhere are able to contribute with their own commentary surrounding the events. Social media is not just attractive because it gives the platform for a voice, but the ease with which others outside their network of friends and family can hear their voice furthers the desire to create content. Since 2010, more image-based social media has become a more prominent means of online contribution. The stream of photos posted to applications such as Instagram has created a "'now' that is just one temporal aspect of many" (Hochman 13). The multiplicity of "now" enables a much broader range of perspectives to join a global conversation, dependent on the ability to access the technology necessary for cultivating an online presence.

Joining the "now" places the individual user within greater collective groups. While creating an intricate portrayal of one's self in cyberspace by creating a "profile" on a multitude of sites, that same singular user can choose to virtually position themselves within groups sharing similar identities. Online, there is more freedom within identity construction. Certain constraints, like gender, race, ethnicity or age, may not have the same implications online as they do offline. If a person chooses not to reveal their demographics, then their voice and perspective exist on the webpage without outside contexts and factors influencing other readers' perceptions about the user posting. In the Internet's earlier years, profiles or activity in chat rooms gave text a greater predominance in creating the individual's online identity (Fernández Utrera 12). With text-based identities, the physical factors of identity could be largely subdued or eliminated.

However, social platforms have since concentrated more on images. Most social media or communication modes allow for a picture next to text in a user's profile. While the photos connect the corporeal aspects of identity with the user's self-constructed text, there is space for the individual to control their own image and incorporate it into their identity on their own terms, not based on societal expectations.

### **Instagram in the Online Conversation**

A popular social media used to negotiate online, image-based identities has become Instagram, a photo-sharing application only available on smartphones that emerged in 2010. It provides users with a platform to post square photos and add filters and effects that make photos appear aged. Profiles are highly personal and individualized, archiving the photos of the users' previous journeys in relation to the present. The features of Instagram allow for the user to curate their personal photos to create a specific online presentation of their identity. A person's profile becomes an extension of his or her self, despite its contrived representation.

Instagram is highly focused on the individual user, but there is a large emphasis on connectivity with the broader user community. Users can caption their photos and attach hashtags to aggregate the photos in to a larger collective amongst other photos with the same hashtag. Thus, the photos that fall under the particular hashtag create an online representation of the physical. Photos under the hashtag are continuously added, creating a virtual gallery of representations of the particular object or place.

### **Instagram and the International**

As the application's popularity grows and more images are added to these virtual galleries, many more locations in the world become visible. However, use of Instagram is highly limited to only those with smartphones and wireless Internet access. Therefore, first world foreign travelers

or expatriates post the majority of images of less developed regions of the world, steering the control over the place's online representation out of the control of nationals. A more specific example of how the identity of a nation is formed by those outside of it is Cuba. Complex international relations, a unique history and a lack of Internet access make Cuba a peculiar case in examining social media's effect on identity.

### **Cuba and the Internet Era**

Internet access in Cuba is difficult to obtain reliably and affordably. Dependable Internet access in Cuba is reserved for hotels, where people must purchase access cards. The price of an hour of Internet access is equal to a quarter of the average state salary, making access too unaffordable for the majority of people (Venegas 401). Within private residences, Internet connection is only legal for those in certain professions, such as teachers. In 2013, the government opened cyber cafes across the island in order to provide access opportunities for all people free of charge (Associated Press 1). Cyber cafes only increased access technically though. The connection and bandwidth is too unreliable to be effective, but most people are without laptops and technology to connect to wireless Internet in the first place. Although the State largely blames poor connection and irregularity on the US embargo, critics of the Cuban government from within the island and internationally blame the lack of Internet on the government's purposeful restriction and blockage of free information from the Cuban people (Mohr 1). With the announcement of restored economic ties between the US and Cuba, the future of the Internet on the island remains uncertain. It is possible that the telecommunications companies of the US could infiltrate Cuba to offer services and improve the quality of Internet connection. It is also possible that the Cuban government will prevent Internet providers from expanding into Cuba to block free information.

Despite challenges to Internet use, bloggers from various political perspectives share their personal, firsthand account of the current state of the government and society. Bloggers will receive money from abroad to purchase Internet cards in order to post their writing. However, the lack of access has implications for who the primary audience of these blogs is. The blogs are written from within Cuba and aim to show perspectives outside of state media, yet the audiences reading these blogs are predominantly people outside of Cuba, emigrants and foreigners. Some blog content does circulate on the island via USB drives, similar to other online media content, such as movies, television shows and music (Venegas 403). Contrary to the most basic conceptions of the Internet as explicitly an online, wired space, in Cuba, online content travels offline, which requires the blogger to personally diffuse their content in to the community. This does not allow for the full diversity of blogs to be accessed as recurrently as if Cubans could access Internet freely and regularly. It is much easier for the blogs to circulate internationally where readers can view any of the multitudes of sites regularly. Amongst these various blogs, online communities of other blogs from the same political ideological camps form networks. Simultaneously, the blogger has asserted their individualism by sharing their personal account, yet specifically in conjunction with other “similar” individuals. No longer does one have to assimilate in to general society, but they can choose to belong to groups or subcultures existing in cyberspace. Years of the State’s attempts to promote solidarity across the population in the name of socialism are ruptured with the Internet’s potential for people to realize his or her self as an individual.

Regardless of the separate factions amongst bloggers, the proliferation of blogs from the island indicates a desire for a space in the “now” to share their own experiences and perspectives from a place once closed to international eyes. Simultaneously, the partial reentrance of Cuba

into the global economic order compels the government to foster their own image of Cuba as untouched by time, as tourists are drawn to that which makes the island distinct: 1950s cars, urban ruins and the relics of Revolution. Such forces are in direct conflict.

### **Travel “Writing” in the Digital Age**

Technological advancement does not align with ideas of a nation “stuck in the past”. However, the online space is critical for the Cuban people to develop their own online image of life on the island. Mary Louis Pratt suggested that to make a place and its culture known to the broader world it needs “to be read, and to be readable” (3). The notion holds truth still, yet the meaning of “readable” has changed significantly. As the amount and importance of text decreases on the Internet, images take its place. Therefore, it is not producing ones’ own writing, but rather showing their own perspective based on images that have come to embody “readable” more since the rise of the Internet and social media.

Travel bloggers, the most recent form in a long history of travel writing, are able to post from within the destination, giving their followers a seemingly more intimate view of the destination than the previous sharing of photographs and posts after the trip has concluded. Hashtagging their photos with the destination’s name create an idea of the destination with these pristine and “unique” travel experiences of outsiders, even if nearly all tourist photos of the same destination emphasize similar tropes. Therefore, the image of the destination is uncontrollable, fluctuating constantly with the influence of tourists and companies trying to place the image of the place within the realms of their own individual experience. Those living in popular tourist destinations in less wealthy nations, who typically rely on tourism as an economic pillar, have significantly less input in how their city or nation is perceived by outsiders.

Not only does Instagram have an effect on the communities travelers document, but there are also implications for the tourists who use the app as a way to share their journeys as a complement or in place of the traditional travel photographs. Travel photography has historically been a means of remembering the place: documenting its peculiarities to one day look back on them and remember the experience had there. Memory is an inherent facet of Instagram that makes it so appealing to all users, but specifically tourists.

### **Instagram's Intricacies**

An aesthetic of memory is created in the photos posted through Instagram's features. Filters on Instagram are not merely a feature to alter the appearance of the photos, but they present images as memories. Similar to the way that a physical photo ages with time, Instagram automatically and digitally ages the photo to share memories with followers or other users. The filters and size of Instagrams builds fascination around any passing moment in daily life that a user chooses to capture and post because phones have made the camera constantly available. Such factors foster what Roland Barthes described as an "astonishment of *'that-has-been'*" in photographs (94). Barthes perceived that the sense of astonishment would "disappear" when photos were eventually discarded, but on social media these photos have the ability to live forever if the user chooses not to delete them or their account (94). Unlike one's own memory, the photo does not fade and distort any further with time<sup>7</sup>, because technology has the ability to preserve it indefinitely.

In this space of memory preservation, there is also an online representation of one's identity. The user curates a presentation of how they wish others to view themselves. Susan

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<sup>7</sup> Time stamps on Instagram are not given by a date in time but by how many days, months or weeks ago the photo was posted to the account. Thus, the time stamp is not fixed by a date, but it is fluid in relation to the user, similar to how a person may lose the specific dates and times of a memory, but they will remember approximate moments in their past.



Sontag theorized photographs as a representation of a person as “seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them that they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed” (Sontag 14). Although photos on social media still have the staged qualities that Sontag felt objectified the person, Instagram has ruptured this conception of photos. In daily experiences, people have begun to imagine their lives in terms of the hashtags, likes and filters they can assign to the photo of the moment. Therefore, photos are not how people “never see themselves”, but rather social media users imagine themselves through photos, as activities are carried out with the cultivation of their online identity in mind. Before a photo is taken, the person behind the camera phone imagines posting it on Instagram: what filter they will use, how they will caption and hashtag it. Thus, the user perceives the moment in terms of the memory that results before the photo is taken and the moment has passed.

Although memory may be central to Instagram, there is no natural moment, because all of the posts are a result of the posters’ thought and intention. The time taken to take a photo or write a post for social media make them inherently inorganic. Therefore, social media may convey genuine sentiment from a user; the content itself may not necessarily be authentic. Travel Instagrams feature small, borrowed glimpses of a culture to present the tourist’s experience as “authentic”. The culture of the destination is turned in to an “Other” and presented as enhancement of the individual tourist’s identity.

### **Instagram Outside of the Individual**

Not only do tourists use the culture of their destination, but also travel promoters distort the culture’s image in a similar manner. The platform is used for branding businesses, entrepreneurs and online personalities, due to the visual nature of choosing travel destinations and sharing travel stories. In the case of Cuba, the government is the full or partial owner of the

travel companies. Therefore, the State has an active role, directly or indirectly, in shaping how Cuba is presented to allure foreigners to the island. With the government's own tourism agency Havanatur's Instagram account they have full discretion over showing Cuban culture and people to anyone in the world. However, the government does not use this platform to present an image of Cuba that is different from the past or more considerate of the people and culture. Instead, women, Revolution and ruin are some of what is exploited in order to emphasize the particularities that cause outsiders to view Cuba as "trapped in time" or a "Socialist paradise". The government's role in framing Cuba may be relatively small, as they only have one official Instagram account, when compared to the thousands of photos that are published daily. However, the government's Havanatur account is the only official source on Instagram; thus they have a large stake in the framing of Cuba from within the island. Furthermore, the impact of years of portraying the island in such a way have solidified in to the imaginaries of foreigners, resulting in tourists' perpetuation of the same ideas, regardless of what the reality for Cubans may be.

### **Instagramming Cuba**

To better understand how Cuba is represented on Instagram, I have analyzed a series of posts from three different actors: tourism related entities, the Cuban government and Cubans themselves. Tourism related entities refer to tourism promotion agencies and tourists from different locations throughout the world. The Cuban government is visible on Instagram from their Havanatur account. Cuban Instagram users most frequently are musicians that have gained international success and dissident bloggers who use photos as a primary means of communicating or secondary to reinforce their other media. For the purpose of this study, I will be focusing on the dissidents, because their content is more relevant.

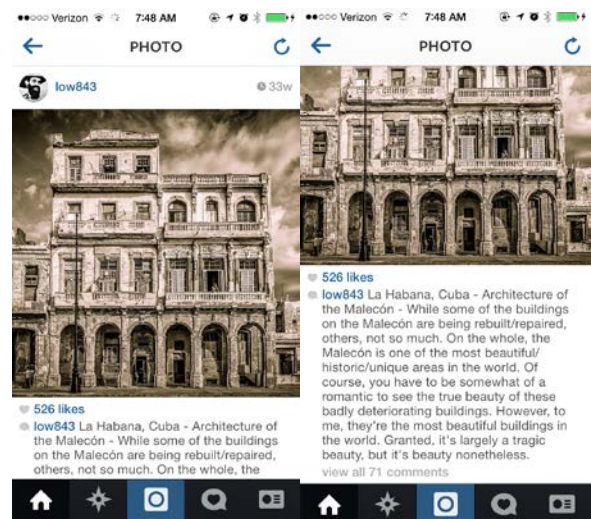
After collecting more than three hundred posts over the course of six months, certain trends became evident. The series of Instagrams in this analysis are not unique cases, but are representative of such trends. I found all the collected posts by searching different hashtags like “#cuba” and “#havana”. Therefore, these series are also mimetic of the collective nature of Instagram. While one singular post may claim to represent Cuba, there are thousands more under the same hashtag that contribute to this collective image. In the following series of photos, I have recreated how posts may reinforce the same image of what the hashtag claims that they exemplify. On the other hand, two posts may contradict one another, disturbing the continuity of the hashtag, yet this is simply the nature of the online “conversation”, a space allegedly inclusive of a horde of perspectives. As the posts will show, three different sets of actors all claim to be representing Cuba, but how “Cuba” manifests for each can be quite different. The posts shed light on contemporary issues on the island and a continuation of the historical trajectory of how Cuba has been presented for and by outsiders and the State, at the same time.

### **The Eroticized Edifice**

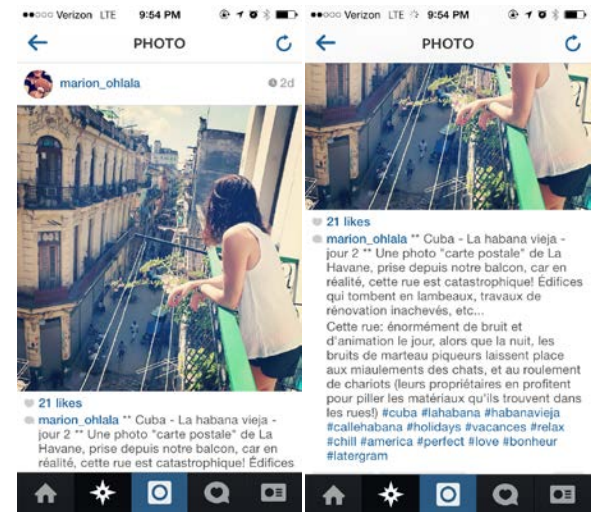
One of the most prominent trends of Cuba-related posts was photos of the island’s architecture. Architecture is a critical piece of forming an image of a place that one has never experienced. The buildings and urban landscape of a place give the city its defining characteristics, or the “character” that tourists imagine and travel to see in person. On Instagram, buildings become a fixture of showing other followers and friends at home what the place “really” looks like. Typically, photos seen in the media highlight buildings perceived as “beautiful”. Many places with histories of colonization will give emphasis to the classic architecture styles of the colonizer. However, alongside emphasis on the classically beautiful, there is an obsession with the distressed: decaying buildings, rubble and neglected-looking

scenes. Such themes in photos are not a new development, but the fascination has spread on the Internet. Blogger James Griffioen is credited with creating the phrase “ruin porn” in reference to photos of decaying buildings and urban distress that appear in his recent images of Detroit as it struggles through economic hardship (Portel 41). However, Ruin Porn has quickly become a widespread Internet phenomena appearing frequently on Instagram. The state of much of the infrastructure in Cuba makes it an ideal place for tourists to document Ruin Porn abroad. The two sets of Instagram posts above show buildings in Havana that has the allure of colonial architecture, yet they are weathered and in poor condition.

The first post is by low843, or Michael Petit a photographer from the US who frequently travels to Cuba. Many of his posts are accompanied with longer captions that detail some aspect of Cuban life and culture from his perspective. His post is of a deteriorated building along Havana’s malecón. He emphasizes the “tragic beauty” of the building, which one needs “to be somewhat of a romantic” to understand. There could be people living or working within this unsafe, declining building. However, this is not important to the foreign eyes that fetishize the building’s damages into being a positive factor that gives the city an aesthetic appeal. Viewing the building as having “tragic beauty” displays a sense of yearning for that which has been lost. The detail and style of architecture has been lost and now the tourist expresses desire for that, even while it crumbles.



The second post further exhibits the foreigners' obsession with the distress of Cuba. Captioned in French, it reads "a 'post card' view of Havana, taken from our balcony, because in reality this street is catastrophic! Buildings falling into rubble, unfinished renovations, etc. This street: tremendous noise & activity during the day, while at night the sounds of hammers and pick-axes yield to the meowing of cats



and the rolling wheels of shopping carts, whose owners take advantage of the situation to plunder building materials they find in the streets!” While the building is not as much of the focus in this post, the caption clearly demonstrates a fixation with Cuba’s unstable infrastructure. In the first sentence, the tourist simultaneously presents Havana as a “post-card” and as “catastrophic”. The caption details the attempts at construction and renovation in Havana, yet none of those details come through in the photo. Therefore, the situation is idealized and made to appear beautiful, even though the reality is unpleasant. Moreover, by making herself the central feature of the photo, places the tourist right in the catastrophe. The tourist looks out over a balcony onto the scene, showing that she is giving a firsthand account of the distress to her followers. Despite clearly feeling that the infrastructure situation in Cuba is in a poor state, she made the post anyway, further confirming the preoccupation with the ruin in Cuba.



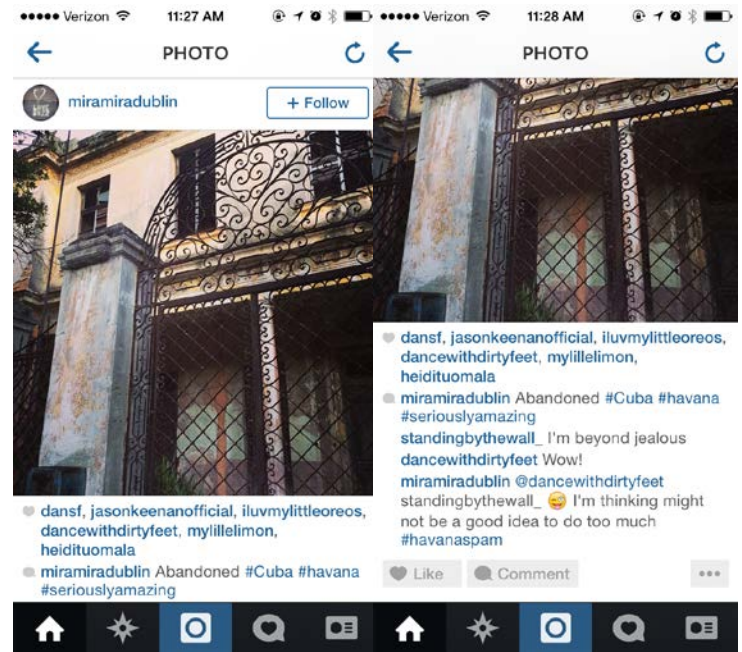
Yusnaby Pérez<sup>8</sup> posted a photo and caption that includes the perspective of nationals into the fascination with ruin. In the post to the left, Pérez accompanies a photo of tourists passing the rubble of a former building with a caption saying “the tourist said ‘Wow! What beautiful ruins!’ referring to the old house of my neighbor Norma”. Foremost, Pérez draws attention to the fact that tourists do gaze upon declining buildings with a romanticism that distorts the reality of the situation. Instead of focusing on the reasons the buildings may be

the way that they are, the distress itself is made beautiful. Likewise, Pérez’s post brings in a human element to the decay. There are people living in and amongst the ruin that are erased when tourists invoke connotations of beauty in reference to the ruin. When a Cuban posts decay, it is no longer ruin porn, but it is a showcase of their everyday realities. Thus, the romance and beauty are stripped from the image. Tourists may attempt to show the raw reality with their photos, but their position as an outsider frequently keeps these images to a surface level of understanding of a situation.

Architecture as a whole has significance in tourism photography, but depending on the specific location, tourists may choose to highlight what the features are that make their particular destination “unique”. This is not limited to tourists, but natives may also showcase what building features set their home apart from others’. The posts above demonstrate the difference in significance between tourists and natives of one common feature of Cuban architecture, gated buildings and homes.

<sup>8</sup> Yusnaby Pérez is a dissident blogger whose primary medium are photos. He has a website, but typically posts his observations of Cuban life through his Instagram account. Many of his posts surround around drawing comparisons between the realities for people in Venezuela and Cuba.

Miramiradublin, the Instagram account of an online specialty gift shop based in Dublin, created the Instagram post to the left showing one of Havana's gated buildings, calling it "abandoned" and "#seriouslyamazing". The tourist behind the post is most likely uncertain whether or not the building is truly abandoned or not. Regardless of whether or not the building is abandoned or not, the tourist projects a romanticized idea of Havana as a treasure forbidden by years of socialist policies and resulting economic embargo.



Yoani Sánchez's post features a gated house, yet her caption compares the gates of the urban landscape to the struggles that Cubans face in daily life on the island. Sánchez uses a



picture of a gated building to make a visual metaphor to the bars that are "constantly present" on the island. The "bars" of Cuba could refer to the challenges of obtaining goods, government restrictions and other obstacles that Sánchez's writing frequently highlights. The post plays on the visual clichés of Cuba featuring these buildings with gates that arise frequently in showing the uniqueness of Cuba. However, Sánchez turns this common mark of presenting Cuba to show a less romantic

Yoani Sánchez is Cuba's most famous dissident blogger. She has gained international attention for her blog commenting on contemporary Cuban life *Generación Y* that she has been writing since 2007. The Cuban government has made attempts to end the blog and censor Sánchez. Primarily, she is a writer, but uses her Instagram to visually reinforce the themes of her blog.



perspective of the island, but rather the realities of the struggle the people in Cuba confront regularly.

In tourist photography, the inhabitants of the destination can be erased: the representation of a place is reduced only to the static image of buildings and streets without people living amongst them. Likewise, specific characteristics of the architecture that are common become representational of what the supposedly place looks like and become powerful forces in shaping how outsiders imagine it. Miramiradublin's post demonstrates the way in which tourists imagine cities as an entity on their own, independent of the inhabitants of them. The "abandoned" gated building gives Cuba a mystique that attracted the tourist and compelled them to share the post to show the "Real Cuba" to followers, friends and other Instagram users. Allegedly abandoned buildings perpetuate the illusory socialist paradise idea that foreigners hold of Cuba. Sánchez's post presents a direct confrontation with the typical formation of ideas surrounding the island. The gated building showcases the classically Cuban, yet re-appropriates this image to symbolize the realities of the Cuban present, not to tell of a historical trajectory, a perspective from which architecture is commonly viewed. As opposed to the tourists presentation of the buildings as its own entity, Sánchez's post sheds light on those that live amongst the buildings, while playing on the common visual clichés.

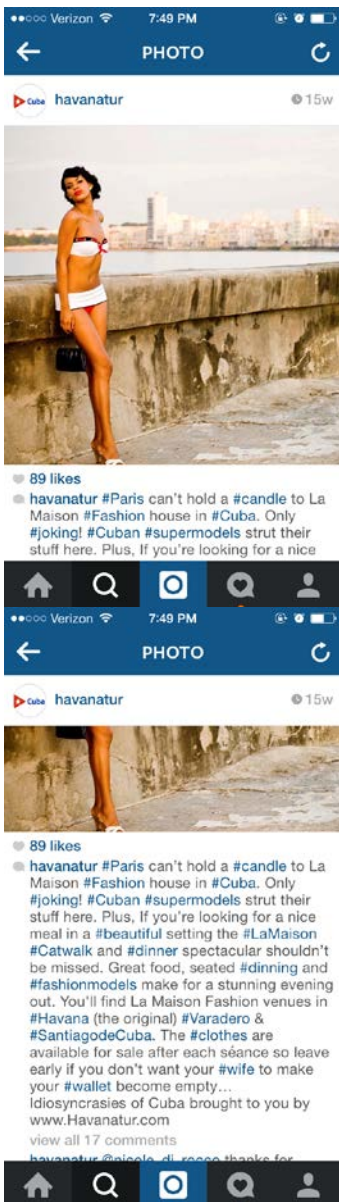
### **The People of Paradise**

After the architecture and physical structures of a place, those that inhabit it make up another facet of the destination's landscape, whether that is only in the imaginary of the tourist, or through their actual experience in travel. Unsurprisingly, Instagram does not lack for images of the people of Cuba. In spite of dubious Internet connection for most in Cuba, Havanatur, a tourism promotion agency owned by the government, has a broad online presence and an active



Instagram account. Internet access is a major struggle for most on the island, the government is able to have an Instagram account that posts frequently. Havanatur's Instagram is evidence that access to the Internet could be more possible for the masses and government control is more visible. The posts on the government's account advertise different features or the "idiosyncracies of Cuba" to promote the island to the world in a competitive market of Caribbean destinations. In the post above to the right, Havanatur advertises a Cuban fashion house, La Maison, by featuring one of the models. Modeling in Cuba only emerged in the 1990s, but using women to promote the island has a long history ("Top Cuban Models").

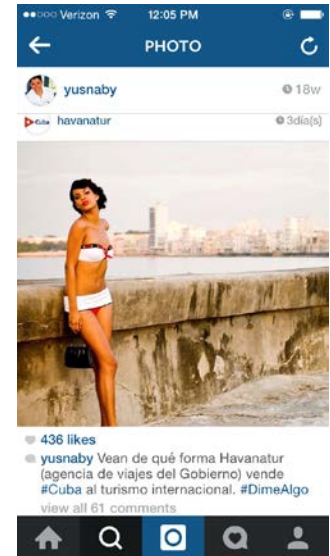
Along Havana's seaside esplanade, the *malecón*, the model poses with closed-off body language that leaves her enigmatic, yet her pouted lips and tilted head invite tourists to explore. It becomes even more obvious that this female model is being sexually objectified to sell the island in the caption included with the photo. Foremost, it is apparent that the post is geared toward men with the caption's comment "you don't want your #wife to make your #wallet become empty". While male tourists may come with wives, Havanatur aims to create a lust for Cuban women. Moreover, Havanatur begins their caption with a joke comparing the Cuban fashion scene to that of Paris. Referencing Paris is reminiscent of the advertisements of the 1950s stating Havana was "Paris of the Western Hemisphere". Comparing Havana to Paris elevates the city to fit into European tastes and sensibilities traditionally viewed as of a higher class. The idea of a more sophisticated European woman contrasts with the exotic appeal of dark-



skinned women, both images of Cuban women have been used previously in selling the sex appeal of the island.

The government's strategic use of women is not without the knowledge of Cubans though. Dissident photoblogger, Yusnaby Pérez, draws attention to the Havanatur post by reposting the same picture on his own account. His caption states "look at how Havanatur sells Cuba to international tourism". Similar to many of his posts, this one is a clear critique of the government. Due to the fact that mostly those outside of Cuba are viewing this post on Instagram, its purpose is not to gain awareness amongst Cubans for how the government sells the island, but rather it is a means of gaining international attention for the situation. However, international attention remains in niche audiences, who may be seeking out the type of perspective and information that Pérez gives. For the time being, the government's official accounts have more weight in shaping foreign opinion, because they are more geared specifically to tourists and the larger audience is comprised of tourists.

While bloggers like Pérez try to draw attention to the government's selling of women, tourists continue to put forth the same lustful imagery of Cuba. To the right is a post by a male tourist from Russia. The photo is a snapshot of the sidewalks of Cienfuegos, Cuba featuring a large tourist buses, the colonial architecture and, directly in the center, two women walking down the street taken from behind. As the tourist tries to capture this scene of "daily life" in Cuba, the two women are made into objects



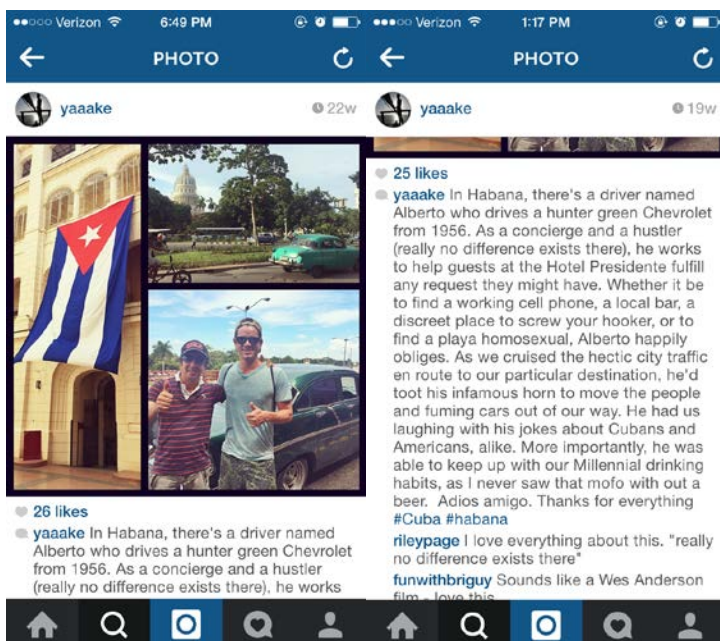
and are not even aware of it. Hashtagged with “#girls” and “#cubangirls”, it becomes clear that the women are the subjects of the photo. While the posts a user makes are primarily meant for their followers, the hashtags increase the visibility of the photos within the larger Instagram community. Therefore, this tourist’s friends at home in Russia are able to have a clear picture of the “girls” that Cuba is famous for and, likewise, anyone searching #cubangirls could see this post and have a glance at them as well.

The back-view of the women projects a voyeuristic gaze onto the women in which they are not people, but objects of the city’s landscape. With no choice whether to be photographed or not, the women’s bodies are objectified. These bodies have been projected as defining aspects of Cuba from a history of media using the Cuban female body. Thus, the women are objects and the tourist’s photo is justified. Such objectification and voyeurism is compounded on Instagram as female bodies are reduced to being hashtag for any person to search and view online.

Together, the posts present women in a different manner yet perpetuate the same notions of Cuba as a haven for tourist fantasies. Havantur is straightforward with their use of sex to sell Cuba. A direct focus on the women replaces the voyeuristic gaze, as the government agency places the model on display. She is clearly in focus, inviting male tourists to fantasize about the

lust waiting for them in Cuba. The tourist’s post makes evident the trajectory of associating Cuban women with sex.

The three photos stitched together in the user “yaaake’s”, an American tourist from Los Angeles, Instagram post show visual clichés of the Cuban flag and the Capitol building with



one photo of the tourist with his hotel concierge. Grouping the man's photo with the typical representations of Cuba place the man as one of the attractions. With the extensive caption describing the man and the tourist's experience with him, making the local an attraction becomes more blatant. Yaaake describes how the local "happily obliges" with fulfilling the tourist's requests and how he jokes and drinks with the tourists. There is no real substance about the local included, but rather only details of how he is of use to the tourist. Furthermore, yaaake emphasizes the availability of sex on the island. His caption claims that Alberto knows of "discreet place[s] to screw your hooker" or where to find a "playa homosexual". From these details, it is apparent that the local knows tourists' desires and is readily available to assist the tourist in fulfilling them. To the tourist, the local is only a fixture in their trip, not a person living out his or her life in their own nation, not another person's destination.

Moreover, this particular post gives an example of the tourist's attempt at portraying his own authenticity on his account. With phrases such as "really no difference exists there" in reference to defining his concierge's role, and "hectic city traffic" to describe the landscape, the tourist demonstrates an "intimate" knowledge of a place most of the post's viewers have never been. The tourist relays these characteristics of Cuba as knowledge for users to learn about the place from his post, because he has been there and seen it for himself, and they have not. Thus, the tourist is legitimized through his tales of his "authentic" experience. The photos show the tourist about the city, but not showing any unusual experience. His caption gives a firsthand account that portrays him as savvy, even if none of what he tells of is accurate.





The second tourist “Panthergram’s” post aesthetically appears different from the first. The images appear less like a tourist snapshot and more like a photograph. Likewise the caption text is much less dense, yet the post contains just as much subtext that reveals insight into the complexities of the relations between tourists and the locals of their destination. In an aging building, an elderly local man leans against a tattered poster of Che. He does not appear to be giving any sense of emotion toward the poster or in general, yet panthergram chose to claim this is “the man who loved Che”. The distress of the building and the man’s apparent lack of expression combined with the darkness of the room the man stands in effuse a feeling of stagnation. Alluding to capitalist ideas of a nation mired by Revolution, the post portrays the man as faithful to the government, in spite of his standing amongst disquietude. Regardless of the photographed local’s actual opinions or experiences, he is reduced to “the man who loved Che” because he is Cuban he is automatically equated with the Revolution. The figures and ideas surrounding the Revolution are thus projected onto the people of Cuba, because they are citizens under the Revolutionary government.



Although both of these posts show how tourists project their previously held notions about Cuba onto nationals, acting “Cuban” or performing the way in which tourists expect them to provides a means of earning money in the new tourist economy. In this way, the ideas that tourists have had before entering the island are reaffirmed, not on a factual basis, but on a performative one. Yoani Sánchez posted an image of two Afro-Cuban women in traditional dresses with tourists observing the women. Around the city, people will frequently dress in this traditional clothing, such as the rumba dresses evident in

Sánchez's photo in order to make money from tourist photo opportunities. Following the trajectory of featuring exoticized, dark-skinned women in advertisements, tourists come to Cuba with ideas of black females as the Other (Roland 159). Cuban women know this and use the assumption as an opportunity to perform this identity in order to make money. Moreover, the government's Havanatur account acknowledges Cubans' outright performance like Sánchez, but in a much different direction. The following post from Havanatur is an up-close view of two Afro-Cuban women dressed in the traditional outfits. The government does not try to keep this performance covert, but rather offers these women for tourist photos, as they "are always on hand whenever needed to spice up your shot!". Tourists are still consuming Cubans in this context, but Cuban women have made themselves available for consumption by performing their identity and the State is complicit in the promotion of such an image.

Despite aesthetic variance between the tourist posts, both place Cubans into the backdrop of the island. From the earliest booms of tourism, the Cuban people have been marketed as one facet of Cuba worth experiencing, similar to the other sights and attractions that may bring foreign tourists. Amongst tourist posts, locals are not people living in the place, but they are features of it, attractions to be seen and experienced. Instagram provides a new space for these ideas about Cubans to manifest, but the notions themselves are not new. Promoting the Cuban people has a history and is only perpetuated by Instagram.

### The Cuban Mystique



Cuba's unique position as a continued stronghold of socialism gives it certain, automatic connotations, especially in the minds of people in the US. Whether the socialist government in Cuba is vilified or sentimentalized, there is a clear obsession with its features that juxtapose it to the US and the rest of the capitalist world. Cars from the 1950s have become an image nearly automatically equated with Cuba in the minds of many foreigners. The old cars are an element particular to Cuba, symbolizing the island's "survival" of socialism and the "stuck in time" idea

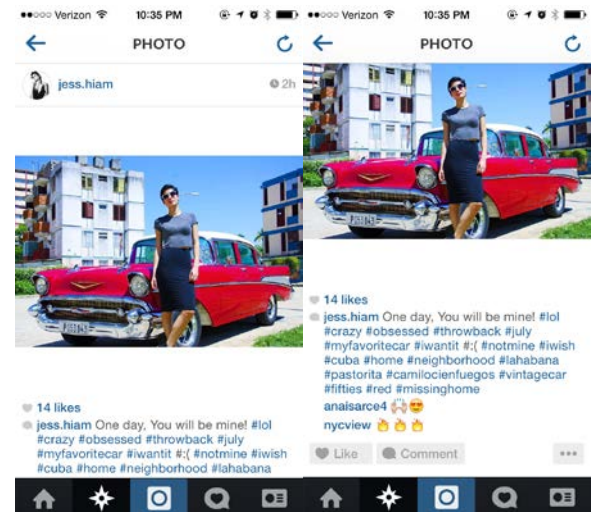


of the island that outsiders project. Therefore, photos of the cars are expected of tourists due to their place as a visual symbol of the island. Unsurprisingly, Instagram contains an overabundance of tourists' posts of cars, proving the 1950s car's status as a symbol of Cuba. Posting a photo of a classic car then becomes a sign of proof that one has traveled to Cuba. The tourist is legitimized by posting a car photo because the photo gives first-hand evidence that the cars are everywhere in Cuba.

Moreover, this concrete evidence of the island's reliance on the cars reifies outsider ideas of Cuba, particularly for those in the US. The post to the left shows men working to repair a car right on the street. While the tourist has captured the "irresistible" car photo, they have also captured a less romantic vision of the car. The hashtag "#streetlife" suggests that the inconveniences brought on by frequent car breakdowns are a part of the everyday routine for Cubans. Thus, capitalist assumptions that socialism harbors inefficiency and bars people from progress achieved by economics are proven. Furthermore, the hashtag "#intrepidtravel" implies the tourist has an inside perspective into the world of 1950s

cars that is commonly portrayed throughout popular media, but not seen as often from the first-person perspective. By seeing a photo of the car in distress taken by a tourist, imaginings of the island as unable to progress with time as a result of a socialist government are legitimized, as the tourist has provided evidence with a photo.

Despite the way that cars act as proof of the inferiority of socialism from the perspective of tourists and onlookers in capitalist nations, the same visual cliché is used to express amazement and yearning. Contrasting with images of the cars in distress, more glamorous photos of the cars in mint condition are just as common amongst tourist posts. The post by travel blogger

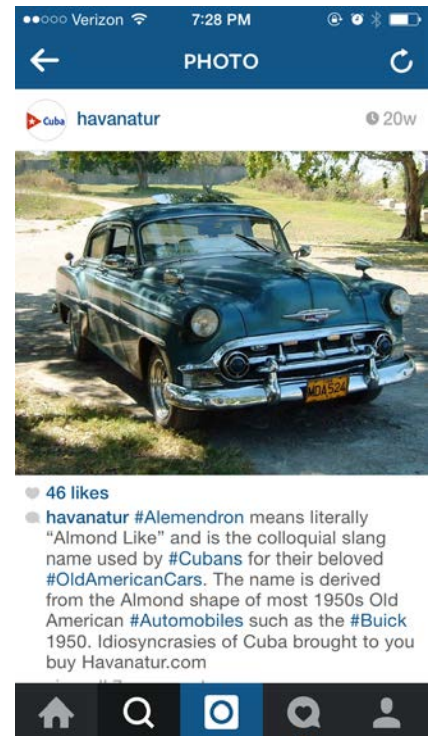


jess.hiam features the Instagrammer in front of a bright and shining 1950s Chevrolet, paired with the caption “One day, you will be mine!” and hashtags such as “#obsessed” and “#iwantit”.

Desire is communicated blatantly in the post, but the desire is in nostalgia for what has passed. Technology has brought cars in the US far from what a Chevrolet in the 1950s, yet this woman claims to still want the old. Likewise, the desire expressed in the post is an expression of capitalist consumption. It is not enough to simply appreciate the car; instead, there is an underlying impulse to want to own the car, which reflects the emphasis of consuming in capitalist society. Such a projection of capitalist desires onto socialist Cuba, the reason for the use of the cars, presents another way in which tourists and outsiders fetishize Cuba.



Fully aware of the outside's nostalgic obsession, the old cars are a point of promotion for the government tourism agency. Havanatur has many posts showing the cars in the landscape, but the post above features one of the cars directly. The caption details the common slang used in reference to the car. By infusing the colloquial language, the government emphasizes the way in which the cars are an innocuous part of daily life in Cuba, not a rarity or specialty. For the tourist, these cars are a main attraction: evidence of the island's endurance despite embargo. Havanatur knows how to play on these ideas, even if they present the government and socialism in a negative light, because people are lured to the island regardless. On one hand the Revolutionary government and socialism are threatening and negative, yet accompanying facets of them, such as 1950s Chevrolets are romanticized nostalgia to be desired.



The difference in economic systems brings the idea of traveling to “get away” a new meaning. Much of the time, tourists do not come to Cuba only for beaches, which is more typical of other islands in the region. Instead, the presence of socialism is a main attraction for foreigners. People come to Cuba to experience the remaining socialist nation “before it ends”, an assumption that it will inevitably return to capitalism (Babb 54). Cuba is distinctly set apart from other tourist destinations in the region and the world. Therefore, evidence of the presence of socialism and revolution become fixations for tourists. Murals, billboards and posters of Cuban revolutionary heroes and slogans are present throughout the island in place of the advertisements that infiltrate every aspect of life in Western capitalist countries. This contrast magnifies the

outsiders' fixation on the revolutionary propaganda, as they perceive the murals and billboards as shocking or unsettling, yet attractive.

Photos of promotion of the Revolution function similar to that of the 1950s cars: they provide evidence of authenticity. Those viewing a tourist's post will see that Cuba truly does have the government propaganda. For many outsiders, this confirms previously held notions about socialism, the Revolution and the Cuban government. The following tourist post captures one billboard with the island's motto. The caption highlights an apparent feeling of disgust and shock for the motto. Despite negative sentiment, the propaganda still remains a point of fixation. The tourist feels compelled to capture the billboard or mural and share the photo with their friends and followers, in spite of their alleged disgust. Such a contradiction highlights the attraction in that which is perceived as shocking or aberrant. For the Cuban government, such sentiments of outsiders are positive. They perpetuate the mystique of socialism, which makes Cuba unique and attractive to tourists. Paradoxically, foreigners travel to Cuba despite having negative ideas about the Revolutionary government. Tourists desire to witness socialism at work, if not only to confirm their own beliefs about the government and its policies.

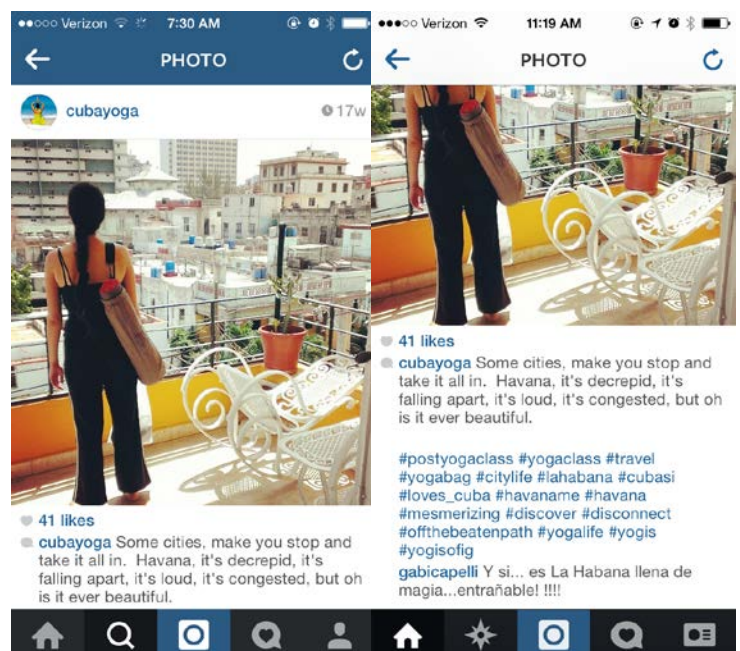




The other post presents a different perspective on the propaganda. From Pérez's account, he has captured a tourist posing as if she is kissing Fidel. His sarcastic comment calling the tourist a "schizophrenic" highlights the absurdity of the tourist's actions, as well as tourists' fixation on the propaganda. For Cubans, the propaganda is just a part of the daily landscape; however, tourists see it as different and distinct from their home, giving it significance as a signature of Cuba. From this post, it is not possible to tell if the tourist in the photo actually has positive opinions of Fidel and the Revolution or if the photo was only a

joke. Nonetheless, the fact that the tourist took the time to pose with the mural in such a manner clearly demonstrates that she distinctly noticed it and felt it deserved special attention. Pérez's post displays how the propaganda has a greater effect on outsiders rather than Cubans, another way in which that socialism and the Revolution are attractions that bring tourists to Cuba, not just ideologies of the government.

Tourists come to Cuba for their encounter with socialism and Revolution, yet they are still in Cuba for a vacation; thus, relaxation is at the forefront, which appears contradictory to the desires to experience socialism. The Instagram account of Mhai Yoga, a yoga resort center in Playas del Este, Cuba provides an example of this contradiction in wanting to see what makes Cuba unique, yet wanting the more typical tourist experience. Mhai Yoga's



official website advertises the opportunity to “be a part of the Cuban Yoga Movement”, while “tast[ing] real Cuban food and its delicious organic produce” during a visit to the resort’s beachside villas (“Mhai Yoga Retreat”). One of the posts on the resort’s Instagram account is the photo to the right: a woman with her yoga mat bag, gazing from a balcony out into the streets of Havana. While the photo is meant to entice tourists to their resort, it contradictorily describes the city as “decrepit[t]”, “congested” and “falling apart”, as it makes the claim that the city’s beauty lies in these qualities. In such a post, elements of the Manichean allegory are present. The caption marks the city with characteristics that the First World marks as negative or unnatural, yet turns these negativities into obsession; thus, fetishizing the place. Moreover, the description offers no history or reasoning for why Havana may be in such a state, but it simply exists that way and its existence is for the viewing pleasure and enjoyment of tourists from developed countries (JanMohamed 21-2).

When examined alongside Mhai Yoga’s Instagram, the post to the left by Yoani Sánchez



illuminates one of the paradoxes of tourism in Cuba. With a picture of two men standing casually in the street, Sánchez captions the post telling of a joke amongst Cubans that they have invented yoga by the patience needed to wait for everything. Cuba’s socialist economy makes the State the central distributor for goods and services, and since the 1990s the systems of distribution suffered a lack of efficiency (Carter 133). Therefore, receiving goods and services from the Cuban state can require a significant amount of waiting. Sánchez aims to portray how vast parts of the average day in Cuba consist of waiting. This vastly contrasts with the yoga that tourists partake in at resorts, representing one of

the dichotomies in the Cuban tourism industry in general, but more specifically in “specialty” tourism like eco tourism and yoga resorts that emerged in the 1990s, but has grown more since the 2000s.

Much of the appeal of vacations, specifically resort centers, lies in the notion that one will be waited on. During a tourist’s time away from their daily stresses at home, they will be served meals, cleaned up after and provided with extra accommodation. As the Mhai Yoga resort provides these resources to foreigners in Cuba, Sánchez’s post shows a population of locals in the same nation waiting to be served in order to meet the basic needs of life, not for extra amenities. The lack of ability of the State to provide adequate resources is evident in the urban landscape: the “decrepit[t], “falling apart” buildings. While the dissident’s Instagram acknowledges this deficiency, the resort’s post turns such deficiency into romance. Part of the allure of vacation is escape and seeing a place unlike one’s own home. Thus, the presence of dilapidation appeals to the tourist’s desires for escape. On the same island that tourists flock to “get away” from home and relax with their yoga practice, there is a different kind of “yoga” occurring.

Individually, the posts shown are representative of the user who posted them, but on social media, images do not exist statically. They are in contact with others of the same subject, connected by hashtags and sharing. What the collective image of what they claim to represent is constantly changing. For Cubans, national representation of their identity is left to their government, as it has been historically, and dissident bloggers, who are trying to enter Cuban voices into the conversation. These two groups are polarized and in contention with one another, leaving a myriad of other perspectives excluded. An abundance of tourists posting photos of Cuba overwhelms users from within. Therefore, outsiders have most control in representing the

island, but their posts typically fall in line with images of Cuba from tourism marketing from the industry's golden ages and the efforts since the Special Period.

## **Conclusion**

The posts in this investigation are only a sample of what Instagram holds to exemplify Cuba, yet the series shown are representative of common streams of posts that put forth the same ideas and themes. Social media participation is dependent on an array of factors, but at its foundation, it is dependent on access to the technologies. As technology continues to develop and becomes more affordable and accessible for people throughout the world, the impact for those excluded from social media and the Internet will become increasingly palpable.

With the potential for changed relations between the United States and Cuba, international eyes will continue to gaze upon the island with curiosity about the contemporary socio-political landscape and questions about the future. Similar to how most news and opinion on current events is shared, questions surrounding Cuba and its future will continue to appear online. The Cuban government claims to lack the infrastructure for better connection while some point to outright restriction as the reason for Cubans' difficulty in accessing the Internet. If Cubans remain excluded from online spaces, conversations surrounding the island will continue to thrive without a more full perspective of nationals.

The government and foreigners' control over the image of Cuba is not a new phenomenon. Certain features of Cuba have been highlighted and exaggerated in order to sell the island to outsiders throughout history. The people are one aspect that received an abundance of attention from the tourism industry, making nationals an attraction to be seen on the island. From early travel writings of the imperialist period, contact with the native people was detailed in much of the literature. Advertisements from the previous highpoints of tourism showcased

Cubans' genial nature and easygoing lifestyle. More specifically, women have been historically presented as readily accessible for sexual exploitation. Previous advertisements and magazine features blatantly centered on women's sexual availability, while today's tourists have accepted these and present a more voyeuristic view of the women in Cuba. Nonetheless, the fetishization of the women has continued as part of the temptation of traveling to Cuba. Tourism agencies from within and outside of Cuba, as well as the Cuban government have all had a role in creating such ideas of the Cuban people; Instagram proves how the messages of those entities in history have become engrained in the minds of foreigners. Tourists now revert to thinking of Cubans as fun loving, affable and available for consumption, as a result of years of the promotion of such conceptions.

Moreover, a history of negative relations between the US and Cuban governments have made is a place of obsession, whether it is romanticized as a socialist haven or snubbed as a destructive communist dictatorship. Aware of the two conflicting perceptions, the government brings more visibility to the presence of old cars and dated technology that remain on the island because of embargo and socialist policies. By emphasizing these features, Cuba sets itself apart as unique from other nations, which contributes to the outsiders' fixation with it, regardless of how the fascination is framed. Therefore, the Cuban government uses the revolutionary history and ideology to promote tourism, although it is publically claimed to be sacred.

While the promotion of Cuba is remained largely similar, how the images are presented has changed greatly. Technology has brought more proliferation and visibility of a wider range of images, even if they are not necessarily more diverse. It is likely that images will only gain more importance on the Internet. Without the presence of photos of Cuba from the perspective of nationals, there will be a serious lack of information to help form the collective image. Instagram



has the potential to be useful in connecting people throughout the world to show their perspectives from their homelands. When tourists, the government and businesses override the image from nationals, Instagram has just as much power in propelling an entirely false projection of the place. Increased emphasis on images means that Cubans have a unique opportunity to present photographic “evidence” of their realities, outside of what State rhetoric claims it to be. However, if nationals cannot make their images visible, they have no potential for real impact. State and outsider images will continue to reign, as they currently do.

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