

CUBAN SOCIALISM: A MODEL OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

By

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ABSTRACT

As the only developed country with a mostly publicly-owned and centrally-planned economy, sociological study of Cuba offers profound opportunities for theoretical and practical consideration of the viability of that model. Hitherto unseen levels of support for socialism among Americans and a renewed European Left in the wake of the Great Recession and worsening human-caused climate change provide a context of renewed interest. Cuba's geographic location, high standard of living, ethnic/racial diversity, and relative cultural liberalism, further, make it the uniquely best-suited counterexample to the "end of history" model of (neo)liberal democratic consensus. While limited, partial analyses of the Cuban system abound, attempts to synthesize this information and meaningfully address its unique development of the Marxist-Leninist single-party state as a legitimate form of society are nearly nonexistent. I will argue that the system's survival and significant adaptations from its past as a Soviet client state warrant a second look as a viable alternative type of social organization. A review and synthesis of the social scientific literature in addition to notions of democracy and attempts to quantify utilitarian function like Happy Planet Index demonstrates that, more so than untested models, the Cuban one presents a viable if very imperfect example of equitable sustainability.

Introduction: Cuba's Place in Social Scientific and Political Theory and in the History of 'Actually-Existing Socialism'

In the last country that could, by the pre-1991 definition, still be accurately described a socialist, the widely unexpected success of the Communist Party and Castro-led government of the island is of profound social theoretical and political importance. The implications of the undeniable material successes of the country, both before and after the Special Period, in providing a uniquely environmentally sustainable society with higher life expectancy and lower infant mortality than our own and several other unique and even more profoundly significant distinctions in the areas of education, racial/ethnic and gender equity, and in creating a truly democratic one-party socialism, have not received sufficient political or scientific attention.

My personal drama aside (having studied on the island and tried personally to inject the increasingly relevant form of Marxism-Leninism being practiced in Cuba into the American political debate at least on the left), I have been disappointed by the relative lack of comparative analyses and literature reviews written from a socialist, especially from a materialist (real) Marxist, even Marxist-Leninist (although I will spare the readers much engagement with Lenin's theories and those nominally written in the spirit thereof given the political climate at this time, or perhaps just in this country) theoretical orientation on the profoundly unique and therefore obviously theoretically relevant Cuban case. None of my classmates endeavored to address this important and perhaps fleeting, giving the return of prostitution, some degree of racial economic inequity, etc. that we have seen in light of the relatively limited neoliberalization of the economy effected by necessity after all the main trading partners—most significantly the Soviets, who offered very favorable trade terms for partially geopolitical reasons, leading an economic boom. Even before this aid became a significant driving factor, Cuba's elimination of widespread

illiteracy in some six months. It did contribute to the eventual surpassing of the United States' lifetime expectancy and achieving profoundly lower infant mortality, especially among Black and Mulatto infants, achieving the highest reading and math scores in the region among third graders, eliminating performance gaps between the country and the city, etc. But these achievements were quickly regained without a superpower friend, with a superpower 90 miles away blockading the small nation.

Instead, most American academics have limited themselves to Cuban issues less important from a theoretical, geopolitical, and indeed philosophical, moral, perspective, such an analysis on Santeria or African-inspired dance or the relatively very uncommon drug use among adolescents, not that these are not areas that are worthy of—that demand, rather—study. But this reflects a more basic problem whereby, while increasingly financializing their final, perhaps perfected stage of capitalist domination (imperialism, of course)—they obfuscate with the lapdog media issues of existential importance.

When the WWF declared in 2011 that Cuba was the only country successfully pursuing sustainable development (i.e. both environmentally and politically, providing a high standard of living for its citizens), (Cabello 2012:573), that scholars didn't ask whether this proven solution to an existential crisis were our only hope and come to the obvious conclusion that something closer to the Cuban model may need to be implemented worldwide to avoid completely catastrophic environmental devastation was disappointing. Maybe capital will come up with cold fusion (and then sell it for just less than petroleum) and save itself, but probably not, so this reflects either the cultural and economic domination of the bourgeoisie of the previously more-independent academe or some other degeneration in the imaginations of our social scientists. That such a groundbreaking finding wasn't on CNN goes without saying.

Less surprising, but due in part to said failure of academe to fairly study Cuba as an alternative model of society to anywhere near the degree they did the much more imperfect Soviet Union, has been the political failure of the American Left to engage, if not embrace, the Cuban experience. Despite the recent resurgence of the fight for racial justice in the United States, and Jafari Sincalire Allen's claim that "the vision of Cuba has become more salient and more complex as the position of blacks in the United States becomes more fraught with contradictions," (2009:53), debate about what, at least as far as racial equity is concerned, represents *the* proven solution in most regards has effectively been stifled by the Right or just pathetically forgotten by the Left.

Malcolm X called Fidel the only white person he ever liked (Allen 2009). Fidel was greeted as a hero when he visited Harlem, wearing military fatigues, and Blacks were extremely enthusiastic about Cuba during the more radical years of the Civil Rights Movement (Marable 1999:6), 1984. Why don't Black Lives Matter activists, especially considering the recent diplomatic successes and destigmatization of socialism (thanks in large part to Bernie Sanders' campaign) making Cuba if anything politically much less toxic than it was when most of the Black Left strongly embraced it, address the country 90 miles from our shore with that has largely solved all these problems?

"Under the current internal conditions," claims Boaventura de Sousa Santos, "Cuba is no longer a viable solution for the left. The problems it faces, while not insurmountable, will be very difficult to solve. If they are solved within a socialist framework, however, Cuba will be a different Cuba, bringing about a different kind of socialism from the one that failed in the twentieth century and thereby contributing to a renovation of the left that is urgently needed. To bring to fulfillment the ferment of transformation contained in its current political moment, *Cuba*

will need the solidarity of left individuals, organizations, and movements worldwide" [emphasis added] (2009:43). He's certainly right about the last part, and the continued failure doesn't make a lot of sense except as a Cold War vestige or force of habit, as Cuba continues to thrive and capitalism continues to fail. And he's right that Cuba, like every other country in the world, faces significant problems. Having achieved high human development (data isn't available for the more meaningful inequality-adjusted HDI, but one can probably safely assume Cuba would succeed there similarly to its top 10 Happy Planet Index rating) with a sustainable environmental footprint, though, its problems are perhaps not existential, while every other countries' are.

Cuba was never a solution, anyway. It's a country, a nation. Its approach to justice and equity for women, Afro-Cubans, its food rationing system, its educational system starting with the Literacy Campaign—in short, both its ideals and its concrete policy achievements, insofar those can ever be quite exactly replicated from one country by another—however, are *increasingly* not only viable but urgent solutions for the Left. I will even argue that, especially in the context of a rapidly warming world that will need to be able to respond at least as effectively as Cuba did to its loss of oil to that difficulty and similar ones, even Cuba's commitment to Marxism-Leninism led by a vanguard Communist Party certainly must continue to be the model for Cuba for the foreseeable future, and at least elements of it may be helpful for other developed countries as well. Certainly nobody is calling for the conceit of "Cubanism" or "Fidelism" as a concept.

The United States in particular therefore should serve as a point of reference when evaluating the successes and failures of Cuban socialism from as objective, utilitarian a view as possible. This must consider the history and the future, within its actual political reality, the country faced and faces, some theoretical analysis of the Marxism that still officially (largely

genuinely) guides the government and, to a lesser but still impressive degree, the people, the measures currently available by which to judge the utilitarian effectiveness of governments as objectively as possible, including again the Happy Planet Index, HDI, GNI, as well as more specific measures of health and educational success and of racial/ethnic, gender, sexuality, etc. equity.

In the U.S., theft of the working lives—of the very lifeblood via, for instance, their totally unique, even among developing countries, denial of sick and vacation and paid maternity leave—of the billions of workers who, within the country and around the world, fund their yachts and, to a yet much greater extent, their trust funds, hedge funds, Swiss bank accounts, etc., however, make the traditional comparison irrelevant. That is, of GDP per capita, of how hedonistic, in the colloquial sense, the average obese, depressed, unemployed American can be in comparison to Cuba's status as a middle-income country, especially considering that it would take several earths for everyone to live as Americans do, assuming population growth were to freeze (McDonald 2015). This is obfuscating the great scientific, political, philosophical, theoretical, sentimental, ultimately material, of course, battle that must be fought between something close to socialism, such as what is currently practiced today, and the model much closer to unfettered Wild, Wild West Capitalism that has so successfully been convinced to be the only option by the eunuch "social" "democrats" in Europe.

This is true also in Europe, where, despite their more reasonable foreign relations with Cuba, the intellectual Left completely abandoned all pretense of fairness when the Soviet camp collapsed, for reasons obviously completely unrelated to the viability—the necessity, now that Cuba has adopted the model to be sustainable, and far more democratic—of central planning or public ownership. For that reason, any discussion of, say, the French political showdown that

existed between Hollande and Sarkozy is a farce. Even the French Communist Party has moved to the right of where the Socialists were a generation ago, so really they should be called the Socialists and the Socialists the Liberal Democrats. Perhaps some kind of truth in advertising law, rather than academe, would be a better hope for forcing a reality-based dialogue and evidence-based policy. At the political level, an honest study of the literature would compel social scientists, at least those great majority who believe the anthropomorphic model of global warming to become more involved in advocating the (proven!) “radical alternative” of much lower consumption (of useless trinkets--Not only should the world-saving, humanity-saving potential of a global shift to the “market socialism” with which Cuba is succeeding (in comparison to the failure of the European “social market” whereby the roles of public and private property are backwards) be a study of intense study, it should be a topic of intense public debate, protest, and agitation. Some movement toward this can be seen with the recent successes in Portugal, and of Sinn Fein in Ireland, Podemos in Spain, Syriza in Greece (despite their recent retreats), and the election of Jeremy Corbyn in the U.K., where in each case the academic left has used the facts to help discredit the so-called center left. This provides a glimmer of hope, but even the aforementioned three parties and Corbynistas have yet to show enthusiasm for embracing the public ownership (and possible reduction of consumption) necessary to actually confront capital and move toward a sustainable socialism.

For this reason, with the reasonable governance of the developed world literally a life-or-death matter with entire sovereign (island) nations slated to be wiped off the map (causing yet more refugee “crises” to countries with birth rates near 1 per woman and a rapidly aging workforce) in the coming generation (Davenport 2015), is the last chance for honest social scientists truly committed to evidence-based policymaking via a completely objective analysis of

a truly left-wing economic model. Cuba is a model for developed countries, with Vietnam, the second-to-top performer in the Happy Planet Index (2016), a potentially more relevant model for developing countries. The largely less successful Soviet economic model, for instance, even with the Brezhnev Stagnation caused by military spending over 15 percent, never had a formal economic recession. During the Great Depression, thousands of Americans, many Black, emigrated there for its high economic growth and perceived lower level of racism (Simmons 2014). The profoundly-flawed Soviet Union averaged higher annual GDP growth than the U.S. until the Brezhnev Era. The popular conclusion that the inherent inferiority of a centrally-planned, publicly owned economy was the reason for the collapse of the USSR and Eastern European socialism is completely unsupported. If there were any inkling of truth to this assertion, it would not have taken until nearly 20 years later for the post-Soviet states to recover their combined 1991 GDP (with Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan still significantly poorer) in an area that, again, had not had a recession and therefore presumably would be much wealthier today were it not for legalized looting of the entire region that occurred.

Why, then, do nearly all mainstream commentators' analyses of the Cuban socialist experiment (and not a few academics') demand a fire sale of public assets and quick abandonment of the world-class, best-in-the-hemisphere (in some areas) education (which does require proportional higher spending, much to the rage and fear of the Right, lest parents and students find out a fair society is possible) and healthcare?

Perhaps the ignorance or a conscious decision to ignore this profound opportunity for groundbreaking theory should not be surprising. Elements of the European Left at times were dogmatically positive in their evaluation of the USSR. But how many Western social scientists

discussed the fact that Soviet bookstores were so much more widespread, had more books, and checked out each book on average six times as often as their Italian counterpart? (Boffa 1959:96) American data seems to be unavailable but presumably is closer to the Italian standard, or, anecdotally, maybe even much lower. And, in most ways, the animosity has been bizarrely more enduring with the Cubans. Maybe it is the lack of any other almost-fully socialist rival. Maybe it is the proximity. Maybe it is out fear that scholars may one day have the courage or insight to develop a cogent theory to explain just why the “Shock Doctrine” approach that had such an unanimously unsuccessful track record was so strongly pushed. But that would require admitting the international character of class struggle continues.

From a materialist point of view—to say nothing of Marxism, but I will address the forgotten value of other aspects of its utility to expose capitalism, and, to a lesser degree, to propose some guidelines for creating a socialist society.

Keep in mind, Marx wrote, at most, a couple dozen pages about, for instance, the Paris Commune, and about what the socialist transition to classless, stateless communism would look like, with very little “actually-existent socialism” upon which to base his theories. Therefore, to blame Marx for misinterpretation of vaguely defined concepts like “dictatorship of the proletariat,” important to the valuable Leninist practical adaptation of Marxism to an actual, existent, successful revolution, in the largest country by area and one of hundreds of millions of people, no less. One must concede this indisputable fact before declaring Marxism the blueprint for the transition from socialism to communism when Marx had so very little to say on the subject and Lenin was so incredibly successful—even if not at effecting a classless, stateless world communism by any means, but at least in moving in that direction with far fewer drastic missteps than any of those who followed him.

The Khrushchev era was economically fairly successful (more so than the rival Americans!) and internationally very much so until Cuban Missile Crisis used, mostly illegitimately, as the reason for his ouster by the neo-Stalinis, culturally conservative Brezhnev clique. It, too, is deserving of reassessment in the wake of the total failure of global capitalism since 2008. Brezhnev's cultural (and economic) conservatism was policy that, in the face of the necessity to temper opportunist, abjectly harmful nationalism that Gorbachev would proceed to so seriously misunderstand, did nothing but fetishize blue jeans for Soviet citizens.

One famous anecdote tells of Khrushchev visiting a very abstract, perhaps cubist, modern art exhibition. He was disgusted, having developed quite a taste for, or at least fidelity to, socialist realism like all the other leaders of his cohort. However, the exhibition was not closed even a minute earlier than originally planned, despite the leader of the party's distaste. Many artists attended his sparsely-advertised (thanks to the pathetic mediocrity of Brezhnev) funeral and wept at the lost decade of a level of artistic freedom rivaling or surpassing the West (Boffa 1963). Presumably, such a response to an art exhibition by President Obama very well might lead to its early closure. I mention this to paint a more accurate picture of what 'actually existing socialism' was, and to emphasize the culpability of cultural conservatism and imperialism by the Russians (and opportunism by some fascist elements in the SSRs that in every Central Asian case continue to hold power today with worse repression and without the social welfare) for the collapse of the USSR.

Cuba has similar concerns about capitalist cultural diseases, discussed in greater detail later, but has been able to much more effectively adapt to the inherent pressures of global cultural hegemony and direct attempts by the U.S. at sabotage, including propaganda and at times through acts of abject terrorism against civilians. Given the geographic proximity, family

ties, etc., Cuba could never have hoped to isolate its citizens from American culture as the Soviets did. The Soviets were incredibly foolish to do so. More bands like Kino and fewer military parades would have been good for Soviet socialism. Perhaps the Cuban Communist Party might have tried during the worst years of blindly following the Soviets' lead to really insulate the country if it were further from the U.S., so this might have been quite fortunate. For the Cuban people, it has served both as a temptation toward consumerism but also a warning. They can get bootleg copies of all the best American TV for free or cheap, anyway. Who needs Netflix when it comes along with police shootings of unarmed Black kids? That seems to be the line of thinking, at least, particularly among Afro-Cubans. Many Cubans are as aware of America's uniquely brutal class and race problems, and are afraid of the white Miami Cubans nasty intentions (de la Fuente 2007).

This provides yet another reason that this unique society deserves, in fact, more study than the Soviets. Not only have they taken the inherent superiority in education, health, poverty and crime reduction, and equity of a mostly publicly-owned economy while avoiding the issues with cultural conservatism and nationalism, but they have added to that much greater levels of grassroots (and even some liberal, representative with the Assembly of People's Power) democracy, environmentalism, and a much greater commitment to feminism and anti-racism, in a now proudly-spoken form that represents the Marxist theory of intersectionalism applied. The hollow identity politics of the American left, again, completely bastardize the explicitly Marxist nature of intersectionalism, at least as originally described by Collins (2000) and Acker (2004; Foster 2012).

There was, however, damage done by the failures of the USSR on the Cuban development of socialism, given the realities of their unequal, if hardly neo-colonial, relationship:

“Cuba could not replace or dispense with the Soviet Union. Unlike the US, the Soviet Union's influence was not based on the direct ownership of Cuba's productive resources, on equity interest in enterprises. This was an important reason for Cuba's greater relative autonomy from the USSR than from the US. On many occasions Havana and Moscow coalesced, at times differences arose. The USSR enjoyed a varying capacity to enforce policy changes on the Cuban government. If one general evaluation of the relationship could be made it would be this: in the trade-offs between Havana and Moscow, the Cubans were able to attain their objectives on many occasions by utilizing Soviet aid; the price they paid was to compromise their independence and damage the possibility of a transition to a communist mode of production. *Growing dependence on the USSR led Cuba to adopt a bureaucratic and authoritarian political and economic structure. Divisions between mental and manual labor, between party and masses were widened.*” [emphasis added] (Tsokhas 1980:319).

The loss of the Soviet Camp, then, despite the decade of extreme hardship it brought, thanks in large part to attempt to force capitalism on the Cuban people by hunger, lack of medicine, etc. through the strengthened blockade, might have been a good thing of the most successful socialist economy hitherto. Although the USSR would have been a very different place had it survived as the Union of Sovereign States, the divisions—classes, really—that the Soviet system encouraged with its extreme bureaucraticism and obsession with party privileges might have, as the relationship almost surely would have continued to be at least a strong one, prevented Cuba from moving away from the excessively top-down model from which they continue to distance themselves. Perhaps more importantly, the loss of Soviet oil, though far from feeling “special” at the time, combined with the embargo, really did provide a special opportunity for a nation committed to socialism to bring itself back to a high standard of living and even surpass it surprisingly quickly in a completely environmentally sustainable way.

The damage of the “possibility of a transition to [communism]” is far beyond the scope of this paper, but that Cuba still aspires to this possibility, and arguably has come closer than has any other country, is of great political and theoretical importance. Even if other countries have had less private property, the grassroots successes and race and gender successes are likely more important in the long-term feasibility of a transition from socialism than the relatively easy elimination of the small enterprise that does currently need to exist.

“The history of Cuban-Soviet relations is one of transition from independence to integration within a Soviet dominated sphere of influence,” adds Tshokas. “In the early 1970s the Soviet Union emerged as the dominant political force in Cuba. By 1973 the Cuban economy had been securely subordinated to the Soviet economy. Also, in the domain of ideology Cuba had come to support the Soviet line on revolutionary strategy and ‘socialist’ diplomacy, and had abandoned the ‘Cuban road.’” (1980).

But this greatly understates the degree to which Cuba, despite its economic reliance on the USSR, maintained perhaps the most independent, and surely the most genuinely internationalist, foreign policy of the Soviet-aligned countries. Given its economic dependence, this required courage and national unity. Although largely assumed by Americans to be Soviet-directed, Cuba’s successful interventions in Angola, for instance, were almost entirely independent (other than that Soviet military hardware purchased at very discounted rates were used), and gave it an outsized influence. While no longer the case militarily, Cuba’s internationalism continues to give it an incredibly outsized role in the world. The obvious link between its unique economic system and the use of moral incentives that allowed Cuba to fight these wars without popular discontentment (compared to, say, the Soviets’ horrible morale in Afghanistan or our own in Vietnam). The efforts to create a “new man” were successful enough,

at least, that risking one's life to liberate an African nation without even the obvious geopolitical significance of, again, say, Afghanistan to the Soviets, was seen as a great honor in Cuba (Kapcia 2008).

Said spirit of internationalism, perhaps another variable by which a political system's success should be evaluated (it probably actually hurts a country's HDI) continues with "medical diplomacy," the oft-overlooked aspect of Cuba's foreign policy whereby various elements of Cuba's world-class health care system—i.e., medical education and training, medical supplies and equipment, vaccinations, epidemic control, research, and long- and short-term placement of willing doctors (Feinsilver 2003:591)—are donated to or exchanged with other countries. The massive investment Cuba has made to improve health in the developing world, for instance, has provided Cuba with important symbolic capital (Feinsilver 2003:590, 594). This was justified considering that this program started in 1963 despite the country's own lack of doctors (thanks in part to emigration) at the time and that, by the mid-1980s, "Cuba had more doctors working abroad ... than [the World Health Organization]" (Feinsilver 2003:591). In 1990, there were literally well over one hundred times more Cubans doing international aid work than Americans per capita, and they were generally much better trained; Cuba also outclassed China and its Soviet Bloc allies in this area (Feinsilver 2003:592-594). The latter's aid in particular tended to consist of a few advisors, old military equipment, and largely nominal support presumably meant to a significant degree to appease the Soviets.

Many on the Right complain that this is a dirty trick meant to cover up Cuba's failings at home. This reflects only on their depressing inability to even imagine anything but total, consuming selfishness. Certainly, very, very few Americans know of this, and I doubt even many Europeans or those outside the countries directly helped do, so the fact that a country of such

modest means is willing to sacrifice so much for those in greater need is of great political philosophical question and raises the specter of an entirely different type of global order and provides a vision for how a community of freely-associated (in contrast to the tendency for the Russians to revert to imperialistic tendencies) socialist countries. The current political scientific theory of “national interest” is something scholars and laypeople should have the courage and creativity to look beyond, and Cuba once again provides a unique opportunity to help one to do so.

In addition to questions of policy and the implications of the racial and gender equity achieved in Cuba, its continued success should revitalize the debate that was prematurely ended with the collapse of the USSR for reasons unrelated to the legitimacy of a more materialist view of human rights—the idea that it is more important that one be “free” from homelessness and hunger than be “free” to pay lower and lower wages: “With independence those Third World countries that adopted socialism, such as Cuba, reinterpreted Marxism within the context of their particular societies. The mutuality of rights and obligations and the state's responsibility for fulfilling the basic needs of man/woman such as food, housing and health care are the substance of rights in contrast to the West's emphasis on individual civil and political rights” (Pollis 1981).

Slavery, Capitalism, and Socialism

The U.S. and Cuba were among the last countries to abolish slavery, and this ominous distinction (as well as their fairly similar demographics, histories, cultural similarities, and geography) makes comparison between the two countries late transition from slavery as an

integral part of capitalism to racial inequity as an integral part of capitalism to, in one case, racial equity as a defining accomplishment of Cuban socialism.

Demographics are, for obvious reasons, a defining material factor in class struggle. Whites were the minority in Cuba from 1841 to 1861 (Chomsky, Carr, and Smorkaloff 2003:37; de la Fuente 1998). Similarly, for parts of the 18th and 19th century, Blacks were a majority in South Carolina and other southern states. The demographics today of the two countries were affected profoundly as fear of their slaves getting their just revenge caused them to make a strong effort to change this ratio. The Haitian Revolution, in particular, terrified the American and Cuban bourgeoisies (Chomsky 1998:4-5, 10). It also effectively expanded the conception of human rights, particularly for the Black working class (Knight 2012).

To understand the importance of slavery in the development of American and Cuban capitalism, one must first acknowledge that it was an integral part thereof, and not an anachronism. In Cuba in 1868, 1912, and 1933—and in the United States, if with less success, with Nat Turner’s Rebellion, among other slave revolts—“local expressions of a world-historical process” (1991:324) elucidated the integral nature of slavery to the development of modern global neoliberal capitalism and remain central to a materialist conception of racial inequity and therefore inequality because of the enormous, lasting effect of slavery on the capitalist world economy, and in particular on the relations of production.

Cuban slavery was arguably worse, strengthening the evidence that slavery was and still is an inevitable part of capitalism and that only socialism can eradicate it entirely from a society. Cuba has come so much closer to ethnic/racial equity (and, therefore, equality) than the U.S. in every conceivable metric that such a basic difference in the basic structure of these countries’ political economies must explain the difference. Before the “example of a milder treatment of the

Negro by foreign residents in Cuba,” some ten percent of Cuban slaves died annually (Wurdemann 2003:40). Fertility rates were usually low (de la Fuente 1995:135-136; Wurdemann 2003:40), much lower than in the U.S., where slave-breeding and improving living conditions from slaves were required by colonial slavery’s transformation from the “pedestal” of capital accumulation to a “dispensable form of labor depending on its competitiveness in the world market for survival.”

Again, slavery was no anachronism but rather an integral *part of* the growth of global capitalism. Slaves bore more resemblance to proletarians than did other workers of the day, and slavery gave “a ready apparatus with which to preconfigure capitalist production and accumulation” (McMichael 1991:326-327). This theory provides an airtight theoretical framework by which to understand resurgence of slavery as wage-labor spread throughout the globe. McMichael explains that in capitalism, “Capital integrates various labor systems via a common value relation ... we should conceptualize them as local expressions of a world-historical process” (1991:324). An understanding of the relationship between slavery and capitalism is prerequisite to the accurate materialist concept of racial inequality by the enormous and continued effect of slavery on the relations of African-Americans to the means of production, and to white workers. The near elimination of racial inequality in Cuba after just a generation of socialism—and still, with some exceptions that can all be traced directly to the return of private property—on the other hand, demonstrates the moral superiority of this system, at least by the moral philosophy most people espouse in public.

Partly due to the expulsion of mostly Haitian “illegal” immigrants in the 30s (de la Fuente 1995:144), nearly three-quarters of Cubans were white in 1943 (de la Fuente 1995:135-136). This was caused also by lower fertility rates and worse mortality amongst Blacks and that

young Blacks had fought to free the nation from the Spanish yoke disproportionate to their numbers, which meant the baby boom that followed the war was, other than in Oriente, “a basically white phenomenon” (de la Fuente 1995:137).

However, after 1943 the percentage of Cuba that was White decreased, as Black fertility (but still mortality) became higher than whites, which continued throughout the 50s and then after the Revolution until 1981 (de la Fuente 1995:139). “The baby boom reflects the optimism and confidence generated by the revolution in the population *and this suggests that confidence in a better future was felt with particular intensity by black and mulattoes, beneficiaries of the redistribution measures promoted by the government after 1959*” [emphasis added] (de la Fuente 1995:141). The mortality gap had actually *worsened* during the approximately thirty years prior to 1959. It was rapidly eliminated, while the continued dominance of private property, even with piecemeal improvements (and regressions) to the welfare state here and there and, in the United States, affirmative action (that didn’t exist in Cuba until very recently, to address the dangers brought by private property and the tourist sector). During the 80s, Cuba had reduced the difference in life expectancy to a bit less than a year, while it was 6 to 7 times higher in both Brazil and the U.S. (de la Fuente 1995:143; 2007:68). The unique amount of equity (and very high human development in absolute terms, too, despite a uniquely difficult economic situation) provided by the Revolution to Afro-Cubans by its socialist, class orientation vindicates a Marxist understanding of the sociology of ethnicity and reaffirms the theoretical importance of Cuba to said study and its political importance to Black struggle for equality elsewhere. The wealthy United States, in particular, could presumably be pressured to catch up by its inferiority on this metric, among many others.

It also raises the controversial question of how racist Cuba was before the revolution. Sympathetic commentators have obvious political and theoretical motives to exaggerate the degree to which Cuba was a racist society, perhaps even worse than American society in that regard. Those on the Right have perhaps stronger incentives to downplay the amount of racism and racial inequality that existed on the island prior to the triumph of the revolution in order to weaken the sledgehammer argument for Cuban socialism as a legitimate alternative model, especially given the current state of the American political conversations wherein racial inequality is increasingly a subject of great importance on the Left. Arguably, if often for entirely the wrong reasons and missing the point, i.e. class struggle, entirely, it represents the single most important variable in determining the legitimacy of a polity in the currently dominant paradigm of American progressive thought, especially among the young. So, with millennials moving sharply to the left economically with majority opposition to capitalism, the unique success of the Cuban system in eliminating structural racism becomes nearly as important an argument for its validity as a subject of social scientific study and also as a model for a post-petroleum, post-racial, feminist society.

When Fidel Castro proclaimed, in 1966, “We believe that the problem of discrimination has an economic content and basis appropriate to a class society in which man is exploited by man ... Discrimination disappeared when class privileges disappeared” (de la Fuente 1995:132-133), he was proven mostly right. Given the reductivist Marxist orthodoxy imported from the USSR that stifled Cuban socialism during the Cold War, affirmative action, let alone admitting there could be racism or racial inequity in a socialist country was taboo. So, the American solution of occasionally loud complaints resulting in Band-Aids over the gaping racial wound capitalism (remembering that slavery was necessary for capitalism’s success) created in

American society like, again, affirmative action or, more recently, minor criminal justice reform, was obviously not the source of the world-leading degree of racial equity in Cuba.

To be clear, although the Revolution “has eradicated the most important aspects of inequality” from a previously very racist society, it has not completed this process (Casal 1979; de la Fuente 1995:133). Housing issues, remittances, the growing private sector, and in particular the tourist industry, discussed at greater length below, import racism and inequality into Cuba where its socialist economy would otherwise be wiping out the last vestiges thereof.

Again, it is important to remember that, while debate exists over just how bad it was, the literature does confirm that racial inequality had been increasing in Cuba before the revolution. Part of a more general proletarianization, the Great Depression affected blacks more severely, and capitalism would continue to increase the levels of racial/ethnic inequality in Cuba until 1959 (de la Fuente 1995:159-160), as it inherently does.

Ultimately, though, it is important for modern, intersectional study of the validity of the Cuban model as an alternative model of democracy, of political economic organization, etc. to appreciate the deep commitment to Marxism that has distinguished Cuban socialism. This also represents fidelity to Collins’ original Marxist definition of intersectionality. Joan Acker, importantly, denounces the identitarian nature of much modern application of “intersectionalism,” (Foster 2012), and this is highly relevant when considering the lessons of the country that has been most successful in actually effecting these ideals.

Specific proof of the direct responsibility of the elimination of private property for the elimination of racial inequity is hard to deny. Again, no race-specific policies were initiated until a recent general proclamation that women, youth, and Blacks and Mulattoes should get priority

promotion to the highest levels of government and Communist Party membership, whose geriatric nature and the initially fairly white nature of the small number of men who fought with the Castros and Che and Cienfuegos make this one of the last bastions of inequality. In employment otherwise, areas in which many Americans certainly seem to believe minorities to be less capable have long seen proportional representation despite no affirmative action. Blacks and mulattoes represent a proportional number of doctors, medical workers generally, professors, teachers, managers, lawyers, etc. Unemployment, virtually nonexistent, naturally doesn't differ significantly by race/ethnicity (de la Fuente 1995, 1998, 2007). The contrast with the American employment situation is stark and profound (theoretically, politically, morally), and the current Black Lives Matter movement and allied organizations should take note.

They might also be interested in Jafari Allen's description of the relatively quite friendly relations between young Black men and the police in Cuba, where slavery existed even later than in the U.S. "In Cuba, we 'talked back' to the police, attempted to cajole, shame, or playfully tease these young men who could easily be our cousins" (2009:60). The Cuban and American political economies needed to diverge dramatically for "race relations" to likewise have diverged so dramatically from the very similar, capitalist realities of both countries in 1959.

Laying the Foundations for Socialism: Cuba's Early Colonial History

It didn't happen overnight. With its 1940 constitution, Cuba "found in citizenship ... the possibility of equality in which racial, *class*, and political differences could be erased" [emphasis added] (Bobes 2005:62). Batista, of course, was a Mullato, and modern American sensibilities would celebrate his status as the first Black Cuban president! However, the total control of

Cuba's means of production by the white, mostly American ruling class, made the government totally illegitimate and made the revolution inevitable.

The 1912 "Race War:" Class Struggle, Racialized

The *guerra de las razas*, as it was penned at the time and is still, even in Cuba, often interpreted as such, was neither a war nor an essentially racial conflict. In Oriente, some ten thousand or so Blacks rose up, and most died, along with a handful of whites (Pérez 1986:536),

"... the United States landed marines in Oriente province to protect North American property [thus allowing that] the Cuban armed forces undertook a ruthless and grisly pacification. The armed forces killed indiscriminately: by decapitation, by hanging, and by firing squad. Unknown numbers were killed, allegedly while 'trying to escape'" (Pérez 1986:537).

The historiography of the near-genocidal tragedy still largely maintains its racial nature, as reflected by a lecture put on at the MLK Center by a leading Cuban historian (Heredia 2013). Naturally, that the *Partido Independiente de Color* played a leading role is thus emphasized, but actually, the massacre in Oriente was hardly related to the originally-planned uprisings in Matanzas, Pinar del Rio, among other places. (Pérez 1986:531-533).

The violence in Oriente was a class conflict, and its class nature was evident in the small amount of support the party had in the province in which the "war" would take place almost entirely. Despite the large Black population in the east, this was again due to class conflict. The PIC represented the black petit bourgeoisie, and the Morúa Law they found so intolerable was of little material interest to poor Blacks in Oriente (Pérez 1986:529). Even in the PIC's stated goals,

many “were not racially specific-an eight-hour work- day, free immigration for all races, distribution of land among veterans” (Adams 2010).

Oriente had been a land of opportunity, where Blacks farmed some 26 percent of the land (Pérez 1986:512-513). Following the War of Independence, though, “[e]verywhere in Guantánamo small farms and family lands were disappearing. Sugar production increased and land concentration expanded. More and more land passed under fewer and fewer owners” (Pérez 1986:523). Mostly American rich foreigners stole this land of opportunity up from under the enterprising farmers of the area. Meanwhile, the region’s men, who had fought in the war for the country’s independence hugely independently returned (Pérez 1986:516-523).

So, it was private property, not whites, that was targeted. Attacks on sugar property were the more significant element (Pérez 1986:533-534). The political and racial elements of the causes of the uprising were clearly the superstructure of material class interests, not the other way around, something that will emerge as a clear theme in evaluating Cuban socialism politically and theoretically. The PIC, representing a different class in a different part of the country, was incidental to the uprising that occurred, and skin color should not be allowed to obscure what should be reclaimed as one of the early acts of violent revolutionary justice by the popular classes of Cuba that led inevitably to their eventual triumph in 1959. As usual, though, the specter of race was employed to justify state violence and divide the working class (Pérez 1986:539).

The massacre and the historiography that followed it (and, again, still some Cuban historiography today is problematic, perhaps increasingly so given the interest of the nascent white petit bourgeoisie will likely have in rewriting Cuban history along lines of identities other than that of the triumphant working class majority) further racialized and strengthened the class

domination that would only worsen on the island until the breaking point in 1959. Racialized class struggle is still, however, class struggle that at its core is defined by the mode and relations of production and not by conceptions of identity. With the context of the unique achievements of Cuban socialism that would follow available to us—that is, given that in all but name, the causes of the violence were ultimately class-based, the solutions that were finally applied were socialist, and that the results of the revolution that finally addressed the demands of the 1912 uprising were uniquely racially equitable—the 1912 “Race War” should be seen as part of the socialist, anti-imperialist history of the development of the Cuban alternative.

The Cuban conceptualization of nation was one that for obvious reasons defined itself as anti-imperialist in contrast to, or at least to a much greater extent than, the American conceptualization. Anti-imperialism, of course, necessarily meant socialist, at least in 1959. The racist aftermath of 1912 and the continued attacks on predominantly Haitian emigres afterwards “laid bare the contradictions in elite nationalism” (Chomsky 1998:31), which, in Cuba, with its less elite nationalism, soon enough effected a profoundly popular revolution.

But first, Cuba’s relationship with the United States completely undermined its sovereignty in the early 1900s—in fact, until 1959. A neocolonial relationship was effected by military, political, and economic domination. This was actually a crude form of neocolonialism that lacked the semblance of secrecy that the United States would learn to employ during the Cold War and, during the military occupations of 1906 to 1909, 1912, and 1917 to 1920, was effectively old-school colonialism. The military response to the 1933 revolution, too, demonstrated the degree to which Cuba was still basically a colony; only its master had changed. And, of course, the Reciprocity Treaty resulted in problems typical to neocolonialism: an insufficiently diversified economy, lack of internal development or production of finished goods,

and an economy “dependent on the outcome of a series of byzantine struggles ... in the U.S. Congress” (Chomsky, Carr, and Smorkaloff 2003:143). Article 7 of the Platt Amendment, furthermore, provided the legal justification for the creation of Guantanamo Bay (Chomsky, Carr, and Smorkaloff 2003:143), which threatens and insults the nation’s sovereignty to this day—as well as international law and therefore every non-superpower.

“The Platt Amendment:” Legalized Colonialism

The Platt Amendment served as a means to provide the United States basically unlimited control over the domestic and international affairs of Cuba, much as Spain had before. Article III, for instance, gave the United States full power to intervene on Cuban affairs “for the preservation of Cuban independence, “ostensibly protecting Cuba from European imperialism, but in reality protecting the United States’ economic interests. Article IV permitted the validation of all Acts of the United States in Cuba during its military occupancy, providing the United States with the power to take action on any and all of its plans for “liberating” the country, with Cuba a mere a pawn in its own search for freedom.

The last two Articles of the Amendment, Articles VI and VII, directly annexed Cuban territory, surpassing even Spanish colonial rule in leaving no autonomy for Cubans in these areas. Article VI removed the Isle of Pines from Cuban territory, leaving its ownership open for a later treaty. The latter stated that Cuba would “sell or lease to the United States land necessary for coaling or naval stations at certain specified points,” which would become Guantanamo Bay, which still insults and threatens the sovereignty of the nation today. This shows just how relevant colonialism still is in the structure of the modern capitalist economy, and how Cuba, which refuses to accept the payment the U.S. sends it for the base, serves as an inspiration for most of the world and is owed at the very least intellectual and political honesty from Americans.

Again, the Cuban Revolution provided a valuable model of independent anticolonial struggle—and then government—for the rest of the Third World. This offered a beacon of hope for revolutionary movements that hoped to forge truly sovereign nations under the nose of American hegemony, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, both within the context of the Cold War and in today’s unipolar world. At the same time, it offered a rare example of a successful armed revolution—and against a military government heavily supported by the most powerful military in the world, no less—that was initially completely independent from the Soviet Union. Of course, there were Leninists among the revolutionaries, and the revolution, as all popular revolutions after 1919 have been, was indebted on some level, however indirectly, to the Russians. But, the agrarian reform of 1959 that “set the stage” for massive social reorganization, a commitment to equitable, egalitarian development, and even “a new definition of patriotism” (Chomsky, Carr, and Smorkaloff 2003:334) (though one organically developed from and inextricably linked to Martí’s ideas) was, like Arbenz’ repressed attempt in Guatemala, nationalist in its origin and initial development. The Cuban Revolution was nationalist first, socialist second, and Marxist-Leninist third. Other Cold War revolutions failed for getting this backwards, or for missing one of the ingredients entirely. This uniquely popular, nationalist nature of the revolution meant that, despite the context of the Cold War forcing Cuba to rely—for good and for bad—on the USSR, Cuba has always forged an independent path domestically and internationally (Chomsky, Carr, and Smorkaloff 2003:333-334). And it has kept the Revolution going through thick and thin.

“Man and Socialism:” A Dream Unrealized Yet

Although, again, nationalist first, the Cuban Revolution did and still does have profound ambitions that have contributed to Marxism-Leninism significantly, and today are the vanguard

of the entire world (by default, but also by merit) in advancing Marxist theory and praxis—and, by it, as Marx predicted, the very nature of the human condition

. According to Guevara, the evolution of the “new man” during the transition to socialism is dialectic. He must contend with the old man, so to speak, in whom still exists “the residue of an education systematically oriented toward isolating the individual” (2003:371). A lack of education, also, according to Guevara, directs one toward an anomic state of individualistic pursuit, as do the characters of some people (2003:371-372). As this individualism is born from the alienating material conditions of capitalism, the ideals that will define the “new man” must, likewise, “[g]o forward with the development of new economic forms.” To rectify the ideological and moral failings of man under capitalism, then, one must first get rid of “the economic cell of capitalist society:” the commodity; that is, of material incentive altogether (Guevara 2003:371). To reach this next stage in human development, Guevara proposes that the new man participate at all levels of the publically-owned means of production until he conceptualizes work as “social duty” and as fulfillment of his human nature instead of alienation from this nature, from his fellow man, and from the product of his labor (Guevara 2003:372-373). Communism will be realized only when people internalize this pro-social impetus to work (Guevara 2003:373).

The Literacy Campaign represented an early and extremely successful application of Guevara’s Ideal. Myriad motivations drove the hundreds of thousands of youth who volunteered for the Literacy Campaign. Despite their youth, they saw that the campaign was a “historic event;” one former volunteer worried at the time how she would be able to explain foregoing the opportunity to her grandchildren (Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon 2003:389). And that it was; nearly one million illiterate Cubans were taught to read and write in under a year. This dire need was

naturally part of the impetus for these youth. The same woman said that it would be “downright immoral” to eschew the opportunity and wanted to experience solidarity with Fidel—to share his experience bettering the lives of her countrymen (Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon 2003:390).

Furthermore, many of these young people wanted the sense of independence that comes from leaving home and the sense of fulfillment that comes from teaching (Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon 2003:390). Many went on to become professional teachers.

This contributed both to the development of the world-class education system, but also to the effort for a “new man,” an ambitious and actually somewhat successful endeavor that has played a vital role in allowing the Cuban case to survive the Special Period and then to transcend in most ways what had been accomplished during the best years of the Soviet Union. It also evidences the unique power of a society built more around moral incentives than consumer and financial incentives to much more effectively accomplish the most important functions thereof, and at little cost. Why haven’t the Gates Foundation or one of those other monstrosities with more resources than the entire Cuban government been able to recreate such success with their loans and other market-based solutions?

However, the true communism to which Guevara’s ideal strives obviously has always been theorized to require abundance. The Special Period took away the relatively auspicious economic situation, and, due both to absolute deprivation and also the rapid relative loss compared to the Soviet-subsidized days, “Social security payments rose from approximately 4 percent of the gross national product in 1982 to 15 percent by 1997; 38 of 100 workers obtained a medical certificate of total physical incapacity that allowed them to retire permanently” (Aguirre 2002:67-69). An aging society surely played a large part in this, but the question of how to further advance Che’s theories into practice is a difficult one. It is one to which American

intellectuals should contribute, because Cuba's success is now firmly in the "national interest." More significantly, moral incentives are free, and given the limited resources on the planet, high likelihood the population will increase to at least 9 or 10 billion before levelling off, and global warming, material incentives are very limited and will become more so yet, quickly.

Cuban socialism was only able to rely on the charismatic authority of Guevara and Fidel to a limited degree. In addition to efforts directed at individual morality, grassroots, neighborhood-based approaches keep the revolution revolutionary in addition to the continued need for more traditional central planning of the publicly-owned economy to for instance, root out such laziness. The Family Code was a paradigmatic example of the former.

"The Family Code:" The Revolution within the Revolution

The Family Code was both revolutionary—especially for 1975—and traditional. First: the traditional. Its promotion of marriage, an institution that, for most of its existence, has been a transfer of property from father to husband, is quite traditional. Given the plethora of social benefits of enduring marriages—particularly for men and children—this is a utilitarian application of traditionalism. And, considering how entrenched the institution of marriage is, an attempt to legislate the "free love" for which Marx called would likely be too revolutionary for the Cuban people. Sadly, they still don't even have gay marriage, reflecting just how strong Roman Catholicism has remained under the always relatively liberal Cuban Communist Party.

However, the Code was revolutionary overall. Its mandate that women be equals not only in the public sphere but also in marriage is incredible considering the continued failure in the United States to guarantee even nominal equality in work, health, and various other areas of the law—*let alone* to address the "second shift" legally. Though clauses 24 through 28 (governing

childcare and housework) rare are actually enforced, they are read during marriage ceremonies (Randall 2003:402), and it seems that the Code has contributed to a significant reduction in *machismo* an undeniably radical shift in Cuba's Catholicism-steeped culture. Considering the material implications of the "second shift" and the world-leading equality of women in the sciences, government, and health in Cuba, these clauses have been radical enough to play a significant part in a veritable transformation of gender relations on the island. That the change is particularly evident among young people (Randall 2003:403-404) is especially encouraging and proof of the continued progressive effect of the legislation.

Education

Equality has always been an ideal at the heart of Cuban nationalism. Cuba, even in the context of the early years of nominal independence under American domination "found in citizenship ... the possibility of equality in which racial, class, and political differences could be erased" (Bobes 2005:62). This commitment was the impetus for the Revolution, for Batista's regime had become illegitimate by abandoning the equitable conceptualization of citizenship promised by the profoundly important 1940 constitution. Any government to betray this mandate so central to Cuban national identity obviously was doomed to illegitimacy and, given the spirit of the Cuban people, overthrow by any means necessary. Economic growth, of course, was also a concern. By providing lifelong training for every Cuban—from teachers to doctors to tourism officials to cigar rollers—the country's socialized education system is the backbone of economic growth, both by traditional metrics like HDI and nominal GDP growth but also by more meaningful, meritocratic considerations that are perhaps harder to quantify.

The most important success of the revolution and the greatest source of continuing legitimacy and effectiveness for the Communist-led polity, therefore, is the free, world-class education provided to Cubans as a right of citizenship, as it is instrumental in nullifying inequalities and increasing moral incentives necessary for the equitable, stable growth of a socialist economic system. That element in particular is hard to quantify and therefore might be of tremendous unseen benefit. Applied to the U.S., with our much greater wealth and natural resources, the consciousness-raising elements of the Cuban educational system could be of great value to our own troubled schools. Of course, the existence of private schools changes things, and the American political conversation has been moving in the wrong direction toward the literal abolition of public schooling, to be replaced by coupons for profit-generating charter schools.

Importantly, the average Cuban had only completed the third grade under the dictator Batista. By 2002, the average Cuban had finished more than 10 years of school (Cluster and Hernández 2008). It was the socialist education program's egalitarian nature and that guaranteed the remarkable success of a socialist education system in Cuba, even with incredibly limited resources and a blockade by the nearby superpower. While a few bourgeois, overwhelmingly white Cubans had a chance to go to university before the realization of socialism on the island, inequality was multiplied and reproduced by a dearth of opportunities for work and lack of solidarity among workers, amplified by such massively disparate educations. This represents a profound instance of the idea that fulfillment of the goals of the revolution was not achievable with a capitalist economy. The incredible success of the literacy campaign to teach a million Cubans to read in about a year (Gott 2005:189) exemplified the socialist nature of the revolution, which in retrospect was evident, intrinsic, and inevitable well before its formal declaration.

Much of the success of the aforementioned egalitarian concept of citizenship in Cuba is thanks to the consistency of its commitment to education financially, socially, ideologically, politically—at all levels. Though with what some call “the cost of one party rule,” the government has been overwhelmingly the most successful in the region at providing the educational excellence for which the people rightly ask in part by dodging “the disruptive effects of continuous changes in strategies and plans” (Gasperini 2000:8). This framework incorporates long-term, “lifetime” teacher training that includes a requirement of constant, applied pedagogical research. Every educator presents his or her best research at a conference every two years (Gasperini 2000:9-10). My host brother Dariel when I studied in Cuba in 2013, a university student studying English language teaching, confirmed this; he worked on a project to introduce Marxist concepts in a simplified form to younger students before they are formally required as a class of study in secondary school.

Also evidencing the evidence-based, long-term approach of the Cuban education system is that they provide free preschool and daycare to those families (a large majority) who choose to enroll their children (Gasperini 2000:24). Training for parents and other programs for the children are provided for the minority who prefer to opt out, and all children receive some preschool education. This is profoundly important considering the immense correlation between lack of quality childcare and unemployment with teenage pregnancy, criminal behavior, lower IQ, and other negative social indicators in the United States, which one can probably safely assume would also manifest itself in Cuba without its greater investment in early childhood education (Zoritch, Roberts, and Oakley 2000). School remains tuition-free at even the very highest, doctoral level. Textbooks and other school supplies are provided free of charge. School uniforms come at a nominal cost equivalent to a few cents. Of course, Cuba’s educational

commitment necessitates a sustained and serious social and financial investment. The country spends some 10 percent of GDP in this area (Gasperini 2000:28). This evidence-based approach recognizes the importance thereof to the long-term health of the economy.

The curriculum for primary and secondary schools is standardized, owing to its publicly owned nature. Almost every Cuban therefore has about the same baseline of knowledge with which they can communicate with each other. Seeing as said books are cheap and of high-quality (Gasperini 2000:6), represents an efficacious method of creating an inclusive society with a high degree of solidarity and common values. In the United States, the Civil War and evolution are taught entirely differently in different states, creating pockets of different types of charlatans rather than a society of critical thinkers, a trait conducive both to the functioning of a nation (even without liberal democratic trappings) and to economic competitiveness to the degree to which that should continue to be a goal insofar as it relies on fossil fuels.

Consider, next, educational quality. Every student in Cuba receives an education of more or less the same world-class quality, so opportunity is equalized rather than denied to some while some literally can't fail. In the "pull yourself up by your own bootstraps" U.S., children of parents in the top quintile (not even decile or the top 1 percent!) who drop out of high school have a higher average income than children from the bottom quintile with graduate from college. This raises questions about the nature of citizenship. The right to a decent education (not to say myriad additional human rights) is based on local property values in this country (Apple, Au, and Grandin 2009:116-118). In Cuba, it is guaranteed as a central, indivisible element of being a Cuban.

Solidarity—a prerequisite for economic equality and widespread, effective use of moral incentives—is also effected through myriad other phases of the educational system. "Training for

school directors,” for instance, “is provided at the same time as teacher training, so that directors will understand the teacher development process.” Similarly, an aspiring education professor must teach at the level for which they want to educate teachers, usually for six or seven years. This “school-based” approach is instrumental in minimizing the distance between academia and practice. Furthermore, *colectivos pedagógicos*, or groups of teachers from the same department, meet every two weeks to “discuss teaching methods, produce learning materials, adapt curricula to local needs, and exchange experiences” (Gasperini 2000:9). This surely builds solidarity between teachers, probably more so than the one day each quarter that there is a “teacher’s day” at the high school I attended. Even more tangential to my experience with secondary education, though, are the deep ties to the community teachers have. They spend a full 20 percent of their working hours with students in students’ homes helping with homework or meeting with parents (Gasperini 2000:10). This is another element of the neighborhood-based approach—also pivotal in health with house calls by the neighborhood doctor once to four times a year (source), politics with CDR meetings and local assembly meetings to collectively draft laws, etc.—that created the socialist culture at the grassroots, instead of just the ‘commanding heights’ of the economy, that allowed Cuba to survive the Special Period. Instead of suffering an antagonistic relationship whereby parents bully teachers for better grades—which, as in the United States where lack of respect from parents is listed as a top reason for leaving the profession, can result in high teacher attrition rates—teachers develop solidarity with their students and their community. Better, more experienced teachers, then, provide the more efficient investment needed with Cuba’s limited resources. Effective central planning puts teachers where they are most needed and avoids the incentive for schools to hire less-qualified teachers to save money.

Solidarity between students and between students and the rest of society, too, is an important element of the system. For example, at the *Centro Vocacional Lenin en Ciencias Exactas*, there is a high degree of cooperation between students, with no apparent arrogance on the part of the mentors or shame on the part of the mentees (Gasperini 2000:18). This disposition is fostered, particularly in primary school, by “labor education” that “when appropriate to children’s age, appears to have become an instrument of intellectual and social development and a sharing of responsibilities” (Gasperini 2000:17). The minimum requirement is 480 of the 5,680 hours of elementary school and 280 of the 5,799 of secondary school, usually done in school gardens. At the *Escuela Ciudad Libertad*, for one, students spend a month performing agricultural work in a neighboring city, developing solidarity with people from other parts of the country and with agricultural workers and manual laborers in general for students. A Marxist understanding of praxis informs this strategy. Though the original intention for the schools to be completely self-funded has been abandoned, a significant amount of productive work is indeed completed by students, which does help budget (Gasperini 2000:16-17). Students at the aforementioned school furthermore spend two hours every week on military training, developing solidarity with the armed forces. This solidarity (not to mention an incredibly efficient education system) could explain how Cuba manages to have the most doctors in the world per capita (and a higher life expectancy and lower infant mortality rate than the United States) despite their low pay. That is, Cuban doctors understand the island’s limited resources and the value and the difficulty of their compatriots’ labor; so, they need not be paid more to want to help the country in the best way they can. Moreover, the socialist consciousness fostered from a young age by the educational system and socialized throughout a lifetime with the ideal of the *Nuevo hombre* and the neighborhood-based approach likely creates the kind of empathetic people who are attracted to

medicine. This reflects Guevara's concept of *conciencia*, which means something deeper than its English cognate; it refers to a specifically political and socialist education (Blum 2008:141).

The alienation inherent in the division of labor between physical and mental labor must be lessened by this process, and the Cuban educational system also successfully works to negate the alienation between city and countryside. Indeed, there are some 2,000 schools with fewer than ten students in Cuba, and yet there is a dropout rate of only about 2 percent overall—and test scores are statistically /equal in rural and urban areas (Gasperini 2000:15).

However, there are still serious challenges to the Cuban educational system that hamper its effectiveness in promoting growth and threaten its equitable, socialistic character. For one, the continued use of separate schools for special needs children goes against the pedagogical consensus that supports integration as “the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.” Integration also costs less in the long-term (Gasperini 2000:16). Another challenge is to successfully impart the pro-social values necessary for the functioning of the socialist economy in a time of liberalization. Marxism-Leninism is not a part of the curriculum at all until 11th grade (Gasperini 2000:29). Even though I grew up in “liberal” New Haven mostly, my classmates and I were inundated with the values and claimed superiority of neoliberal capitalism from a young age. Americans' extremist individualism doesn't come from out of nowhere.

This lack of understanding likely contributes to the apathy and alienation said to be felt by young Cubans. For this reason, Arias wants to study how to better integrate into pre-university and secondary school socialist values that might curtail the bootlegging and theft that divert money to the black market and take money out of the productive economy. Moreover, the

growing pull of the tourism industry is driving up attrition rates and demanding higher pay for teachers, which threatens the state's ability to continue to invest 40 percent of the education budget in non-salary spending (Gasperini 2000:7). Most direly, sharp cuts to education in the last few years to Cubans who "have taken a full, free education as a birthright" (Frank 2012) face the economic demand to train a greater number of people in skilled trades and fewer by the traditional liberal arts model. Still, though, spending as a percentage of GDP is the highest in the region, and if the United States were to adopt the Cuban model with the resources we have, we might very well be able to lead the world toward the scientific revolution that will be necessary to handle the damage capitalism has done to the environment globally and locally.

Despite these growing contradictions, the Cuban education system continues to be the most important source of economic equity and equality in Cuba. Therefore, it remains the most important element of the continued support of the revolutionary government by the Cuban people. Successes in healthcare, biotechnology, and many other sectors would have been impossible without the evidence-based, solidarity-building, economically efficient education system that exceeds its Latin American counterparts at every level; Cuban third graders do far better on standardized tests than their equivalents in any other Latin American country—in some cases by an average of two standard deviations (Gasperini 2000:23. Considering the sense of "uneasiness" that has guided the dynamic nature of the Revolution (Angotti 2009:128) and Cubans' deep value of education, Cuba will ultimately continue with this paradigm so central to the Revolution.

Race, Gender, and Equity

The *libreta* or food ration book, is an important symbol of the equity that principally defines Cuban socialism. While perhaps invoking for some bread lines or other negative stereotypes, it is widely beloved in Cuba and should be embraced as central planning returns to the scientific and political debate as a positive or at least legitimate way of fulfilling human rights. At first, it truly was meant to be temporary. Initially, only lard was rationed; after a “lard census” conducted by the Committees in Defense of the Revolution (CDR), the government limited each person to buying one pound of lard each week (Benjamin, Collins, and Scott 2003:351). The next year, 1962, this was expanded to include other food staples nationally, hygiene products in 26 cities, and myriad other foodstuffs in Havana (Benjamin, Collins, and Scott 2003:351-352). If this system had been intended to be permanent, it seems unlikely that it would have been initially implemented in only the neediest places (which, in a reversal of the previous dynamic, was the cities). Moreover, if it had been intended to be permanent, Fidel himself would not have promised until at least 1965 that rationing was soon to end (Benjamin, Collins, and Scott 2003:352). The wildly inaccurate (i.e., overly optimistic) predictions of economists like Charles Bettelheim whom the government had employed helped to create this view among politicians (Benjamin, Collins, and Scott 2003:353). The continued utility—at times, necessity—of the *libreta* was particularly evident during the Special Period, and now, perhaps because of its indispensable role in mitigating hunger during these years, it remains a popular and integral part of Cuban life that plays an important part in maintaining a high standard of living despite scarcity.

Its popularity and success are reason, again, for scholarly and political attention outside the country. With obesity such a problem in the U.S. and the political debate over whether

certain types of food should be banned from purchase with SNAP “food stamps,” even the classist Right should be able to see the merit of food rations. Hunger is a very real issue in the U.S. still, and especially given the “food deserts” in which many SNAP recipients live, perhaps a system of direct distribution of staples to the neediest Americans, or even to all Americans, to encourage them to eat decent food, would make more sense and certainly be cheaper than subsidizing junk food sellers.

“Women in the Swamps:” Where the Revolution Built Everything

The legacy of slavery and colonialism, and then an almost hyperbolic form of naked, shameless neocolonialism under Batista, created an enormous amount of geographic inequality. Cuban socialism did fail to completely eradicate the legacy of inequality in housing by race/ethnicity even before the Special Period (de la Fuente 1995), arguably the one failure of socialism rather than of capitalism in evaluating equity in Cuban society. I would argue this to be a problem simply of not enough time—people are naturally very attached to their homes and neighborhoods, and rushing the process of socializing housing has obvious, severe negative implications. Think of Stalin’s forced population transfers. Regardless, the degree to which the Revolution has been able to spread its benefits and effect equity consistently throughout the country, from Havana to rural Guantanamo is remarkable, and merits political consideration as yet another unique accomplishment of Cuban socialism. It is impossible to say whether this is a natural product of the abolition of private property, which has long been shown to alienate the city from the country, among so many other things, or whether there was something particular to the Cuban Revolution. Some have borrowed from Weber to propose charismatic authority (Aguirre 2002). But the retirement of Fidel in favor of Raul Castro, who completely lacks this

form of social capital, as it were, does not seem to have changed the situation beyond what private property in the tourist sector has been shown to have done.

Again, in sharp contrast to the situation in this country, there is not a significant difference in test scores between the one-room schoolhouses of the country and large Havana schools (Gasperini 2000:15).

La Cienega was barely integrated into the nation at all prior to the triumph of the revolution. “[F]or weeks at a time,” the entire area was cut off from the rest of the country—and, therefore, medicine, education, even newspapers. The only transportation to *La Cienega* was a non-operational railroad line. When it was operating, the train only came once each day. This was especially devastating because the area was arguably the least developed in the entire country and its people the most oppressed and backward (Randall 2003:364). When Fidel arrived, necessarily by helicopter in the early days of the revolution, it was the first time the locals had seen a helicopter (Randall 2003:365). The revolution rapidly (importantly, before Bay of Pigs invasion) integrated the area into not only the highway system of the country but also, essentially, the medical and educational systems and the economy—totally opposite to the total lack of investment by the Spaniards and “Cuban oligarchy” who had previously held power (Randall 2003:364).

I visited the area in 2013, by which time it had been transformed again, this time into a tourist attraction and museum showcasing the gains of the Revolution. To return momentarily to the comparisons with Vietnam and China, Cuba has reduced its geographic GDP disparity to just 50 percent, with Havana residents making about that much more than Guantanamo residents (Yamaoka 2007). The disparity is nearly an order of magnitude in Vietnam and China from

North to South and East to West, respectively, and average incomes in Maryland are greater than 50 percent those in Mississippi.

The “Periodo Especial” and the Increasing International Relevance of Cuban Socialism

The “Special Period in Time of Peace” was the difficult transition Cuba was forced to make after the collapse of the Socialist Camp and the loss of Soviet oil and a full 70 percent of the country’s imports. The adjustments to the economy resembled on some levels those imposed on other developing countries by the IMF, but there were key differences as well (Chomsky, Carr, and Smorkaloff 2003:595-596). Broad liberalization of the economy included the legalization of the dollar and then the CUC, reduction in government employment, heavy investment in tourism, and legalization of private business in hundreds of areas including taxis, restaurants, *casas particulares*, and farmer’s markets. Food rationing and a dedication to health and education limited the misery endured by the Cuban people and maintained the country’s vaunted achievements in these areas, as evidenced by indicators like child mortality and life expectancy that have continued to surpass those of many wealthy nations like the United States (Chomsky, Carr, and Smorkaloff 2003:596). This period was also marked by an increase in religious activity, NGOs, and more broadly, national discourse without the tutelage of the state (Chomsky, Carr, and Smorkaloff 2003:597).

The “Food Program” of the Special Period in particular was an ambitious, wide-ranging one intended to decrease the country’s enormous reliance on imported food and improve the distribution of food so that it would reach the people more efficiently and effectively. This was attempted by expanding “rice, banana, plantain, root and green vegetable production”— both

through irrigation and conversion of land previously used for sugarcane production—and thousands of new dairies, poultry sheds, and hog-breeding centers. New food storage and distribution centers were also created because “extremely inadequate” development in this department had meant that a third of all crops were rotting before reaching dinner tables. Because of the lack of fuel, feed, and fertilizer, the results did not meet expectations (Eckstein 2003:608). Said lack of fuel and the adoption of some economic features typical of precapitalist societies (Eckstein 2003:607, 619-621) did, however, give Cuba a much lower ecological footprint and improved health.

The Continued Threat of Right-Wing Terrorism

Luis Posada Carriles is paradigmatic of the specter of American-backed right-wing terrorism that Cuba has faced for more than half a century, a threat that may well renew itself under a hawkish Hillary Clinton administration. The return to Cuba of the “Cuban Five” arrested for “spying” for trying to collect intelligence on a terrorist plot to kill innocent Cuban citizens, represents a profoundly positive point in the recent thaw. That they were imprisoned in the first place represents, however, the complicity of the U.S. in essentially incorporating Cuban exile terrorists like this mass killer into the American security apparatus.

Carriles is a high-profile terrorist who has carried out countless attacks against Cuban civilians and plotted to assassinate Fidel Castro. A “lifelong anti-Castro militant,” he masterminded “a dozen bombings of Havana tourist centers” in the summer of 1997 that killed an Italian citizen; the same report in the *Miami Herald* indicated also his involvement in terrorism in other Central and South American countries (Tamayo 2003:666). Had a tip not warned FBI agents of guns and explosives stored in a warehouse by Carriles’ associates, Carriles and company likely would have gone ahead with the plot to assassinate Castro, a scheme the 71-

year-old veteran terrorist proudly called his “best shot yet” (Tamayo 2003:667). Infected with an obsessive, irrational loathing for the Cuban Revolution, Carriles has been in hiding since he escaped Venezuelan prison, where he was waiting to be tried for the horrific terrorist bombing of a Cuban airliner that left seventy-three innocent people dead, in 1985 (Tamayo 2003:669). In contrast to the Right’s depiction of the Cuban security apparatus as similar to, say, China’s, given that the country faces similar threats that we do,

Cuba and ‘Actually Existing [Market] Socialism,’ Part Two

While there are inevitably some similarities between the path Cuba might take, or rather the potential of Cuban socialism as a social model, to the sort of middle-ground (vs. China) Vietnam has taken, Cuba’s long experience with the blockade, high human development, already more urbanized population, and dominant service sector, labor-intensive industrialization as in Vietnam will likely not occur in Cuba. “It must instead focus,” says Wilkinson (2012), “on harnessing its potential for boosting knowledge-based services and on progressively strengthening its internal market in the production and distribution of food and domestic consumables.”

The larger degree of state ownership, the neighborhood-based (and much more comprehensive) delivery of basic services, and the much lesser degree of social inequality also distinguish the Cuban model (Gabriele 2011a, b). Wilkinson contends that “Public delivery of basic services such as health care and education are to continue in Cuba. In both China and Vietnam attempts at privatization and the application of fees in both health and education caused social problems. Cuba is not going to make the same mistakes of applying market-based

approaches where they have proved to be inadequate,” which should keep the degree of social and regional inequality “under control” (2012). The “millionaire phenomenon” of Vietnam and China can be avoided—and largely is successfully being avoided, at least anecdotally—because private property is confined to, at largest, medium-sized businesses, which are often cooperatively owned and managed and operated democratically. The growth of a middle class is inevitable and probably desirable, “but the political class will not be challenged,” claims Wilkinson, “by what amounts to a new bourgeoisie that will be powerful enough to dictate policy” (2012).

My concern is that, with the likely end of the embargo coming, Cuba might see the explosive growth its Asian counterparts have seen. This might actually be harmful, as, first of all, the country is currently the most sustainable country with very high human development and that could likely not be sustained under such a scenario. Also, it would likely be impossible to control the wealth and influence of the nascent bourgeoisie if that were to occur. Cuba’s relative lack of natural resources and reliance on its service sector and its highly educated population to grow make this seem unlikely, however.

Wilkinson warns that “certain benefits will become means tested and targeted instead of universal but the principle of free at the point of use will be maintained” (2012). Given the solid economic growth to come with the recent four-fold increase in the amount of remittances that can be sent back (already a significant percentage of GDP, this almost guaranteeing GDP growth on that alone assuming it is taken advantage of by the presumably significant number of wealthy Cuban-Americans for whom the previous limit represented how much they sent), inevitable growth in tourism which contributes a larger part of the GDP yet, etc., there is no reason to accept this austerity orthodoxy. That even a leftist social scientist like Wilkinson, and one in the

minority clearly supportive of continued Communist rule in Cuba accepts this without providing any reason for why the Party would accept such a thing in an egalitarian society that fought so hard to protect socialism even during a massive depression is indicative of the profound need for laypeople and scientists alike to remove themselves from the false, narrow debate in modern American politics and academia and consider the history of the country and the will of its people. If “means testing” human rights was not on the table during the Special Period, then one can assume or at least hope that Cuba will instead seek to expand the benefits it can offer free to every citizen. Nothing currently offered free by the Cuban government is not a human right. Maybe a larger middle-class could mean increasing the 4 cent price Cubans currently pay to see a world-class baseball game or ballet performance or concert (assuming that hasn’t changed since I visited). And most Cubans would probably like to see wage raises be a top priority before increasing benefits. But, even if the author’s prediction comes to pass, the possibility exists of containing the ills of tourism and *improving* Cuban socialism with a small, limited private sector, even in the context of the still-professed goal of development toward communism.

In addition to the sacrosanct preservation of public property and services and, perhaps more important yet, the political control of (and hopeful later elimination of) capital, “there will be an environmental dividend because of the absence of heavy industrialization. And the fourth advantage will be cultural and dietary as a consequence of the continuing US embargo - there will be no McDonald's” (Wilkinson 2012). This might seem almost sarcastic, but I don’t think the damaging effects of the cultural hegemony of consumerism can be overstated. A misguided (they would later admit) desire for blue jeans is often listed as a contributing factor to the fall of the Soviet Union, and Cuba’s ability to resist losing the culture of socialism entirely has been remarkable given its proximity culturally (e.g. a shared national sport in baseball, the popularity

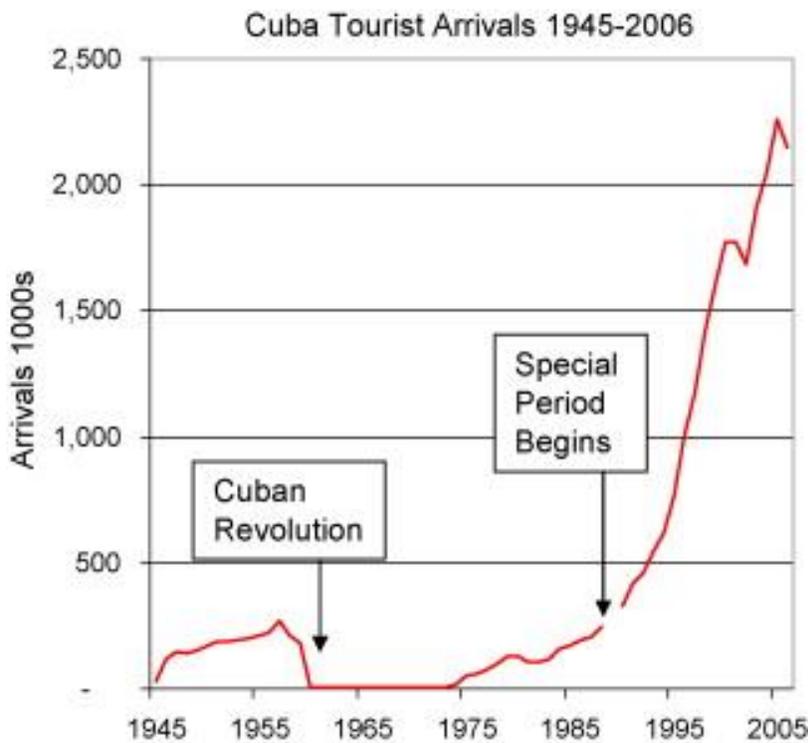
of pirated American TV shows like *Game of Thrones*), historically, and geographically to the U.S. Again, elements of racial and gender inequity *have* started to creep back into a society that had been uniquely free of them, or at least closer than any other country to being able to claim that status with some actual semblance of truth. But, anecdotally and seemingly the consensus of the majority of fair assessments of Cuban culture, this neighborly appreciation of American culture has not, even for the youngest generations, warped into the kind of blue-jean-aspiring consumerism. It has not turned into existential crisis of exponential growth of envy and empty, endless desire for the extremely unsustainable throwaway cultures of other developed countries, in particular the U.S. That is, for a second, unnecessary car; for a bigger TV; for a new vacuum cleaner when the old one works fine; for throwing away several plastic bottles a day; for, basically, asinine insanity like Keurig K-Cups that preys on the laziest, most narcissistic parts of the human brain.

“Can Capitalism Save Socialism?:” Tourism, Prostitution, and the Revolution

Cuba lost about 75 percent of its international trade with the collapse of the trading bloc. Fidel Castro explained that, “We have to develop tourism. It is an important source of foreign currency. We do not like tourism. It has become an economic necessity” (Taylor and McGlynn 2009:411), “signifying a continual reliance on former colonial powers and outside forces for economic stability” (Cabezas 2004:121).

“International tourist arrivals in Cuba fell from a peak of 272,000 in 1958 to less than 4000 annually from 1959 until 1973. By 1975, Cuba had begun to promote tourism reaching over 300,000 visitors annually by 1990. As the Special Period began, the industry exploded during the nineties and by 2000, the number of tourist arrivals to Cuba had doubled. By 2004, the number of visitors to Cuba surpassed the two million mark for

the first time. Concurrently, gross revenues from tourism increased from U.S. \$1.1 billion in 1995 to U.S. \$1.9 billion in 1999 to U.S. \$2.25 billion in 2004. By 2003, revenues reached \$2.1 billion, almost half of Cuba's total hard currency. During this period, tourism surpassed the sugar industry as the prime source of hard currency and became the engine driving the economy. *Cubanos* used to declare, *sin azucar, hay no país* (without sugar, there is no country). Now, they say, *sin turismo, hay no país* (without tourism, there is no country)”



This required that the number of hotel rooms double from 18,565 in 1990, to 37,178 a decade later. In Havana, the expansion was more rapid yet at an increase from 4,682 rooms in 1988 to, in 2002, over 12,000. This, perhaps naturally or obviously, required joint

ventures with foreign companies with the expertise, technical and otherwise, required of such expansive endeavors. “The rebeldes understood sugar, tobacco, and manufacturing, but had little experience in the tourism, leisure and hospitality sector,” (Taylor and McGlynn 2009:408; Cabello 2012). Among the 25 joint venture companies in Cuba in the late 90s were Accor, Sol Melia, and even SuperClubs and Sandals. Over 100 U.S. companies had, by 2002, licenses to operate within the country. A significant number of U.S. citizens continued to travel to the

country during the worst of the blockade: some 200,000 in 2007 (Taylor and McGlynn 2009:409). Where previously, during the 80s, visitors were approximately equally from Western Europe, Eastern European allies, Latin America, and North America, by the turn of the century, about half were from Western Europe, where the American blockade became only more unpopular as it became more and more apparent that the government was surviving, and in some ways even eventually thriving, through the so-called Special Period.

Prostitution has obviously come along with this. When Fidel once boasted of being America's brothel no more, during the Special Period he was reduced to boasting that Cuba (and its sex workers) at least had the lowest STD rates in the hemisphere. The elimination of prostitution had carried great symbolic importance to the Cuban Revolution. The shame to the Cuban national pride that prostitution brought was twofold; it made the country essentially a brothel for Americans and other foreigners, and it limited women's opportunities. Its elimination was seen on par with the advances in food, health care, and education as part of "the nation's twin goals of social equality at home and dignity in the international sphere" (Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon 2003:395). The initial regulation of prostitution reduced the pimping and oppression of the system (Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon 2003:396), and when "rehabilitation" was offered and prostitution outlawed, prostitutes jumped on this opportunity at a new start (Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon 2003:397). Though the transition was difficult for some, most successfully and happily quit prostitution, except for a few who left to the United States (Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon 2003:398). The return of prostitution, then—though understood as an inevitable result of the horrible recession and subsequent liberalization of the economy—is seen as a great source of national shame (Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon 2003:395).

This also takes the form of so-called *jineterismo*, “a colloquial term that refers to the broad range of activities and behaviors associated with hustling, including, but not limited to, sex for cash. *Jineteros* trade in the margins of the tourist economy; they are often seen in the streets of Havana, peddling everything from cigars and rum to sexual services. They act as tourists’ guides, escorts, brokers of sexual services, and romantic companions” (Cabezas 2004:127)

Whether or not this type of behavior was ever entirely eliminated as was more formal sex work, as it were, is unclear, but given that tourism was a small fraction of what it is today during the Cold War years, one can probably safely conclude that *jineterismo* is reflective of a larger change in the relations of production in Cuba as that most private of private sectors, the tourist sector, has had to be adapted into market socialism. Its strong association with sex work, and the success of the Nordic model of prostitution law in reducing prostitution—in light of research exposing the pro-legalization camp’s myth of the happy prostitute who loves his or her job and wouldn’t rather do anything else (Skilbrei and Holmström 2011)—reflect that this phenomenon is another ill of the tourist industry. That prostitution was ever completely eliminated while even Sweden and Norway fail to do so despite a concerted effort demonstrates the likely causal link between the existence in society of private property and the sale of (mostly women’s) bodies. This is yet another profound political and theoretical implication of Cuban socialism that has, to my knowledge, not seen significant public attention, neither scholarly nor in more political feminist discourse.

Between 1992 and 1995, reforms were introduced to fit the exploding tourism industry within the socialist framework of Cuban society, while also allowing it the necessary amount of growth to “capture” the hard foreign currency the island nation naturally needed to maintain the high standard of living its people had come to expect.

The single most important factor, ultimately, was the Cuban government's intense focus on the "social function strategy of neighborhood development ... based ... on the notion that neighborhoods were the building blocks of the city and that government should attack urban problems at the community level. Against this backdrop, during the eighties, Castro forged a series of initiatives to strengthen, stabilize and organize neighborhoods, such as the Family Doctor and Nurse Program and the Workshops for Integrated Neighborhood Transformation. Wrestling with hard times in communities based on cooperation and reciprocity spawned a way of life that offset the ideological onslaught caused by the rise of consumerism and materialism" (Taylor and McGlynn 2009:413). Without this foundation of grassroots socialism, one that Eastern European socialist seemed largely to have failed to equal, capital, through the tourist sector, likely would have gained too much political power.

In 2007, employment in the tourist sector was estimated at 587,000, or some 11 percent of total employment. This ultimately supports Taylor and McGlynn's assertion that the government's attempts to isolate the tourist sector were hopeless, but making an effort certainly improved what, as is obvious by the condition of its neighbors, could have been a worse situation.

This took a tremendous effort, of course, given the fairly nonexistent state of the tourist sector during the Cold War: "In 1998, only 7.1% of the hotels in Cuba had a 5-star rating, 30% had 4 stars, and 66% were either 2 or 3 stars. Thus, with the expansion of tourism, Cuba came under constant pressure to increase the quality as well as the quantity of available rooms. By mid-2000, Cuban officials predict[ed], about 64% of all their rooms will be in the 4- and 5-star category" (Taylor and McGlynn 2009:410). This has since been accomplished and then some, and, with the likely influx of more Americans in the coming years, the improved infrastructure

should allow GDP growth that will satisfy Cubans and allow a continuance of market socialism rather than an attempt to adapt the social market that, say, Gorbachev wanted for the Soviet Union, but that would more likely end up with a complete loss of the country's high standard of living as has proven true of most post-socialist countries.

Another prong of the necessary retreat was how, in 1993, the government allowed Cubans to rent out rooms to tourists. "Between 1998 and 2002, the number of *casas particulares* increased from 1537 to 4980 across the island, while in Havana, they increased from 2284 to 2730" (Taylor and McGlynn 2009:410). This represents a significant desire among Cubans for extra income and for opportunities for entrepreneurship, but also represents a much different path than that taken by other countries in the region, and these socialist bed and breakfasts, as it were, should limit the power of capital immensely compared to traditional tourist infrastructure while maintaining the socialist culture that attracts many of the visitors in the first place.

American politicians and theorists can look to this success as a next step after breaking up the big banks, which is finally on the table. An American market socialism with a similar limit to the size and scope of business, with the small business tradition of the country, large amount of resources and of demand, and the entrepreneurial spirit of our citizens, could likely see an even more vibrant consumer experience within the context of a Cuban-type socialism. That is, with the majority guaranteed employment by the state if they want it (and a universal basic income) but with a significant number of (actually) small businesses. This could fuel a cultural renaissance as the diverse nature of the population would create an explosion of great restaurants, for instance, to replace the awful chains.

Of note is the ubiquity of live music in the vast majority of bars and most restaurants. Cuba is a good product for tourists. And there do exist a significant number of restaurants and clubs where tourists and locals mix, and in the latter locals often get in at a reduced rate—but one that must stay be paid in CuCs, or formerly in dollars. Therefore, much of the population is mostly or entirely cut off from these important cultural and recreational institutions. This unfair situation is acutely felt, and should hopefully, as these concerns reach decision makers via CDR meetings, via Assembly of People's Power members, continue to put pressure on the authorities to eventually reunite the two-tier economy. For what it's worth, eliminating the CuC within the next couple of years is a stated goal.

One must recognize that the government wanted both to protect Cubans from tourism, and to protect tourists from Cubans. That is, they wanted to protect Cubans from consumerism and prostitution. They wanted to protect tourists from crime, or the perception thereof, and the loss of revenue that would incur. Of course, crime has been low in Cuba for decades, but the temptation to deprive rich, possibly drunk tourists seems obvious given the relatively cash and consumer good deprived (though well-treated medically and well-educated) status of the average Cuban.

“Overall, the government policy of isolating Cubanos from tourists failed. The distribution of tourist facilities throughout [sic] city meant that numerous opportunities existed for *habaneros* to encounter *turistas*,” conclude (Taylor and McGlynn 2009:412; Cabello 2012). I tend to agree, but would caution that such evaluations need always to be relevant as well as absolute. That is, how did the Cuban government do in shielding Cubans from the ills of tourism and tourists from violent and property crime, in comparison to its Caribbean and Latin American counterparts? I would argue, and the literature certainly concurs, that they did well. This is

probably in large part because other, capitalist countries in the region made no effort whatsoever to protect their people from, again, say, prostitution and consumerism. Instead, they attempted to squeeze every dollar possible out of these social ills without any regard to how out-of-control they might get. That's why, despite a similar reliance on tourism (and in spite of the unique challenges of the Special Period with which no other country in the hemisphere had to deal), the destitution, violence, and death that stem largely from the inherent contradictions of private property do not exist in Cuba. They certainly do in, say, Puerto Rico, a country sometimes actually compared *favorably* (despite across-the-board lower social indicators and, adjusted for PPP, similar GNI per capita) to Cuba by some of the more shameless neoliberal commentators.

“The integration of tourist sites and facilities within residential communities created the conditions which made it possible for international tourism to influence everyday life and culture by imbuing it with consumerism and material-based notions of the ‘good life’—the equating of personal happiness to the purchase of goods and services and using material possessions to shape and reinforce identity and define social status. Through tourism,” claim Taylor and McGlynn (2009:412), “Cubans are beginning to share a ubiquitous phenomenon of the contemporary world, whereby products serve as symbols, and are evaluated, purchased, and consumed based on their symbolic content and perceived social meaning.” This is an idealist interpretation that, at the same time, exaggerates the degree to which Cuba had progressed toward communism. While the danger of the cultural domination of the U.S. is very real, that the embargo (which always allowed some exceptions, and now allows many) has been enough to preserve a distinct, socialist culture in Cuba—despite the cultural and geographic proximity of this global hegemon with its powerful economy and its millions of right-wing Cubans with family ties and constant communication with Cuban nationals—supports a materialist perspective that leads to a hopeful

conclusion about the ability of the Cuban government and society to maintain its solvency and socialist character so long as its economy remains socialist. In other words, Cubans were never so far removed from capitalist that they didn't know about consumerism and "material-based notions of the 'good life.'" They just didn't care that much, because they know that with the limited resources of the island (and the world! Cubans believe the 98% of scientists who support the anthropomorphic model of global warming) and an intransigent U.S., to lose their higher life expectancy, lower infant mortality, lower unemployment, etc. for a chance at a PlayStation 4 would hardly be worth it.

They have also seen very starkly, by the introduction of an, again, *especially* capitalistic, as it were, sector in tourism into a society previously almost devoid of private property, social ills that are obviously caused directly by the reintroduction thereof.

For one, the overwhelmingly white ethnic/racial character of the Cubans who fled the Revolution has meant that, with the legalization of the dollar and increasing importance of remittances, cash from a capitalist country directly creates racial inequality where little had existed. Similarly, the racist demands of those socialized in capitalist economies means the tourist sector is the glaring exception in an otherwise socialized and equitable system of hiring and employment. That is, Blacks are not represented proportionally in the tourist sector (de la Fuente 1998, 2007). If they were able to quickly achieve proportional representation among doctors and lawyers and professors, why shouldn't they be able to in the less demanding but more lucrative tourist sector?

In the U.S., racial/ethnic inequality—like Black and Hispanic families having, after the Great Recession, about a twentieth the net worth on average of white families (Kochhar, Fry, and Taylor 2011)—is legitimated in the minds of Americans by the cruel logic of the market. Or,

rather, the evil of it is obscured by the machinations of the market. So many different inequities—lack of universal healthcare, college, etc.—exist that it's hard to keep track of. If they're literally 20 times poorer, they must be at least a little bit dumber, or lazier, right? The Cuban case, more simply than addressing each individual variable (inheritances, private schools...) provide as close to a controlled experiment as possible to prove the structural racism of the market.

Agriculture and Sustainability

An advantage of tourism as primary development strategy is that it is relatively compatible with the uniquely sustainable socialism Cuba has quietly created. The ability of the Cuban state to respond to the global environmental crisis, with which it was confronted more rapidly and profoundly than has been perhaps any other country with the sudden loss of Soviet oil and of the socialist trading bloc in the context of the embargo, reflects another unique advantage of a socialist state. That is, not beholden to large companies for which an appropriate forward-looking, evidence-based response to a rapidly warming (due to human behavior) planet would hurt the bottom line, the Cuban government has been able to become, again the only ecologically sustainable country with very high human development. This was accomplished while recovering from the depression of the Special Period and even likely, in the wake of rapprochement with the U.S., reaching higher levels of consumer spending with increased tourism and remittances upon a foundation of organic, sustainable agriculture and other forward-looking initiatives.

Obviously, Cuba served as the laboratory and provided these solutions to the crises the rest of the world will soon face reluctantly. The economic disaster was sudden, and severe, but the centrally planned nature of the economy allowed for a quicker response than one imagines, again, say, Puerto Rico would be able to manage if it lost three-quarters of its imports and what not. “By November 1991 about 12 percent of Cuba’s agricultural tractors were idle because of lack of fuel,” and in response, “100,000 oxen had been trained for duty in animal traction,” which, although initially done out of pure necessity, was found to be beneficial in avoiding soil erosion and weeds.

The inherent superiority of socialism in education played a pivotal role in this trying time. “Cuba, with 2% of Latin America’s population but 11% of its scientists, was able to mobilize its research infrastructure to develop substitutes for the unavailable agricultural inputs. By 1993, Cuba had 14 centers for ant production and 222 mini-centers for the production of biopesticides and biofertilizers” (Gonzalez 2003:687). Market incentives absolutely would not have produced that kind of innovation. They would have incentivized the creation of things like pawn shops, check cashing places, etc. as a few get into the business of profiting off the suffering of the many as in a capitalist recession.

The shift to agro-ecology was painful for the first few years, with some estimates suggesting the average Cuban lost almost 20 pounds and was eating fewer than 1,900 calories at one point. “In 1992 Cuba applied chemical fertilizers to 817,000 hectares of sugarcane, compared to 2,625,000 hectares in 1989” (Diaz-Briquets and Pérez-López 2000:254). While yields were initially lower as the government was slow to ditch the Soviet-style state farm model for a more decentralized, cooperative-based model, change was certainly more rapid than it would have been in a market economy. Most commentators seem to agree that Cuba served as,

basically, a controlled scientific experiment that represents well what all countries will face (Patel 2012), but few seem to have the courage to address the obvious implications for the future of capitalism and liberal democracy.

“By 1999 Cuba’s agricultural production had recovered and in some cases reached historic levels” (Diaz-Briquets and Pérez-López 2000:257). And by 2007 “Cubans produced more food while using one-quarter of the chemicals as they did in 1988” (Patel 2012). With the reality that extreme climate events will continue to be more and more common due to global warming, Cuba’s example of “agro-ecology” is increasingly more and more important. After Hurricane Ike devastated the country in 2008, for instance, “a research team found that both traditional plantain monocultures and agro-ecological farms were devastated. But there were striking differences: Monocultures lost about 75 percent of tree cover, where agro-ecological farms lost 60 percent.”

In addition to the poly-crop agro-ecological model, “Organic techniques in urban gardening ... show that organic agriculture could actually work as the basis of an entire nation’s farming sector. This ... puts a lie to the oft-repeated myth that ‘organic farming could never feed the world’” (Funes 2012). To be fair, Cuba still imports most of its calories and nearly all of its cereals, as it always has. That is unlikely to change, given the relative strengths of the Cuban economy, how poorly cereals grow in the region, and the population of the island. But, to return to agro-ecology, many of the relative improvements Cuba has made are objectively superior techniques that will be key once the monocrop, inorganic fertilizer-based industrial farming of the past is no longer an option, and should be adopted before that is the case: “Intercropping of corn and cassava, plantains and cassava, coffee and taro, and soybean and sugar cane, for example, has become a common practice. This practice provides food for farmers and their

families, earns greater income for the agricultural enterprise, enhances agricultural productivity, improves soil condition, and helps control harmful pests and diseases.” Thus, from 1989 to 2000, production of tubers and root crops increased by 106%, and bean production and corn production increased by 318% and 332%, respectively.” Even export crops “tobacco, citrus, and coffee have experienced significant recovery” (Diaz-Briquets and Pérez-López 2000:254).

It is important to remember that Cuba was only able to accomplish this, and to provide this priceless example for existential problems for which we otherwise would not have proven solutions, somewhat isolated from the neoliberal global capitalist economy—“as a consequence of the political and economic autonomy occasioned by its relative economic isolation, including its exclusion from major international financial and trade institutions. Paradoxically, while the U.S. embargo subjected Cuba to immense economic hardship, *it also gave the Cuban government free rein to adopt agricultural policies that ran counter to the prevailing neoliberal model and that protected Cuban farmers against ruinous competition from highly subsidized agricultural producers in the United States and the European Union*” [emphasis added] (Gonzalez 2003:690). Had Cuba been a part of NAFTA, not only would it not have the political freedom to pursue alternative, objectively better solutions instead of the myopic ones offered by the market; it wouldn’t even be economically possible, as Cuban farmers would have suffered the fate of so many Mexican farmers.

The Future

Taylor and McGlynn give the following bleak scenario concerning the quality of life in a liberal democratic Cuba:

“In this scenario, Cuba transitions to a U.S. style democracy based on a multi-party political system and a market-based economy. Miami-based *Cubanos* become influential in governance as the island transitions to capitalism. The tourist industry will also expand into casino resort gambling, pornography and sexual tourism, as it comes to dominate the Caribbean tourist market. Economic growth, however, will not translate into a higher quality of life among *Cubanos*. The promise of enabling *Cubanos* to become U.S. style consumers is a false one. Changes in property tenure combined with diminished interest in neighborhood development will trigger the accelerated rise of vulnerable communities. The new government will dismantle the social approach to neighborhood development. Racial discrimination re-emerges, crime increases, street children reappear, and the social life of ordinary *habaneros*, especially Afro-Cubans will deteriorate. Urban centers like Havana and Santiago de Cuba will resemble distressed neighborhoods throughout the Americas, including the United States.” (2009:414)

This, given the reality in every other Caribbean country, is not only a reasonable prediction, but the only reasonable prediction as to what would happen to Cuban society with “democratic” elections and a superpower intent on the result thereof being the complete destruction of socialism.

The closest historical example is the Russian case. In Russia, popular discontentment with the ruling Communist Party was, I think few would argue, considerably worse with the collapse of the USSR than Cubans are with the Party today. Regardless, majority support for a continuation of left-wing policies, which I argue has always existed in Russia, would hardly guarantee a majority of the votes. Consider the admission of Dmitri Medvedev, who surely never would have reached the presidency if not for Yeltsin’s reelection, that the Communist Party of the Russian Federation actually won the country’s second democratic election (Shuster 2012). This was despite the previously-revealed tampering of the United States and its allies, and by the Yeltsin regime, whereby billions were poured into his reelection effort while the Communists were unable and/or unwilling to go over the statutory \$2 million campaign spending limit. In the days prior to the elections, state TV channels were flooded with documentaries about the worst

abuses of Stalin and insinuations that a vote for a return to socialism would bring the country back to the 30s (Shuster 2012).

And, while Cuba, again, has recovered and far surpassed us in some health and education metrics (the aforementioned plus, for instance, the first country to eliminate mother-to-child HIV transmission (Brink 2015), etc.), capitalism has blessed Russia, previously as the USSR a leader in health and education, with a life expectancy for that fell below 60 for men in capitalist Russia.

Remember that, according to the respected, independent Levada Center, 58 percent of Russians say “they would like to see a new socialist system,” although only 14 percent believe this is likely to occur. About the same “regret the collapse of the Soviet Union,” although this is down from a high of 75 percent in 2000 (Porter 2016). Clearly, for a courageous and independent nation determined to forge their own path independent of American hegemony and the rapidly failing neoliberal capitalist global economy, multi-party democracy has so far shown to greatly decrease the democratic nature of government. This nostalgia for the higher life expectancies, GDPs, economic growth, and lower crime, infant mortality, etc. of the single-party era is also seen in polling available from most of the Former Soviet Union, with the Baltic states and perhaps Poland the obvious exceptions, but also worse comparisons to Cuba, a country that chose socialism in a revolution widely admired as deeply democratic and egalitarian throughout the world.

If such an effort were so easily undertaken in Russia, it would be impossible for the Cuban left to get a fair shot, despite the actual feelings of the Cuban people, especially with the likelihood of a more hawkish president in the White House at the time than Obama. Consider the geographical and cultural proximity of Cuba to its superpower neighbor and also Taylor and McGlynn’s astute observation (2009:416) of the likely outsized role that former *gusanos* from

Miami would likely play in a Cuba undergoing rapid, Russia-style regime change to neoliberal capitalist democracy.

Taylor and McGlynn see, or saw, the continuation of the regime without a change in relations with the superpower next door as likely to mean the “mitigating forces of neighborhood life and culture will sustain the revolution,” with a continuation of the Communist government but within the (now real and developing) context of improved relations with the U.S. would mean a middle path whereby, overall, Cuba is able to continue to improve its citizens’ standards of living but less able to control the inequities already being bred by the growth of private property on the island.

This has shown to be fairly accurate given that the regime has indeed survived some rapprochement with the U.S. without any signs of collapse. But Cuba has become a “nascent class society” because it now has a growing bourgeoisie, which, in the context of the increasingly liberalized economic system of the island, will only continue to enrich itself at the expense of regular, hardworking Cubans. “Cubans who learned skills from their revolutionary education now sell them for dollars,” many of whom, as in Russia, are former privileged bureaucrats of the Communist Party who use their “connections” and resources to open restaurants, *casas particulares*, or other private businesses to take advantage of the CUC (convertible peso) economy to which most Cubans do not have significant access (Landau 2003:626). This is an impulse born out of scarcity and hardship previously unknown to a people who enjoyed a high standard of living under socialism—and out of the profound contradictions born out of a two-tier economy that has created differences where previously equity and meritocracy had justly existed. However, without the continued existence of the relatively robust

social safety net, as exemplified by the *libreta*, it could be much, much worse (Landau 2003:625).

Conclusions

In the U.S., this, more or less, is what passes as a *fresh, new perspective* on socialism: “Socialism, once banished from polite conversation, has made a startling comeback. But what about socialism as a remedy for today's crisis? *If you think of the Soviet Union or Cuba, socialism doesn't have any relevance.* But if you consider the Scandinavian countries, as well as Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, and the Netherlands, whose economies were shaped by socialist agitation, then another kind of socialism—call it liberal socialism”—has a lot to offer” [emphasis added] (Judis 2009:142).

First of all, to equate Cuba with the Soviet Union a generation after the collapse of the latter—and I think I have demonstrated how far Cuba has come from the Soviet model—is ridiculously unfair. It wouldn't even have been fair in the 80s. And, despite its massive environmental, social, and political inferiorities in the development of socialism of the 1980s USSR compared to today's Cuba, again, the Left took it more seriously than they do Cuba today. This might be due to some basic psychological weakness whereby people can't help but equate military or geopolitical power with ideological or even scientific importance or legitimacy.

That such trite nonsense—and really, it is an enormous claim, social scientifically, to make with no support—regularly passes peer review and infests the pages of ostensibly objective sociology, ethnic studies, anthropology, and probably worst of all economics and political science journals is reflective of a very disturbing scenario. It seems to stem from a combination of

a scandalous intellectual laziness and the spoken (by funding, by the five companies that control all for-profit American media, etc.) and unspoken demands of the ruling class. The former, at least, should be able to be rectified from within.

While it is important for academics like de la Fuente, who so well elucidates both where Cuba has succeeded and where they continue to fail—and, in some cases, newly regress—in achieving racial equity in the island (1995, 1998, 2007), to offer a fair but critical perspective on revolutionary Cuban society, it is more important that we see a return of some genuinely supportive academic analysis. This wouldn't be political, because the country's unique achievements certainly warrant at least a look, especially now with the heavy corpse of neoliberalism seeming to rot ever more rapidly.

Politically, too, though, the overlooking of an objectively successful society represents a failure by the Left and successful redbaiting by the Right. Feminists should notice the popularly-elected Cuban Assembly of People's Power's 48.9 percent female (IPU 2016) composition. They certainly have noticed fifth-place Sweden's 44 percent, but that's easier. Likewise, the Family Law represents the uniquely passionate, prominent, and relevant feminism of Cuban politics and Cuban society. If Sweden made it illegal for men not to do their fair share of the housework, you can be sure every shade of the American left, from *Buzzfeed* to *Huffington Post* to *Feministing* would be *freaking out*. Of course, the Scandinavian countries accomplish what they do with an ecological footprint much closer to the United States'—and it would take something like seven earths to support 7 billion Americans—than to Cuba's unique accomplishment of high human development and environmental sustainability.

Likewise, if anywhere near the degree of racial/ethnic equity that has been achieved in Cuba were accomplished anywhere else, especially if it were a European country, it would be a

part of the political conversation, to say the least. Cuba's approximately three times lower infant mortality for Black infants (Office of Minority Health 2012) despite its relatively infinitesimal GDP should probably be a consideration vis-à-vis Black Lives.

As soon as the Cold War ended, predictions of Cuba's demise were widespread. From the Right and from liberals, these were largely—exclusively, as far as I know—idealist in nature and focused on the perceived failure of the Cuban state to routinize the charismatic authority and on deeply flawed comparisons to the breakup of the USSR and its Warsaw Pact allies (Pérez-Stable 1992, 1998). This is in addition, of course, to the ever-popular but never-supported hypothesis that Cubans yearn for the broken electoral system of the U.S., with the grandiose spectacle it makes every four years of billions of corporate dollars funneled into the two representatives of the many allied factions of the ruling class. Of, as Noam Chomsky put it, a system of vigorous debate, but only within the incredibly narrow, 'patriotic' parameters allowed by the ruling class (1979). Historian Robert Whitney opined in 1995 that, while the Cuban Revolution was still ongoing, Cuban socialism was dead. Reflective of a generally overcritical Western Left, this is an absurd statement, especially given that public employment was still over 90 percent at the time (Kapcia 2008). This is analogous to saying Lenin's USSR was not socialist during the NEP years. The much greater degree of central planning and the 80-or-so percent public employment of the Cuban economy make it much more accurately describable as 'socialist' than 'capitalist,' or even a 'social market.'

Market socialism is still socialism, and its markets are within the publicly-owned economy and directed toward the efficient use of public resources and social capabilities to fulfill the material needs and wants of the country. This is opposed to an economy dominated and defined by a "free" market whereby the exploitation of labor value by capital is the engine of

inherently extremely unequal and exponentially more inequitable growth with varying degrees of welfare state checks and balances to correct the natural course of capitalism. Norway, with about 30 percent of its workforce employed publicly to use that metric again as a proxy for degree of public ownership, thus lacks the socialist culture of Cuba, not to say the equity and equality in, say, parliamentary representation or employment, and environmental sustainability (not even close), the neighborhood-based socialism like the twice-yearly doctor house calls and CDR meetings, and the opening it creates for radical politics like the Family Law and hope for a communist future, which is more important, and probably necessary, than ever in a warming world.

No matter the path of development it pursues, Cuba will not become a wealthy country like the U.S., especially given the stagnation of global capitalism. But growing tourism and successes in other areas like medicine and healthcare, perhaps even the discovery of significant amount of oil in the Gulf of Mexico, should give the country the resources it needs to continue its strategy of social development. In the end, with the contradictions of the corruption, inefficiency, and other contradictions inherent to private property adequately, proactively vigilantly managed, in the short-term Cuba should be able to “save socialism” with a private sector limited to small- and medium-sized enterprises. However, the ultimate goal should remain communism, no matter how far away that might be. Especially given the objective, social scientific support for the superiority of much of what Cuba is doing to what the failing capitalist world is doing, as the environmental crisis worsens, Cuba’s service as a model for the rest of the world could well be even more indispensable than the inspiration its revolution provided so many, from Nicaragua to Colombia, across the world. Eventually, Cuba might find itself no longer in a sea of hostile capitalists, but instead as the Mecca of an entire world following its

lead toward a better, more natural method of human social organization. By then, presumably, Americans will take notice.

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