Cuba Today!... And Tomorrow?

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A kaleidoscopic view of activities and encounters over an eight-day period.

Vignettes to describe and possibly provide some insights on what is going on in Cuba today!
What, When, Why & How...

- **What:** Perceptions from “Educational Tour” of Cuba
- **When:** February 2012
- **Why:** Historical and current development and political interest.
- **How:** Lexington Institute under license with U.S. Treasury Department for an “Educational Tour”
- **Personal context and influences:** Cuba and the Dominican Republic (D.R.). then and now
The Caribbean
Cuban (D.R.) Demographics

- Population – 11,177,743 (D.R. – 10,088,598)
- 19% < 14 years of age (D.R. – 29.5%)
- 10% > 65 Years of age (D.R. - 6.5%)
- Health - 11.8% of GDP (D.R. – 6.1%)
- Water & Sanitation – 95% (D.R – 87%)
- Infant/Maternal mortality – 5.12/53 deaths (D.R – 21.3/100) per 1,000 live births/per 100,000 pregnancies
- Life expectancy – 77.41 years (D.R. – 77.44 years)
- Ethnic groups: 1% Asian, 10% Black, 24 % Mulattoes, 65% White
- Education - 13.6% of GDP (D.R. 2.3%) [Expectancy - 16/12]
- Literacy – 99.8% (D. R. 87%)
- Youth Unemployment – 3.1% (D.R. 30%)
Very Brief History

• 1492 – Columbus “discovery” America

• 1898 – Spanish-American War

• 1902 – Cuban Independence

• 1953-1959 – Cuban Revolution - New Year’s Eve ‘59 entered Havana!

• 2008 – Fidel hands government over to Raul
“Abel Prieto..., now Minister of Culture, has played an important role in creating these spaces for the debates to occur.

At the same time, I believe that we are a great distance from exhausting this space. For example, one of the things that has always bothered me is the lack of communication and of information in Cuba. It really bothers me. Why can’t I have access to what other people say? I would like to learn more about the opinions of people who don’t think along the same lines as myself, because that helps me to reflect, and maybe it will help to improve me, to make me understand things...
The Bottom line...

“One of the defects that all socialist systems have had is precisely that. Why do people say that there is more freedom in a capitalist system than in a socialist one? It is precisely because, whatever the reason may be, there always exists in socialism the pretext that can be used to restrict certain freedoms. I am a complete socialist. But I would be far happier if we who live in a socialist system could really say that we are freer than those who live under different systems. That is the kind of socialism which we should be constructing.”

Silvio Rodriguez – Folk Musician, 2001
Changes...

• Ownership of property
• Ownership of “small” businesses
• In 2011, 2.5 million tourists, up from 250 thousand a few years ago
• 1,618 private restaurants and 5,297 B&Bs
• Dual currency – Cuban pesos and Convertible Cuban Currency (CucS)
• Infusion of “exiled family” money
Comments from meetings...

- Political opposition – individuals, unorganized
- Political leadership – unknown!
- Fidel versus Raul – waiting to see!!!
- Political prisoner – Alan Gross – improve the computer system within the Jewish community; 15,000 before the Revolution – 94% (900 still in Cuba; or 5,000) left after the Revolution; Cuba was stepping-stone to U.S. in 1910-1920 – only group allowed to immigrate, if going to Israel.
Encounters & Meetings

• Airport encounter
• Meeting with Health Clinic personnel
• Meeting with Catholic News Magazine “Especial Laical” Editors
• Meeting with Political Analyst – Guantanamo, Bay of Pigs (Pride of being Cuban)
• Meeting with Jewish teacher at local synagogue
• Meeting with tobacco grower
• Meeting with cab driver
• Meeting with small dress shop owner
• Meeting with restaurant owner
• Talking with ice cream vendor
• “Talking” with food ration outlet
• Visit to cigar factory – asking for “money”
• Small businesses in commercial establishment
• Children’s theater – “La Colmenita”
• Health Club
• Meeting with artists and ceramicist
Conclusions...

• It remains to be seen...