


¿CUBA, SI?

An American visits Castro's island
— and thinks he might like to go again

¡CUBA, NO!

Cubans who now live in Philadelphia
don't care if they ever go back



Americans hit the beaches in Cuba.
Bunker in background serves
as a sundeck.

Photos by Hoag Levins



Top left: Cuban schoolchildren, dressed in their traditional uniforms, pose in front of their school in central Havana, which in the old days was a mansion. Top right: An aerial view of Havana, with the harbor shown in the distance. Above: In the countryside, villages look much the way they did 100 years ago, but, slowly, electrical service and concrete foundations are emerging. Right: A soldier stands guard at the Ministry of Industry on Revolution Square.



AN AMERICAN IN CUBA

Surprising Scenes From Castro's Island

'It's weird,' says a tourist. But is it good weird—or bad weird?



By HOAG LEVINS

One of the first things you notice on Cuba's beaches are the bunkers. Pushing up from the sand like the heads of buried giants, the ugly concrete monoliths are as much a part of every bathing beach as are the palm trees, crystal-clear surf, brilliant sun or carpets of colorful shells left behind by every wave.

Positioned just behind the tree line, the fortifications are set about 200 yards apart, and when you climb inside one you realize they were designed to afford their gun crews a 180-degree sweep of the beach. Any part of the shoreline could be instantaneously subjected to a withering crossfire.

Sitting inside the dank interior, peering out the forward gun slits, you can get an intimate feel for the last 17 years of Cuban history; like squinting eyes, the narrow ports look north across the water scanning the horizon for signs of the next American invasion.

You can also get a good feel for the latest historical turn in Cuba by lowering your view to the carpet of bodies left in front of the bunkers by what might be called the Invasion of '78:

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tourists. Lobster-red under the broiling tropical sun, the Americans loll on colorful towels and debate the Cuba they are discovering, the Cuba that has lain quietly obscured behind the walls of political flak and propaganda rolling out of Washington and Havana for the last 17 years.

About 150 American tourists arrive in Cuba each week under a new program instituted in December as part of the diplomatic thaw between the two countries. Flying a special charter flight out of New York, the Americans come heavily laden with curiosity as well as the greenbacks that are sorely needed by Cuba's hard-pressed treasury.

Tramping across the island, many of the tourists have come to this conclusion: While Cuba is a far cry from the socialist utopia Fidel Castro would have the world envision, it is even a further cry from the dismal picture painted by Uncle Sam since 1960.

The new Cuba is a country of mind-boggling contradictions and incongruities not easy for an American to smoothly absorb. On one hand, its people-oriented social program and achievements grab warmly at the gut instincts, while on the other, its unyielding political system stabs coldly at the intellect.

One older, well-traveled American tourist lying in the sun atop a bunker

on Santa Maria Beach summed it up thus: "I've been to Russia and through Asia and to a good many South American countries. Cuba is by far the weirdest place I've ever seen. I mean, you can't quite decide whether it's good weird or bad weird. That's what makes it so strange."

A new Jersey restaurant. Two men sit over uneaten plates of spaghetti and two empty bottles of wine. One man is a Cuban who still tells stories of what it was like to be connected with the 2506 Brigade as it planned and executed the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. He is now settled in the Philadelphia area and stays in contact with numerous friends in Florida who still hope to liberate Cuba from Castro.

The second man is a writer. The two men have been friends for a long time, and the Cuban is worried about the writer's plans to visit Cuba.

"Listen to me," the Cuban says across the spaghetti. "Don't do it. How often I got to tell you that. Don't do it. You will take your cameras and that typewriter of yours and they will put you in jail. It is terrible in Cuba. You can't imagine how things are under Castro. Police are everywhere. No one is allowed to travel. You won't be allowed to see anything. Why must you go to Cuba?"

"I have to go. I want to see what it's like," said the writer. "Can it really be

that bad?"

"We have ways of knowing. Our people in Florida. They know. It is very bad in Cuba. They will not let you take pictures or write. Listen to me. I'm your friend. Don't do this."

A third bottle of wine arrives. The Cuban leans back in his chair, hand on his face to show his concern and his frustration at the writer's determination. The two men clink their freshly filled glasses.

"There is no wine in Cuban jails," the Cuban says.

Washed by the Gulf Stream, Cuba is a unique place for ship-watchers and other general students in the wanderlust school. The island's northern shore forms the southern edge of the Straits of Florida — the 90-mile-wide channel through which the Gulf Stream flows as it pushes out of the Gulf of Mexico, runs past Havana and then takes a sharp turn north to parallel the East Coast of the United States before it takes a final turn east across the Atlantic.

In the old days of windjammers and Spanish conquest, navigators followed the Gulf Stream and its trade winds regularly. Running atop the Stream, the trades came and went like clockwork through the straits, and Havana's position on those straits is what

continued

CUBA continued

made it such an important city in the Old World. The country that commanded Havana commanded the Gulf of Mexico and access to South America.

The fortresses built during that era are still there, and today one can sit atop their cold stones and watch the water off Havana where a good part of the world's shipping passes each day. Out on the horizon, like a string of awkwardly shaped jewels, the vessels stretch as far as the eye can see in either direction. They carry crude oil from New Orleans, heavy machinery from Galveston, ore from Mexico, silks from Peking, tea and TV sets from Tokyo, mahogany from Manila, computers from Taiwan.

All day long, day after day, year after year, the world's riches float by just a few miles offshore for all of Cuba to see. But for 17 years most of those ships have been prohibited from entering or trading with Cuban ports — because of the American-instituted embargo against Cuba. In the last year, that embargo has been lifted by South American and other countries, which have begun business relations with Cuba, but the embargo by American companies and ships continues.

The results of the economic blockade, which are in evidence throughout the island, can perhaps be most graphically seen in the streets: Edsels. Hudsons. DeSotos. Tank-like Buicks and Chevrolets with the garish tail fins of the 1950s.

Unable to acquire enough new cars or spare parts, Cubans have created what must be the most bizarre collection of customized vehicles in the world: Falcons rebuilt with Russian truck parts. A '57 Chevy fitted with Volvo bumpers and the headlights of a Polish bus. Cone-nosed Studebakers whose engine parts were cannibalized from an ancient French limousine. Standing on a street corner watching this demolition derby of cars go by, one is hard pressed to figure out what is holding them together more, the rust or the several layers of house paint used to cover the rust.

Just down the street from the harbor, positioned so that he can sit on his stoop and watch the passing ships out in the Gulf Stream, is the home of a Cuban construction worker. The ancient street is a gentle curve of starkly plain stucco rowhouses, many of which are more than a century old. Exteriors are shabby with peeling paint and crumbling mortar. Repairs are hard to come by in this city, which is critically short of most building materials. Even paint is a rare item, and takes two years or longer to acquire through the ration system.

The man is in his late 40s, has four children and works 44 hours a week as a concrete laborer in and around Havana. Like other workers, he often puts in overtime — and is paid for it. He frequently qualifies for bonuses that are given to productive work crews. He has money — but, like all other Cubans, he has little to spend it on.

His house has four large rooms, furnished spartanly. In the rear room,

three broken window panes are covered with cardboard — and have been for four years. Window glass is not available in Cuba. In the living room, the only wall decorations are tacked-up photographs of family members, a calendar and two pictures of flowers torn from magazines. The kitchen table is handmade from discarded lumber found along the waterfront. One of the chairs is made from a curious combination of two-by-four sections and pick handles scavenged from work sites.

"There is no furniture to buy," the man explains. "Sometimes you get used furniture if a relative dies, but usually you do the best with what you have or can make."

In the bathroom, one must sit on the cold porcelain rim of the toilet because there is no toilet seat. The last time toilet seats were available in Cuba was more than 10 years ago. Today, if they are broken, they cannot be replaced. Water is also a problem at times. Often, there is fresh water only three or four hours a day.

On the old bureau in the bedroom lies a silver Esterbrook pen — found by the man 15 years ago. It no longer writes, but it is one of his most cherished possessions. In Havana such pens are for sale for more than \$100.

The family's entertainment equipment consists of a small Japanese radio and a record-player. The record-player was purchased on the black market. "I would not ordinarily have done that," the man says, "because the penalties are heavy if you are caught. But the children enjoy records very much and we would have had to wait a year or more to buy a record-player from the normal (ration) store."

At the kitchen table, the man's young daughter sits with her school books using the only pens available at the schools — ball-point refills that must be held close to the tip so that they do not bend. The little girl is wearing a loose-fitting smock of a faded gray material with a red flower print on it. Before being sewn into a smock, the material had served as a shirt for the father. Before that it had been a shirt for the grandfather. Before that it had been a house dress for the grandmother.

"Material is very hard to get," says the man's wife, a woman with a quick smile and delicate fingers that belie the bulk of the rest of her body. "Each year, we may buy three meters of cloth. That is all. That is the ration. It is this way for everyone. You can also buy one dress — but you must buy it at only one store where the (ration) card is good. Last year I was going to buy a dress, but the store did not have one in my size, so I had to wait for this year."

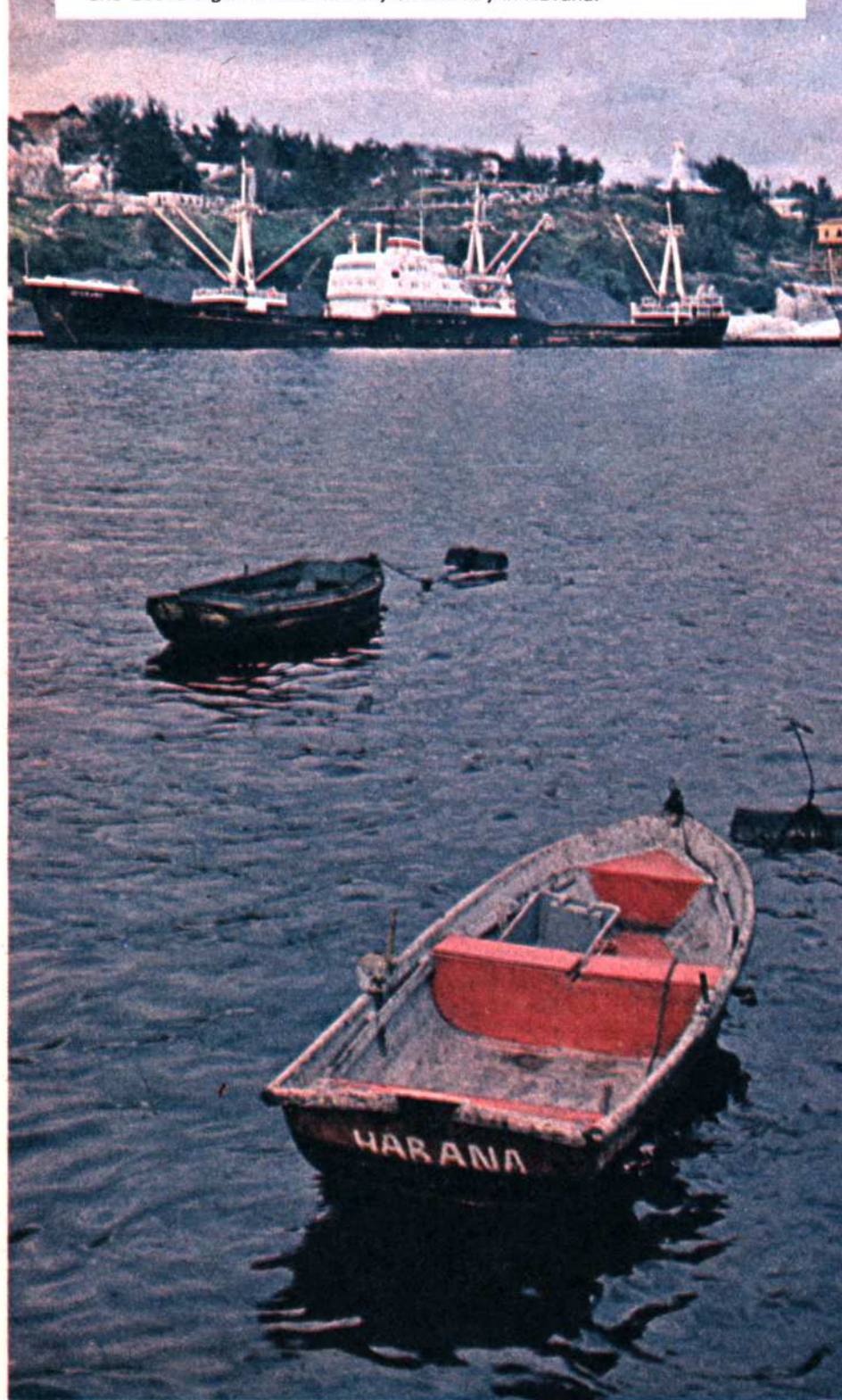
Eyeglasses are another item nearly impossible to obtain. Both the woman and her husband have glasses on order. She says she ordered a pair last year after having gone to the eye doctor. Her husband corrects her good-naturedly, saying her memory is slipping again — she ordered the glasses in 1976.

"The paper (prescription) must go to Germany or Poland and glasses are

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Che Guevara graces the Ministry of Industry in Havana.



Havana harbor: Russian ships are anchored below the statue of Christ of Havana.

made there. It takes a long time. A woman next door has been waiting since 1975," the wife says.

Shortly after nightfall, the couple's eldest son comes in. He is a strikingly handsome young man in whose face are angular European features and swarthy Latin coloring. The son attends an architectural school. He is one of 100 students in the school, and he says a major problem is slide rules. There is only a single slide rule for the entire school. This causes great problems because the 100 students must take turns and often wait long periods of time before they can do calculations required for their studies and assignments.

Looking coolly fashionable in his custom-made light-blue tropical suit, the American tourist leans against the bar at La Bodeguita del Medio. The man, deeply tanned, looks 40, though he is actually in his mid-50s. He wears a tightly woven white straw hat whose dark-blue band matches the tuft of handkerchief sticking out of his coat's breast pocket.

The del Medio is nearly as narrow as it is high. It lies hidden away down a crooked street near the Havana waterfront. The street is filled with school-children in red uniforms. At one end is a cathedral spire poking into the cloudless sky. Along the second-story windows of the houses and shops, old women lean their elbows on the wrought-iron railings or hang out a bit of wash as they watch the street below.

The bar has a freshly painted sign and hopes to cash in on the American tourists who may wish to drink at this former haunt of Ernest Hemingway. Before returning to Idaho in 1961, Hemingway spent a good many years in Cuba. His villa, known as La Vija, or The Lookout, sits high on a mountain overlooking the city. Here they refer to Hemingway only as "Papa" and tell how he frequently came to the del Medio to down potent rum mojitos

while working on *The Old Man and the Sea*, the story of a fisherman in the nearby town of Cojimar that Hemingway reworked into a novel.

The man in the straw hat is watching the bartender and studying the walls, which are filled with memorabilia brought by sailors and travelers from around the world. All in all, it is about as dumpy a bar as one could find in the Western Hemisphere.

Straw hat downs a third *mojito* and recalls Havana before the revolution. "I came here first as a serviceman — Navy — and then later as a businessman. I was coming regularly right up to the overthrow of Batista. You had to see Havana then to really understand what has happened here. This was the most wide-open city in the world, outside of maybe Manila. I'm not talking just about prostitutes or wildness in the streets. I mean you could have anything you wanted in this town — if you had the money to pay for it.

"There were casinos and neon and glitter everywhere. Fancy cars. Millionaires. Hustlers. You could buy anything. Want sex with a donkey? Opium? Guns? Getaway boat? False identification? Someone killed? It was waiting to be bought. You had to see it to believe it.

"That's really why I came when the tours opened up. I wanted to see the change. All I can say is that this city is completely different.

"Good or bad? I guess that depends on a personal judgment. It involves your politics. I'm just saying the changes have been so complete and so dramatic from the Havana I knew that they are almost incomprehensible."

For all its shortages, Cuba has no lack of restaurants, snack bars and ice cream parlors. While food purchased for home consumption is strictly rationed, Cubans may eat all they wish at the stands and restaurants.

This particular ice cream parlor is one of six situated on different levels of a park in downtown Havana. The tables



Inside the del Medio tavern, a favorite haunt of Ernest Hemingway, where tourists flock.

are of wrought iron and sit here and there among the stands of royal palms and oleander. It is evening, and two Americans sit at one table over plates of freshly made chocolate ice cream. Both the man and the woman have cameras slung over their shoulders. The man has a notebook sticking from a back pocket. There is a pencil behind one ear, and pens and another notebook bulge from his shirt pocket.

The woman has a pink flower in her hair — given her minutes before by a group of Cuban children she had stopped to photograph. One little girl had run to a nearby bush and plucked off the pink blossom and had run back with it to the Americans. All the children waited as the woman put the flower in

her hair. Then they applauded and ran off.

"I feel like I'm in the wrong Cuba," said the man, as if he were perplexed.

"Wrong Cuba?"

"Back home I have Cuban friends, and for years they have been telling me how horrible it is here. Now here I am sitting in an ice cream garden after spending three days wandering uninhibited through Havana. I've been all over this city. Homes. Churches. Schools. Back streets. The docks. Stores. Nobody has stopped me. I've taken 12 rolls of film and no one seemed to care what I was photographing. That's why I even brought these tiny notebooks — so I could write in them and hide them. That's how paranoid I was. God! I've even taken two rolls of film of Russian ships in the harbor and military vehicles."

"What did your Cuban friends tell you?"

"That I'd be put in jail. I've even been hiding rolls of film in my socks and underwear in case I got stopped and they tried to confiscate it. What happened to the 'Nazi Cuba' I've been hearing about. I come expecting a police state and instead I get picturesque ice cream gardens and invitations into people's homes."

"It is a surprise. I expected something different, too."

"I mean, think about what we've seen so far. We drove those roads named for North Vietnamese war heroes, past those signs welcoming us in Russian. The walls around here have posters showing an American M-16 plunged deep into the heart of Cuba, and even the road maps make a point of ranting against the illegal occupation of Guantanamo by the 'imperialist Americans.' Yet at the same time, I've never been greeted more warmly by people anywhere."

"And all the standing in line for everything, and having to do without so much. I was visiting this family yesterday and I asked them about that. 'Isn't it awful to live like this?' The woman said it wasn't so bad because she said everyone stands in lines like everyone else and although they can't get a lot of things, everyone has to do without them. She said it is very hard, but then she said it has its good points, too. 'No one is abandoned any more,' she said. 'Before the revolution, many people were abandoned. Had no food. No homes. No place to go. Now, we don't have a lot, but we know that we will always have a place to go and food to eat.' It's just not like what I expected at all."

The man's conversation was suddenly cut off when the children came running back through the bushes and surrounded the table, laughing. They had another pink flower, which they motioned to the man to put in his hair. Instead, he put it in his beard.

You can get one of the grandest views in all of Cuba from the rear of the palatial Nationale Hotel. Once known as the "Versailles of the Caribbean," the hotel sits atop a bluff overlooking the ocean on one side and the entrance to Havana harbor on another. The surrounding grounds are a lush maze of terraced patios, gardens, exot-

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Cuban street scene: Vintage American cars from the 1950s — with local modifications — are in evidence throughout the island.



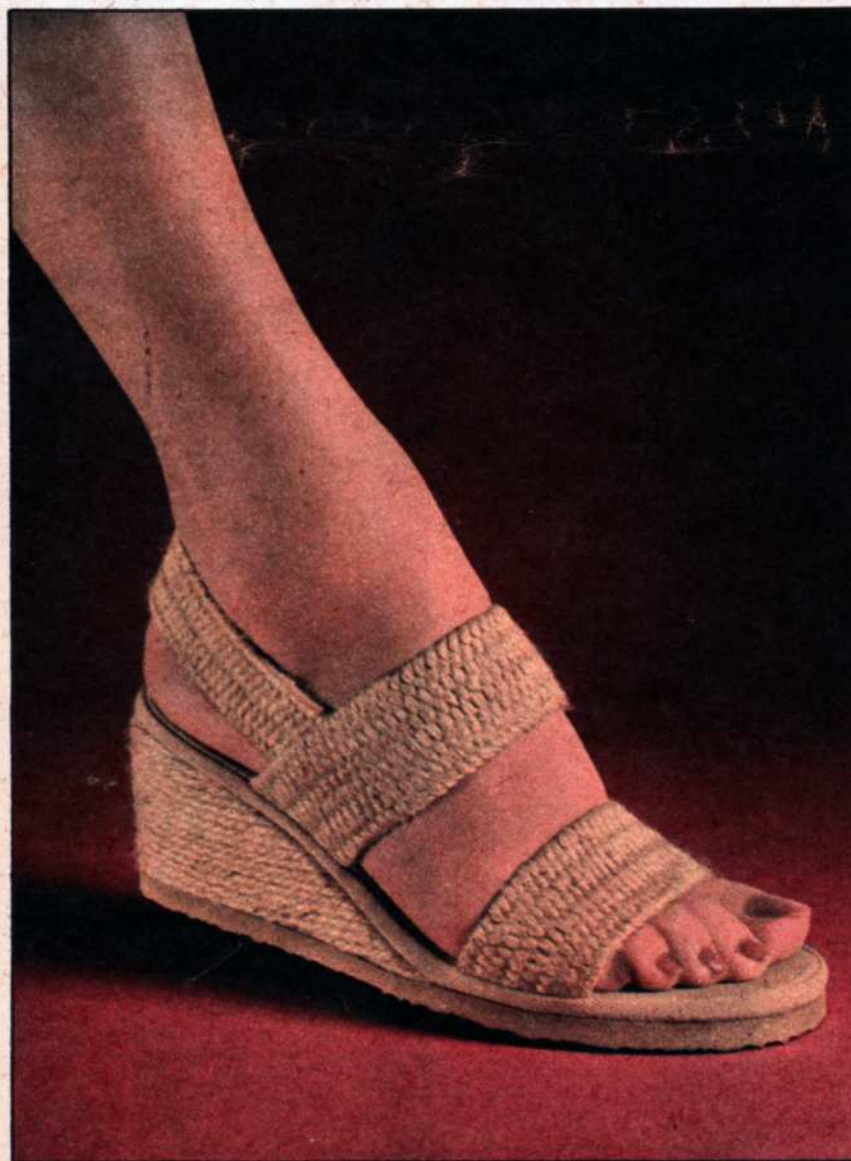
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John Hanamaker



CUBA continued

ic trees and two swimming pools, one of which is fed by a marble nymph riding a waterspewing fish.

"In the old days, this hotel was the center of all that really mattered in Havana," says Abe, a New York businessman who was once a regular at the Nationale. "This is where the deals were made. This is where the ambassadors had lunch and we completed our business. Only the wealthiest and most powerful people came here."

Abe, head of a hardware firm that once had one of its most profitable operations in Havana, is a baldish, white-haired man given to wearing business suits and starched white shirts despite the tropical heat.

A hundred yards below the Nationale gardens where he stands is a monument to the battleship Maine. The USS Maine blew up under mysterious circumstances in 1898, and the United States used the occasion to invade and seize Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippine Islands.

The pot-bellied businessman can remember that the monument once had a huge golden American eagle sitting atop the central column. Now there are only four twisted bits of steel rod where the eagle sat — all that was left after the eagle was ripped off in anti-American demonstrations in 1960. The head of the bird was salvaged by an employee of the American Embassy. It is stored in the basement of the embassy, near the monument, along with the portraits of President Dwight D. Eisenhower and the other objects and furnishings that were locked inside when the embassy was closed.

Abe came to Cuba on a tourist charter trip — the only way he could get into the country — for two reasons. First, he wanted to satisfy his curiosity about how things had changed. Second, he wanted to make discreet inquiries about opening up business lines once again in Cuba.

"I thought, 'Look, things are opening up. Why not jump in and get first advantage?' I tried yesterday to contact the Ministry of Industry here. I told them, 'Look, money is no problem on my end. Whatever it takes to get things rolling. No problem.' You know what I got? I got nothing. Nothing. I can't figure out what the hell these people are trying to do here."

"I walk through the hotel and I feel sick. Sick. It's all gone. Everything that made

this place something is gone. What do you have now? Cubans crawling all over the place. Go inside and look at the ballroom. Look at the lobby. These people don't know how to appreciate the finer things of life. They don't have the feel for it. There is no class here any longer. You can't just let anyone into a place like this or you ruin it."

"You can't imagine what it was like. There were cream-colored limousines lined up out front and the most beautiful women in the world were here. I mean the wives of millionaires and ambassadors. Princesses. It was one of the most elegant places in the world. Now what is it? Just an old hotel filled with Cubans."

"I have come to measure the revolution," says the gray-haired college professor, a man in his late 40s who speaks these

'I walk through the hotel and I feel sick. Sick. It's all gone. Everything that made this place something is gone. What do you have now? Cubans . . .'

words with as much dignity as the rum he has been drinking for two hours allows.

On the wobbly stool beside him is another American, who has just confided that he is not a tourist but has come to write about Cuba. This has prompted the older man to raise his bushy eyebrows with delight and reveal his own secret mission.

The two are sitting in a corner bar in Matanzas. The bar is hardly larger than a closet and has no walls, so it seems more like a sidewalk stand. On the ceiling, a large fan with wooden blades and a bad motor provides background noise but little relief from the heat.

Behind the bar, a sleepy proprietor has only beer, three kinds of rum and Russian vodka to offer. Rum comes one inch deep at the bottom of a water tumbler. No mixers. No ice. It is sipped slowly and allowed to burn a random path down the back of the throat.

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"That is why I am really here. That is my project," says the gray-haired professor solemnly. "I intend to measure the revolution."

"Measure it? You mean like how tall it is?" asks the other American, who also speaks with as much dignity as the rum

will allow. It does not allow much.

The professor scowls sourly at the younger man, obviously appalled by his lack of intellectual depth or the degree of his drunkenness, or both. In a softer tone, the professor propounds his theory. He speaks in the overly tolerant voice teachers use when dealing with mildly retarded but educable adolescents.

"What we have here in Cuba is a revolution. A revolution is a living, breathing, changing thing. One may read its vital signs. One may take its pulse. In a Third World revolution such as this one, one may develop a quick profile of its internal social texture by using certain formulas. One of the simplest ones could be called the Three M's. By this I mean

Mansions, Mountains and Monuments.

"What one seeks to discern with the Three M's is this: Has there been an authentic revolution that has altered the basic social conditions, or do we have just another banana-republic dictatorship? A revolution that places inordinate priority on monuments to itself is generally not a secure one. Nor is one that merely replaces the inhabitants of its exclusive mansions. So, first one checks the mansions: Has the concentration of wealth really been redistributed or just passed on to the new leaders? Then one checks the mountain villages: Has the lot of the rural people changed at all?

"This may sound overly simplified, but you can see the measurement that can be taken by merely touching these three points. A rough index of the socioeconomic extremes may be established. You begin to answer the broad question: Behind the rhetoric of this revolution, are there still lavish mansions and squalid slums and rigid class lines?"

MANSIONS — Among the most opulent mansions in all of Cuba are those found in Miramar, a western suburb of Havana where the palm-lined boulevards and sprawling Spanish villas have the visual feel of a Beverly Hills. When the town was laid

Today, Miramar has a tacky, disintegrating feel about it. No longer manicured, its lawns have reverted to semijungle wildness, and its mansions have long gone unpainted.

out earlier in this century, its main street was named Fifth Avenue — after the New York street that was also home to America's millionaire industrialists. A large number of Miramar's houses were built by American sugar czars whose plantations carpeted much of the island. The baronial homes also housed many of the Cosa Nostra figures who ran the world-famous casino operations in Havana.

The section was also an enclave of numerous Cubans who rose to power — and great wealth — during the Batista and prior regimes.

Today, Miramar has a tacky, disintegrating feel about it. No longer manicured, its lawns have reverted to semijungle wildness, and its mansions have long gone unpainted. Ornate iron scroll grills on the windows and verandas rust quietly, while the stucco walls of the arched porticos and central courtyards crumble to reveal the brick beneath.

Fifth Avenue is still there, but the Rolls-Royces that once swept along it are gone — replaced by a scurry of olive-drab Jeeps and school buses. The mansions have been converted into schools, nurseries, medical facilities and day-care centers. Many have been

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partitioned off into as many as six or eight apartments, providing housing for construction workers and dentists, school teachers and bus drivers, secretaries and dock hands.

MOUNTAINS — A five-hour drive eastward from Havana and into the heartland of Cuba. For the first three hours, the road snakes through flatlands of dusty towns separated by vast expanses of sugar-cane fields, where ox-drawn carts work next to new Russian tractors hauling loads of cane.

Nearby, crews of bare-chested, straw-hatted men wield machetes beneath the blazing sun. Slash the cane stalk. Pull the cut stalk from the tangled bush. Pile the stalk behind. Slash. Pull. Pile. Slash. Pull. Pile. The lines of brown bodies move in unison, like a well-muscled ebony centipede thrusting itself at the green walls of cane.

The final two hours of road pushes through rolling hills and tobacco fields until suddenly the mountains rise up abruptly and run each way down the center of the island like a lumpy spine. Near the town of Cumanayagua a small path leaves the road and zigzags upward for a mile before it ends at a cluster of thatched huts clinging to the side of the rugged slope. The path is just wide enough for two human feet or the hooves of donkeys, which are the only other means of transportation here.

At the first hut, a man uses a wooden club and a hollowed tree stump to grind up the day's coffee beans. Nearby, his wife stokes an oven made from a 25-gallon fuel drum. Chickens skitter back and forth, and in the distance pigs can be heard snorting and blustering through the underbrush.

The only plumbing is made from split sections of bamboo stalks, hooked together to form a primitive aqueduct, bringing water from a stream a short distance uphill.

This village is typical of the rural hamlets throughout Cuba that are home to the *los humildes*, or humble people, who played such a large part in the rhetoric and writings of Fidel Castro when he was still a relative unknown living in the mountains and leading his *barbudos* (bearded ones) in a guerrilla war to overthrow the government.

What has Castro's revolution meant to the rural settlements?

An old man in the village ponders the question. He rubs his bristled chin and opens and closes his mouth, displaying toothless gums. Sitting forward in a battered rocking chair, he points out four things the revolution has meant to him: a scar on his left foot, a thin black wire in the air, a pad of paper and a gnawed pencil on a nearby table, and the concrete floor beneath his feet.

The scar was inflicted by an ax, which slipped when the old man was working three years ago. The serious injury allowed him, for the first time in his life, to meet and be treated by a doctor, in a new clinic less than 45 minutes from his home.

The thin black wire is an electricity line that is nailed to trees as it comes

up the mountain to power three light bulbs and a small radio in the old man's house. Six times the man flips the switch to demonstrate that the lights go on and off. His wife explains tolerantly that he has not yet got over the novelty of having electricity in the place.

The pencil and tablet belong to his

grandchildren, the first generation of his family to attend school. Each day the three children ride a horse down the mountain to school three miles away. The old woman explains that the gnawed pencil is actually the old man's — left over from when teams of *alfabetizadores* (reading and writing instructors from the cities) came into

the mountains as part of an islandwide literacy campaign. Quietly, so he does not hear, the woman explains that the old man did not do so well, although he tried hard. He can now write his name, but not much more. But this is the way it is with old men — and women — she points out with a self-conscious grin.

continued



Grace Trofa of Rhode Island riding in the rear of a tourist launch that ferries people to and from the resort of Guama, which is situated a short distance from the Bay of Pigs.



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CUBA continued

The concrete floor, which looks incongruous in the brown thatch hut, is the same as the floors poured in huts and houses throughout the island. The program has finally stopped the rampant spread of debilitating worm-borne diseases that ravaged the rural communities — particularly their children.

MONUMENTS — Perhaps the single most striking physical feature of the new Cuba is not a physical feature at all, but rather the lack of one: Fidel.

In sharp contrast to some other socialist countries whose leaders glorify themselves in gaudy multimedia displays of their own facial features, Cuba is devoid of Castro's image. In an 800-mile trek up and down the country, American tourists were shocked at not finding a single poster, picture, statue, banner or mural bearing the likeness of the *Jefe Supremo* of Cuba.

The only item that even bears Castro's name — on a small sign — is a Czechoslovak tank parked outside the Museum of the Revolution in central Havana. The tank was the one driven by Castro when he led his army into the Battle of Giron Beach — the name by which the Bay of Pigs invasion is known in Cuba. Giron is a small town near the bay where the final remnants of the American-backed invasion were surrounded and captured, ending the fighting.

But Cuba is not without monuments. There are thousands of statues, banners, flags and murals deifying the memory and physical image of Jose Marti, the Cuban writer, poet and revolutionary who died in 1895 in the war of independence against Spain.

Marti's impassioned writings — many of which echo the themes and sentiments expressed by Thomas Jefferson and other American revolutionary authors — provided the philosophical roots of the Cuban movement against American domination, which reached its peak in the 1950s.

In particular, Marti's work caught the imagination of a young Jesuit high school student who went on to Havana University Law School, earned his doctorate and then led a war against the American-backed government of Fulgencio Batista.

Now, 17 years later, as *Jefe Supremo*, Castro continues to build monuments not to himself, but to his boyhood hero, Marti, who so eloquently expressed what it was like to

be Cuban rather than colonized.

An outside cabaret near the beach at Marazul. The tables are scattered amid the palm trees, and in the distance you can hear the surf rolling in. The air is filled with the smell of beef and black bean sauce, spicy rice, fresh beer and scented bodies. There is also the pungent tang of Cuban cigars, and moist night smells waft out of the thicker groves of trees.

In the center of it all is a stage and a nine-member salsa band, whose sound is tighter and more viscerally exciting than a live Santana concert back in the States. The band has the crowd of American tourists, Russian servicemen and Cuban families tapping the tabletops and filling the dance floor.

In between a musical set, a

'Now don't get me wrong on what I'm going to say. I have no sympathy for Communism. I'm a free-enterpriser all the way . . .'

white-haired American doctor in his late 70s is circulating around the tables and talking of the Cuba he used to know, when he and his wife would winter here.

"Now don't get me wrong on what I'm going to say," the doctor said. "I have no sympathy for Communism. I'm a free-enterpriser all the way and have been my whole life, but you have to look past broad labels here to see what is really going on. Things were bad here in the '50s. I don't mean for people like myself. It was fine for us. Very luxurious. But I can remember the city and how people lived in the alleyways. Sometimes whole families would be living in a packing crate.

"Back in those days there were two kinds of Cubans, rich ones and very poor ones. There was little middle ground. The only real schools you ever saw, for instance, were the private academies in Havana where the better-off Cubans sent their children — if they didn't send them to the States or Europe.

continued on Page 27

"Now of course, there are a great many restrictions here, and Cubans don't have many of the personal freedoms we take for granted. I don't like that. I don't agree with that. But there are other things you have to look at also. One of the things that has struck me very strongly — as a physician — during these last few days is the children. I have never seen such uniformly healthy children in any other country, including the United States.

"What is the single largest change I see? Well, if I had to pick one thing that appears to have changed more than anything else, I would say the basic mood of the people. Before you had what was essentially a society of bellhops, shoeshine boys, maids and the like. Now, there is a sense of dignity and purpose about these people that has deeply impressed me.

"Frankly, I came here expecting to see a Gestapo state and a devastated countryside. Instead, I find a country

'I don't like the repression I see here. But it's also obvious that you can't do what Castro has done here with repression alone. He has somehow motivated these people.'

that is spartan and drab, but a people who are proud and holding their own against odds that would have crushed just about any other nation faced with them. I don't like the repression I see here. But it's also obvious that you can't do what Castro has done here with repression alone. He has somehow motivated these people. You can feel it. You can see it. If you were here and knew this land 20 years ago, you sense that what has happened to these people's basic sense of themselves is nothing short of miraculous."

A Havana patio restaurant. Eight tables clustered beneath a vine-entwined stone terrace. Out in the street the noon-time sun beats down relentlessly, so that the beads of sweat that fall from the foreheads of pedestrians sizzle dry as soon as they touch the ancient gray paving stones.

There are few passersby. It is a weekday, and nearly everyone in the city is at work. They have to be. While the government guarantees food, shelter, medical care and education for everyone, it also demands that they work in return. If you don't work, in about 15 days the police come for you — and deliver you to a work camp where the crews labor on public construction projects. This became a law in 1971. As one Cuban man says, "If you want to eat, you want to work." So, on weekdays, few Cubans dally in the streets.

In this patio eatery, Cubans lunch at seven of the eight tables. In the corner sit two Americans. Both are deeply tanned from eight days in the Cuban sun. The woman stirs a straw in a \$3.50 glass of sangria — so costly because wine is very rare in Cuba. What there is must be imported from the Soviet Union.

The woman's companion flips through a tiny pocket notebook, frowning. Finally, he jams the pad back in his pocket and sucks at the empty sangria glass in front of him.

"What's the matter?" The woman has a worried look on her face, as if afraid she might be to blame.

"How the hell am I going to write all this?"

"That again?"

"Yea. How can I say that what Cuban exiles in America have been saying for 17 years is not the whole story. Maybe not totally wrong, but not totally accurate, either.

"I mean, think about it. When you know the island's colonial history and the way it was in the 1950s; the way Batista was; the way the Mafia-run casinos were; the way the people in the hills had nothing and the American sugar plantations used the population as de-facto slave labor. I mean, how can you balance all that and tell people about the good parts of Castro's Cuba they've never heard about before? How do you do that without being labeled a Marxist or pinko or something? How do you get people to read it without tuning it all out?"

"I wouldn't want your job."

"You know what kept flashing in my mind these last couple of days? I wrote it down about 10 times in my notes. The children. Up in the hills. In the city. Along the roads. I never saw kids look so lively and healthy. I was thinking how different they looked — as a group — from the kids in Philadelphia's ghettos. You walk around there in Philadelphia and the kids have sallow faces, sunken eyes, sullen stares. Has it occurred to you how ludicrous it is for a country like America — with its ghettos — to criticize a country like Cuba for oppressing people?"

"Just write what you saw."

"No one will believe it. They're programmed not to believe it."

"Write what you saw. People here will hate you for a while. Then in a few years, they'll realize you were right and shake your hand for having such gifted foresight."

"So what happens those years while I'm waiting for this to happen?"

"Simple. You lose every Cuban friend you ever had in Philadelphia."

"How can it really be so different? So different from what we've been told for 17 years?"

"You're the writer and you're asking me questions like that? Ask CBS. Ask the New York Times. Ask Reader's Digest or the Pentagon. Don't ask me. I'm as surprised as you are."

"What am I going to write?"

"Stop worrying. Do something sensible."

"Sensible?"

"Rum."

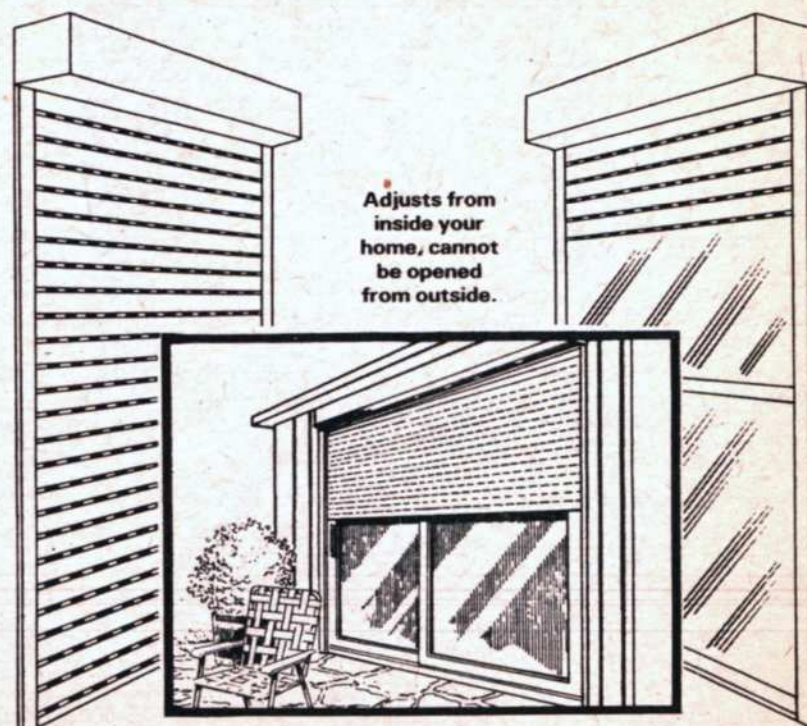
"Rum?"

"Rum."

"Waiter!"

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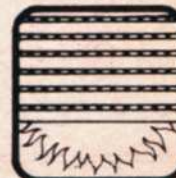
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