

# THE MAROON TIGER

THE VOICE OF STUDENT EXPRESSION SINCE 1925

WEEK OF JAN 28 - FEB. 10

SPECIAL EDITION

CUBA

Photo By Nigel Ziyad



Photo By Cynthia Trawick

# CUBA OVERVIEW

**Vaughn Arterberry**  
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Taking advantage of the improved relationship between the United States and Cuba, a Morehouse delegation comprised of 37 students, faculty and staff traveled to Cuba last month to learn about the people, culture and history of the island.

The trip, led by Cynthia Trawick, the administrative director of the Student Health Center, began in Havana and took in various sites such as a sustainable mountain community and museums about Cuba's art, slave trade, and the country's revolution led by Fidel Castro in 1959.

A special emphasis was placed on Afro-Cuban cultural connections such as dance performances related to Santeria, an African-rooted religion still practiced in Cuba.

The tour extended from Jan. 6-14 and included 25 Morehouse students, two from Clark-Atlanta University, Morehouse faculty members Natasha Crosby, Patricia DeSouza, Triscia Hendrickson and Ron Thomas, and administrators Trawick, Kevin Booker, Tiffany Bussey, Kasi Robinson and Vice President for Student Development Timothy Sams.

"It was a great opportunity to be exposed to a new culture and see how people in other parts of the world live," senior English major Matthew Tyler said. "I also got to practice my Spanish and meet a lot of amazing people. I hope to go back some time soon."

While there, students learned about the history of the relationship between the United States and Cuba. They also attended multiple lectures and were challenged to reflect upon how their experiences in the United States compared with those of black Cubans.

"To see that Cuba had a lot of the same racial problems we have in America was very eye opening to me," sophomore Sterling Cooper said. "I felt a connection with the black people there just because of the color of our skin, despite the fact that I didn't speak the same language as them."

Students were divided into groups on the trip and tasked with completing projects upon their return to the United States that will show the Morehouse community what they learned while in Cuba.

"It'll be interesting to see how the kids express to the community what they learned," said DeSouza, a Spanish and Portuguese professor who was one of the trip organizers.

The academic diversity among the 27 students was a unique feature of the trip. Most of them participate in Trawick's education program, therefore their majors spanned all three divisions of the College. Three journalism students – Vaughn Arterberry, Alexander Barcus and Cabral Clements – contributed articles to this special Cuba Edition of the Maroon Tiger.

## A BLACK MAN'S EXPERIENCE

As I exited Hotel Vedado in Downtown Havana on the morning of my return to the United States, I felt a pull on my arm. I turned around and was welcomed by the warm smile of the bartender at the hotel.

"Mi hermano," meaning "My brother," he said to me as we embraced one last time before my departure.

The bartender, a tall, brown-skinned Cuban man, had come to know me quite well over the past week. But my conversations with him were much more than orders of drinks and questions about where to buy the best cigars. Our exchanges, and my exchanges with other Afro-Cubans throughout my stay, felt much deeper than simply interactions between a foreigner and a native. They felt as if I was meeting long-lost relatives for the first time.

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# TOURISM: THE KEY TO CUBA'S ECONOMY

**Alexander Barcus**  
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Millions of people travel to foreign countries for various reasons throughout the entire year, and each country has its own historical element dedicated to tourism. Now that Americans can visit Cuba for a limited number of purposes, tourism's importance to the economy – which already was highly significant – will increase even more.

When Professor Milton Hidre of the Varadero School of Tourism spoke to the Morehouse tour group on Jan. 11, he described tourism as “the engine of the Cuban economy” because it generates the production of food, building construction, retail trade, the infrastructure of tourist destinations and supplies, such as water and gas.

Tourism's durability is another reason it's so important around the world. It provides 16.6 percent of the Caribbean islands' Gross National Product, Hidre said through the tour interpreter, Raul Diaz Pomares.

“In the world there have been catastrophic phenomena,” Hidre said. “There have been wars, earthquakes, there have been tsunamis. But tourism grows and grows and grows.”

In 2014, Cuba attracted more than 3 million tourists for the first time. According to Travel Weekly, 779, 576 Canadians comprised Cuba's highest percentage of tourists from Jan. 1-July 15 of 2015, and the island also was popular with visitors from Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Argentina, Venezuela, Peru and the United States, which provided more than 50,000 visitors. Cuba's prize attraction is Varadero, a beautiful stretch of beaches that has attracted 50 all-inclusive resorts.

Tourism's role in Cuba has varied during the last century. From 1915-1930, it was the island's third biggest revenue producer, behind tobacco and coffee, and by the Castro revolution in 1959, 80 percent of its visitors were Americans.

“There was a plan financed by the Mafia from Italy and United States – Meyer Lansky, Al Capone, Lucky Luciano,” Hidre said. “These people you have seen in films and you have seen also in books, so they had made a large contribution in money to turn Cuba into an alternative of Las Vegas, to turn Cuba into a paradise of casinos, the gambling industry, prostitution, drugs in the Caribbean region.”

Fidel Castro's Communist government abolished gambling in 1959 and the U.S. trade embargo placed on Cuba in the early 1960s restricted economic opportunities and held back infrastructure advancement.

Therefore, tourism shrank until the 1990s. Interest in it was renewed after Cuba went into an economic downfall when the Soviet Union broke up. Eighty percent of Cuba's foreign investments had been in the Soviet bloc, Hidre said.

Cuba believes it has four major advantages in tourism: geographical diversity, low levels of crime and violence, a qualified labor force and variety of sites to visit, including parks and museums.

Currently, Cuba lacks the necessary resources to be considered an economic powerhouse driven by tourism similar to the Bahamas, Costa Rica or the Dominican Republic. However, among the labor force in Havana, 61 percent work in the services market and, because of tips, employees earn two times more than those who do not work in the market.

“Cuba has a lot of heritage and I am influenced by the American culture,” Stefan, the owner of a booth in the arts and crafts market of Havana, stated. “The small items of clothing and wooden toys I sell here in the market help me provide for my family. When I'm not at work I'm either at Havana University studying literature or working on cars with locals. Being in the market I see people from Canada and Europe. It's great to see Americans.”

When travelers arrive to top destinations for the first time, they seek memorable experiences. For the tourism sector in Cuba to thrive even more, increased investments have to be created and completed.

Because of the U.S. embargo, companies from Spain dominate the hotel market. But Hidre said Cuba recently has hosted executives from Marriott, Sheraton, Westin and other U.S. hotel chains that want to build there.

He admitted that Cuba “has a long road to go in the field of technology. Wi-Fi connections are very new to Cuban hotels, and this has existed in other countries for many years.” Also, phone connections to the U.S. are erratic.

There are risks connected to increased tourism, such as prostitution, drug usage, organized crime, and people from other countries possibly holding jobs that Cubans need. But the benefits that tourism brings to Cuba are much greater than those risks.



Photo By Cabral Clements



Photo By Ron Thomas

# A BLACK MAN'S EXPERIENCE

[CONTINUED]

**Vaughn Arterberry**  
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They felt as if I was meeting long-lost relatives for the first time. After only a couple days into my stay in Cuba, the amount of African influence on the country's culture and identity had become clear to me. In the people, I saw Cubans of every shade – from sandpaper brown to midnight black.

In the music, I heard the upbeat rhythms of Son Cubano (The Cuban Sound) and Rumba, two Cuban musical styles rooted in the culture of enslaved Africans brought over during the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

In the religion, I was captivated by the traditional dances associated with Santeria, a religious practice brought to the Americas by slaves from West Africa. It is now practiced by approximately 70 percent of Cubans.

Everyday, I was shown that my blackness was an identity that stretched far beyond American shores.

I was shown that our people's phenomenal ability to survive and thrive in the United States was also the case in Cuba. Black history was the class, and Cuba was my classroom.

When describing the texture of my hair and the brownness of my skin, my Cuban sisters used the word "hermoso," which in Spanish means beautiful.

While in the United States, Eurocentric ideals of beauty often leave black children making fun of each other's differences in skin tone and hair texture in public. While in private, they question whether or not "beautiful" will ever be a word used to describe them.



Photo By Nigel Ziyad

When in conversation with Afro-Cuban men of all ages, they referred to me as "hermano," which means "brother."

What does a black man in America call his fellow black man?

His "nigga."

## JUST SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

While in Cuba, anytime I asked for directions, the best places in Havana to eat, or even a hook up on low-price cigars, "mis hermanos" were there for me. Despite the language barrier created by my good but not yet fluent Spanish, in conversation I was able to connect and communicate with my Cuban brothers. They went out of their way to help me become accustomed to their way of life. We exchanged culture, life stories, and showed love and admiration for one another.

## SO I POSE THESE QUESTIONS TO THE BLACK MEN OF AMERICA.

- When was the last time you were able to connect and communicate openly with a fellow black man without it being looked at as weak or feminine?
- When was the last time you sat down and had a heart to heart with a fellow black man – learned about his life, his goals, how he feels about certain issues.
- Are you able to tell your fellow black man that you love and admire him, that you appreciate his existence despite the circumstances he faces in his homeland? Or is that also looked at as being too vulnerable?

Do we black men in America even see each other as brothers? Do we recognize the common struggle that we all face and have to persevere through together? Or do we steal from each other, fight each other, and even kill each other over saying the wrong thing, wearing the wrong color, or walking down the wrong street.

## CUBA HAS ITS FLAWS, TOO

Although Cuba showed me all types of love during my stay in the country, I can't help but wonder how much love it really shows to its black population. Despite the country's large black presence and the contributions they've made to Cuban culture and history,

Afro-Cubans still in some ways seem.....

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"The Doll Test" from the video "American Denial"

*In the 1930s and '40s, Dr. Kenneth Clark and his wife, Mamie Clark, used four dolls, identical except for color, to test children's racial perceptions. Their subjects, children between the ages of 6 to 9, were asked to identify both the race of the dolls and which color doll they prefer. A majority of the children preferred the white doll and assigned positive characteristics to it. The Clarks concluded that "prejudice, discrimination, and segregation" created a feeling of inferiority among African-American children and damaged their self-esteem. Dr. Clark helped write a brief about their study that was instrumental in the famous 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education decision that declared separate but equal education unconstitutional.*

..... to be stuck in the margins of Cuban society. The revolution of 1959 that brought Fidel Castro to power eliminated systematic segregation and discrimination in Cuba. Everyone is guaranteed free healthcare, free education, and guaranteed employment once they graduate from the university level. But during my stay there, I saw few black professionals and government officials.

In the two Cuban cities of Havana and Matanzas that I spent most of my time in, it seemed that the poorest parts of these cities were more occupied by people whose skin color more closely resembled mine. In the tourist destinations such as hotels, restaurants, and cultural sites, I witnessed few blacks in visible roles such as hotel front desk clerks and tour guides, and more in subservient roles such as chambermaids and cooks.

While there, I tried to make sense of the racial disparities I was seeing, and then it dawned on me. The legs of racism and white supremacy walk all parts of our earth: North America, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Wherever there is race, there is racism. Wherever we see color, there is a color line.

**NOW BACK TO CUBA.**

I once read in one of my favorite novels, "Midnight" by Sister Souljah, that "any man can learn another man's language if he can shut up long enough to listen, and sit still long enough to study."

So I've learned enough Spanish thus far to take the opportunity to end this editorial by thanking the people of Cuba in their language, not mine.

Gracias por su hospitalidad, su amabilidad, y su amor. Su país me enseñó cómo vivir una vida de agradecimiento y humildad. Su cultura es hermosa. Su gente es hermosa. Su voluntad de sobrevivir es lo que admiro. Espero que nos encontremos de nuevo.

Cuídate.

-Vaughn Arterberry



Photo By Rasheeda Jones

# RECYCLE

## THE MAROON TIGER



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REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK

# CLASSIC CARS KEEP **CUBANS ON THE MOVE**

**Alexander Barcus**  
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Cuba's economy is not among the best of the world and the level of poverty is extremely high; but that doesn't hinder the citizens' work ethic. Having the opportunity to visit Cuba for nine days helped visualize the passion with-in their culture and their friendliness toward Americans.

Once we arrived at José Martí International Airport and rode through Havana, the large number of classic cars were noticeable. Even some of the taxis were convertible classic cars. When most people think of Cuba they think of cigars and Fidel Castro, but the topic of cars is hardly included.

When the U.S. trade embargo was imposed onto Cuba in the 1960s, it restricted the access Cubans had to newer cars and those who owned cars had limited options when certain parts were needed. Many of the cars there are at least 50 years old, often comprised of parts from different brands of autos.

Cubans who own classic cars that have been kept in good condition showcase them to tourists at popular sites to earn more money. For some, it's considered more of a hobby than a job. Also, being that classic cars are popular in Cuba, there are plenty of mechanics.

The first restaurant we ate lunch at as a group was called La Casa and it was the actual home of the owner. He opened it after the Cuban government allowed family homes to be operated as local businesses. On the same street as the restaurant, there was a fenced home with a white pickup truck that was being worked on by someone.

REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK

# ENJOYING THE **MOMENT**

**Cabral Clements**  
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Right before leaving Matanzas, Cuba, a district about two hours from Havana, a couple of us decided to rent mopeds and drive around the town.

As I was about to take off on the moped, I saw two beautiful Cuban ladies approach, one wearing an American Flag beach shawl. They knew less English than I did Spanish (which is very little), so communication was difficult, but my friend Nigel Zayad and I managed to get them to agree to take a ride with us, with the help of the person who worked at the rental place.

Laiah, the one wearing the American Flag shawl, rode on the back with me. Laiah was amazing; very patient, and appreciative. During the ride, for a while we lost sight of Nigel, who was riding with her friend. In my broken Spanish, I asked Laiah if she thought that was funny and if she was OK.

Un poco comico, (a little funny) she said, but she did confirm that she was having a good time. We were both enjoying the adventure. After a bunch of twists and turns, we finally caught up with our friends. We stopped for a moment and the girls got off the moped, directed us on the back, and started driving. I was terrified – holding on tight to Laiah, who was admittedly driving faster than I had been.

After a short ride, they both stopped and Laiah said, “La policia ... No licencia.” I thought the freedom and openness we had was pretty amazing, and something that isn't as easy to find in the United States. Nigel and I dropped the girls off and had to get back to our hotel to catch the bus back to Havana.

One of the most profound parts of this trip is the amount of amazing Cuban people I met. In the United States, after meeting and engaging in a great conversation with someone, I would get their phone number, business card, or social media account. However, in Cuba, with both an embargo and very little Internet access, I could only enjoy the person for the moment, and be content with the fact that I probably wouldn't see them again.

## **CUBA POLICE AND SAFETY**

It's 3 a.m. in Havana, Cuba. You walk the streets and see men and women both striding by themselves down dark alleyways, and police are sparsely found. However, nothing bad happens.

Taking a step back, bad things happen everywhere, but crime and violence in Havana are rare. As an Atlanta native, I never totally put down my guard, but it was a bit surreal knowing that I might have had that option. Especially while being a tourist, you want to account for your possessions at all times, but there are few problems outside of petty crime.

Like most places in the world, citizens can't own guns, but the police officers do carry service weapons. Talking to some of the Cuban people, they think it is bonkers how America has so many guns, and they say that guns and shootings are things they just don't have to worry about.

During my eight days in Cuba, I did not hear a single gunshot and sirens were sparse. That contrasts with many neighborhoods in Atlanta, where I often cannot go 24 hours without hearing gunshots.

One example of safety in Cuba occurred on a Saturday afternoon where hundreds of people, young and old, gathered close to the water to chat, listen to music and just have a good time. Walking down to the shore with three others on the trip, we saw people running. From my experience that means one thing, that somebody is shooting.

However, we realized that an individual had thrown a bottle into the air. While a glass bottle accelerating down to earth is certainly dangerous, it is not a bullet, which is eerily refreshing. A few officers were in the area and made sure the streets were clear, but they did not stop the assembly completely by ordering everybody home.

While police were present, they were few and far between. In Cuba, the police do have the right to stop and ask you for your identification, However, that was not something I experienced personally. Rather than looking for trouble, the police presented themselves like regular citizens who will help out whenever necessary.



Photos By Cabral Clements



# HAVANA:

## A GRITTY BUT SURVIVING CITY

By Ron Thomas  
Maroon Tiger Adviser

Havana, where the Morehouse group of 37 people (27 students, 10 faculty and staff) spent seven of our nine days in Cuba, looks much like a Rust Belt, heavily industrial American city that thrived before economic factors eliminated jobs and ruined many thriving neighborhoods.

The Cubans credit two factors for their financial woes. Eighty percent of the island's investments were in the Soviet Union when it broke apart in the early 1990s. Cubans call it "The Special Period" and the island's economy hasn't recovered yet.

Also, because of the embargo the U.S. has imposed on Cuba since 1962 – Cubans call it a blockade – many products Americans take for granted (such as auto parts, house paint, and toilet paper in bathrooms in public places such as restaurants) are difficult to find, and infrastructure maintenance is badly lacking.

Consequently, central Havana is an odd mix of quaint Old Havana where street vendors and small shops sell goods, dilapidated and crumbling buildings, neatly kept museums and historic sites, aged apartment buildings where people hang out their laundry on clotheslines facing the street, and privately owned, 1920s-1960s American cars that range from pristine to falling-apart condition.

Many people work in low-paying government jobs and it's obvious that many people live in difficult circumstances. But the people our group met were very friendly, open, excited about meeting Americans, and proud of Cuban history. On one hand, there was little upscale about life in Havana. On the other hand, I saw only one person who I believe may have been homeless.

### CUBA STREETS AT NIGHT: OMINOUS, BUT SAFE

You can't see or touch one of Cuba's biggest assets: safety.

Drugs and the private ownership of guns are illegal, so unlike the United States, where more than 30,000 people die of gunshot wounds every year, in Cuba one feels very safe walking at night. Pickpocketing occurs and your camera might get stolen if you leave it unattended, but at least you won't get shot.

That's an enormous relief, especially in Havana, a city of about 2 million people that is dimly lit. There are very few street lights, mostly on major streets, and those have energy-saving bulbs. Side streets are so dark at night that you feel like you are walking in a Charles Dickens novel. But people sit on their stoops chatting, families frequent ice cream parlors, women go out with friends, and you don't get an ominous feeling if a group of teen-age boys is walking toward you.

My first night there, a doorman from our hotel escorted me and a colleague down a dark, barren-looking side street to a restaurant. After we ate, I hurried up to pay the bill so we could follow a group of people who had just left. That way, I figured that if we got mugged and yelled out, someone would hear us.

On the way back to the hotel, a few people were hanging out in doorways, one car passed us, and nothing happened. That was the last time I felt fearful in Cuba.

### INSTANT DIET

In nine days in Cuba, I saw four noticeably overweight people. Older men and women may carry some extra pounds, but the obesity that is so common in the U.S. was virtually unseen. Consider that a benefit of the Cuban diet and the absence of American fast food.

Our group had lunch and/or dinner at restaurants every day, and the entrees included meat or seafood, along with a serving of vegetables, rice and/or beans, plus flan, ice cream or brownies for dessert. No one went hungry, but the portions of everything were significantly smaller and leaner than they would be in the States. Also, I never saw a traffic jam because there are so few cars, which means that many people do a lot of body-slimming walking.

### COULD IT BE THE CARROTS?

Our excellent tour guide, Raul Diaz Pomares of Amistur Cuba SA, was extremely knowledgeable about Cuban history, culture and society, but he couldn't explain why so few Cubans wore glasses. Regardless of age, they were seldom seen.

Maybe that's because they have some of the best health care in the world – one doctor for every 138 citizens, and health care is free.

### COLLEGE STUDENTS GALORE

Groups of college students like ours roamed throughout Cuba while we were there from Marquette (Wisc.), Gettysburg (Pa.), Stonybrook College and Skidmore College (NY), U. Texas-Austin, Burlington College (Vt.), a college from South Dakota, and a four-professor scouting trip from Ohio U. that is considering a student trip.

Among HBCUs, U. of District of Columbia also was there, and Howard and Spelman preceded us over winter break.

## MY CUBA REFLECTION



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My trip to Cuba was by far the best trip I have ever taken in my life. Visiting a country that seems to have been cut off from us as Americans gave me a sense of pride for my short time there.

I wanted to show Cubans that they aren't too much different from us. Upon our arrival, we ate extremely well. Choosing between lobster and lamb for a meal is out of the norm for a college student such as myself. On top of that, I didn't have to worry about being carded for alcohol. They served it complementary with our meals! Best mojitos I've had by far. As I walked through Havana's streets marveling at some of the most beautiful architecture and old-school whips, I began to realize that my skin color made me blend in with other Cubans pretty well.

What I really value from my trip are the conversations with the locals. Much like the division between what is real and what the media portrays in America, many Cubans have different political ideals than what tourists are led to believe. After numerous chats with kids, senior citizens, pimps, prostitutes, and even drug dealers, I realized a whole new perspective differing from the Fidel Castro -praising ideology that has been force-fed to citizens for years.

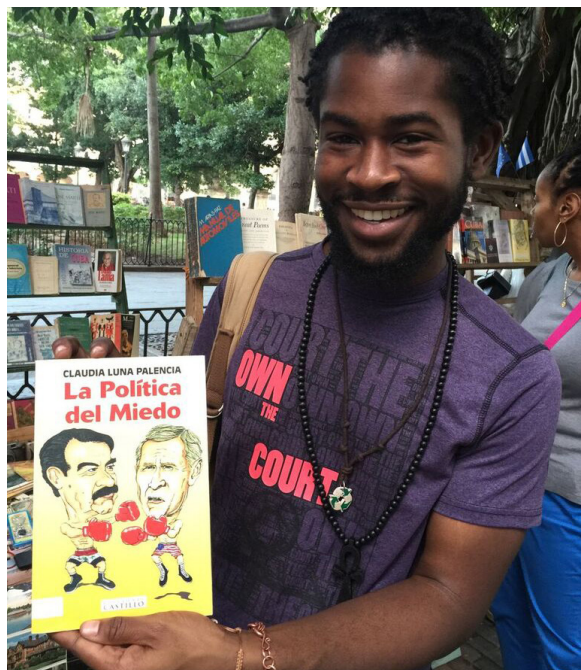
I was only able to take two hot showers for the entire trip, but it humbled me. I realized that not everyone in the world has it like us Americans do, and I've learned to appreciate things that I took for granted in the past.

Even without much materially, Cubans are so rich in culture that I somewhat envied how well almost everyone knew their country's history of social justice. They are constantly reminded of their triumphs with statues of Jose Martí, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, and other revolutionaries.

To top everything off, I got to smoke a Cuban cigar in Cuba. Smoking my first Cuban cigar on a crystal-clear water beach was beyond my expectations.

The trip was truly a blessing to be a part of, and I am ever grateful for Cubans to be so welcoming. I told one of the OGs out there that I'd come back with three degrees under my belt, and I look forward to sticking to my word.

## MY CUBA REFLECTION



**Jovan Davis**  
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Cuba was amazing. Honestly, I almost missed the opportunity.

I did not see the advertisements for the trip until about a week or two after the interest meetings had passed. Immediately I'm thinking I am too late. I skimmed the poster and saw a name: Dr. DeSouza. I emailed her, probably asking some of the most detailed questions I can design, about trip information and deadlines. She responded aptly, and after running around campus like a madman for a week, like normal, I was set!

I'm definitely going back to Cuba. It felt like a home away from home many times for me during the trip. One night, a group of us had a conversation about prostitution and race relations with two Cuban students. Their stories contrasted from and aligned with the previous dialogues we'd heard on those issues in sessions. It made me realize that Cuba is just like everywhere else – its own little world.

## MY CUBA REFLECTION



**Rasheeda Imani Jones**  
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As I departed the airport in Miami headed to Havana, Cuba, I was reminded of the words of encouragement my dad shared with me not too long ago. He said, "Rasheeda, I believe any global or foreign trip for you can only expand, broaden, and enhance your overall view and understanding of yourself and the world in which we live," and he was right.

As a student obtaining my Masters in Social Work, I understand the significance of being familiar with others' cultures, beliefs and values. We often learn about the history and social concerns of places all around the world, but we can never get a full understanding unless we get the first-hand experience. Hence, this trip was very relevant.

Traveling to Cuba with no expectations, I can honestly express that I am beyond honored to have had the opportunity to genuinely embrace the culture, learn the history, and be among the people. The highlight of my trip was meeting a wise man named COCO. He was a resident born in Cuba and raised in my hometown, Los Angeles. I sat, laughed, and listened to him for over an hour as he shared his best and most challenging times of his life; a lot of which I could relate to.

Soaking up his knowledge allowed me to see how we shared more similarities than differences even though we lived in different parts of the world. He showed a genuine concern and authenticity not because we were "college students", "tourists", or "Americans," but because we were Black. He expressed love, understanding, and the importance of solidarity and what that means for people of color.

Overall, I enjoyed the cultural experience in Cuba with the young men of Morehouse. Attending it with them made my experience in Cuba that much more worth it. Their academic excellence, political views, respect for themselves and women was acknowledged and appreciated a great deal.

In closing, I would like to extend my gratitude to the staff for welcoming me as their CAU sister and a special thank you to my mother for her sacrifices in making sure I was able to participate in another experience of a lifetime. I highly recommend this or any other study abroad experience.



## MY CUBA REFLECTION

**Tyriq Jackson**  
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As I reflect on my stay in Cuba, I thought about how life would be if I had to live there as a full resident. The most difficult part about living in Cuba was the Communist society.

The government owns everything. There is very limited freedom for the citizens of Cuba. In the United States, I have the opportunity to take advantage of a lot of resources. The Internet is an example. I have 24-hour access to use the Internet on my phone and in my dorm, home, school and local restaurants.

The Internet in Cuba can only be utilized in facilities that are being monitored by the government. I am not used to my moves being monitored. Because of this experience, my eyes have opened to the different cultures around the world. As I went on this trip, I expected to get a different outlook on the world. I received the exact outlook that I was looking for. I would encourage all students to go abroad. I never expected this trip to change my perspective on different cultures as much as it did.

I really enjoyed Cuba and I expect to return again one day!

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# RACE RELATIONS IN CUBA: IF YOU'RE BLACK, TAKE A STEP BACK

**By Ron Thomas**  
**Maroon Tiger Adviser**

He was a hard-working man in Havana. And he was black, the color of a pecan nutshell. He saw an American who matched his brown skin color and pointed to his fist and then to his own to show solidarity.

"Malcolm X," he said in barely understandable English. Then he tried and tried to remember Malcolm X's contemporary until the American helped him by saying, "Martin Luther King."

Yes, yes said the Cuban, speaking of the great civil rights leader. Then he showed off his knowledge of America's civil rights struggles by pantomiming a policeman hitting a black person.

"Yes, and it's the same today," the American said.

"Black in America - bad!!!" the Cuban said, referring to the overall plight of African Americans.  
"Black in Cuba - bad!!!" the Cuban added.

"Black in ..." and he couldn't find the word, so he pointed to the ceiling and twirled his index finger in the air until

the American said, "the world!!!"

The Cuban smiled excitedly in agreement, then raised his fist in the air.

"Obama!!!!" he exclaimed.

"Obama!!!!" the American replied.

Then the Cuban made a fist and extended his arm, and the American did the same until their knuckles touched in a fist pump – one in brotherhood and the struggle against racism.

## NOT SEPARATE, BUT NOT EQUAL

**By Ron Thomas**  
**Maroon Tiger Adviser**

The skin tone of Cuban people who live in Cuba covers a wide color spectrum – from white to several shades of mixed-race tan to dark brown. One would expect, however, that in a socialist nation that prides itself on providing equal opportunity to all, the color palette would be irrelevant.

Turns out that's not true in Cuba, the epitome of "The Land of Contradictions."

Cuba has strived to become an egalitarian state since Fidel "El Comandante" Castro led the overthrow of Fulgencio Batista's government in 1959. A brutal dictator who enriched himself through embezzlement, Batista's government not only tolerated racial discrimination, but promoted it. It all seemed to fit, since Cuba had slavery for 373 years until it was banned in 1886.

Under Batista, "There was work that black people could not do," said Vladimir Falcón, a spokesperson for ICAP, an institute that promotes Cuba today. "There were places black people could not attend. There were recreational centers and beaches that black people could not go to because of the segregation and the discrimination.

"The Cuban revolution eliminated all of that. But I cannot tell you that there is no racism in Cuba."

Yes, there have been tremendous advances toward the goal of equal opportunity, including free education, a 90 percent literacy rate and excellent free medical care focused on preventive measures. However, when it comes to racism, do these examples sound bitterly familiar?

- At a major hotel, most darker-skinned people are employed as bellmen, kitchen workers and maids, jobs that seldom directly contact tourists. Very few dark-skinned people are hotel managers, waiters or bartenders.
- Cuban television shows that feature the young and beautiful people invariably choose white actors to represent those ideals.
- Some families are determined to stay racially pure, meaning as pure white as they can retain.

"I'm talking about, for instance, the private sector in Cuba," Falcón said. "You see people that own a restaurant and they do not hire black people. They just don't want to do it. You see people who do not want their white daughter to marry a black man."

For Falcón, it's all a mystery.

"To summarize, there is equal opportunity for everybody in Cuba," he said. "The revolution changed the life of the black community in Cuba by far, but we still have remnants of racism in Cuban society. People cannot tell you why they are the way they are, but they express racism in the way they behave."

Sometimes, that includes deeply personal and hurtful behavior.

"In Cuba, as in the rest of America, we have hair of good quality and hair of bad quality," said Zuleica Romay, a dark-skinned woman and author who spoke to the Morehouse tour group about racism in Cuba. "For about 40 years, I have not straightened my hair, and some of my mother's friends used to tell me, 'With that nose and that mouth, why do you have hair like that?'"

"And I looked at myself in the mirror and I could see that I looked normal, so we have a Eurocentric way that brands us a lot. For over 500 years, we have been convinced that we would be more beautiful if our hair is different, if our hair is straight, if we had smaller lips – and there are people who still believe in that."

Just like in the U.S., there are people who mock fellow Cubans who they believe identify too closely with white people. In America, they get called "Oreos" after the chocolate cookie that has white filling on the inside. In Cuba, they get called "altea."

"When I was young, they said to me, 'You are an altea,'" Romay said. "My friends used to say I was black outside and white inside. It's still common in Cuba."

So common and meaningful that Romay named her award-winning book "Elogio de la altea o las paradojas

de la racialidad." Translated that means "In Praise of the Oreos or the Paradoxes of Race."

Although Cuba is a totalitarian regime, its people are not afraid to acknowledge their racial problems and try to solve them. Falcón said that in the last 20 years, the education system has put more emphasis on the contributions black people have made to Cuba, interracial relationships have become more common, and racial topics have been covered more frequently in the media.

Romay noted that novelists, artists and hip-hop groups have all advocated racial equality through their creativity. In addition, the Aponte Commission, named after an 18th-century Cuban hero who led slave revolts, was created to bring together intellectuals to try to close the racial gap. One of them, Professor Esteban Morales, addressed the Morehouse contingent.

"In the U.S. the racism is open; under the table in Cuba," Morales said.

The commission has received statistics from the government that prove Cuba's discriminatory hiring practices. They are especially harmful in the tourist sector. The typical Cuban's salary is very low, so tips from tourists can significantly increase his or her take-home pay.

As a deputy in parliament, Romay is pressing to solve one particular flaw. Workers in the tourism industry are chosen by a commission that reviews applicants' resumes, which must include the applicant's photo. Romay believes that the photo determines who gets hired far too often, so she's trying to get the photo banned.

The Aponte Commission suffers from a critical weakness, too: racial discrimination is not illegal in Cuba.

"In my opinion, we must have a law especially related to the racists," Morales said.

It's ironic that as much as Cuban and U.S. politicians have made it sound like their countries are drastically different, when it comes to race, they are virtually twins.



Photo By Ron Thomas

Visitors who fly into Cuba are introduced to the 1959 revolution by this billboard displayed across the street from the Havana airport.



Photo By Nigel Ziyad



Photo By Ron Thomas

Zuleica Romay



Morehouse Professor Patricia DeSouza and baseball writer Rene Javier. / Photo By Ron Thomas

# BASEBALL: CUBA'S HEARTBEAT

By Ron Thomas  
Maroon Tiger Adviser

The history of Cubans in professional baseball in the U.S. dates all the way back to Esteban Bellan from 1871-73 in the National Association of Base Ball Players league. He had been introduced to the game at St. John's Jesuit College (now Fordham University) after his parents sent him to the U.S. to study.

Yet, Cubans' role in the sport has been largely forgotten in the U.S. because after Fidel Castro abolished professional baseball in Cuba in 1959, he wouldn't let the island's players leave. After that, the only Cuban major leaguers were defectors.

The powerful impact President Barack Obama's more liberal policies toward Cuba could have on baseball was seen two months ago when four defectors – Alexei Ramirez, Brayan Peña, Jose Abreu and Yasiel Puig – returned home during a Major League Baseball goodwill tour.

Rene Javier, who covers Cuba's most famous baseball team, the Industriales, for Tribuna de La Habana, reflected on those developments when he spoke to the Morehouse Study Abroad students on Jan. 9 at the historic Hotel Nacional de Cuba. He admires America's progress in human rights and Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" inspires him.

"I think that my dream as a Cuban journalist is that when the ties between Cuba and the United States are established, baseball can be a bridge between (them)," Javier said through an interpreter. I think that dream can come true."

Through Obama's "openness," Javier has been able to meet some Americans. "So that will be part of the history," he said.

Javier told students that the first organized baseball game in Cuba was played on Dec. 27, 1874, when Club Havana routed Matanzas, 51-9, with Bellan playing third base for the winners.

While black players were banned from the major leagues from 1887-1947, about 70 Latin American players played in the majors under the guise of being white, according to "Away Games" by Marcos Bretón and José Luis Villegas. The best among them was Cuban pitcher Dolf Luque, who was 194-179 from 1914-1935. However, dark-skinned black Cubans were limited to the Negro Leagues.

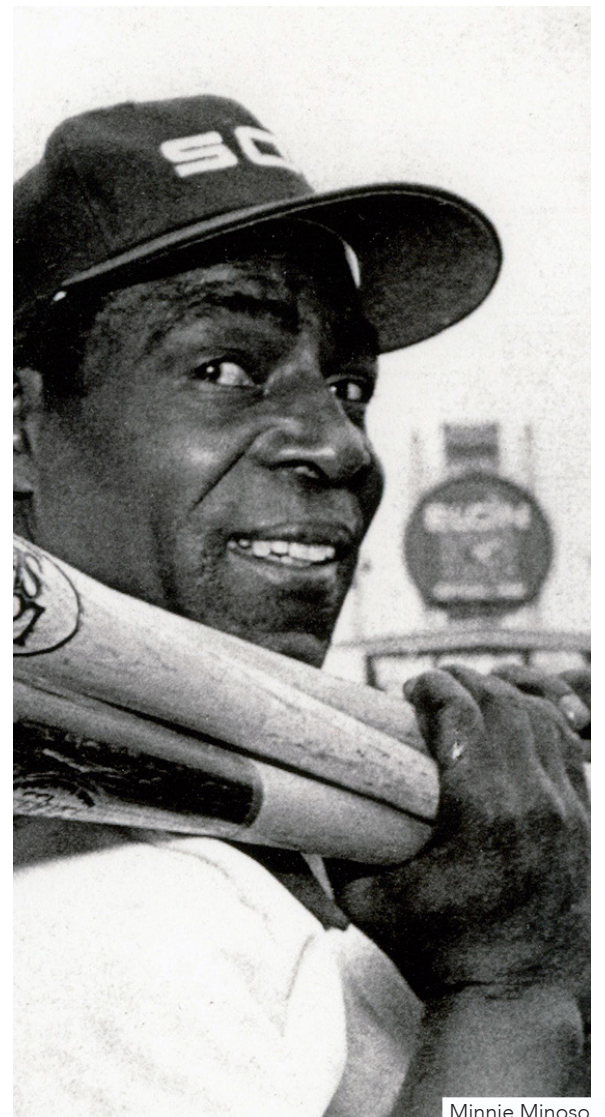
After Jackie Robinson's debut in 1947, dark Cubans finally could flourish in the majors. The first to do so was Orestes (Minnie) Minoso in 1949, starring mainly with the Chicago White Sox during a 17-year career. He played in at least one major-league game in five decades, taking his last at-bat in 1980 at the age of 54.

Six Cubans are in the Baseball Hall of Fame: Negro League players Martin (The Immortal) Dihigo, Cristóbal Torriente, José (The Black Diamond) Méndez and team owner Alex Pompez, broadcaster Rafael Ramirez, and Tony Perez, a star on Cincinnati's "Big Red Machine" teams of the 1970s. In April with the Miami Marlins, Ramirez will begin his 70th year of broadcasting baseball games.

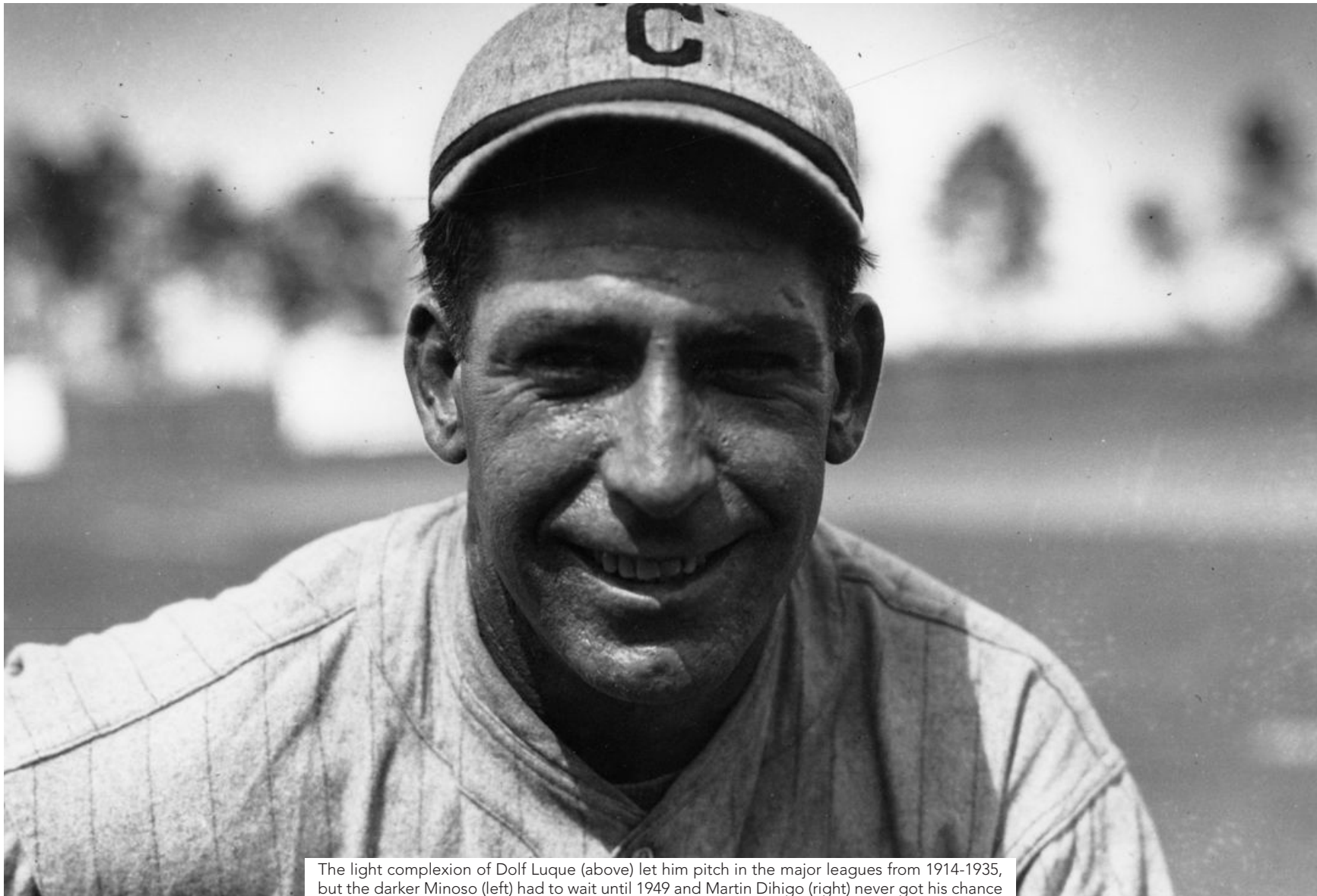
After Castro's ban on pros, Cuba established its own amateur National World Series that Javier called "the most important social and cultural show in Cuba" and won three gold medals in baseball during the Olympics.

Javier said the quality of Cuban baseball has dropped in the last decade because many of its best players have defected to other countries and Cuban children prefer soccer. But the Tampa Bay Rays hope to play two spring training games in Cuba in March.

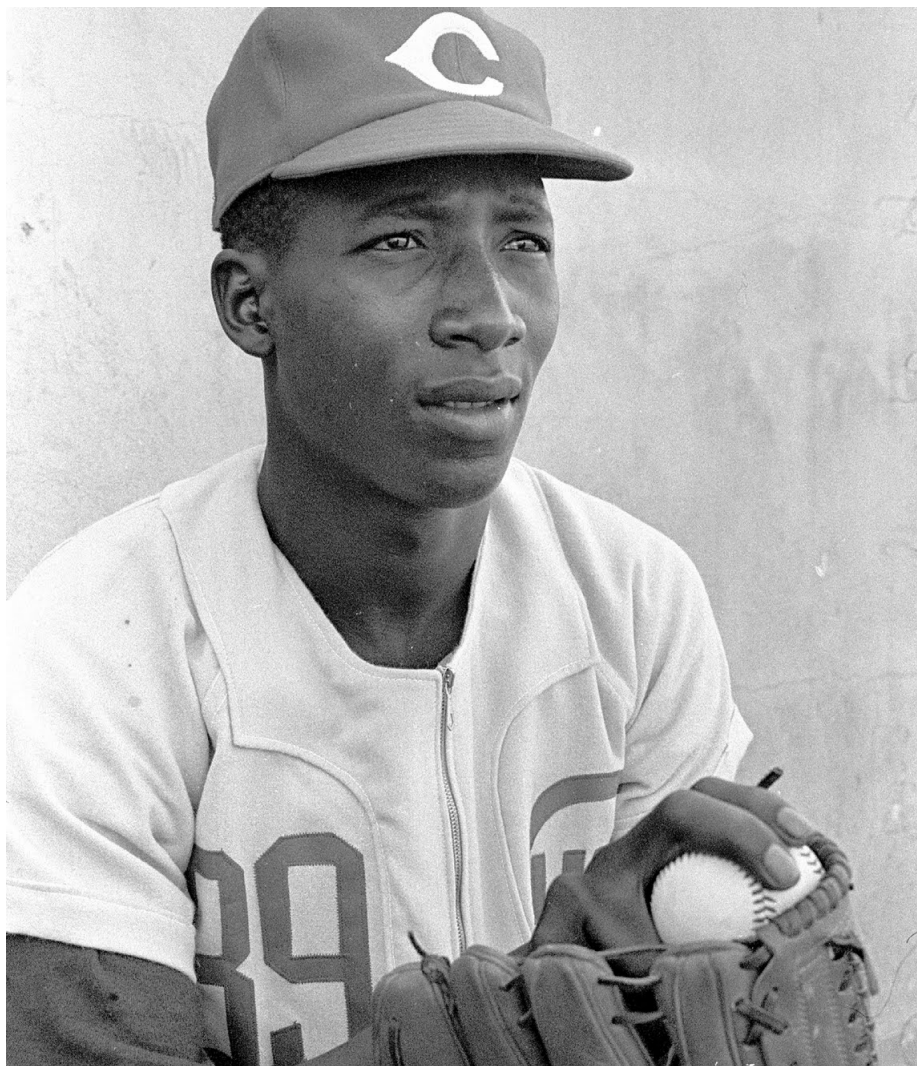
"If Cubans are authorized to play in the major leagues, baseball will go back to the top," Javier said.



Minnie Minoso



The light complexion of Dolf Luque (above) let him pitch in the major leagues from 1914-1935, but the darker Minoso (left) had to wait until 1949 and Martin Dihigo (right) never got his chance



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