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SPECIAL EDITION | THE MAROON TIGER

CUBA



2017 CUBA SPECIAL EDITION



THE VIEW FROM SANTIAGO DE CUBA

BY RON THOMAS

For the second January in a row, a large group from Morehouse visited Cuba during winter break J-Mester largely through the planning and direction provided by the Division of Student Development, Student Health Center director Dr. Cynthia Trawick, Registrar Kasi Robinson and Associate Dean of the College for Student Life Kevin Booker.

The tour group included 19 Morehouse students, Spelman senior Jonell Brown and six faculty and staff members. They were accompanied throughout the trip by Walter Turner, president of the board of directors of Global Exchange, the company that arranged both tours.

Many of the students were STEM majors interested in careers in teaching, public health, research or medicine. Throughout the trip, Journalism and Sports Program students Vaughn Arterberry, Jonell Brown, John Cooper, Ayron Lewallen and Alton Pitre, along with program director Ron Thomas, gathered material for this special edition. Trawick said the trip provided a valuable experience in a foreign country for many students who will not have the opportunity to study abroad for a semester.

Cuba is a complex society that placed them among people who live in a very safe country in which drugs and guns are banned, education and healthcare are free, and homeless people are seldom seen.

Yet many – probably most – Cubans live barely above what we would consider a subsistence level unless they receive income from relatives who live off the island.

They routinely blame their economic problems on the U.S. embargo imposed in the 1960s to limit Cuba's imports and exports. In addition, the government now led by President Raul Castro closely restricts Cubans' ability to leave the island even temporarily.

"This trip is for students to take in a new culture – gaining an understanding of cultures other than their own," Trawick said.

But why visit Cuba twice, when there were so many countries that could have been visited?

"I think for the educational experience and learning more about the political and historical perspective as it relates to the United States," Trawick said. "Our students were learning the history of Afro-Cuban society and its similarity to African-American history. It is really good for our students to build new relationships and gain new insights. They gained a new perspective on their own culture by learning and tracing the linkages of Afro Cubans and African-Americans."

The 2016 trip focused on Cuban history and the island's commercialization, and the Morehouse group mostly stayed in Havana, a city of more than two million people. This year's tour from Jan. 2-10 was focused on Cuba's revolutionary history, education system, medical care and sports heroes. Activities were centered in Santiago de Cuba, the province immediately west of Guantánamo, which includes the controversial U.S. military prison Guantánamo Bay.

The province's capital city of Santiago de Cuba goes by the same name. It is the second-largest city on the island, with a population of about 500,000 people and a mix of city living and tightly knit neighborhoods surrounded by rural areas where wild pigs and chickens are frequently seen and two cows may be standing in the middle of the road as cars drive by.

Santiago de Cuba is considered the home of the Cuban revolution because its leader, Fidel Castro, led his first attack there on the U.S.-backed Cuban government. It also is the cultural hub of Cuba, noted for its Afro-Cuban traditions and historic buildings and institutions.

During the Morehouse group's nine-day tour, which was led by beloved guide Grethel María Suárez Sánchez and kept safe by bus driver Raffaele "Marin" Marino, the Morehouse contingent heard lectures about Cuban-American relations, the life of Cuban revolutionary Céspedes, racial issues in Cuba, great Cuban sports heroes, and African influence on Cuban art, music and dance.

The trip included visits to the Catholic religion's revered Caridad del Cobre Basilica, a community health center in which a family doctor resides and treats patients, a beautiful botanical garden, and several sites related to Fidel Castro's legacy. The group saw the Moncada Barracks where he led an initial failed attack against the military, his hideaway headquarters in the Sierra Maestra Mountains, and the Santa Ifigenia Cemetery where revolutionaries

José Martí, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes and Fidel Castro all are buried.

The trip ended on Jan. 9 in Holguin Province, just north of Santiago de Cuba. Holguin, where Fidel Castro was raised, is known for its trademark squares that earned its nickname "The City of Parks". Then there was a visit to a paper-making business, a surprise visit from Hollywood star Danny Glover (a longtime friend of Global Exchange's Walter Turner), and a final stop at a middle school.

A cultural exchange occurred as students from the school sang in English their renditions of "Imagine" by the Beatles and "Hello" by Adele, and the Morehouse group responded with Glee Club member Marquez Hall singing "Life Ev'ry Voice and Sing" and "Dear Old Morehouse".

The bus ride to Holguin Airport ended with an emotional good-bye to the group's guide Grethel and driver Marin, who had become very close to many Morehouse students. As Hall brought them to tears by singing "Fare Ye Well", the closing hymn at Morehouse commencements, everyone knew it was time to leave Cuba behind.

How did the journey affect students on the trip?

"It broadened the students' knowledge of the world," Trawick said. "They seem to be more humble and understanding. It gives students a different perspective of what's important and what they can do to be inclusive of all people."

Ron Thomas is faculty advisor to the Maroon Tiger



I WAS LOVED LIKE A CUBAN BROTHER

HOW ONE STUDENT'S FAMILY
TIES BACK TO CUBA

BY RIVER LEWIS, AS TOLD TO PROFESSOR RON THOMAS



River Lewis' Cuban roots were obvious when he stood next to a painting at Casa del Caribe cultural center in Santiago de Cuba.

(Visiting Cuba had a powerful effect on Morehouse junior Sociology major River Lewis from Harlem, New York, because his grandmother, Graciella Garcia, is from Santa Clara, Cuba. She left Cuba by boat in 1957 because she didn't like being cut off from the rest of the world and there was a separation between white Cubans and dark-skinned Cubans.

Rivers reflected on the time he spent in his grandmother's homeland as the Morehouse group waited in Holquin Airport for their return flight to the U.S.)

Going to Cuba has truly changed my thought process of just how I carry out my daily tasks. It's made me a lot more grateful and a lot more thankful for just waking up to breathe. In America, they've got the iPhone 5, and the next thing that they want is the iPhone 6, the next thing that they want is iPhone 7.

Here, it's like if they have the iPhone 3, they make sure that iPhone is running smooth for the next 10 years. Cubans are a lot more grateful for the simple things that they have.

Back home, we'll complain about going around the corner just to get some bread from the store, where here men and women have to walk three and four miles to get to the nearest grocery store just to get bread and have to walk three and four miles back. So it's just made me so much thankful and so much more aware of everything that's happening in Cuba and in the world.

I get butterflies walking around Cuba seeing the culture, seeing the love they have, seeing how they won't even know you, but they treat you like you're their brother. For that, it meant so much to me because I have my own family members that are bloodline with me and the Cuban people have shown me more love than they have.

I come from a big family so the love is supposed to be strong, but now I have an even more bigger family.

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PASSING THE TORCH



Jonell Brown interviews Cuban track star Tania Fernández Hodelín. Another Cuban sports hero, Alberto Fernández Fuente, acts as translator

BY JONELL BROWN

SANTIAGO de Cuba – Tania Fernández Hodelín, former track and field world champion, highlighted her accomplishments at a special program with Cuban highly distinguished world champions on Jan. 3. As the only female athlete in the group, her journey to stardom stood out.

Her muscular build and tall stature led her to play basketball, starting at the age of 9. Meditating while on a bike ride with her uncle a few days after her 16th birthday, she stopped and considered how great of a runner she had the potential to become.

Only three blocks from the San Juan Hotel, the Morehouse tour's homestay in Santiago de Cuba, she met her destiny at the José Pepe del Cabo Stadium. In fact, she passed by this stadium many times before she made it her new home.

Hodelín's first national championship was at the Pan-American Games, a major sporting event held in the Americas, where she ran the 400 - meters in 56:33 seconds. That was the first of her records.

In her prime, she competed in over 21 countries including the United States, Dominican Republic, Spain, Germany and Czechoslovakia.

She was on the Cuban National Team for 10 years of her 21-year career. Similar to any athlete who has given his or her all to be victorious, she cried even as a champion. Hodelín ran track because she had a love for sports.

She had a big dream in her heart – a dream to make her country proud by competing in the Olympics.

"It was a good feeling receiving each medal," Hodelín said. "Winning medals inspired me to get better and better."

One morning she felt a sharp, persistent pain in her side. Immediately after the meet before the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, she had an operation to remove her fibroids. Hodelín's Olympic aspirations were shattered.

Hodelín still held her head up high and continued to strive for greatness. Her relationship with her coach was always respectful. Even after her injury, she never had any issues during track practices. In fact, star athletes in Cuba had the luxury of a strong support system on the field and in the classrooms.

"Cuban people are in the same situation," Hodelín said. "We attend the same schools and receive the same athletic training. Like other world champions, I was honored to be representing Cuba."

With all the benefits that come with being a world champion, there are major challenges. For Hodelín, it would become hard to balance taking care of her children and managing her professional athletic career. Her end goal was to positively represent her country.

By obtaining her Ph.D. in physical education, Hodelín had another guiding light to pass on to the Cuban people. She had the desire to improve herself as a person by ensuring

that all of her athletes learned English.

Eleven years into her career, she had her youngest son, Luis Enrique Zayas Fernández in July 1997. In light of her extraordinary achievements, the torch was passed on so that Fernández would become her living legacy.

When Fernández was 12, he followed in his mother's footsteps at the same place, José Pepe del Cabo Stadium. He gave running a try but he performed well in field events, not speed. With joy she discussed how great it felt to have her son make his mark in history.

In July 2016, two weeks after his 19th birthday, Fernández became the world champion for the high jump in Bydgoszcz, Poland. Under the age of 20, he had the best mark of the year, 2.27.

As the best high jumper in Cuba to date, Fernández is on track to make the Cuban National Team for the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo. He is definitely an athlete to look out for and his mother could not be any prouder.

"I know that my son's achievements will be far better than mine, despite doing a different event," Hodelín said.

Hard work and perseverance translated into the values imposed on her children.

"Don't go out tonight, you have goals," Hodelín told him repeatedly.

Fernández had to respect his mother's wishes. In turn, his discipline matched her work ethic and has resulted in impressive results on the track and field world stage.

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(River publicly expressed his gratitude to Cuban people when people living in the Boniato community held an outdoor reception for the Morehouse contingent.)

It really touched my soul and really touched my heart. Just walking up there seeing all the men and women and children just so happy to see us. That experience will forever be in my soul. I'll never ever forget the way I felt when I walked in.



River Lewis literally hangs out in the city of Bayamo

Boniato community says good-bye to their guests from Morehouse (Left), A young resident of Boniato hangs onto a fence for a good view (Right)

BY RON THOMAS / PHOTOS BY RON THOMAS

SANTIAGO de Cuba – It started out sounding like a meeting at a political convention, with dignitaries from Morehouse College and the Boniato neighborhood's Committee for the Defense of the Revolution bringing greetings from their respective constituents.

Then the celebration started, and it ended with the Morehouse contingent leaving the scene like rock stars. The Morehouse 29, as opposed to The Jackson 5, were accompanied by the rhythms of hip-hop music and stopped occasionally to pose for photos with teen-aged girls and boys. They were trailed by a human train of dancing, shouting, cheering residents of Boniato – which means sweet potato – as the Morehouse group stepped aboard Bus No. 3703 to return to their hotel on Jan. 6 in Santiago de Cuba.

One student, Isaiah Hudson, who had been a dancing machine during the party, was so touched by the community's reception that he almost cried as he left Boniato. He probably was not alone.

Many, if not most Cubans, live at the subsistence level. They have free education and healthcare, and very few are homeless. But beyond that, by American standards they get along with the bare minimum in terms of shelter, modern conveniences, working bathroom facilities and utilities. In the U.S., many Cubans would be considered impoverished, and not many Americans would be happy with those circumstances. But no one could tell that when Boniato residents opened their hearts to the Morehouse group.

"Once we walked in, I felt like we were

important, like we were welcomed with open arms no matter what their living situation was," Hudson said. "It was a sense that even though we had a language barrier, it was the simple fact that we danced and we laughed and we communicated without saying anything to each other. That really touched my heart because I felt like I was at home, in a sense, in Santiago de Cuba."

Speaking through Grethel María Suárez Sánchez, the guide for the Morehouse delegation's nine-day journey through the island, the head of the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (essentially a Neighborhood Watch organization), the local Communist Party and other officials began the evening by expressing their pleasure in hosting the 19 Morehouse students, nine faculty and staff members, and one Spelman student at the community gathering.

Everyone from kids to an elderly gentleman whose wife of 58 years had recently died gathered around a courtyard that contained tables filled with traditional Cuban fruit and libations. People were literally leaning out of balconies of surrounding apartment buildings to watch and hear what transpired.

They cheered loudest as junior CTEMS major Vaughn Arterberry, speaking in their native Spanish language, expressed gratitude for the CDR's hospitality.

Boniato residents loved it when, through the translator, junior sociology major River Lewis told them that his grandmother was from the city of Santa Clara in central Cuba and that he had never felt as loved as he had that week. As he tried to verbalize

his feelings, he spoke so fast that he had to be reminded to slow down for the translator. It was, to be sure, a magic moment in his life.

The formal part of the program ended with a tightly orchestrated dance routine performed by adolescent girls in the community, plus one grade schooler who couldn't remember the steps but was adorable nonetheless.

Then a crowd gathered around several Morehouse students and a dance-off began between them and Boniato residents: a college-aged woman in a grey striped dress, a mother in an orange top enjoying a throwback to the parties of her youth, and a precocious girl about 10 years old who tore it up with moves far beyond her years. It was all fueled by a mix of songs from Morehouse junior John Cooper's ipod, including "Work," "Wat U Mean?" and "Ju Ju".

When it was time to leave, Morehouse students circled up and linked arms as they sang "Dear Old Morehouse" as their Spelman sister Jonell Brown videotaped it while standing on a chair to get the best angle. Then they all meandered through the cheering, energetic crowd to their waiting bus.

"Even though they don't have things to our degree," Hudson said, "they have family, they have community and they have love, and that's all that they need to suffice in this embargo that they're going through (with) the U.S."

Thomas Wolfe wrote "You Can't Go Home Again." After being embraced by Boniato community made the Morehouse 29 hope that Wolfe was wrong.

I could feel the love in the air. I could feel the love in how the people would communicate and talk with me and how they would help me when my Spanish wasn't on point. They tried to talk with their hands.

They were so giving. They would take the shirt off their backs for you and they don't even know you. Meanwhile in America, people are stealing; just trying to get one up on you.

Cuba was the first country to respond to Hurricane Katrina, saying that they would send 1,600 doctors right to New Orleans. And Bush (President George W. Bush) was like, nah. What country has less than you, but will give you more than they have?

It showed me how thankful they are for pure life and for being able to wake up in the morning to see the sun. We take so much for granted and are so absorbed in the media, and who's hot and who's not. But it's more about your family, more about your loved ones and more about the experience you have just being alive because life is way too short to just be lollygagging around.

I'm getting butterflies sitting here right now looking through the pictures that I took. To me, it really hurts my heart. I'm actually ashamed to be called an American, to be honest. Because in America, people are just so horrible and mean to each other. Here in Cuba people are just so loving, it's like the complete opposite.

I wish people in America had the mentality and work ethic that the people in Cuba have. If all the Cubans were brought to America, America would be 50 times what it is now. People are hustling and making their money because they have to feed their families. At the end of the day they're worried about their family, not making money and living in a big house, having nice cars, flashy stuff. Their morals are intact.

My grandmother really doesn't like to talk about Cuba a lot, and I'm upset about it. Life was hard. It was stressful. She had to fend for her family. She wanted a better life and I guess that's what she saw that America had.



A TRUE ALLY IN THE STRUGGLE: Fidel Castro's Half-Century Long Legacy Of Supporting People of African Descent

BY VAUGHN ARTERBERRY

Raul Castro salutes Fidel Castro's tomb in a large rock as guards stand beside.

USA Today



People stand outside Santa Ifigenia Cemetery during late president Fidel Castro's funeral service.

Jack Gruber, USA Today

SANTIAGO de CUBA – As our cemetery guide moved away from the stone chamber that held the ashes of former Cuban dictator Fidel Castro in Santa Ifigenia Cemetery, I stopped for a moment to scan the faces of others I was traveling with. Some students appeared tired from the scorching heat. Some Morehouse faculty members seemed enchanted by the elaborate gravesite we were visiting next, that of Cuba's 19th century freedom fighter and Castro's idol, José Martí. But one person remained frozen in front of the stone chamber, mouthing words in its direction as tears streamed down her face.

This woman was Grethel Sánchez, our Afro-Cuban tour guide. As I moved closer, she noticed me and began to wipe the tears off her face. When I asked her why she was crying, she responded, "This is my first time being able to pay my respects to our commander-and-chief. He was very important to myself as well as many other Cubans."

I asked her exactly why Castro was so important to her, and she responded, "Before the revolution, people who looked like you and I were not free. We were not looked at as human beings. While Fidel was in power, black people in Cuba and all over the world felt his friendship."

Fidel & Afro-Cubans

From 1952-1959, under the reign of U.S.-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista, the Cuban economy and social atmosphere were largely dictated by American policy. This meant that a large portion of Cuban businesses were American owned and operated, and Cuban society was dictated by the same white supremacist, racist, and unequal laws and practices that were present in the United States. Afro-Cubans were relegated to second-class citizenship, without access to sufficient medical care, social services, and educational opportunities.

When Castro came into power in 1959, passing laws to desegregate beaches, parks, and work sites was one of his first orders of business in reshaping Cuba. He then outlawed all forms of legal discrimination, including discrimination in education and employment.

Castro's social and economic reforms have had a significant impact on contemporary Cuban society and politics. The gap in racial disparities in health and education has been narrowed, and at least 30 percent of current Cuban political representatives identify as Afro-Cuban. Despite that, Cuba is not a paradise.

In my two trips to different parts of the island within the last two years, I can count

on one hand the amount of black business owners I've encountered in Cuba's emerging private business industry. Additionally, when speaking to Cubans about the obvious effects of racism on their present-day society, they speak as if race doesn't exist in Cuba. However, we as black Americans understand that wherever there is race, there is racism. And wherever there is color, there is colorism, no matter how accepting and equal your society seems to be.

When commenting on the issue of race in present-day Cuba, noted Afro-Cuban writer and researcher Dr. Alberto Jones shared my perspective in saying, "Cuba is not a paradise, but Castro came in and leveled the playing field."

Fidel & Africa

No leader from the Western Hemisphere has been more supportive than Fidel Castro in assisting African nations in their struggles for independence and their right to self-determination. After the CIA's Bay of Pigs invasion failed to overthrow Castro in 1961, it was not difficult for him to convince other countries of the threat of imperial and neo-colonial forms of foreign intervention. So Castro boldly decided to declare solidarity with other oppressed, colonized, and newly independent nations,

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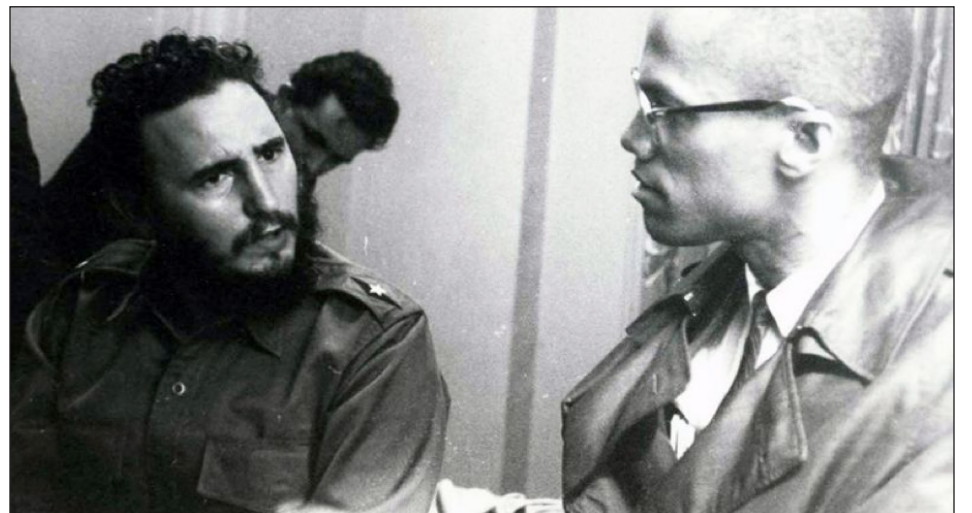
Fidel Castro rides with Lt. Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam in Ethiopia on Sept. 12, 1978. Castro had arrived to attend celebrations for Ethiopia's fourth anniversary of toppling the emperor. [AP]



Ernesto Barbon, a veteran of the Angola war in which Cuban troops fought in the 1980s, waits in line to enter the Revolution Plaza to pay homage to Fidel Castro in Havana [Ricardo Mazalan/AP]



Cuban President Fidel Castro speaks to South African President Nelson Mandela at the World Trade Organization in Geneva in 1998. [Patrick Aviolat/European Pressphoto Agency]



Fidel Castro and Malcolm X meet at Harlem's Hotel Theresa (1960). [Universal History Archive/ UIG via Getty images]

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especially in Africa.

Beginning in 1963, by sending 56 doctors to newly liberated Algeria, Cuba began a campaign of medical internationalism in Africa that is still in effect today. Cuba has medical professionals working in more than 33 African countries. And as world powers scrambled to protect their own borders from the more recent Ebola epidemic in West Africa, Cuba sent 461 health workers to the region, the largest delegation sent by any country. The military support provided by Castro and the Cuban government demonstrated their support of African independence movements in even stronger ways.

In 1963, Cuba began providing military training to independence movements in Algeria, Yemen, Cape Verde, and Guinea-Bissau. Castro sent Cuban revolutionary hero Che Guevara to the Republic of Congo in 1965 along with 100 Afro-Cuban soldiers to train guerilla fighters in support of the Marxist Simba movement. Additionally, Castro proclaimed loudly to the international community his support of emerging African political leaders such as Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, Burkina Faso's Thomas Sankara, Mozambique's Eduardo Mondlane

and Angola's Agostinho Neto.

In 1975, with the MPLA (the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) in desperate need of military support, Castro sent tens of thousands of Afro-Cuban troops to Angola under "Operation Carlotta." Between 1975 and 1991, hundreds of these Cuban troops would die helping the MPLA battle against U.S.-backed South African apartheid forces. The Cuban troops' decisive victory at Cuito Cuanavale in 1988 serves as a historic moment in South African history as it made way for independence in Zimbabwe and Namibia – and the beginning of the end of South African apartheid. Articles in Military History Online and Dissident Voice stated that a total 36,000 Cuban troops were sent to Angola.

Nelson Mandela, one of Castro's closest friends in the international community, said in a 1990 television interview, "We have our own struggle, which we are conducting, and our attitude toward any country is determined by the attitude of that country to our struggle." He continued, "Yasser Arafat, Colonel Qaddafi, Fidel Castro support our struggle to the hilt."

Fidel & African-Americans

As American corporate media outlets and politicians express outrage over Cas-

tro's documented and alleged human rights violations, take a close look for yourself at the United States' record of human rights violations both domestically and abroad.

What do you see?

I see that the United States of America has no moral, political, or social authority to judge anybody for anything.

While the United States government attempted to sabotage movements in the American black freedom struggle (read up on COINTELPRO), here's a list of ways in which Castro stood in solidarity:



- While in New York in 1961 to speak at the United Nations, Castro stayed at the black-owned Hotel Theresa and held conversations with Malcolm X;

- A young poet named Leroi Jones visited Cuba in July 1960 with a delegation of American writers and artists. His experiences there along with the assassination of Malcolm X inspired him to transform into Amiri Baraka, one of the greatest 20th century American poets and the founder of the Black Arts Movement;

- Bobby Seale and Huey P Newton, co-founders of The Black Panther Party For

Self-Defense, credit Castro's Cuban revolution as being a major inspiration for their movement;

- Assata Shakur, a former Black Panther and Black Liberation Army member who escaped to Cuba after breaking out of a New Jersey prison in 1979, has lived in Cuba under political asylum since her escape, even as the FBI has put up million-dollar bounty for her capture;

- Black activist and former NAACP leader Robert Williams fled to Cuba in 1961. With Castro's blessing, he was allowed to broadcast his militant views to blacks in the American south via "Radio Free Dixie";

- Castro was the first foreign leader to offer emergency medical assistance to New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. U.S. President George Bush rejected this aid and left black people to die in swampy waters, in abandoned jails and on rooftops.

In comparison with Fidel Castro, no foreign leader in the second half of the 20th century has displayed, in both attitude and action, greater support of black people's struggles for freedom and equality around the world.

A true ally in the struggle.



Raheem Jessop takes in the scenery during hike to Fidel Castro's mountaintop headquarters / Photo by Alton Pitre

It was a cold and rainy day, and no one was looking forward to the task that awaited when the participants exited their cars. By the time we conquered the daunting task, the sun was out and the temperature had risen dramatically.

Extending 6,476 feet above sea level, the Sierra Maestra Mountains poke through the clouds and create beautiful landscapes for tourists to gaze upon. While the mountain range is spectacular, the scenery became overshadowed by the energy it took to climb up and down the mountain in the heat of the day.

During the Cuban Revolution spanning from July 1953 to January 1959, Fidel Castro hid within the woodsy mountains to escape his nemesis, Cuba's President Fulgencio Batista, to engage in guerrilla warfare. Castro defeated Batista's army of 30,000 professional soldiers with his 800 rebels, and overthrew Batista to assume the position of commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

The boldest of the Morehouse group rode up the highest road in Cuba in Jap-

anese-made minivans before they began their trek up the mountain on foot. The muddy terrain along the trail made it difficult for climbers to secure their footing up the path and folks began slipping and sliding, creating sporadic comical moments along the hike. One of the funniest moments occurred between Spelman student Jonell Brown and Morehouse Biology professor Dr. Tricia Hendrickson.

Morehouse senior Raheem Jessop was attempting to get Hendrickson's attention; however, she could not hear her name being called as she had her earphones plugged in bumping the tunes. Brown attempted to help get the professor's attention by extending her walking stick in Hendrickson's peripheral vision. A loud shriek echoed throughout the mountain and hikers scattered like ants running for their lives.

After the group recuperated, Brown and Hendrickson explained to on-lookers what had happened. Hendrickson explained that when she saw Brown's walking stick in her peripheral vision, she thought it was a snake and screamed. Hendrickson ran and

caused everyone else to scamper, too, out of fear of the danger that lurked in the shadows.

In this instance, the stereotype "all black people avoid threats even if no real danger exists" prevailed. However, participants in the experience tore down another stereotype, "black people don't climb mountains." Along the trail, other groups of hikers met the Morehouse delegation with stares of confusion when they met them along the trail.

The three-hour hike was difficult and tough on the psyche. When the mind told the body to quit, all one had to do was reflect on Castro and his regime hiking up the mountain carrying food and supplies and building multiple facilities along the slope without the technology available today. The Morehouse delegation carried themselves up the mountain, which didn't compare to Castro's army carrying a full-sized refrigerator to his secluded residence deep within the forest.

Prior to beginning the hike, some members of the delegation decided not to par-

take in the hike and stayed behind at the resort located at the bottom of the mountain. Upon returning, hikers were greeted with up-turned noses and trekkers were immediately informed that they reeked of animal feces.

The explorers did their best to ensure that they avoided stepping in the feces littered along the trail; however, their efforts failed. With the thunderstorm that occurred earlier that morning and the animal droppings present on the path, the two blended. Unknowingly, voyagers stepped in the mixture of feces and mud and were forced to clean off their shoes in a stream.

Despite the grueling effort exhibited along the route, the climb strengthened bonds among participants and pushed them beyond their presumed physical and mental strength. Castro and his regime carried necessities to support 800 men and a refrigerator to save their lives. The daily walk across campus with a backpack full of books and a laptop to sit in a classroom is nothing compared to the effort it took to ensure Castro's safety.



BY AYRON LEWALLEN

FOLLOWING IN CASTRO'S FOOTSTEPS



Fun in the Cuban Sun

Impressions of Cuba, 3 Words Per Person

Eye-opening, nationalism, solidarity
Humbling, community, love
Humbling, longing, tobacco
Admiration to curiosity
Dictatorship, loyalty, happiness
Overwhelmed, humble, unequal

SHAPING OUR PERSPECTIVE

BY JONELL BROWN

In an extremely hot, tropical rural setting, Santiago de Cuba is very different from Havana. Located in eastern Cuba, it is where the revolution led by Fidel Castro was started. At first glimpse, the Morehouse contingent's misconceptions about life in a Communist state were replaced by an appreciation for the abundance of information provided by our tour guides.

A dollar and a dream couldn't bring about much joy in the United States. But in the land where solidarity is the norm, having little equates to much happiness. Cubans exude a sense of community in their effort to achieve success. True nationalism is all around.

From feelings of admiration to curiosity, expressed by the above three-word memoirs by members of the Morehouse contingent, the tour group was honestly pleasantly surprised by the sentiment among Afro-Cubans that problems with race and discrimination were nonexistent.

Thankful, appreciation, perseverance
Love, community, hard work
Tropical, friendly, perplexing
Happiness, family, community
Blessed, humble, awakening
Rural, relaxing, extremely hot

Living under the authority of the Cuban Communist Party, they claim that equality knows no color.

And literally in the brunt of the storm, the infrastructure of Santiago de Cuba was destroyed by Hurricane Sandy. Yet, the industrious nature of the Cuban people was unchanged.

It soon became evident that some Cubans were more well off than others. Huddled around the Wi-Fi hubs, we were fascinated by Cuban millennials. After being separated from easy access to technology, their attachment to their phones was invigorating.

Looking at two sides of the same coin, Cuban life is incomparable. As a dictatorship, the Communist Party of Cuba governs people whose loyalty is overwhelming. "Y SOY FIDEL, Y SOY FIDEL" was plastered or chanted everywhere we went.

Captivating our hearts by the warmth of their genuine love and stimulating our

minds, each lesson inspired us to hurry home to enlighten others about the realities of Cuban society.

To put it into perspective, being introduced to the "Sweet Potato" community is one example of pure kindness. Resembling a Morehouse open house, nothing was what it seemed. We had no idea what authentic Cuban life was like until setting foot in our new home away from home.

Though Santiago de Cuba was relaxing, our hike up the Gran Piedra and Sierra Maestra Mountains gave us plenty of time for reflection. The experience was definitely humbling and eye-opening, especially for members of the Morehouse delegation who had never been out of the country.

All in all, our tour group, plus host Walter Turner from Global Exchange, made the Cuba trip a special experience. Many of us are longing to return.

Honestly pleasantly surprised
Community, love, open-minded
Cultivating, captivating and stimulating
Grateful, humble, kind
Invigorating, inspiring, incomparable
Different from Havana

Kind, humble, industrious
Informative, eye-opening, authentic
Morehouse open house
Race, discrimination, equality
Affirmation, information, reflection
Revolution started here

BY MARQUEZ HALL

"Don't worry, be happier."

This daily greeting from our free-spirited tour guide served as the underlying theme of the Cuba 2017 trip. From being taught rumba and salsa to climbing slippery slopes and mountains and even exploring old Cuban castles, experiencing everything eastern Cuba had to offer was the best way to start off my final semester at Morehouse College.

The focus of our trip was the Cuban revolution and it was very interesting to see how Cubans actually feel about the legacy and death of former president Fidel Castro. The news we receive here in the United States about Cuba's relationship with Castro is a total contrast to what is shown in their lifestyle. Castro freed Cuba from the regime of tyrant Fulgencio Batista in 1959 and for that, they are eternally grateful.

Nationalism and a love for their country was the focus of Castro's leadership and these morals are instilled in all Cubans, which is why he could reign for so long. Every Cuban did not love Castro, however. We were told that Castro received over 600 death threats and attempts both nationally and internationally, but that did not stop Castro from controlling the entire country.

One of the most surprising facts we learned was the amount of control the government has in Cuba, which includes the

Reflecting On Cuba

restaurants, housing, tourism, and even the internet/Wi-Fi. Because of the government's control, everything is very cheap. Normal \$20-25 meals here in the U.S. were between \$5-15 in Cuba, a liter of water was 0.80 and clothes were \$10 for an entire outfit. However, salaries are unusually low, too.

Nationalism is instilled in Cubans from birth and it was apparent in the way they carried themselves, as well as in the love and joy they expressed toward us. Two of my biggest highlights were being greeted by an entire community as well as going to a secondary school of about 500 students welcoming us with open arms into their country. Having an entire community prepare a reception in our honor and listening to the students from the school sing popular songs for us like "Hello" by Adele warmed my heart.

I was even given the opportunity to sing the Negro National Anthem, "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing," for the students, a moment that I will never forget. Just as they are proud of their Cuban heritage, I, too, am just as proud of my Black heritage, which is why I chose that particular song. Seeing the enjoyment on the faces of the students and teachers made the moment an unforgettable time, proving how music makes connections for people of all nationalities.

Despite living in the American equivalent of poverty, the Cubans live life to the fullest. Not once did we hear complaints from them nor see a frown on anyone's face. It was apparent they were content with their lives and took excitement in spreading joy to us during our stay.

Because of their hospitality, by the time of departure it was so hard to say goodbye. I was asked to sing a farewell song for our tour guide Grethel María Suárez Sánchez and bus driver Marin, so I chose the Morehouse commencement song, "Fare Ye Well."

Singing the song for them was such an honor because I know that the trip would not have been the same without them and I was elated to show a personal moment of gratitude. They were the perfect pair for the Morehouse community and the song was the beginning of a heartfelt and tearful farewell.

The last line of the song states "I'll meet you on the other shore," reassuring that this is not a goodbye, but more like a see you later. Eastern Cuba is a treasure all on its own. The generosity of its citizens, the cuisine and all the attractions within the country make it one of the best places to visit if given the opportunity. I cannot wait to go back to hopefully explore the western part of the island.



Marquez Hall in Santiago de Cuba



Raffaele "Marin" Marino and Grethel Sánchez



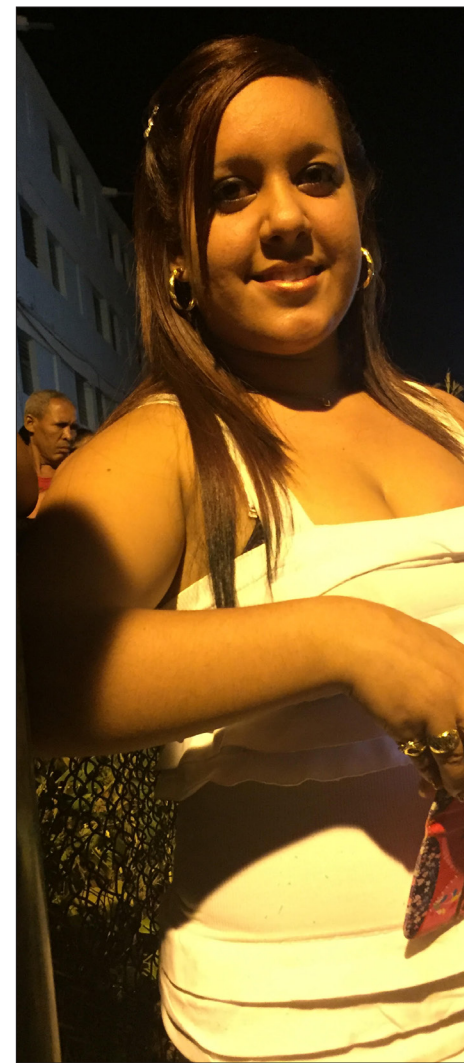
An unidentified man asks if members of the Morehouse group were Americanos. To the right of him is Morehouse student Vaughn Arterberry.



Three men pictured: Pedro Gonzalez Reames (left), Emillo Suarez (center) and Alton Pitre (right);



Alton Pitre pictured with Yanis Suarez Hernandez



Photos by Alton Pitre

LIVING THE AMERICAN DREAM THE CUBAN WAY

BY ALTON PITRE

As the saying goes, “You never know what you have until it’s gone.”

Well, if I may append, you never know what you have until you have traveled to Cuba.

I didn’t have any concrete expectations prior to landing at Frank País Airport in Holguin, Cuba, along with my fellow 18 Morehouse brothers and one Spelman sister. But what I didn’t expect was the magnitude of love and joy expressed toward a group of mostly young, African-American men by the natives of a country so contrary to popular belief.

Despite being a recipient of the typical stranger stares because you’re a foreigner in someone else’s homeland, everywhere we walked people would generally welcome our presence with warm smiles and generous handshakes. Not one day went by without at least a few people approaching our group personally asking if we were “Americanós,” all said with affection.

For five days, we resided in Santiago de Cuba, the second largest city in Cuba with a relative high number of residents who identify as Afro-Cubans. There I witnessed civil life for the average Cubans, where you see everyone out working and hustling to survive and make ends meet.

Yordanka Despaigne Bravo, a female employee at a hotel, told me that she makes only \$10 a month and has only one pair of work pants and shoes.

My thoughts immediately reverted to images I used to see on the news of Cubans risking their lives on small boats traveling to the United States in treacherous waters to obtain what we take advantage of: the American Dream. Maybe that’s why everyone was so happy to see Black Americans in their country. Maybe we were their only hope of freedom.

Before our departure to another city, our final night in Santiago de Cuba was spent visiting a barrio of CDR (Committee for the Defense of the Revolution), a network of neighborhood committees across Cuba. It was there I recall one of my Morehouse brothers saying, “We’re like the dream team.”

Grethel Maria Suarez Sanchez, our tour guide for the trip, fortunately planned this nightly activity without our notice, and we were immediately embraced by an entire community called Boniato the second we stepped off the tour bus.

The meeting opened with greetings and remarks from both our delegation and the Cuban community. We were then

treated to a host of various fruits, foods and drinks prepared for us on tables outside, and the evening concluded with a festival of music and dance that connected everyone.

“We live in a society where we should be united,” Yanis Suarez Hernandez said. “From my personal point of view, it’s time to be united because Cuba is part of America.”

Hernandez, an 18-year-old resident of Boniato, is in her first year of medical school at Facultad de Medicina No. 1 Santiago de Cuba. She aspires to save lives and be a doctor like her mother, who is a general comprehensive doctor in another country.

While in Holguin, a city about three hours away, I encountered two gentlemen, Pedro Gonzalez Reames and Emillo Suarez, who stopped me to ask if I was from America. They both spoke decent English so I asked them what they thought about America and Americans.

“I love the United States and the people,” Reames said. “We like Black people, not White because some Black people, the police kill. We don’t like that.”

Cuba is a country that has a very low crime rate where there is a low tolerance of violence.

Reames informed me that his father is originally from America, but he left Cuba in 1987 and never came back. His friend Suarez also educated me on how Cuba incarcerates the unemployed.

“I was locked up for three years, for nothing ... because I don’t have a job,” Suarez said.

My soul was profoundly touched by these two men because we all shared common experiences as citizens from two different countries. However, I felt their emotions when speaking out about police brutality and especially their government’s injustice because I know what it feels like to be locked up for an illegitimate reason.

Studying abroad in Cuba was one of the most humbling experiences I’ve ever had. To be able to travel from the U.S. to a country that many people have fled reminded me that no matter where we go in the world, no matter what language the people may speak, no matter what the culture is, the people just want to live free and be happy.

As I continue my life as a future leader of my community, country and the world, I am further obliged to advocate for the betterment of my people regardless of the social consequences.



Cuban sports heroes were brought together to meet Morehouse group, including school registrar Kasi Robinson / Photos by Ron Thomas

CUBA, U.S. SHARE REVERENCE FOR ATHLETES

BY AYRON LEWALLEN

Cuban and American cultures have very little in common. However, there is one aspect of life that is universal to both – sports. Sports play an equally great role in bringing citizens together and serves as a pastime throughout both countries. In fact, Cuba's constitution protects each citizen's rights and guarantees them the opportunity to participate in sports.

Although Major League Baseball is known as America's favorite pastime, 250 Cuban athletes were signed to MLB organizations in 2016, about a half-dozen hailing from Santiago de Cuba. Like in the U.S., athletes are held in high regard and are revered heroes for upcoming generations and spectators to admire.

During a visit to the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP), former and current athletes reflected on their careers. A high-ranking international director of recreation in Cuba, Elena Sanchez, is a former rhythmic gymnast. She also has 16 years of experience serving on the executive board in Santiago de Cuba.

More than 20 noteworthy female athletes hail from Santiago de Cuba, one

being Tania Fernándež Hodelin, an outstanding 400-meter runner. She won world championships in Rome and, in 1987, in Indianapolis. She also holds a PhD.

Juan Hernandez Sierra is a boxer who has been competing since he was 14. He was a world champion in 1994 and 95, and in 2008, he added another accomplishment by graduating with a degree in Sports and Education. These days, Sierra spends his time mentoring students who are practicing sports in school.

Reuben Harden-Bell, another boxer, is a bronze medalist from the 1997 World Championships and won another world championship title in 1998. Bell has competed in the Playa Huron International Competition and the Central and Pan American games and has trained athletes in Venezuela.

Similar to America, everyone in Cuba can be an athlete; however, some people are better suited for other positions within the sports industry. Thus, someone must make the decisions at the executive level. That is where former athlete turned manager Luiz LaRoz found his calling, using

the 47 years of experience he has gained as a former member of the national football team.

Within the Cuban education system, 250 professors are training the 8,759 student-athletes in Santiago de Cuba schools. While in primary school, students with outstanding capabilities are scouted by special training programs to continue their education and train in sports simultaneously.

Similar to the U.S., outstanding athletes are compensated for their extraordinary talents. Since athletic training is free, money is allocated for athletes to be compensated every month and world champions receive 300 Cuban Convertible Pesos as well. Athletes and their families are also eligible for government assistance.

Retired athletes are also paid for the duration of their life with personal needs coverage. Retirees receive additional monies corresponding to the medals they won over the span of their career. Medals won in more prestigious competitions yield higher payouts for retired athletes.

Handicapped players are also afforded a seat at the table. Seniors assist organiz-

ing events for handicapped players. Santiago de Cuba is the second providence in Cuba with outstanding results in athletics, just barely trailing behind Havana.

Santiago de Cuba is home to 63 stadiums for students-athletes to practice and play in, one located in each community. In the 1,200 schools within Santiago de Cuba, 35 sports are practiced, ensuring success in international sport competitions.

During the visit to the ICAP headquarters, two students went toe-to-toe with professional boxers. Seniors Raheem Jessop and Justin Guyton volunteered to shadow-box the accomplished boxer, held their own in the make-believe "ring" and managed to survive without being knocked out.

Parallel to the U.S., each citizen in Cuba is given equal opportunity to pursue their dreams as a professional athlete. With hard work and dedication, Cuban children despite socioeconomic status or education can join the ranks of great men and women who have come from their own neighborhoods to become exemplary athletes.

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