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# Global Markets and Inequalities: Changes in the Cuban Society

Melissa Dreffs

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# Global Markets and Inequalities: Changes in the Cuban Society

## **Abstract**

The relationship that Cuba has with the United States and global markets is shifting. This project will address the changing mindset of Cuban society in regards to the global markets and internal changes that have already drastically affected the island and will continue to do so. The structure of employment in Cuba has changed, allowing the private and self-employed sectors to grow, while attracting fewer and fewer state employees. Additional analysis of the changing economic system in Cuba shows the increase in foreign investment, both by states and private corporations. This increase affects both national sovereignty and the role of the Cuban state in enterprise, while its environmental and social impacts remain to be evaluated. I will investigate the values of Cuban society, which once tended to focus on social and economic rights, such as free, quality healthcare and education, and has since shifted to prioritize the tourist industry, foreign investment, and economic growth. I hypothesize that the increased engagement with global markets has the potential to bring explicit inequalities back into Cuban society, working in opposition to the founding ideals of the Cuban Revolution. This project will analyze how society will address and/or intervene against the inequality coming from the opening of the Cuban economic system to global markets.

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Dr. Richard Stahler-Sholk

## **Second Advisor**

Jeffrey Bernstein

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SOCIETY**

**By**

**Melissa Dreffs**

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**Eastern Michigan University**

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**with Honors in Political Science**

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**Supervising Instructor – Dr. Richard Stahler-Sholk**

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**Honors Advisor – Dr. Jeffrey Bernstein**

**Department Head – Dr. David Klein**

**Honors Director – Dr. Rebecca Sipe**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The relationship that Cuba has with the United States and global markets is shifting. This project will address the changing mindset of Cuban society in regards to the global markets and internal changes that have already drastically affected the island and will continue to do so. The structure of employment in Cuba has changed, allowing the private and self-employed sectors to grow, while attracting fewer and fewer state employees. Additional analysis of the changing economic system in Cuba shows the increase in foreign investment, both by states and private corporations. This increase affects both national sovereignty and the role of the Cuban state in enterprise, while its environmental and social impacts remain to be evaluated. I will investigate the values of Cuban society, which once tended to focus on social and economic rights, such as free, quality healthcare and education, and has since shifted to prioritize the tourist industry, foreign investment, and economic growth. I hypothesize that the increased engagement with global markets has the potential to bring explicit inequalities back into Cuban society, working in opposition to the founding ideals of the Cuban Revolution. This project will analyze how society will address and/or intervene against the inequality coming from the opening of the Cuban economic system to global markets.

## INTRODUCTION

As many changes have recently affected Cuban society, the ideals of the Revolution, collectivism and social welfare, are now fighting with the ideals of individualism and capitalism in every sector of the economy and society for the future path of the country. In order to investigate the impact of growing inequality on the political culture of a socialist society, his project will focus on the inequalities that are returning to Cuban society as it engages with global markets, especially the role of tourism. My analysis draws on my studies of international affairs, examination of the Cuban political and economic systems, and interviews conducted in February 2017 with current university students at the University of Pedagogical Sciences Enrique José Varona in Marianao, a municipality of Havana. In formulating this project, I will address the following three questions: (1) How is engaging with global markets bringing back inequalities into Cuban society?; (2) How is the role of the tourism industry changing in regards to shifting societal priorities? (i.e., are societal priorities shifting away from collectivism and social welfare, the ideals of the Revolution, toward individualism and capitalism?); (3) How is society reacting to these changes?

Following a semester long research and study abroad trip in fall of 2015, I found myself in between feeling like a tourist and a local. “The average tourist does not spend time in the homes of Cubans, visit Cuban schools, travel by distinctly Cuban transportation, or participate in Cuban recreational activities. Few tourists thus experience blackouts, wait hours for overcrowded buses, or experience material shortages of any kind while in Cuba.” (Jiménez, 2015, p. 178). However, I was able to experience these realities that Cubans face every day while living with a family in the Pogolotti neighborhood of Marianao. Being a

student at Ciudad Escolar Libertad, I was able to witness an important part of Cuban society: its education system at work. A military base prior to the Revolution under Fulgencio Bautista's rule, Ciudad Escolar Libertad was converted into an educational campus that now serves students of all ages, with preschool aged students in one building and university aged students in another across the street. It is home to a museum dedicated to literacy and Cuba's literacy campaign that took place in 1961, one of the major actions taken by the new government following the triumph of the Revolution. This campaign brought education to the forefront in Cuban society, and education became a key pillar in the post-Revolution political system. The university based on this campus, Universidad de Ciencias Pedagógicas Enrique José Varona, caters to a range of subjects, from hard sciences to foreign languages, in hopes of building the next generation of educators in Cuba. The Cuban Revolution made education one of its main priorities, allowing for free education for all, through all levels. Even a quick visit to Ciudad Escolar Libertad would allow for someone to easily see just how important education remains in Cuba. However, as changes in the economic system infiltrate Cuban society, the importance of this sector faces a new challenge: societal benefit vs. individual benefit.

## METHODS

Following in depth research on the Cuban political and economic systems, history, and civil society, I was able to formulate the research questions for this project. In hopes of addressing issues that were recurring throughout this research, including a growing tourism industry, changes in relations with the United States, and growing wage discrepancies between different categories of employment. I continued comprehensive studies of the topics through books, articles, anthologies, and other scholarly materials. After analyzing these materials, I conducted interviews with individuals and focus groups using a list of questions ranging from their educational experience to recent economic changes within their country stemming from foreign capital. The interview questions, approved by the Institutional Research Board and Eastern Michigan University, can be found in English in Appendix A and in Spanish in Appendix B.

The subjects interviewed for this project were students at the faculty of foreign languages in the University of Pedagogical Sciences Enrique José Varona in Marianao, less than eight miles from Central Havana. All interviews took place in February 2017 and were conducted in English, Spanish, or both. These students are benefiting from the education system in Cuba, which includes free education up to and including the university level. As a part of the Revolution's founding principles, education is a basic right given to all Cubans. In return for this, there is a social service requirement of three years, which may consist of military service prior to university studies and/or working for the state following these studies. In this case, students who did not serve in the military prior to going to university will serve as an educator for three years, and those who completed military service will serve as an educator for two years following graduation.



However, following the social service, many of these students do not plan on remaining in the field of education. Because these students have or will have language skills that would allow an easy transition to the tourism industry or private businesses such as language schools, this group is an interesting case that overtly demonstrates the opposing and changing societal ideals from collectivism to individualism. In conducting qualitative individual interviews and focus groups with these students from each level of the five-year program in the foreign languages faculty, I was able to gain insight into many aspects of their lives such as their thoughts on embracing global capitalism and a growing tourism industry, their future aspirations, and their career goals beyond the social service.

## BACKGROUND

Following centuries of Spanish colonial domination, Cuba's connection with the United States grew in the early 20th century with much of the economy tied to foreign capital, many businesses and properties owned by foreign entities, and a tourism industry deeply connected to organized crime from the United States. Following liberation from Spain, the United States became the neighbor that came in and replaced Spain as a dominating colonial force. After fighting for independence from Spain for many years, Cuba was then aided in this attempt by the United States. In 1898, the United States militarily stepped in while Cuba was fighting the Spaniards on the island as they had been for years. "In February 1898 the US battleship Maine had been lying peacefully at anchor when, without warning, a gigantic explosion swiftly sank it, killing 258 American sailors." (Gott, 2005, p. 99). This event sparked United States involvement in Cuba's war for independence from Spain, which would become known as the Spanish-American War in the United States and the Spanish-Cuban-American War in Cuba. With their involvement, the United States helped the Cuban War of Independence move swiftly along, and independence was gained shortly after their involvement began. Following a short occupation by the United States once Spain was gone, Cuba seemed to have finally gained its true independence at the surface level. However, once the process of writing a new constitution took place, the system would continue to reflect that the power the United States had in Cuba was not ending anytime soon. In 1902, the Platt Amendment was added to its new constitution. In explaining the amendment's ramifications, Gott states, "continued military occupation was no longer an option, but the wording of the Platt Amendment would ensure that, even when independence had been granted and the

American occupation force had sailed away, the United States would maintain a unique form of colonial control.” (Gott, 2005, p. 110). Continuing in his discussion of this amendment, Gott states, “Its purpose, when first outlined in February 1901, was to cement the relationship between Cuba and the United States into a permanent pattern before the Cubans had a chance to give an opinion on the matter. The Cuban constituent assembly, elected to draft a new constitution in December 1900, was obliged to accept it.” (Gott, 2005, p. 110-111).

“By the late 1920s, U.S. firms controlled 75 percent of the sugar industry and most of the mines, railroads, and public utilities.” (Brenner, Jiménez, Kirk, and LeoGrande, 2015, p. 117). Seeking a more independent political system that could benefit the people on the island more than foreigners, Cubans organized and rallied support, leading to the 1959 triumph of the Revolution, led by Fidel Castro, Ernesto “Che” Guevara, and others. This triumph brought the socialist system into place that is still remaining today on the island. “The remembered vision of pre-revolutionary Cuba that prevailed in the early years of the Revolution was one of economic stagnation over many decades, of political failure, corruption, bureaucratic incompetence, gangsterism, violence and social breakdown. Revolution and/or socialism, according to taste, was perceived as the natural outcome of an intolerable situation. The Revolution’s task was to re-order society and bind its wounds.” (Gott, 2005, p. 165). Following the triumph of the Revolution and stemming from these sentiments felt within society in the years leading up to 1959, a prioritization of economic and social rights captivated and resonated with the people. Minimizing wage discrepancies and income inequality became a main priority of the new government. Universal access to free healthcare and education became the norm in Cuba and a source

of great pride for the people to this day. The emphasis placed on these two sectors of society and on values of collectivism among the people were two of the most pertinent changes affecting people at all levels of society.

Soon after the triumph of the Revolution, Cuba aligned itself with the Soviet Union and other communist countries during the Cold War. The economy of Cuba then shifted back to a single product economy that became the main source of income for the state. “In mid-1963, returning from a trip to the Soviet Union, Fidel Castro announced a return to specialization in sugar. By the turn of the decade, Castro pledged, Cuba would produce 10 million tons of sugar annually and use the proceeds to develop the rest of the economy.” (Brenner, Jiménez, Kirk, and LeoGrande, 2015, p. 118). In early 1960, a deal was established between the two states. The Soviet Union agreed to purchase a million tons of sugar per year for five years. They agreed on a payment that would permit payment consisting of both dollars for twenty percent and goods such as “oil, machinery, wheat, newsprint and various chemical products” for the remaining eighty percent. Additionally, the Soviet Union provided a credit to purchase plant and equipment worth 100 million dollars. (Gott, 2005, p. 182). This agreement and similar subsidized trade agreements with other Soviet allies became the lifeblood of the Cuban economy for many years following the Revolution, representing over 80% of Cuba’s foreign trade. (Pérez-López, 1991). Although Cuba did not have access to trade with the United States, the biggest economy within the Western hemisphere, the economic connections with the other communist states allowed for the state to thrive and pursue their goals, even with a major global power against them and seeking to change their leadership and regime type.

The connection with the United States following the Revolution remains extremely complicated. The United States saw the Cuban revolution as communism's entry into the Western hemisphere, igniting fear throughout the United States of the potential spread and domino effect this may have had in the region. In an attempt to oust this new regime from power, the United States tried diplomatic, economic, and military tactics, but it was not able to achieve its end goals of ousting Fidel Castro from power and changing the regime type. In implementing sanctions in the early 1960s, the United States hoped to see swift changes in Cuba. Adding to the initial sanctions, the invasion of the Bay of Pigs became one of the largest militaristic attempts to spur change in Cuba. However, this CIA-sponsored invasion failed within three days, and it boosted Fidel Castro and the Revolution's status and recognition in the world as a powerful force, especially against the United States. "Following the Bay of Pigs, the U.S. had adopted a twofold policy: to isolate and contain Castro, and to improve economic and social conditions in the hemisphere so as to deny him targets of opportunity." (Smith, 1988, p. 80). The militaristic approach proved itself counterproductive, leading to more economic and diplomatic tactics being employed with the same goals of ousting Castro and changing the regime type. The U.S. sanctions became stronger, but their full effects were not yet revealed as the support of the Soviet Union and their allies allowed for a stable economy for decades. Although access to goods from the United States would have been easier and cheaper due to proximity, Cuba's allies at this time filled the void left by the economic embargo of the United States.

In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed, leaving Cuba without deep ties to a major economic power for the first time since Spanish colonialism began. The years following the collapse became known as the "Special Period" in Cuba. The dire economic situation

was further worsened by legislation in the United States that strengthened the economic sanctions against the island. With the Helms-Burton Act in 1995, Congress gained more power on foreign policy towards Cuba, which had been mostly determined by the executive branch up until this point. “It is time to tighten the screws,’ Senator Helms announced when he first presented the bill to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Congressman Burton predicted that passage would be ‘the last nail in [Castro’s] coffin.’” (Kornbluh and LeoGrande, 2015, p. 2). The deep effects of the embargo finally came to fruition. There was great suffering among the population because there was no longer a market to sell Cuba’s main source of income, sugar, and they could not rely on that to sustain the nutritional needs of the people. One of the Special Period’s main goals was to produce enough food for its people in order to prevent a serious crisis of malnutrition. The second main goal was to reorient relations toward the West in regards to trade, as they no longer were supported by and able to trade with the Soviet Union and its allies. This goal sought foreign capital to assist the Cuban people and government when they needed it the most. “The strategy included a series of market-oriented reforms, including the reestablishment of free farmers’ markets, the devolution of many state farms to cooperatives, reductions in subsidies to state enterprises, the legalization of self-employment, and, most significant, the legalization of dollars.” (Brenner, Jiménez, Kirk, and LeoGrande, 2015, p. 119.) These reforms marked an important shift in Cuba’s history. “Only the collapse of European communism freed Cuba from dependent trade relations with the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies – albeit at the cost of enormous economic disruption.” (Brenner, Jiménez, Kirk, and LeoGrande, 2015, p. 117).

The main tactic coming from the United States as seen by the public eye, following the failed invasion of the Bay of Pigs in 1961, has been the economic sanctions against Cuba put in place over five decades ago and still in effect. However, out of the public eye, there has been consistent behind-the-scenes diplomacy. In a recent book, Back Channel to Cuba by William LeoGrande and Peter Kombluh, one of the authors' main points is that "every president since Eisenhower has engaged in some form of dialogue with Castro and his representatives." (Kombluh and LeoGrande, 2015, p. 2). However, the channels of communication that Washington and Havana have used to contact one another have often been secretive and through facilitation of other states; therefore, the communications were insulated from public opinion in both countries. "To limit the political risk of direct contact, Washington and Havana have developed creative clandestine methods of communication." (Kombluh and LeoGrande, 2015, p. 3).

These back channels are what led to the change of relations that occurred during Barack Obama's presidency. Most of the negotiations that led to these changes were through the secretive, clandestine channels out of the public eye. Following his announcement in December 2014, President Obama sought to change what was under his authority. Travel restrictions were eased, an embassy was reestablished, and more cooperation between the two states and between the people were allowed to happen. However, due to the legislation enacted during Cuba's "Special Period," only Congress has the power to fully normalize the bilateral relations, as the removal of economic sanctions would require an act of Congress that the executive branch cannot overstep.

## DUAL CURRENCY SYSTEM

During the Special Period, Cuba adopted a dual currency system that still remains in place today. In order to understand the phenomena discussed later in this project, it is pertinent to address this system. The two currencies, the Cuban peso (CUP), commonly referred to as moneda nacional, and the convertible peso (CUC), have allowed for some to have access to the global markets and some to lack this access. The Cuban peso can currently be exchanged at a fixed rate of 24 CUP to 1 CUC to buy and 25 CUP to 1 CUC to sell in the CADECA exchange offices found throughout Cuba. The CUC is equal to one U.S. dollar. Today, imported goods are more accessible in Cuba and they are sold at the global market rates. Because of this, in order to acquire these goods, Cubans need CUC, which they cannot get through working for the state given that state salaries are paid in CUP. Although the state salaries can be exchanged into CUC, the amount that is earned remains very little. As explained in a study conducted by Rose Marketing and published in the Miami Herald, it indicates that the official average monthly salary was “687 pesos, or about \$25, in 2015, according to Cuba’s National Office of Statistics.” (Whitefield, 2016). However, in the study, it was found that Cubans earn considerably more than this amount. The survey took place in the cities of Havana, Santiago de Cuba, Holguín, Camagüey, Pinar del Río, and Cienfuegos from May to June 2015. 1,067 Cubans participated in this survey. Some of the results of the survey included, “about 27 percent of Cubans earn under \$50 per month; 34 percent earn the equivalent of \$50 to \$100 per month; and 20 percent earn \$101 to \$200. Twelve percent reported earning \$201 to \$500 a month; and almost 4 percent said their monthly earnings topped \$500, including 1.5 percent who said they earned more than \$1,000. The remainder of respondents declined to state their income, and Rose said



the survey had a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.” Cubans are finding better paying jobs or ways to supplement their income if they are unable to acquire those positions. However, over sixty percent earn less than \$100 per month according to this study. Within the Cuban system, education and healthcare are free and housing, utilities, and basic foodstuffs are heavily subsidized by the Cuban government. Because of this, the basic necessities in order to survive are not what wages are spent on, but rather supplemental goods, such as new clothing, technology, and entertainment.

As described by one of the subjects interviewed for this project, “For example, I gain \$20 [per month], which is 500 pesos. In the states, you can gain \$20 in one hour. In the States, \$20 is \$20, \$500 is \$500. Here, 500 pesos is \$20. So, in the States you gain \$20 in one hour. In one month, I earn \$20 which is 500 pesos, so, what is the point? We want a better salary.” Now, more than ever, the comparison of wages in CUP to the dollar shows how little a Cuban earning this wage would be able to afford on the global market. Because the global markets are determining the prices of many imported goods, wages in CUP are no longer sufficient for the goods and the kind of lifestyle desired by many. “After more than twenty years of hardship, Cubans are first and foremost interested in increasing their incomes in order to satisfy basic needs. Heavily exposed to the hegemonic worldview that private enterprise and markets work best, many believe that privatization and marketization represent the best path to sustained economic growth.” (Piñeiro Hamecker 2015, p. 55-56).

Income inequality is a growing phenomenon in Cuban society. A growing tourism industry, more room for employment in the black market, and easier access to remittances from relatives abroad has allowed for greater wealth to be acquired by some. “A key element in sustaining the ability of ordinary Cubans to get through the ‘Special Period’ was

support from abroad in the form of remittances. In 1993, in hopes of increasing the flow, the Cuban government legalized the possession of dollars and opened dollar stores (Tiendas de Recuperación de Divisas) for Cubans to purchase imported goods. The policy succeeded; over the next decade, the remittances sent to relatives by Cubans abroad rose to over \$1 billion annually. At the same time, however, the purchasing power of the Cuban peso receded, creating a two-class system of consumption: those with access to dollars (from remittances, work in the tourist sector, or the black market) and those without.” (Brenner, Jiménez, Kirk, and LeoGrande, 2015, p. 119). Tough restrictions were put in place from the United States in regards to remittances and travel between the two countries for many years. Specifically, under the George W. Bush administration, family visits were limited to one every 3 years and remittances were only allowed to be sent to immediate family members with a cap of \$300 quarterly. These restrictions were relaxed by Obama in 2009. (Silva & Wilkinson, 2009). Even with these restrictions, many families were able to overcome these obstacles. Today, many of these restrictions have been eased, allowing further connectedness financially through remittances and travel. With growing access to imported goods such as technology, the desire for higher income is beginning to overcome the ideals of collectivism and social welfare. In a survey conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago in 2016, forty-seven percent of those surveyed affirmed that they do receive money from friends or family members living outside of Cuba. (NORC, 2016, p. 16).

The dual currency system led to what can be seen today as a dual society based on who has access to hard currency and those that do not. “As the availability of goods at subsidized prices on the ration card shrank, the rationing system ceased to provide an

adequate floor for basic consumption. State sector salaries – even good ones – were not sufficient to buy many goods priced in hard currency. The unskilled, the elderly on fixed incomes, and people living in rural areas that saw few tourists all suffered enormously. At the same time, a new entrepreneurial class of self-employed – both legal and illegal – emerged, some of them earning previously unimaginable incomes – ‘the new rich,’ Fidel Castro called them.” (LeoGrande, 2015, p. 63-64).

With the creation of “the new rich,” race-based discrimination has crept deeper into a society that claimed to have ended racism with the triumph of the Revolution. Many Cubans abroad today are lighter skinned because of whose families were once in a position of privilege before the Revolution. “There is also an insidious racial element to the ‘new’ Cuba since remesas, or family remittances (now an estimated \$2 billion annually), come largely from white Cubans living abroad and go to their (mainly white) relatives, this exacerbating socioeconomic differences based largely on race.” (Brenner, Jiménez, Kirk, and LeoGrande, 2015, p. 375). The 2010 US Census reports that eighty-five percent Cuban Americans (i.e., 1,525,521 of 1,785,547) identified as white. (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, and Albert, 2010, p. 14).

In addition, the tourism industry exacerbates the issue of economic inequality due to race as well. “The reintroduction of tourism into the Cuban economy appears to have exacerbated the racial inequality, as Afro-Cubans have significantly less access to jobs in the legal tourist industry, placing them in direct contact with visitors who tip for services rendered. In the late 1990s, 60 percent of the Cubans involved in legal tourism were light skinned. This phenomenon is strengthening the racial divide because Afro-Cubans have less access to hard currency with less opportunity in the tourist industry. The discrepancy

in access to hard currency would be problematic on its own because of its impact on Cuba's goal of creating an egalitarian society." (Jiménez, 2015, p. 176). Limited access to positions in the tourism industry prohibit many Afro-Cubans from gaining wages in CUC. The 2010 US Census shows that less than five percent Cuban Americans (i.e., 82,398 of 1,785,547) identified as black or African American. Because of there being so few people of Afro-Cuban descent in the United States, remittances are not nearly as common among Afro-Cuban families as they among others. (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, and Albert, 2010, p. 14).

Speaking of Cubans of African descent, William M. LeoGrande states, "Few had family abroad to send them remittances. Because they live in poor neighborhoods, few had opportunities to earn hard currency by opening paladares (private restaurants) or casas particulares (rented rooms) for tourists. And because of lingering racism, they were less likely to be employed in the tourist industry, where workers received hard-currency tips." (LeoGrande, 2015, p. 63). As change comes to Cuba, some groups are benefiting more than others, with Afro-Cubans benefiting the least, if they are benefiting at all. The Cuban state has restrictions, such as subsidized or free basic necessities for everyone, in place to help diminish these economic inequalities between groups. However, the Cuban system cannot address the problem of racism because in the eyes of the government, racism no longer exists in Cuba. The government claims racism at all levels was eradicated following the Revolution. In reality, racism and the historical legacies of inequality are issues that need to be addressed, but the government's stance prevents any resolution of these issues, and therefore, the government has not adopted anything like affirmative action policies to correct for these inequalities.

## ECONOMIC REFORMS UNDER RAÚL CASTRO

In 2006, following health complications, Fidel Castro, then at age 79, was unable to fulfill his duties as President, which allowed for Article 94 of the Cuban Constitution to be enacted. “In case of the absence, illness or death of the President of the Council of State, the First Vice President assumes the President’s duties.” (The Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, 1976). Fidel’s positions of President of the Council of State of Cuba, President of the Council of Ministers of Cuba, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba, and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces were all transferred to the First Vice President, his brother, Raúl, provisionally in 2006. In 2008, Fidel did not run for reelection as President, allowing Raúl to be formally elected into the positions he had held during his brother’s absence. Raúl will step down when his term ends in 2018. It is assumed that the next President of Cuba will be current Vice-President Miguel Díaz-Canel, a high-ranking, senior Party member in his fifties. (Cave, 2013). After decades of Fidel holding this position, Raúl brought with him a new manner of leading the Cuban people and many economic reforms. Miguel Díaz-Canel will become the first non-Castro to hold the position of President of Cuba since Fidel began his term in 1976.

Agriculture, employment, and market structures started to be reformed once Raúl came to power. In July 2008, Raúl told the National Assembly, “Socialism means social justice and equality, but equality of rights and opportunities, not salaries.” (LeoGrande, 2015, p. 67). This idea of socialism shows a drastic shift from the previous belief that there should be very little discrepancy between wages in order to achieve their core goal of building a socialist state. Additionally, this idea allowed for the increase in wage

discrepancies seen in Cuba today, as it became something that was able to exist alongside of socialism in this perspective.

Under Raúl's authority, the agriculture industry was then allowed to shift decision making and power to individual farmers and worker cooperatives instead of the state, as it was prior. "From 2008 to mid-2011, nearly 15 percent of agricultural land (1.13 million hectares) had been given in usufruct to 146,000 individual farmers (70,000 new ones) and, to a lesser degree, to worker cooperatives while recognizing that permanent (not only seasonal) wage labor was used by both." (Piñeiro Hamecker, 2015, p. 50-51). These changes allowed for a more efficient structure of production of agricultural goods as people closer to the daily functions were given greater authority and power in decision-making.

Under Raul, independent employment continues to grow, and the restrictions placed on these individuals have shrunk. "Other rules were passed that made independent work (*cuentalpropismo*) more flexible, including the possibility of hiring wage laborers on a permanent basis. Independent workers are now able to rent spaces, establish economic transactions with state institutions, and receive lines of credit in Cuban banks. The number of licenses for independent work more than doubled in less than a year, ten of these in part because many simply legalized their status. In spite of high taxes, many have seen benefits from legalizing their activities, such as access to retirement, security for disabilities and maternity, bank credit, and state contracts." (Piñeiro Hamecker, 2015, p. 51). "In 2013, according to state figures, more than 424,000 Cubans (8.6% of all workers) were classified as self-employed; as recently as 2009, fewer than 144,000 Cubans (2.8%) were." (DeSilver, 2015). While many independently employed individuals operate their business in the underground or black market, the Cuban government tries to push them to come above

ground with easing of license restrictions and access to beneficial resources to help them prosper further. However, being underground, businesses are not regulated, and they do not pay taxes. In doing this, they are able to earn more money and save enough for any fines stemming from their illegality. Additionally, these independent business owners “don’t know how it works in other countries, and they feel they are being strangled by taxes and rules. When small businesses sprang up in Cuba illegally, they had profit margins of 500 percent. With 200 percent gains, they think they are suffering.” (Barbassa, 2005, p. 23). While there are benefits to legalizing and registering a business with the government such as bank credit and state contracts, five-hundred percent profit margins are often too great to give up, allowing the underground economy to continue thriving.

Additionally, many of the unpopular restrictions placed on Cubans were removed. Before 2008 and Raúl’s assumption of the role of President, different types of technology were prohibited from being sold, and automobiles and real estate could not be legally sold privately. Tourism was restricted for many Cubans as they were prohibited from staying in tourist hotels on the island and could not travel abroad without a government issued permit. “In 2008, the government began eliminating prohibitions that Cubans found especially exasperating, legalizing the sale of computers and cell phones, for example, and eliminating rules against Cubans staying in tourist hotels. In 2011, the government legalized private real estate and automobile markets, allowing Cubans to buy and sell directly to one another without a state intermediary. And in 2013, the government eliminated the ‘tarjeta blanca,’ the exit permit required for travel abroad; now, Cubans with a passport can travel whenever and wherever they like.” (Brenner, Jiménez, Kirk, and LeoGrande, 2015, p. 121). Another great impact on society in recent years has been the

expansion of internet access. With Wi-Fi hotspots coming into many neighborhoods throughout the island and prices recently decreasing, internet access is attainable and easier than it ever has been. Additionally, the “paquete”, a weekly packet of media and information that can be accessed without internet is another way to connect with the outside world. Including movies, television shows, magazines, and software, Cubans have used this as a way to gather and share information without the necessity of the internet. One of the impacts that internet access and the “paquete” may bring is “ideological contamination,” a danger to the longevity and support of the Revolution. (LeoGrande, 2015, p. 69). With the internet and “paquete” comes access to new information that everyday Cubans have not had access to prior, changing their perspectives on the world with each connection or download.



## TOURISM INDUSTRY

Prior to the Revolution, tourism, especially of people from the United States, was a large portion of the Cuban economy. It was the second largest percentage of income before 1959, only following sugar. However, the issues stemming from tourism, such as its ability to create inequality, have made this an issue of moral incentive versus material incentive. “The revolutionary government neglected tourism because of its association with the social ills of prerevolutionary Cuba. (Brenner, Jiménez, Kirk, and LeoGrande, 2015, p. 120). During the Special Period, the time of deep economic despair following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuba was in need of hard currency. In order to acquire the hard currency, the leadership began to revive the once booming industry, tourism. Foreign investors became interested in the revival of Cuban tourism due to its ability to grow quickly. The tourism industry’s revival was a key factor in the Cuban economy’s recovery. During the 1990s, twenty percent of total investment was used to develop the tourism industry. (Jiménez, 2015, p. 173). “The government’s focus on tourism paid off, and the industry has grown exponentially during the past twenty-five years. For example, between 2000 and 2005, tourism increased nearly 20 percent annually, helping Cuba break into the top ten most frequented tourist destinations in the Western Hemisphere.” (Jiménez, 2015, p. 173). Tourism is now ten percent of Cuba’s GDP. (Gonzalez, 2016).

Especially since the change in relations with the United States and Cuba, more and more tourists are traveling there. In 2015, approximately 3.1 million tourists traveled to Cuba, up 17.6 percent from the previous year. With only around 150,000 of those being Americans traveling there legally, in accordance with the restrictions of the United States, the number is likely to continue increasing as most travel restrictions have been relaxed

significantly. In *The Political Economy of Leisure* by Marguerite Rose Jiménez, she states, “By jump starting the economy with an infusion of hard currency from tourists and foreign investments, the Cuban government set off a chain reaction that has contributed to a gradual deterioration of many of the ideals on which revolutionary Cuba was founded.” (Jiménez, 2015, p. 173-173). She continues by stating, “Often excluded from the discourse on tourism, until recently, are its inherent sociopolitical consequences, such as discrimination, unequal power relations, and socioeconomic inequality. These negative effects raise questions about the viability of tourism as a means to sustain both economic development and the Revolution’s sociopolitical goals.” (Jiménez, 2015, p. 174). The class conflict is building within the dual economy. More discrimination rooted in racism has entered into society. The marketing of Cuban culture, especially Afro-Cuban traditions and religions, has turned into mere commodification and a way to get profits. Women and to a lesser extent, men, are being objectified again with this new system. Educated Cubans are leaving their professions in order to pursue employment opportunities where they will earn hard currency. These disadvantageous side effects of tourism were some of the reasons the industry was limited following the Revolution. With the reentry of a prominent tourism industry, these long-term effects have already begun altering Cuban society.

As many highly educated Cubans are unable to achieve the quality of life they desire, they are leaving their professions as doctors, educators, scientists, and lawyers, among others, in an attempt to partake in the tourism industry, where dollar tips are creating drastic wage differences between the professions. Julian Foley, author of *Trinidad – Life in the Margins*, explains, tourism’s growth “will continue to pull doctors and scientists into its ranks and erode incentives for young people to get educated in higher, but lower paying,

pursuits.” (Foley, 2005, p. 56). In an interview with a third-year student of English and French education, when asked about future career aspirations, the student stated, “Well, I do want to be a teacher, because I really like it, you know, but at the same time, I feel like the money I will get from teaching will not be enough for me as a person. So, I want to learn as much as I can, at least, I hope, three or four languages so maybe I can get two jobs or after five or six years, I can quit and make some money as a tour guide or maybe I can work in a hotel or maybe I can work in some embassy, or maybe I don’t know, something international.” This sentiment was recurring with many of the students interviewed. Marguerite Rose Jiménez states in her article, “If Cubans cannot legitimately gain access to hard currency through occupations that provide for the common good – such as medicine or education – they will have less incentive to educate themselves.” (Jiménez, 2015, p. 180). From my interviews, I gathered that many students, while less incentivized to learn about certain topics, such as the teaching courses, they took their language studies very seriously. These students see the potential for a better life through this knowledge, but not necessarily through knowing how to teach. One fourth-year student of English and French stated in an interview, “At first when I came here, I was not thinking about being a teacher. I wanted to start here at the university with foreign languages. I came here because here I can learn English.” Doctors earn approximately \$30 per month. Teachers earn even less than that. A teacher of English at the University of Pedagogical Sciences Enrique José Varona disclosed that monthly salary for that position was 600 CUP, or 24 CUC. Compared with chefs in private restaurants that often cater to tourists, who can now earn well over \$1000 per month, it is easy to see the appeal in pursuing a career in the tourism industry. As a fifth-year student of English and French explains, it is easier to get involved in this

sector and as it continues growing, there will be more and more opportunities. “It has to do with the increase in foreigners here. Now to be a tour guide, it’s easier than before – it’s huge. People are demanding for tour guides that know their languages, so yeah, Cubans that are looking for it are going to have access to the tourist area in Havana.”

Following the Revolution, all Cuban beaches were made public, and the leisure industry was catered less to foreigners and more to Cubans. However, today, places claim to be for the Cuban people, but they are now able to set prices so high that entry or purchase of goods is unattainable by most Cubans. In an interview with a third-year student of English and French education, the subject described the phenomenon as the following; “Certain people are taking advantage, because they can. Walking in the street you can see a lot of restaurants, particular restaurants, maybe ice cream stores, and also [rooms for rent], but at the same time, people are making new places dedicated to the tourists, and also they can say tourists and the Cuban people but often the Cuban people don’t get enough money to get in, or maybe they get the money to get in, but maybe they can’t be buying stuff and it’s only you getting into the store and you see a t-shirt, at about 12 [CUC]. For you it’s okay – it’s cheap. For me, it’s like twelve, it can be like 300 [CUP].” By setting the price of a good so high, it limits the market to foreigners and the small percentage of Cubans with access to remittances or wages in CUC. It would be unreasonable if not impossible for someone working for wages in CUP to acquire this item. Seeking products such as the t-shirt, in this example, or more expensive goods such as household appliances and technology, many Cubans seek employment in sectors that would permit purchasing these goods, allowing for their individual needs or the needs of their household to be met. “Without greater attention to and concrete government efforts to address the inherent

contradictions in the promotion of tourism, the Cuban government ignores a phenomenon that is difficult to hide: contemporary Cuba increasingly resembles prerevolutionary Cuba, with its glaring social inequalities and other trappings of dependency.” (Jiménez, 2015, p. 181)

With the growing tourism industry, many different areas of Cuba have become increasingly overcrowded with groups of foreigners, rather than Cubans. A fifth-year student at the faculty of foreign languages stated, “as far as I’ve experienced, I remember like three years ago, four years ago, I went to Old Havana, and okay, there were foreigners, but now I go, after Obama made some changes related to Cuba and the States, now I go to Old Havana, and I listen. So much English everywhere! And I see so many tourists like from every part of countries, and sometimes, there are some parts where I see more foreigners than Cubans. It’s really kind of weird for me because that’s not the kind of thing I used to see in Old Havana. And also, more places are really, really crowded by tourists, so I think [tourism has] grown.” Another fifth-year student repeated this sentiment by stating, “If you walk through Havana, you will see more foreigners than Cubans.” Increasingly, historic areas of the city are being built up or restored while the surrounding neighborhoods continue to stay the same. The building and restoration projects have allowed tourists access to more space and resources while Cubans are generally not seeing much of these benefits, if they are at all.

## **PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE EMPLOYMENT**

As more options become available for private employment and there is more money to be gained in these positions compared to public employment working for the state, there has been an exodus from the public sector and into the private sector. People in once prestigious and highly valued positions, such as doctors and teachers, are no longer seeing the benefits of these more difficult jobs, as more money can be made elsewhere.

While it is extremely uncommon for Cuban university students to also work while going to school, many of the students in the faculty of foreign languages hold regular jobs or have had paid positions using their language skills at some point. Students work at markets selling souvenirs to tourists, as photographers for travel agencies, in private houses that rent rooms to tourists, as private tutors of English, or as translators for movie subtitles and other materials needing translation. All of these positions earn the hard currency, CUC, allowing for greater purchasing power and an elevated lifestyle if these positions are regular. A fifth-year student who has taught many private English and French lessons to other Cubans stated in an interview, “It’s hard when you just teach for the government. It would be good if you could teach [privately] as well, because that’s a very good way to earn money and that’s what some teachers do here in Cuba. That’s what they have to do to make a living – to make ends meet.” As languages are becoming more relevant with globalization and interconnectedness between Cuba and other states, such as the United States, private language schools are becoming an important source of income for many Cubans that hold that knowledge. At this faculty, the students learn the pedagogy and the languages, making them great candidates for positions in private schools. A fourth-year student explained that many teachers, “especially teachers of English,” are leaving the

profession. “They go to their houses and teach for them and not for the state. Or they look for another job or they leave the country.” Many people working in the tourism industry and with access to hard currency through remittances or self-employment, both legal and illegal, are able to afford these private classes in order to further their skillset and allow them more opportunities for positions working in the tourism industry that highly values skills with foreign languages.

A sentiment felt throughout the faculty between students at all levels is that educators do not earn enough to continue with the profession alone. A third-year student, passionate about teaching, described the difficulty of being an educator, “I think, we don’t get sometimes enough money to support what we are doing. But yeah, I do want to teach because I love to teach, but just for a few years, but then we will see. I will see if it’s worth it or not. But yeah, I do plan to find another job or maybe I’ll do both.” A fourth-year student explained, “It’s the reality that I need money. I can’t do my life with say 300 pesos per month. And if I had more money maybe I would stay teaching.” Given the passion held by many of the students for the profession, the salary was the main issue that has pushed many out of this profession, continues to be the force pushing out many more, and causes students to be discouraged before they have even begun their career. A second-year student at the faculty of foreign languages describes the profession, “I’ve heard that a lot of teachers – their salaries are not that sustainable for a good life.” With more access to legal self-employment and industries connected to global capital, many educators and future educators are leaving their profession, seeking employment that allows greater access to goods on the global market.

## CONCLUSION

In increasing the engagement with the global market, through a growing tourism industry or otherwise, Cuba is allowing inequalities to return into the socialist system. As Juliana Barbassa stated, “This may still be Castro’s Cuba, but the evils the revolution came to vanquish – the dollar, tourism, private enterprise, and inequality – are pushing through.” (Barbassa, 2005, p. 17). With this, the Cuban population have to decide whether they will continue maintaining a more equal, but lower standard of living amongst them or they will accept that some will raise their individual standard of living while others are stuck where they are or getting worse. A quantitative study from the independent research institution, NORC at the University of Chicago strengthens my argument that societal values are becoming more accepting of capitalist tendencies. In a survey of 840 Cubans towards the end of 2016, they asked the question, “Should incomes be made more equal, or are larger income differences okay as incentives for people to work harder?” (NORC, 2016, p. 12). Forty-two percent of the respondents answered that “Incomes should be made more equal” while forty-nine percent answered, “Larger income differences are okay as incentives for people to work harder”. Additionally, seven percent responded that they did not know and one percent refused to answer the question. (NORC, 2016, p. 12). With this statistic, it can be determined that society is divided on this issue. There is not a majority of people that believe incomes should be more equal nor a majority that believes income differences are okay, leading to the fact Cuba will not be able to address this issue easily. Wage discrepancies result in unequal standards of living and unequal access to goods from the global market.



“Described by Castro as necessary evils, these small allowances to capitalism are taking root and seeding change at every level of Cuban society. The advent of the dollar and private enterprise means that the worker’s paradise now has winners and losers. Staying close to the party line and putting in hours in a state-owned company for a peso salary no longer guarantees a good living.” (Barbassa, 2005, p. 17). NORC at the University of Chicago explains in their survey, “What emerges most clearly from those interviewed is a desire to enjoy a more certain, and robust, economic future.” (Ahmed, 2017). Eighty percent of the survey participants felt tourism to their country should be increased. Additionally, “95 percent said having a high level of economic growth was an extremely or very important goal.” (Ahmed, 2017). The old system in place is no longer able to fulfill the basic needs of everyone. People now desire more access to the outside world, but they generally cannot have much access to it by only working for the state. Cubans today have more information about the outside world due to increased family travel, international tourists, internet access, and the “paquete”, but the inability to access many consumer goods from the global market remains a source of frustration throughout society. New forms of employment, whether legal or illegal, and the tourism industry are allowing for some to have this access that they desire. The individual and household economic situation is now more important than the societal economic situation. Now, people are generally accepting tourism, self-employment, and competition within the Cuban economic system. However, in moving forward, there will be a mixture of some of the socialist elements with some of the capitalist elements.

Being a great source of pride and a cause of extreme backlash if gone, I hypothesize that going forward, the education and healthcare systems will remain free and universally

accessible to the Cuban people. These elements of the socialist state have allowed for Cuba to thrive in these categories when compared to many other states, whether they are highly developed or not. However, the growing industry of tourism, changing relations with the United States, and the desire of people to participate in the global market will also maintain itself in Cuba's future. With the embrace of global capitalism, Cuba is generating significant revenue that the sugar industry has not been able to provide prior. Some of the necessary economic reforms that are generally accepted include, "the creation of a single currency, modification of exchange rates, adjustment of salary scales, fiscal policies to reduce subsidies, price mechanisms, unique sectoral policies especially in agriculture, labor discipline, reorganization of public administration, and improvement of management techniques, among others." (Monreal González, 2012, p. 234). While these changes will take time, many of these are already beginning to take shape, such as sectoral policies in agriculture. As more changes come to Cuba, more of these economic reforms are likely to occur. With a new President beginning his term in 2018, greater internet access throughout the island, a growing number of tourists per year, and many other changes, the Cuban people are beginning to see the end of the reign by the historic generation and the beginning of a new era of the Revolution.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A – Interview Questions in English**

**What subjects are you/have you studying/studied?**

**Is/will studying this subject be beneficial for your future? If so, how? If not, how not?**

**Are there any expectations or requirements from your school or the government on what to do after graduating?**

**What do you hope to do with the knowledge you have gained in university?**

**What sorts of careers can you get with this degree?**

**What sort of career do you hope to have?**

**Do many of your classmates want to have a similar career to the one you desire?**

**What, if any, economic changes are needed in Cuba?**

**What impacts have you seen since the relations with the US have improved?**

**What role does the tourism industry play in today's Cuba?**

**What are the effects within Cuban society from a more prominent tourist industry?**

**What role do foreign investments play in today's Cuba?**

**What are the effects within Cuban society from an increase in foreign investments?**

## **Appendix B – Interview Questions in Spanish**

¿Qué asignaturas estudia o ha estudiado?

¿Cree que estas asignaturas le serán o le fueron importantes para su futuro? Argumente su respuesta en cualquiera de los casos.

¿Hay expectativas o requisitos de la escuela o el gobierno sobre lo que puede hacer después de graduarse?

¿Qué quiere hacer con los conocimientos que ha ganado en la universidad?

¿Qué tipos de carrera o trabajo puede tener con este título?

¿Qué tipo de carrera quiere?

¿Hay muchos estudiantes que quieran la misma carrera que Ud. desea?

¿Qué cambios económicos consideras que se necesitan en Cuba?

¿Ha notado algún cambio desde que las relaciones con EEUU se han mejorado?

¿Cuál es el papel de la industria del turismo en Cuba hoy?

¿Cuáles son los efectos en la sociedad cubana de una industria de turismo más prominente?

¿Cuál es el papel de las inversiones extranjeras en Cuba hoy?

¿Cuáles son los efectos en la sociedad cubana de una aumentación de las inversiones extranjeras?