

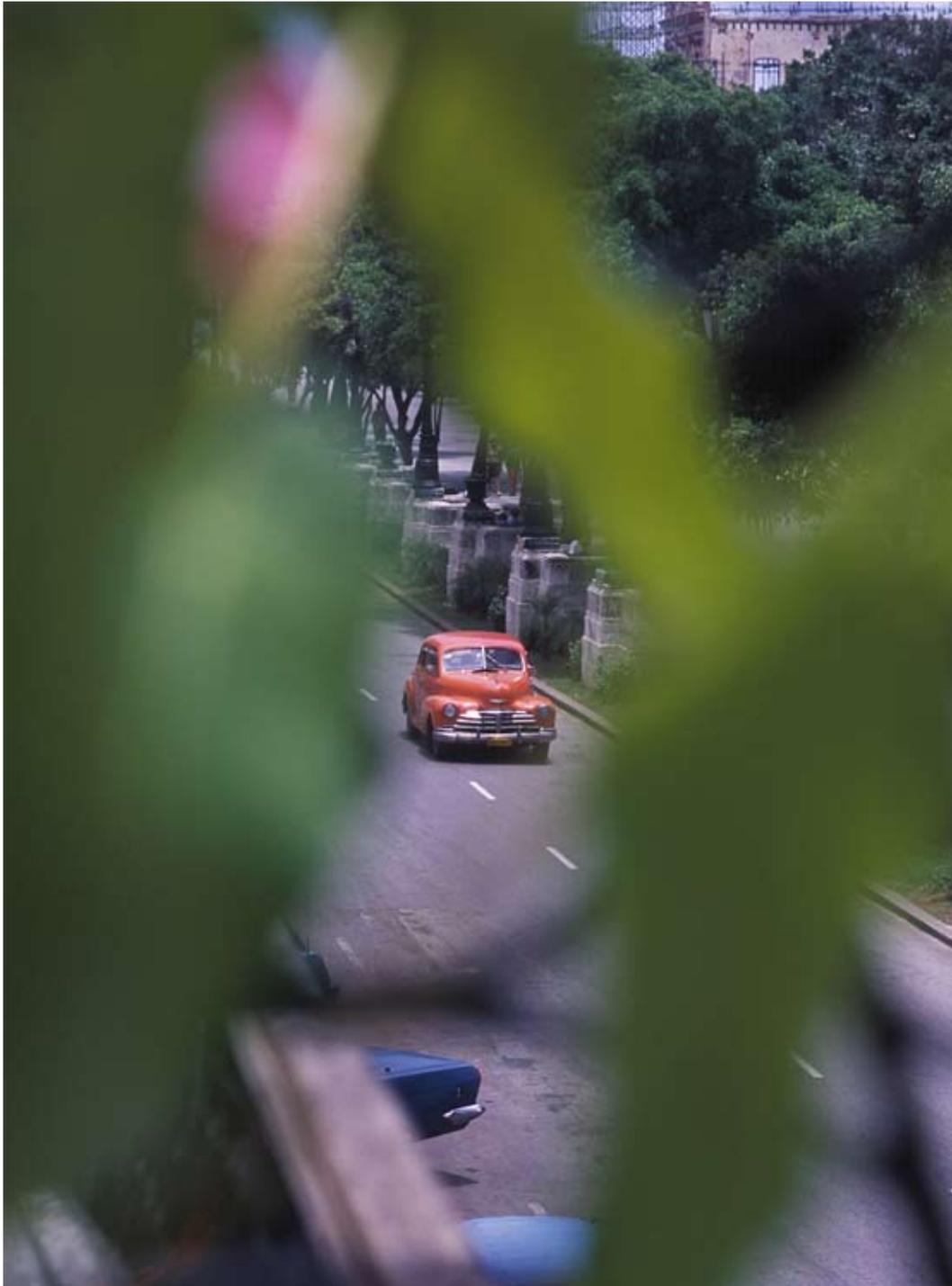
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## Cuba: An Island In Transition

Photos & Text  
by  
Richard Falco

[www.visionproject.org](http://www.visionproject.org)



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Cuba is quickly approaching a crossroad. The end of an era is at hand and the nation will have many new choices and decisions to make. In many respects, the country strides two centuries though lives very much in the present. The past and present are continually merging. The Spanish colonial traditions stand side by side with Marist philosophy, Christianity and Cuban Nationalism. Another critical factor is Fidel Castro's age and the transition of power after his death. Though there is a great deal of speculation, no one man can fill his shoes. A sea change is inevitable.

The island is also a place of contradictions. On the world stage it is the loud and defiant voice of ideology, while at the same time, an undeveloped country of sun and quiet villages. Though a socialist economy dictates the rules for the Cuban people, underneath the surface a vibrant free market thrives and yearns to expand. Even the United States Embargo is a source of contradiction. On one hand, it has crippled the economy and brought harsh, if not painful conditions to the Cuban people. Yet on the other hand, it is one of the main reasons Cuban culture is alive and well. Whereas the rest of the Caribbean has lost its sense of self to "resort culture," Cuba is distinctively Cuban.



Havana is the heart of Cuba. Here the past and present are tried together. It is the political, cultural and economic center of the island. Although many of Havana's houses and buildings are run down and in great need of repair; the heavy traffic, rampant commercialization and extensive slums that choke many of Latin American's other cities is absent here. The city's population now exceeds 2.2 million people.



A young boy plays ball against the wall of a gutted building slated for restoration.

In 1982, La Habana Vieja (the old colonial section of the city) was declared by UNESCO a World Heritage Site. Because of that, millions of dollars have poured in for restoration. However, the US Embargo, poor management and an economy that collapsed after the Russians pulled out have left a good deal of the city in disrepair. Even with these problems the city is filled with many historical monuments and the exuberant friendliness of the Cuban people.



A restored section of La Habana Vieja beautifully reflects the light of the afternoon sun.





Two men try to fix a broken down car. These old vehicles are so closely associated with our image of life in Havana.



No one will dispute the poverty that touches vast segments of the population. The reasons can be debated for hours. However, change has begun to take hold. Castro has allowed foreign investments to grow. Tourism has replaced sugar as the country's largest source of income. Many European and Asian countries have established strong working relationships with the Cuban government. After Castro's death, the US Embargo will end and even American companies will want the opportunity to invest in Cuba.



The words read. "Without culture no liberty is possible. In the world of the future, the greatest and most important wealth will be your intelligence."

- Fidel



A policeman watches pedestrians pass on a city street. There is relatively little crime in Havana. However, Cuba is still a political dictatorship.

Fidel is an anomaly. He is an icon, an intellectual and a dictator. Loved and hated by his own people. He is loved and hated by the rest of the world.





Everywhere the city is teeming with life. The Cuban people are well educated and hard working. As change continues, the economy will become stronger and more self-sufficient, particularly if the oil discovered off shore has reserves that can support the nation.

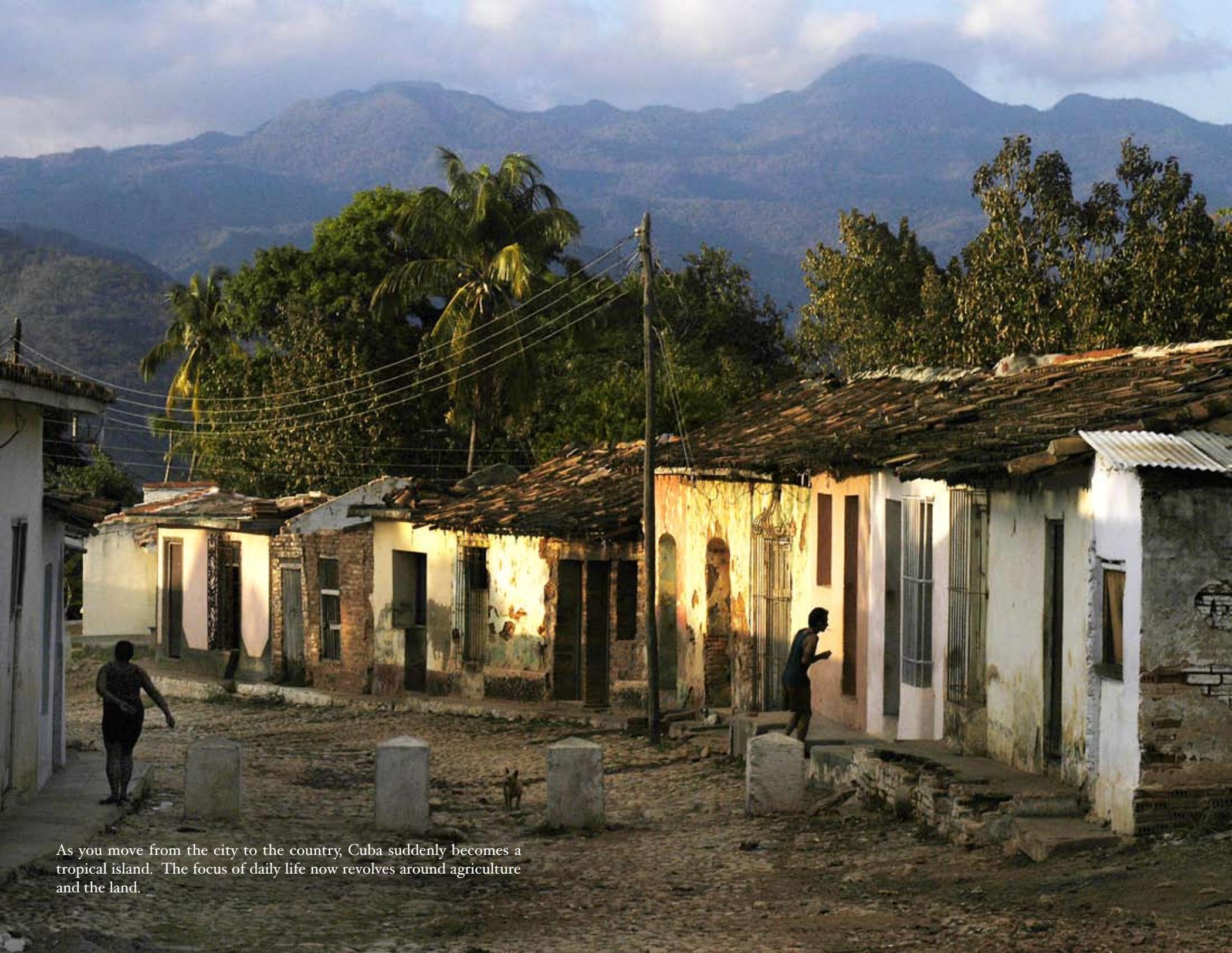


Nightlife in Havana is hot and exciting. There are music and dance clubs that are open late into the night.



Two young boys spin tops in the southern city of Trinidad.





*As you move from the city to the country, Cuba suddenly becomes a tropical island. The focus of daily life now revolves around agriculture and the land.*



The transition between the developing world and the modern world is most evident in the rural areas. In many situations, running water and electricity are luxuries.

Throughout the countryside, the horse is still a means of transportation and an ever present component of the rural network.



Sugar is a very important crop for Cuba. Much of Cuba's history lies in sugar. It is a major export and a vital source of income for the nation. The largest plantations are in the central part of the island. Because the government lacks the necessary resources to buy modern farming equipment, much of the work is done by hand.





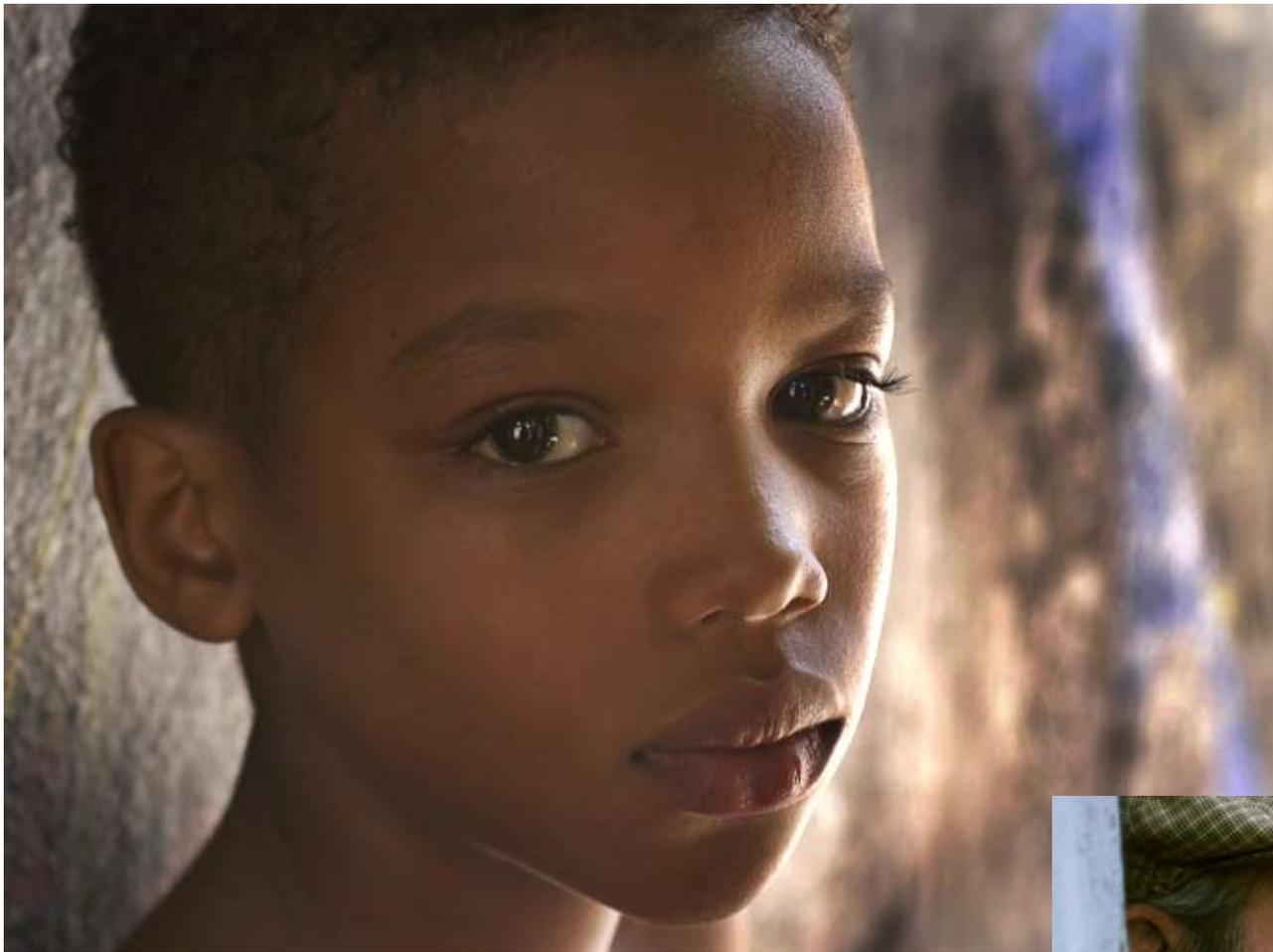
The Festival of Jose Marti. This day marks a national holiday and celebration. The festival is also a day when you can see the rich diversity that is Cuba. Che Guevara and Jose Marti have become the two patron saints of the revolution. On January 28, the entire country celebrates the birthday of Jose Marti. He was one of the leaders who led the First War of Independence. He was killed on May 19, 1895. Along with Che, he is a national hero.



A young boy holds a portrait of Jose Marti on a day of national celebration. Pinned on his shirt is the image of Che Guevara. Behind him, another holding up the Cuban flag wears a T-shirt with the image of Che.



Cuban society is a diverse racial mixture. They do not seem to have the angry polarization we see in the United States and Europe.



Change in Cuba will be found in its youth. The next generation will have many choices. They are ready for economic change and will embrace it. However, social and political change will not happen until after Castro's death.

After Castro, the Cuban people will examine their future from a different perspective. The bridge that straddles the past with the future will be wrought with a myriad of complex decisions.





Cuba approaches a crossroads poised between two centuries, two nations and two ideologies. The road it will follow is still uncertain.