



ORGANO OFICIAL DEL COMITE CENTRAL DE LA CLASE DE MANZOR

## MERLIN: ¿CONTRA O CON?

Nuestros “guías” nos llevaron a muchos museos durante nuestros días en La Habana. Uno de los edificios casualmente fue la casa de la condesa de Merlín donde se peinaba el cabello mientras miraba a las esclavas debajo de su balcón. Aunque platica sobre las injusticias de los negros, un sus textos había comentarios de microagresión. Esto se evidencia cuando dice “nada más justo que la abolición de la trata de la esclava de negros” antes de comentar que “nada más injusto que su emancipación” (Araújo, 126). Después platica del status de la educación de los africanos y la calidad de su trabajo. Explica que hace falta “sesenta o setenta negros para hacer mal el servicio interno de una casa que será bien atendida por seis u ocho domésticos de Europa” (Araújo, 128). La actitud de Merlín representa su privilegio y el de los blancos que llegaban a la isla. Otro ejemplo es cuando dice que su tía “hace por sus manos las canastillas para sus negras y envía una parte de las viandas delicadas de su mesa a sus esclavos viejos o enfermos” (Araújo, 118). La forma en que habla de los esclavos como propiedad de su tía demuestra como veían y trataban a los negros. Estos momentos de microagresión también se ve hoy en día en los Estados Unidos contra la gente de color.



LA HABANA, CUBA - Paseando por las calles antiguas de la ciudad de La Habana o por el centro comercial, algunos cubanos con piel clara pasan por un lado hablando con mucha rapidez. Los padres de los niños sacan sus cabezas por las puertas gritándoles a sus hijos de piel morena que se metan a la casa antes de que llegue la noche. Aunque muchos americanos creen que la mayoría de los cubanos comparten la misma complexión oliva, el porcentaje de los residentes con piel morena en la isla excede aquellos que tienen características europeas.

El primer registro que se tiene de la esclavitud indica que Amador de Lares trajo cuatro

esclavos africanos de Hispaniola veinte años después de que Cristóbal Colón “descubriera” a Cuba en 1492 (Humboldt, 118). No fue hasta el año 1520, cuando llevaron trescientos esclavos a Cuba para trabajar en las minas de oro.

De hecho, los textos de Alexander von Humboldt sugieren que 40,818 esclavos vivían en la isla en 1775 (Humboldt, 108). Más de 800,000 africanos fueron importados a Cuba para ser vendidos como esclavos a principios de los 1800s. Fue durante estos años que la cultura africana empezó a desarrollarse en la isla.

# ¿COMO QUE ROPA VIEJA?

El legado que han dejado los africanos va más allá del color de la piel. La comida es una mezcla de influencias españolas y caribeñas pero la cocina africana ha sido la base del plato típico (Gurian, 1970). Desde la comida hasta las artes vemos el gran impacto que la cultura afrocubana ha tenido en la isla. Un típico platillo cubano consiste de arroz y frijoles o mariquitas de plátano acompañando el pollo asado. Esto viene de las tradiciones que practicaban los esclavos de África cuando llegaron a Cuba y que ahora se han hecho parte de la cultura ("Typical Cuban

Meals," 2014). Otro ejemplo típico son los tostones. Sin embargo, la 'ropa vieja', o la carne de vaca hervida y luego sazonada, es originaria de las Islas Canarias.

## Mojitos

El mojito fue inventado en La Habana. Los historiadores creen que esto se debe a que los esclavos que trabajaban con la caña usaban el 'guarapo' en sus bebidas.

En los restaurantes como La Guarida, nosotros aprovechamos y disfrutamos de la comida que es parte de la cultura caribeña. En el viaje, sin embargo, nos dimos cuenta que la mayoría de los cubanos no tienen como disfrutar de este restaurante.

# EL PODER DEL ARTE

Durante nuestra visita vimos tres obras: *Harry Potter o se acabó la magia*, *Departures* y *Montañeses*.

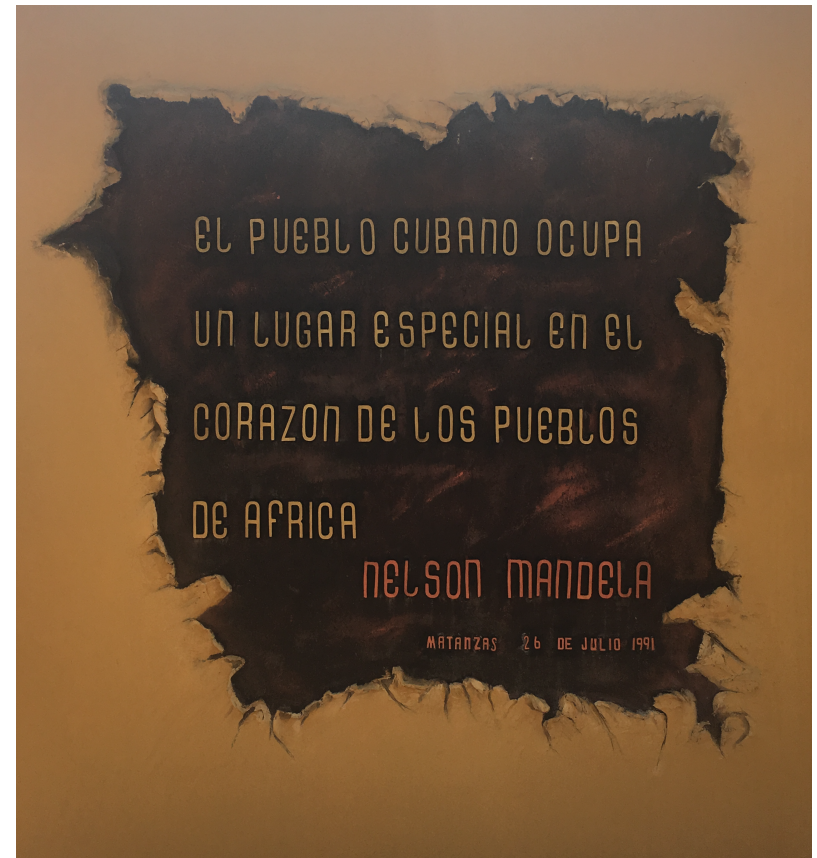
Nos dimos cuenta que el teatro juega un papel importante en la sociedad cubana. En los Estados Unidos, el teatro también es popular pero los americanos tienen formas y libertad de expresarse más allá del teatro. Creo que los cubanos ven el teatro como una fuente de

expresión. Se aprovechan de esta forma artística y utilizan su creatividad en su máxima potencia para crear una pieza de arte extravagante.

El teatro cubano se remonta a los areitos antes de que Colón llegara a la isla. Los areitos eran ceremonias con bailes canciones. No fue hasta el año 1730 cuando Cuba tuvo su primer teatro conocido como El Coliseo (2014). Cien años después

se construye el García Lorca en La Habana. Ahí está el comienzo de la actividad teatral que todavía tienen un gran impacto hoy en día. Otras costumbres que trajeron los africanos fueron sus instrumentos, cantos y bailes religiosos. Esto se ve en *Harry Potter o se acabó la magia* cuando los gemelos morenos de Santa Clara empezaron a bailar al estilo africano al

terminar la obra. Alrededor de sus cabezas tenían unos tocados conocidos como "geles". Estas piezas fueron encontradas en Africa Occidental pero hay pistas que sus orígenes vienen de Egipto y el Imperio Nubio (History). El gele fue un símbolo de poder y con el tiempo se convirtió en un elemento de opresión. Mejor dicho, servía para distinguir entre los esclavos y las personas libres.





# CARIBBEAN MEMORIES

MIAMI, FL - “There’s la yucca and the malanga,” the light-skinned Cuban-native informed the class about the different types of vegetables from the island.

Laughter was heard among the table of students sitting in the busy restaurant.

“What is malanga?!” someone yelled in confusion.

The Cuban hesitated and asked the waiter if he could bring a malanga to show the class. A few minutes later a long potato looking vegetable was placed in between the large bowls filled with rice and beans.

“Ooooo! Malanga!” One of the students exclaimed. The class echoed, repeating the funky word as they studied the vegetable.

More giggles burst out as the term kept being repeated.

It’s crazy to think a class of eight became closer in another country rather than in the comfort of their own class time together.

While hundreds of University of Miami students told their crazy under-the-influence stories after their week long spring break, eight students came back cultured with lifelong memories and first-hand knowledge of the beautiful Caribbean island of Cuba.

The course titled, “The Caribbean Through Literary and Cultural Studies,” grabbed the attention of these eight students. The

spring break travel-course component to the island, however, immediately enforced their decision to fit that right in their Tuesday and Thursday schedule.

Dr. Lillian Manzor, chair of the Modern Languages and Literatures (MLL) department, and graduate student Ernesto Fundora got together to make the course a reality.

**“I loved being off the grid. I mean how else would we end up talking about SpongeBob for 30 minutes in Cumanayagua?”**

While Fundora designed the content of the course, Manzor worked on the infrastructure of the travel component. She also managed to teach the course for the two semesters it was offered.

Her main motivation was her desire to give students at the University of Miami (UM) the “possibility to see and experience the complexity of Cuban society and culture.”

In 1986, Manzor, who was born in Ciego de Avila, returned to Cuba with an academic group that focused on Communication Studies. Her interest to learn more about the island stemmed during her time studying abroad in Paris at L’Institute Catholique during her undergraduate career.

“I discovered from [my classmates] a history about their countries that did not

always coincide with the history I had been taught or what I had read about in US newspapers,” Manzor said. “What if there was more to and about Cuba than what my parents had told me about or the US press covered?”

Within the eight students cramped up in the old taxis that transported the class from city to city was Carlisle Withers, a senior at UM. Her attentiveness, curiosity and open-mindedness shines both in the classroom and 91 miles south of the Sunshine State.

Spanish is not Withers’ first language but that did not stop her from getting all her questions answered by the Cuban community. She took Manzor’s course due to her interest in exploring a new country.

“Miami has such a special connection with Cuba and I felt like this was perfect timing to go visit,” Withers said.

Forty-five minutes in the air is all it takes for the American citizen to touch base in Cuba accompanied by the guarantee that they will make it back home before their Monday shift.

Meanwhile, it takes approximately three days for a Cuban immigrant to reach Key West -- Florida’s southernmost landmark -- by boat with the risk of being sent back by the U.S. Coast Guard.

The ninety-mile gap between Havana and Key West carries more than the weight of the sea. It holds the sweet tears of success with the bitter taste of broken families.

"Cuba is at a pivotal point of change [but it] still has the government restrain that has made it seem so distant and remote from the United States," Withers said.

Margarita Medina came to the U.S. from Mexico when she was 15 years old as an undocumented immigrant. Her story is one that millions of other Mexican-born residents living in the US relate to. It was not until her early 30s when she became a citizen. The accomplishment was a long road filled with times of struggle. American society turns the other cheek. This, too, is one the Latino/a community with Mexican ancestry share.

Undocumented Mexican immigrants are deported back to Mexico at the glimpse of missing documentation by US enforcement. Nonetheless, Medina thinks that the Cuban "wet foot, dry foot policy," which the Obama administration ended earlier this year, was fair.

"I believe it was just because [these Cubans] were fleeing from the government in search for freedom," Medina said. "[These] people are deprived from liberty. I can imagine that they are hungry to learn and know more."

According to the Pew Hispanic Center, 2 million Hispanics of Cuban origin resided in the United States, in 2013. This number, however, means little to the relationship between Cuban-Americans living in the US and Cuban-born residents when it comes to acceptance.

**"There's a beautiful common that unites us, which is our heritage and the strength of the Cuban culture."**

One problem the two subgroups face, according to Manzor, is the need for the Cuban community to discuss both the past, the present and the future.

"The older generations need to confront their pains and fears," Manzor said. "The younger ones need to be aware why and how the older generations are where they are at."

As for Cuban-American Joseph Chica, who has family from Havana and Pinar del Rio, does not have the desire to visit the island. He believes he "would be giving money to a government" that his family has fought to abolish.

"I have not been [to Cuba] and I honestly don't have any intention of going for multiple reasons," Chica said. "It's not the same place that my family left behind so many years ago so going

brings me nowhere closer to understanding my heritage."

Giancarlo Sopo, founder and chair of the CubaOne, a nonprofit organization that strives to build a unity between Cuban-Americans and Cuban-born residents apart from helping the new generation connect with their Cuban roots, debated visiting Cuba for almost the same reasons as Chica.

Apart from the internal conflicts he dealt with about traveling to the island, it was more expensive to visit than other countries he wanted to explore around the globe.

But Obama's speech in 2014 sparked a realization within Sopo. He flew out to visit the island shortly after.

"When I saw the way Cuban people, including my family that still lives there, were reacting to the President's announcement, something in me clicked and I knew it was the time to go."

Ironically, University of Wisconsin (UW) alumni Zoe Norris, who is Black and Russian, knew she wanted to explore Cuba since she was a child. But UW did not have Cuba on their list of study abroad locations.

Her strong desire to visit the island made her apply another university as a transfer in search of a study abroad program that offered



a semester in the island. After dealing with the long hassle of sending in paperwork and test scores, Norris was finally accepted to the program.

“My sister went when I was 8 or 9, which kind of sparked an interest for me,” Norris said. “Since I knew that travel was restricted there, I figured I could use my semester abroad as a legal way for me to spend time in Cuba and immerse myself in the culture.”

Norris studied at the University of Havana alongside both other classmates enrolled in the program and actual students from the island. They had to adapt to the Cuban lifestyle.

“The [classes] were all very interesting but the learning style was something we all had to adapt to,” Norris said. “There are no PowerPoints to follow along in Cuba and a lot of us switched to hand-written notes so that we were not flaunting our expensive MacBooks in class.”

Money may bring happiness but only for a moment - until it runs out. But the opportunity to explore first-hand the rawness of the culture of a country tattoos a feeling of euphoria and the memory of a lifetime on the heart and brain.

“I loved being off the grid,” Withers said. “You just had to enjoy each other and I'm so happy to have met everyone on the trip. I mean how else

would we end up talking about SpongeBob for 30 minutes in Cumanayagua?”



*Carla Withers (third) laughs as la “guagua” (the bus Cubans use as public transportation) suddenly takes off to drop off her and her classmates to a nearby plaza. Pictured is Tatum Rebekah (first), Matías Buedo (Second), Jeronimo Ferriol (fourth), and Mike Allen (last).*