

# Political Intolerance and Cuba's Future: To Hell in a Hand Basket

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**Pobre Cuba, tan lejos de Dios,  
y tan cerca de los EEUU.**

*Adaptation of a phrase  
by General Porfirio Diaz*

# Tenets of this Paper

- Political intolerance has plagued Cuban history, from the start.
- Democracy can only flourish under a regime of tolerance
- ***Tolerance*** is the ability to listen to, and to accept, the views of others, especially of those views that differ from our views
- There is a need to develop **Tolerance**.

# Overview of the Spanish Colony

- Before 1760s, Cuba, Santo Domingo, Puerto Rico and Venezuela (Spanish Caribbean) left to their own resources.
- In 1789, the French Revolution and the Haitian slave revolt in Saint Domingue
- From 1790s onward, Cuba took the place of the English and French *sugar islands*
- Large numbers of slaves were imported

# Independence of the United States

- Second most important event, after Cuban sugar expansion
- The US territorial expansion, also included Cuba in its plan
- Founding Father, President and Secretary of State Jefferson wrote to Madison to discuss Cuba in 1809.

# Four lines of thought

- Were developed during Colonial times that, under various forms and names, prevail in Cuban politics:
- *Colonialism*, also called *integrismo* or *reformismo*;
- *Annexation*, i.e. becoming a part of another country such as the United States, Mexico or Colombia,
- *Autonomy*, Spanish territory governed by an insular parliament and special laws
- *Independence*, at best a *work in progress*.

# Birth of the Cuban Nation

- Francisco de Arango y Parreño, Alejandro Ramirez, Fathers Jose Agustin Caballero & Felix Varela, Jose A. Saco, & Jose de la Luz y Caballero. La Sociedad Economica
- Precursors of all other Cubans, including Mendive, Varona, Govin, Montoro, Marti.
- Cubans were afraid of their slaves, and of a revolt like the one in Haiti, in the 1790s

# Colonial Intolerance

- Refusal of any form of political autonomy
  - Proposals by Caballero, Varela, and Saco
  - Failure of *Junta de Informacion*, in 1866
- *Zanjon* peace agreements: lost opportunity
  - Two Party – asymmetric system
  - Prevented true self-government
- War of 1895-1898: a desperate move
  - *Honorable*: a defeat against the Americans ...
  - Produced Spain's *Gran Desastre del '98*



# Republic and XX Century

- The Platt Amendment – unusual savvy
- *But Lack of Cuban political tolerance*
  - Refusing to negotiate with the opposition
  - Actively seeking American aid, if unfulfilled
  - Middle/educated classes poor involvement
- American active interventionism:
  - 1906, 1912, 1917, 1920, 1933 etc.
  - It was the sign of the times ... for many

# Political patterns of behavior

- Government controls the political machine
- Government develops economic programs
- Opposition, neutralized by the government instead of negotiating, fights and/or looks abroad (to the US) for national solutions
- After a **revolution**, everything previously done is denounced, then abandoned; and officials, efficient or incompetent, are also discarded. Then, the cycle repeats itself.

# After the 1959 revolution

- All political parties except PURS, were banned
- All independent media, taken over by the state
- All Opposition, was neutralized, forced to go underground, or encouraged to leave the island
- Majority of pre-1959 civil society was banned
- Remaining organizations, tightly controlled
- A new government-sponsored “civil society”
- After 1992, Cuban society opened up more
- Raul increased efforts to implement changes

# Useful Popular Sayings

- We get what we pay for
- Aquellos polvos trajeron estos lodos
- La ropa sucia se lava en casa
- Politics ends at the water's edge
- Personas *decentes* no se meten en politica
- Contra la ingerencia extraña, la virtud domestica (Marquez-Sterling)

# Several Transition Examples

- Brazil: 1985-2000
  - A space for the opposition: PMDB
  - No foreign schedule was imposed
- Spain 1970-1985
  - Existence of opposition: political “clubs”
  - No foreign schedule was imposed
- Mexico’s PRI 1929 - 2000
  - A space for the opposition: PAN, PRD
  - No foreign schedule was imposed

# PRI's Unwritten Rules

- President: King for six years w/o reelection
- Selects his successor (Tapado/Dedazo)
  - Not a relative (nepotism); candidates cannot Lobby (pressures); from alternative PRI branch; inherits full command (support from PRI corps.)
- Departing President leaves the country
- Military support such PRI scheme
  - Don't get involved in selection process; no military coups in Mexico in over 80 years
- Space for Opposition Parties: PAN, PRD

# Successful transition features

- Establishment does not corner opposition
  - Instead, allows a space for its participation
- Both sides work inside the system
  - Avoiding asymmetric foreign intervention
- Sentiment of national responsibility
  - Mutual cooperation, tolerance and negotiation
- Foreign countries keep their distance
  - At best, facilitating the transition process.

# Conclusions

- If the *Cuban government* remains *unwilling to open a space* for the opposition:
  - Same situation as Spain, at end of 1898 War
  - When refused to implement a shared solution
- If *Cuban opposition*, inside and abroad, *fails to negotiate* with the Government:
  - A regime similar to the 1902 Cuban republic
- *If US government becomes king-maker*.
  - Return to conditions that brought revolution ...



# Epilogue

- If neither side is willing to budge:
  - *Cuba will only go to hell*
    - *in a hand basket!*