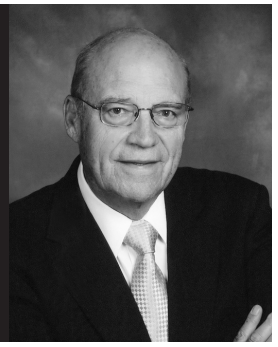




Dr. Fred Schwarz

The Schwarz Report



Dr. David Noebel

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Living the Communist Dream

by Julianne Stanford

The difference between ideas and facts is lost on leftist scholars.

Today Professor Florin Curta is a professor in medieval history and archaeology at the University of Florida, but his road to the sunny vistas of north-central Florida came by way of communist-controlled Romania, where growing up he grappled with empty grocery stores, power outages, and an oppressive government that discouraged creativity and free enterprise.

Curta grew up under the iron-fisted regime of Romanian President Nicolae Ceaușescu, a dictatorship characterized by unrelenting state-control, extreme poverty, and widespread dilapidation and deprivation. Ceaușescu was overthrown and executed by firing squad in 1989, leaving his country in shambles.

Curta, meanwhile, managed to earn his bachelor's degree from the University of Bucharest in 1988, and left his country in 1993, having been invited to pursue a Ph.D. at Western Michigan University after delivering a speech before the International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Mich.

He hasn't looked back. Discovering academic and personal freedom unlike anything he could have in post-Communist Romania, Curta permanently relocated to America.

"There's a certain atmosphere in which scholarly thinking can grow in the United States that it cannot grow in any European country," Curta said. "I left after communism collapsed, but it was a regime that left a deep, deep imprint on people's minds. Even though there was no official communism in the government, a lot of people continued to think in communist ways, specifically in the academic world."

Curta is one of the world's most distinguished scholars in medieval history and archaeology—and is co-founder of the University of Florida's medieval and early modern studies center, where he directs its certificate program.

He recently shared his experience growing up under a communist regime and discussed the rise of socialism in America during a phone interview with *The College Fix*:

Tell us about growing up in communist Romania. What was the quality of life?

Curta: Stores were completely empty. There was no food. There was a black market where you could buy some things, but obviously at much higher prices. Besides the fact that there was no food, every now and then, electricity would be cut off in the apartment, at a sudden moment in time. You would not know when and for how long. Sometimes there was no running water at all, and there was no warm water at all. We're talking about life in an urban environment, we're talking about an apartment, not one or two, but thousands in which people lived in such conditions. I was in college in that time, and I remember actually studying in the library with gloves on my hands because it was so cold. So not a happy place.

Socialism appears to be a popularly embraced ideology in American academia. Why do you think this is? What is so tempting about this mindset?

Curta: I think that there's an idealism that most people in academia, specifically in the humanities, share. We live in an era of ideological morass, especially with the collapse of communism that has left no room for those idealists in the academic world. No matter how you can prove that system doesn't work, with an inclination to go that way perhaps because most people associate socialism with social justice, while the former is an ideology with concrete ideas and concrete historical experiences, while social justice is a very vague abstract notion.

You have to understand, the difference between ideas and facts is what is of major concern here. As my father used to say, it is so much easier to be a Marxist when you sip your coffee in Rive Gauche, left-bank Paris, than when living in

an apartment under Ceaușescu, especially in the 1980s.

Why do you think socialist ideology has been gaining popularity with some Americans? Why do you think Democrat presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, whose platform is based off of socialist ideas, gained such traction with the electorate, especially millennials?

Curta: First of all, I would not be willing to put a blanket on all of the population that is drawn toward that idea. It's a matter of certain segments of that population, especially the young ones, and I think that has something to do with two factors, one of which is the distance in time between the real experience, the historical significance of communism. In other words, the parents of those young people who are now very enthusiastic about socialism and Bernie Sanders were those who lived during the Cold War. So to them, socialism, or even more so communism, was a real threat. And they could see under their own eyes how that form of living was out there.

Also the lack of historical knowledge. I would say the school system is responsible for that. You get courses at the university on the Holocaust, but you don't get courses on the history of communism. Last time I checked, [it was estimated] 100 million people were killed under communism by various regimes in various parts of the world. That seems to have passed without a note in the academic world. I think that lack of prominence in the curriculum, in other words, not teaching what really happened, and the sheer ignorance about the disaster in terms of human cost, economic cost, in tragedy in general is responsible for this rosy picture of socialism.

And so what can be done to counteract this misperception or perhaps even incorrect view of history?

Curta: Education. But also the willingness to know about this. Just by ignoring those factors a dialogue is not possible. . . . Bringing up the truth in what happened is of crucial value. Ignoring what happened will lead to similar mistakes.

But what about "free college education for everyone," which is one of Sanders' campaign promises? Shouldn't people have access to free higher education?

Curta: My answer to that is very simple. I went through 20-plus years of school in the old country, under communism, for free, but I had no food on the table.

Bearing all of this in mind, what would you say to a millennial who wants to vote for Sanders?

Curta: First of all, I would say that you are free to vote for whomever you want. That's the principle in which this country is based on, unlike the one from which I was coming from. You have options. You also have options to educate yourself and to answer questions that might

arise from an investigation of that candidate's points of view and so forth. Don't try to push them down my throat though because indeed I know a lot more about where these ideas can go because I experienced them not from reading books, but from living under it.

Do you think socialist ideas could ever actually be implemented here in the US?

Curta: To tell it frankly, I think this is a philosophical question and I can answer it by giving my take on this. . . . Let's take an invention, for example, an invention that really changes the lives of hundred, thousands, millions of people. From the moment that invention is drawn up on a piece of paper by the inventor, from the moment it actually gains social application, to change the lives of people, it takes very little under the capitalist system. That is because of the profit. It takes a very long while under socialism because it needs to be approved. Originality and creation and creativity, those forms of freedom that most Americans don't think much about are discouraged under socialism. You have to stay in your line, not get out of your line.

—*The College Fix*, March 23, 2016

FARC: Colombia's Terrorists

by Mary Anastasia O'Grady

The day before the terrorist bombings in Brussels, John Kerry met with the leaders of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in Havana.

The meeting produced photos of the Colombian war criminals wearing crisp white guayabera shirts sitting around a large coffee table with the US secretary of state. The FARC wasted no time using the images for propaganda. "We hope that as a consequence, we are recognized as a political force committed to the expansion of democracy and social progress in Colombia," it announced.

Four days later Mr. Kerry was in the Belgian capital to deliver condolences to Prime Minister Charles Michel and pledging never to give in to Islamic State: "We will not rest until we have eliminated your nihilistic beliefs and cowardice from the face of the Earth."

A goodly number of Colombians feel the same way about the FARC. The Castro-backed group has waged an insurgency against the Colombian democracy that has claimed some 220,000 lives. It is one of the largest drug-

trafficking cartels in the world. The US State Department lists the FARC as a foreign terrorist organization. Two FARC leaders who met with Mr. Kerry have each been sentenced in a Colombian court, in absentia, to 13 years in prison for recruiting child soldiers, including girls who were used for sex.

But the Obama administration says Colombians need to trust the FARC, and let all its members, including its leaders, go unpunished and go into politics in order to secure peace. Would Americans take that deal?

The hypocrisy is not lost on Colombians, who took to social media last week to object. Former Minister of Defense Marta Lucia Ramírez tweeted: “After the meeting of Kerry with the FARC I’m waiting for when there will be a meeting with El Chapó Guzmán,” the notorious Mexican drug lord.

Miguel Gómez Martínez, nephew of murdered presidential candidate Álvaro Gómez, tweeted: “Someone explain to me, why those in Brussels are terrorists and those of Nogal”—the Bogotá social club bombed by FARC in 2003—“are ideologues that deserve impunity.” Colombian congressman Federico Hoyos tweeted: “Mr. Secretary, Colombia is one of the countries with the most landmines in the world thanks to FARC’s terror strategy.”

The double standard is obvious. Nevertheless, the Obama administration is invested in the five years of negotiations—in Havana—between the government of Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC. Mr. Santos has not secured one concession from the terrorists. The FARC says it will not accept even one day in jail, will not hand over its weapons to the government, will not relinquish its profits from kidnapping, drug-trafficking, and extortion and will not compensate the millions of its victims. Mr. Santos, on the other hand, has broken multiple promises to the Colombian people, including a pledge not to grant the terrorists amnesty.

At the United Nations General Assembly in September, Mr. Santos announced that negotiators had produced a breakthrough plan for “transitional justice.” He said he would have a final agreement signed within six months.

But the plan has stalled in part because it promises no jail for FARC leaders who confess their crimes, and that’s a proposition that 90% of the country opposes in a recent poll by Colombia Opina.

The plan also puts the military on the same legal plane as the terrorists, offering soldiers a choice of confessing to a war crime when accused to avoid punishment or facing years in prison while their cases work through an often hostile judicial system. Colombia’s military could easily be destroyed under this framework, while FARC

criminals would go free.

On Feb. 10 the deputy prosecutor of the International Criminal Court expressed skepticism about Mr. Santos’s judicial concoction. “Justice matters,” James Stewart said at a meeting of the Organization of American States. “The plight of victims and communities affected by mass atrocity crimes matters. Holding the perpetrators of such crimes accountable before a court of law matters. All of this matters if we are to build a more just and peaceful world.”

In an interview with Telemundo’s María Celeste Arrarás in Havana on Tuesday, Mr. Kerry defended the Santos-FARC talks by claiming that it is not the FARC, but “right-wing militias” that are “increasing the violence.” That is contradicted by the facts.

According to the UN, among the estimated 166,000 Colombians displaced by violence in 2015, 37% fled from the FARC, 31% fled from its close left-wing terrorist cousin, the ELN, and 13% fled from the criminal gangs it works with. A recent letter from the mayor of San Vicente del Caguán to Mr. Santos described the terrified lives of a local population subject to unrelenting extortion by the FARC.

When pressed by Ms. Arrarás, Mr. Kerry said that “if our attitude was we have to kill everybody who was involved in World War II, where would we be with Germany and with Japan?” This just in, Mr. Secretary: Germany and Japan surrendered.

—*The Wall Street Journal*, March 28, 2016, A 13

Rafael Del Pino: Cuban Justice

by Haynes Hunt and Tom Leonard

Milagros Maria Del Pino Suarez has a request for President Obama: While you’re in Cuba, please ask Raúl Castro where her father, Rafael Del Pino—who was hanged in a regime prison in 1977 for supporting democracy—is buried in Cuba so that she can one day honor his grave.

On Sunday, Mr. Obama became the first American head of state to travel to Cuba since Fidel Castro imposed a Communist dictatorship on the island. The visit follows the president’s Dec. 17, 2014, announcement that the US would pursue a rapprochement with the Castro regime. Since then, the administration has loosened restrictions on conducting business in Cuba, made traveling to the island

easier, and opened an embassy in Havana.

These developments are alarming to people like Ms. Suarez whose pursuit of justice for her father could become a casualty of the president's policies.

Rafael Del Pino embodied the values Americans hold most dear. Born in Havana in 1926, he believed strongly in democracy and freedom, and he sought to bring those ideals to his native Cuba. In the years leading up to the Cuban Revolution, that quest created a deep rift between him and a man he had befriended, Fidel Castro. Recognizing that their differences of opinion were insurmountable and made continued friendship impossible, he cut his Castro ties and moved to Miami, where he became an American citizen and served in the US Army.

Del Pino's dedication to the cause of democracy in Cuba enraged his former friend. In 1960, Fidel sent an agent to Miami to trick Del Pino into returning to Cuba under the guise that he was rescuing a family member from oppression. When Del Pino arrived in Cuba the military arrested him on the spot. He was convicted after a sham trial and sentenced to 30 years in prison.

Over the next 17 years, Rafael was tortured and endured unspeakable horrors until he was executed by hanging at the infamous Combinado del Este prison. Knowing that he had been an American patriot to the bitter end, his fellow inmates sang "The Star-Spangled Banner" as Rafael's body was being carried away.

Del Pino left behind two children in Miami—a son, Rafael Jr., and a daughter, Milagros Suarez. The siblings have spent much of their adult lives fighting to hold the Castro regime accountable for its crimes. They brought a lawsuit that led to a jury verdict against the Castro regime in a Florida state court in 2008 for the torture and wrongful death of their father. But the judgment was never honored, and Rafael Jr. died in 2014 before seeing the regime held accountable for its heinous crimes.

Unfortunately, this story is not unique. Across the US, many of Castro's victims and their family members have won judgments against the regime for the atrocities it has committed. These judgments were obtained in American courts of law under statutes such as the Foreign Sovereign Immunity Act and the Civil Liability for Acts of State Sponsored Terrorism.

Although the Cuban Asset Control Regulation (CACR)—implemented in 1963 after President Kennedy imposed the embargo on Cuba—allows these judgment holders to recover their damages from regime-owned assets in banking institutions, the Castro regime has systematically moved significant assets through the global financial system in a manner that circumvents the CACR

and other applicable laws. Justice has thus remained elusive for these victims and their family members.

As the US moves closer to restoring full diplomatic relations with Cuba, the fate of the numerous judgments that have been legally obtained against the Castro regime in American courts will be brought to the fore. The Castro regime will most likely insist that all of these judgments be wiped out as part of any final normalization. Under federal law and Supreme Court precedent, the president has the authority, as part of his foreign policy powers, to extinguish judgments like these that are obtained against foreign governments.

President Obama, and whomever his successor is, must not forget the Castro regime's victims, or their family members. Congress must let it be known that it will not fully lift the embargo against Cuba unless they get justice. Moreover, every presidential candidate, regardless of party, should publicly declare that he or she will insist that the Cuban government abide by the rulings of US courts.

The rapprochement between the US and Cuba is an opportunity to finally secure some measure of justice for many of the victims of the Castro brothers and their surrogates.

—*The Wall Street Journal*, March 22, 2016, p. A11

Bernie Sanders' Socialism

by Daniel Greenfield

Bernie Sanders hates discussing his Jewish roots, but that hasn't stopped his lefty Jewish fans from gnawing at the subject like poorly trained puppies chewing on old tennis shoes.

Think Progress claims that Bernie Sanders is a "devout secular Jew." "Bernie Sanders Is Jewish, but He Doesn't Like to Talk About It," the *New York Times* coughs apologetically. (And the Sulzbergers ought to know.) A *Forward* editorial neurotically screeches, "We Need To Out Bernie Sanders as a Jew—for His Own Good."

But Bernie Sanders likes his devoutly Socialist closet. He prefers to describe himself as the son of Polish immigrants. Asked about religion, he disavows Judaism and embraces Pope Francis. The *Times* has him embracing the description "Non-Jewish Jew" which was coined by a Marxist in an essay explaining anti-Semitism, including the Holocaust, as a "superficial" reaction against capitalism.

Where Obama and Hillary ran on race and gender,

Bernie Sanders avoids Jewishness as much as possible. He doesn't practice Judaism, isn't part of a Jewish community and avoids the "J" word.

One of the few times he used the dreaded "J" word was when a Muslim activist who cheered anti-Israel terrorism told him that she was afraid of Republicans. Suddenly Sanders puffed out his chest and told her, "I'm Jewish, my father's family died in concentration camps. I will do everything that I can to rid this country of the ugly stain of racism."

Considering that the activist, Remaz Abdelgader, had a quote stating, "It would be wrong and inhuman to impose the Jews on the Arabs" and snarled that, "Islam and civil rights issues are mutually exclusive," that might not have been nearly as reassuring to the former Muslim Student Association president as he intended it to be.

While Bernie Sanders invoked his last few drops of Jewishness and the Holocaust in support of a Muslim anti-Semite's crybullying, he didn't feel the need to do so for the Jewish State when it actually stood on the verge of destruction. Instead he had called for denying arms to Israel before the Yom Kippur War.

In 1971, he told an audience, "no guns for Israel." Two years later, the Yom Kippur War brought Israel to the brink of destruction and shipments of American arms made the difference. But Bernie Sanders did not care and in 1988 still insisted that, "It is wrong that the United States provides arms to Israel."

In 1990, he called for America to "put more pressure on Israel."

Bernie Sanders sneeringly condemns what he calls Republican bigotry, but he endorsed Jesse Jackson despite his racist "Hymietown" slur. Before a joint appearance with Jackson, Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan had warned Jews, "If you harm this brother, I warn you in the name of Allah this will be the last one you harm." Despite that, Jesse Jackson refused to cut his ties with Farrakhan.

Jackson had told a *Washington Post* reporter, "That's all Hymie wants to talk about, is Israel; every time you go to Hymietown, that's all they want to talk about." Bernie Sanders however tried to prove he was a good "Hymie" (or a good Non-Hymie Hymie) by defending Jackson's hostility to the Jewish state.

Bernie Sanders brags about his endorsement from Congressman Keith Ellison despite his past support for the Nation of Islam and his appearance with Khalid Abdul Muhammad who had called Jews "bloodsuckers" and had said, "If you're a Jew, I'm against you." Nation of Islam leader Farrakhan, who calls Jews "false Jews," praised Bernie Sanders as a "real Jew, not a so-called Jew." The

very thing that makes Bernie Sanders seem suspect to Jews makes him more appealing to anti-Semitic hate groups.

Sanders met with Al Sharpton despite his anti-Semitic remarks and the horror of the Crown Heights Pogrom in which an entire Jewish community was besieged by racist mobs chanting, "Death to the Jews." The former Democratic presidential candidate had taunted, "If the Jews want to get it on, tell them to pin their yarmulkes back and come over to my house." Not a problem for Bernie Sanders.

While Bernie Sanders is quick to call Republicans bigots, he not only fails to stand up against anti-Semitism from the left, but he has supported and collaborated with anti-Semites.

And he's still doing it now.

When Bernie Sanders reached out for perspective on the Middle East during his campaign, he contacted James Zogby, who defended Hamas and Hezbollah, and Lawrence Wilkerson, who had accused Jewish officials of dual loyalty and suggested that Israel was behind Assad's chemical weapons attacks.

The truth about Bernie Sanders is that he is not Jewish in any sense other than the genetic. He is a left-wing radical who is uncomfortable with any mention of his Jewish background because he does not like Jews. Even his time on an Israeli Kibbutz, a staple with which his Jewish fans nurtured their fantasies of a Jewish Bernie, fell apart when it emerged that his Kibbutz had flown a red flag and admired Stalin and the Soviet Union as part of a radical leftist movement that had initially opposed the creation of Israel.

His first and foremost allegiance has always been to the left at the expense of the Jews.

Bernie Sanders cheered the Sandanista regime whose mobs chanted "Death to the Jews," "Jewish Pigs" and "What Hitler started we will finish." He did not invoke the Holocaust when a synagogue was firebombed and in an echo of Hitler's Germany, its president was forced to scrub the streets.

The anti-Semitic regime that Bernie Sanders supported ethnically cleansed the Jewish population of Nicaragua. It

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marched the indigenous Indian population into churches and set them on fire.

And Bernie Sanders defended the Marxist terrorist regime that was committing these atrocities.

Bernie Sanders was equally enthusiastic about Cuba and the Soviet Union, two other Communist dictatorships that were persecuting the Jews. Sanders did not see fit to invoke the Holocaust on behalf of Jews actually facing anti-Semitic persecution the way that he has invoked it on behalf of Muslims.

But perhaps he thought that, like the other victims of the left, they were getting what they deserved.

When Bernie Sanders went on his visit to the USSR, there were no more concentration camps in Europe, but there were still Jews locked up in the gulags of the Soviet Union. While he was admiring Soviet youth programs, Jewish refuseniks were still being denied permission to leave the Communist dictatorship.

While American official visitors often met with political dissidents, there is no sign that Sanders did so. It would have been out of character for a man who had justified Communist crackdowns on the opposition to have met with enemies of the regime. For Bernie Sanders, the Sandanistas, Castro, and the Soviet Union were models to be emulated and victims of capitalist repression by America, Wall Street, and its evil corporations. Much in the same way that Muslim terrorism against Jews is excused today.

Bernie Sanders invokes the Holocaust when asked about his Jewish identity, not because he has empathy for Jews, but in a classic leftist maneuver to distract attention from that lack of empathy. His conception of the Holocaust is detached from Jewish suffering. It is purely about his leftist politics.

Surreally he references the Holocaust only to add that it taught him that politics is “important.” The Holocaust has no Jewish meaning for Bernie Sanders. It merely validates his self-importance.

At a Democratic debate, when asked about the historic nature of the election, he avoided saying that the first

Jewish president would be as historic as the first female president. Instead he mumbled that it would be his “views” of “taking on the big money interests” that would make him historic.

Bernie Sanders does not want to be the first Jewish president. He wants to be the first Socialist president. There is nothing Jewish about Bernie Sanders except his vestigial accent. He makes common cause with anti-Semites because Jews don’t matter to him, only the agenda of the left does.

—*FrontPageMagazine.com*, March 3, 2016

Inside Communist Cuba

by Joseph Klein

I recently traveled to Cuba on what is called a “people-to-people” tour—the only legal way at present for a US citizen to spend any time on Castro’s island as a casual visitor. The idea, according to the US Cuban Assets Control Regulations, is not for US citizens to flit around Cuba simply as self-directed tourists with guidebooks in hand. We are expected by the federal government, as a condition of travel to Cuba, to engage in a full-time schedule of organized educational exchange activities “intended to enhance contact with the Cuban people, support civil society in Cuba, or promote the Cuban people’s independence from Cuban authorities.”

Air transportation to and from Cuba for US citizens is currently via a charter flight. After dealing with bureaucracy and long waits on multiple lines before the flight took off from Miami, we arrived at the Havana airport only to encounter total disarray in retrieving checked luggage. Despite plans announced recently to allow American air carriers to offer 20 flights per day to Havana, Cuba’s infrastructure is nowhere near ready for prime time.

Once emerging from the chaotic scene at the Havana airport, our tour group of 28 Americans was met outside the airport by our local guide, a young enthusiastic woman

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proud of her Cuban homeland but also curious about the United States and the American people.

When visiting Cuba you realize right away that you are truly stepping back in time. Internet and cellular telephone services are spotty. Cash is still king, requiring Americans to exchange US dollars for what are called Cuban Convertible pesos (CUCs for short) and lose about 13% of value in the process. Old American cars pop up all over Havana. Horse and buggies travel side by side with automobiles in the countryside. Consumer goods we take for granted are mostly non-existent. Railroad tracks look like something out of an old Western movie.

However, there are some development projects underway or in the planning stages. They include not only the refurbishing of Cuba's many fine historic buildings in Havana and smaller cities, but also new hotels and office towers financed with foreign investment. The tourism industry is Cuba's number one priority for foreign investment.

It won't be too long before US businesses, including hotel chains, begin to invest in Cuba, as restrictions continue to be loosened by the Obama administration. Until then, however, the "people-to-people" tours are the primary means for American citizens, who want to beat the crowds that mass tourism will produce, to visit the island.

Each day of our tour was organized to show Cuba in its best light, featuring its rich history and beautiful architecture, lively music and dance, and a vibrant art scene. While we generally stayed together as a group, we were free to walk around the city streets ourselves. I did not sense any government minders following us to make sure that we only spoke to the "right" people. Overall, I had a positive experience on the tour, with the exception of having to endure some over-the-top pro-revolution rhetoric along the way, highlighted by a visit to a shrine built for the blood-thirsty revolutionary Che Guevara.

In fact, our first stop after gathering our bags at the very chaotic Havana airport was the Museum of the Revolution. Our guide, with an amused smile on her face, made sure to steer us towards large wall murals with unflattering caricatures of Presidents Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and George W. Bush. Captions under each of the presidential "portraits" thanked the "cretin" for contributing to the success of the Cuban revolution.

The tour's bookends were stops to see a huge mural of Che Guevara in Revolutionary Square the first day of the tour and, on the last day, a huge statue of Che Guevara outside of a mausoleum in Santa Clara where his remains are kept. Che Guevara is still treated like a god in Cuba. One sees his image virtually everywhere you look, includ-

ing emblazoned on souvenirs. Although he was born in Argentina, and left Cuba after winning a decisive battle against the deposed Batista's forces in Santa Clara to fight other wars in the Congo and Bolivia, Cubans, including our guide, consider Che Guevara one of the "most beloved" heroes of Cuba. Fidel Castro and his brother, the current President Raul Castro, do not come anywhere close.

Before discussing other aspects of the tour, I have to pause on Che Guevara since one could feel his spirit everywhere. The Cuban people, particularly the younger generation, need to come to grips with the crimes against humanity that Che Guevara and his fellow guerilla soldiers committed against Cuban civilians to achieve victory and secure authoritarian rule under the Castro brothers. Learning the truth will debunk the mythology the regime uses to indoctrinate the Cuban people and hold them back from asserting their human rights.

Che was a cold-hearted killer, who, even before his revolutionary days in Cuba, revealed to his parents his psychopathic personality. He wrote his father that he had discovered he loved to kill. He wrote his mother that "I am all the contrary of a Christ."

In "Notas de Viaje," Che wrote the following: ". . . and I know, because I see it printed in the night, that I, the eclectic dissector of doctrines and psychoanalyst of dogmas, howling like possessed, will assault the barricades or trenches, will stain in blood my weapon and, mad of fury, will slit the throats of any defeated who fall into my hands. . . ."

The Cuban revolution provided Che an outlet and pretext for acting on his psychosis. He boasted, for example: "A revolutionary must become a cold killing machine motivated by pure hate."

Che was prepared to use the 1962 Cuban missile crisis as an excuse to wreak vengeance on the United States by launching lethal nuclear attacks on US cities. He wrote: "If the missiles had remained, we would have used them against the very heart of America including New York. . . . We must walk the path of liberation even if it costs millions of atomic victims."

Needless to say, I could have done without the glorification of Che Guevara. But trying to challenge our hosts on their version of Che's legacy would have elicited nothing more than defensive responses or stony silence. Thus, I decided that it wasn't worth going there, and I concentrated instead on the demonstrations we witnessed of the Cuban peoples' creative spirit even while still living under authoritarian rule.

Besides, the best rebuke to Che's legacy has been the

failure of Cuba's socialist experiment. After the subsidies from the Soviet Union and Venezuela, which had kept the Cuban economy afloat, dried up and the Cuban economy cratered, the Cuban regime put its toes into the waters of capitalism. We saw evidence of small-scale capitalism taking root. There are some privately owned small farms and housing. There are family-run and owned restaurants, art galleries, music groups, and tourist businesses that we visited. I got a particular kick out of seeing a privately owned hotel, close to the Bay of Pigs Museum honoring Cuban resistance to the US-supported "imperialistic invasion," which now welcomes American visitors.

The regime still runs Cuba's major industries, to be sure. Most Cuban workers live on low government salaries, supplemented by subsidized food ration coupons. Schools and health care services and facilities, examples of which we had an opportunity to visit, are run reasonably well by the government. Cuba's literacy rate is over 99 percent, and its health system has received praise by Margaret Chan, the Director-General of the World Health Organization.

That said, however, the Cuban people we encountered did not seem content to live the kind of bland, conformist lifestyle that characterized the people living in the old Soviet Union. The creative arts in Cuba are flourishing.

The tour, for example, included a visit to the home of artist José Antonio Rodríguez Fuster, which contains a myriad of vibrantly colorful sculptures, paintings, and ceramics that reminded me of Gaudi's and Picasso's artwork. And, just as Gaudi's art appears in various places around Barcelona, Fuster has installed his work in neighboring streets and houses. Paintings at another art gallery we visited presented examples of truly imaginative individual expression. We did not see any overtly political art that might be interpreted as anti-regime, but nor was there any emphasis on so-called socialist realism art, used in the former Soviet Union to depict the purported "virtues" of socialist values.

Music and dance are passions for the Cuban people that the regime does not appear to try to suppress today. Aside from live salsa music being played everywhere on the streets and in so many bars, Cuba now has highly professional self-sustaining choral and dance groups. We

attended a performance of the Compas Dance Group, who embraced Cuba's Spanish heritage with flamenco dancing, as well as performing dances reflecting Afro-Cuban traditions. But Cubans do not only look back to the past for their music. Cubans, particularly Cuban youth, are hungry for rock and roll. The regime, which once banned the Beatles from Cuba's airwaves, is actually welcoming rock groups to perform in Cuba, including the Rolling Stones and even some American bands. The unintended consequence may be to stimulate the growth of home-grown bands and gradually wean the younger generation away from the officially sanctioned mass thought they are learning in Cuba's public schools.

We also visited Catholic churches, which now welcome worshippers, decades after Fidel Castro's regime had confiscated church property, nationalized Catholic schools and drove priests into exile. Pope Francis's visit last September to Cuba was well-received. However, the Cuban regime still sets strict limits on freedom of conscience and public protest. Prior to Pope Francis's visit, the regime arrested at least 50 Catholic dissidents.

Cuba is at a crossroads. It is still clinging to its myth of revolutionary glory, symbolized by its deification of Che Guevara. Public dissent from government policies is still not tolerated. However, driven by the recognition that it must eschew its rigid socialist orthodoxy in order to save its economy, the regime is going through its own version of Perestroika. Seeds of capitalism are beginning to bear fruit. The regime is also showing more openness to removing some restrictions on artistic and musical expression as well as worship. When President Obama visits Cuba later this month, he needs to encourage such positive behavior. At the same time, he should insist on meeting with political dissidents. And he needs to forcefully urge the Cuban leaders he meets with to release the regime's political prisoners and end their suppression of the Cuban peoples' fundamental political rights to freedom of speech and press, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association. The Cuban leaders should be made to understand that further loosening of economic restrictions will be conditional on the regime's concrete progress on human rights for their people.

—*FrontPageMagazine.com*, March 11, 2016