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Cuban Film Studies
Reflection Essay

The lasting effects of an experience can not be felt immediately. How they alter us, progress us, or challenge us can surface during the experience, but it is their ultimate, more defining changes that only begin to surface once the experience is long over. In the case of the Cuban immersion trip, this formula proves true. Being removed from the Cuban environment for about the same amount of time as the duration of the trip, the real effects are beginning to show.

The essential question upon leaving on the final day of the trip, how does one go back to normalcy, to the regularity of their previous lives, seemed profound and daunting. Within the first 72 hours, most adjustments had been made. English took over our lives once again. Gone were the delays of thinking and interacting in an unfamiliar language (and likewise gone was the learning process that went along with this). I returned to working, eating whatever I pleased rather than what was available, and fell into the familiar habits of checking e-mails, using phones constantly and watching TV. Yet after over a month the question of change continues to introduce itself into my life. How can any of us go to a market again and not think of the immense differences we witnessed in Havana? While we complain of a bruised fruit or long lines, will we think of rations and the Special Period?

How does a mind exposed to such different (though sometimes overdone and over-dramatic) thinking, that of Socialist and Communist scholars and theorists, return to a capitalistic America and not question, even slightly, the words we hear on TV? We have been trained since our youth to fear Cuba. It is the Cuba of Che and Fidel, of missiles, Red Scares, conspiracies, and threats. Yet how many times, upon returning have we heard the question: Cuba? You can go there? I hope it was safe? Or before leaving, "Protect yourself, and hopefully come back in one piece." And yet now we realize the insanity of these well-wishes. The greatest and most lasting effect that I still feel today is one of emptiness and impossibility. I wish to return, to relive the simplicity of the Cuban lifestyle, to partake in their amiable happiness, and to experience a culture I loved to explore. Yes, there were

points where the politics of Cuba drove me back towards the US. I saw the blatant failures of a system that could not provide for its people economically. And yet, perhaps it was still my American naiveté, on the final day I wished to remain there longer, but that, like returning, seems unlikely or near impossible for the moment. In terms of learning the language I saw progress in myself, but due to time it was cut short. A family setting would have been much more beneficial to this portion of the trip, yet the Center provided for us in ways that even a family I believe could never have done. The Cuban Immersion trip, is simply a trip to tell stories for years to come, from simply “Yes, I studied in Havana,” to detailed accounts of Hemingway's house or the sound the waves make when they crash upon the Malecon: in all an experience noninterchangeable with another.