

# Let Cuba Live

P.O. Box 245 Brunswick, Maine 04011

(207) 273-3247

www.letcubalive.org.

September 2011

## To Cuba with the Friendshipment

By Crystal Cron

The Pastors of Peace Friendshipment is an annual caravan to Cuba that began in 1992. This year I had the privilege of participating in bringing one hundred tons of humanitarian aid, including donated vehicles, from the United States and Canada to the island nation. One hundred people came together for this caravan to become a family, and to stand in solidarity with the Cuban people.

In the United States, we are led to believe that Cuba is a dictatorship, that people there are denied basic human rights. The reality, which I saw with my own eyes, is that Cuba is a socialist nation with health care, education, and social services superior or equal to our own, despite a cruel and immoral blockade enforced by the U.S. Government. While the U.S. government has attempted to suffocate the Cuban people by restricting billions of dollars worth of potential trade revenue, Cuba's socialist government has stretched its budget across the entire country to provide for all citizens.



*Crystal, Heather, and Maria Cron (L to R.) with friends in Havana.*

The Caravan was a life-changing experience. The people I met were some of the most loving and wide-awake individuals I have known. What made knowing them even more gratifying was that we were together in the same place and for the same cause. The collective strength that came of our unity was powerful. We had spent two weeks on the road, in groups of around fifteen, traveling different routes, moving from city to city, teaching and learning about the blockade and the Cuban Five, and finally arriving in McAllen, Texas. We spent three days together there preparing for the border crossing and for travel through Mexico to Tampico. It was a time of fellowship and mutual support unlike anything that I've ever felt. I felt completely absorbed by this group, as if in a safe nest. None of the potential obstacles that we were warned about seemed insurmountable. Nothing could penetrate the love that was in our hearts. We were determined to make it to Cuba and share this love with our brothers and sisters there.

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## Let Cuba Live: who we are, what we do

For almost 20 years Let Cuba Live has worked to promote decent relations between the U.S. and Cuban governments. We call upon U.S. leaders to respect Cuban sovereignty and independence. Because of media bias, the U.S. public is generally unaware of what goes on in Cuba, what the Cuban people do and think. Let Cuba Live joins others in our own country and worldwide in attempting to educate, inform, and agitate. To promote solidarity, we encourage direct contact between our peoples.

Let Cuba Live appeals to the U.S. government to end the U.S. economic blockade against Cuba, end the travel ban, return Guantanamo Bay to Cuba, stop U.S. terrorism against Cuba, and free the Cuban Five political prisoners.

We invite others to join us in our important work. To keep in touch with developments in Cuba and U.S. - Cuba relations and with Let Cuba Live, visit our web site at [www.letcubalive.org](http://www.letcubalive.org). Join us at our regular meetings taking place in Brunswick on the third Wednesday evening of every month. To find out specifics, call (207) 443-2899, or (207) 691-0322.

## EDITORIAL

### Justice for Gerardo Hernandez

Five Cuban men, in Florida to defend their homeland against terrorist attacks, were arrested in 1998. Respected appeals court judges later on called their trial a "perfect storm" of bias. Now U.S. authorities are blocking a last ditch attempt by Gerardo Hernandez, one of the Cuban Five prisoners, to secure his legal rights.

Hernandez was convicted of conspiracy to commit murder in the February 24, 1996 shoot-down deaths off Cuba of four invading Cuban American pilots. Hernandez received two life sentences, one on that charge and one for espionage conspiracy. Fellow prisoners Ramon Labañino and Antonio Guerrero, also convicted on the latter charge, received one life sentence each, later reduced on appeal to 30 and 22 years respectively. Convicted on lesser charges, prisoners Fernando Gonzalez and Rene Gonzalez received 19 and 15 years respectively.

Hernandez' lawyers filed a habeas corpus appeal with the U.S. Supreme Court, a remedy allowing defendants or convicted prisoners to secure their freedom or another trial because of new evidence. His lawyers were supposed to have submitted documentation of their case in mid August. The U.S. government, however, refused to release the requested material. To add salt to Hernandez' wounds, prison authorities denied him access to his lawyers and Cuban consular officials. They've impeded delivery of his mail.

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Actress Vinie Burrows welcomed Mainers to the Portland showing of prisoner Antonio Guerrero's paintings, January 2011. (Courtesy of Vinie Burrows)

## Cuba Forum

Let Cuba Live is planning a series of educational events throughout Maine. This project we refer to as a "Cuba Forum" includes film showings, visiting speakers, and reports from recent Cuba travelers.

We are featuring, for example, the Saul Landau film "Will the Real Terrorist Please Stand Up," reviewed in this issue of the Newsletter. Let Cuba Live is also organizing a tour for author Steve Brouwer who will discuss his new book "Revolutionary Doctors," also reviewed here. Lastly, the group is setting up "report back" sessions, as of now in Portland and in Norway, Maine, to hear from recent Cuba travelers.

On November 3 at noon, Steve Brouwer will take part in Professor Doug Allen's Socialist and Marxist Studies Lecture Series at the University of Maine in Orono. At 7:30 PM that day, he will speak at the Peace and Justice Center of Eastern Maine, 100 Harlow St., Bangor. Venues earlier in the week are pending.

Please watch for dates, times, and places of Cuba Forum events as yet unscheduled. Check the Let Cuba Live website.

### WE ASK FOR YOUR HELP

Since our beginnings in 1992 the work of Let Cuba Live has depended on the generosity of others. We are most appreciative. And now we are asking again for donations. Big and small, they go into production of this newsletter, securing humanitarian aid for Cuba, and expenses related to speakers and films. We need help also to support travel by Maine people to Cuba with the Friendship caravans and The Venceremos Brigade. Contact Let Cuba Live at Let Cuba Live, Box 245, Brunswick, Maine 04011, or by phone at 207-443-2899 or 207-691-0322. Visit us at our web site: [www.letcubalive.org](http://www.letcubalive.org)

## Sign petition to President Obama to free the Cuba Five

Five Cuban men, Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando González, and René González, have served 13 years in U.S. federal prisons. Prior to their arrest in 1998, they were monitoring violent extremists in Florida to be able to provide Cuba with advance notice of terrorist plots. In a decision later overruled, a three-judge appeals panel declared their Miami trial to have been deeply prejudiced. Two of the Cuban Five were convicted of espionage conspiracy, another on that charge plus murder conspiracy. They received savagely long sentences despite expert testimony at their trial that they posed no harm for U.S. security interests.

Their appeals process is nearly exhausted. Their freedom is up to President Barack Obama; he should pardon them. Amnesty International last year condemned judicial proceedings and sentencing in their case and asked the Obama administration to consider clemency for the prisoners.

Toward that end, a nationwide committee organized by Let Cuba Live devised a petition on behalf of the Five, based on arguments advanced by Amnesty International. We ask readers to sign this petition asking the President to pardon and free the prisoners. To view the petition on line and sign it, go to <http://tinyurl.com/pardonthe5>, or to [www.letcubalive.org](http://www.letcubalive.org). Links are provided to the Amnesty International report and a Cuban Five "Fact Sheet".



Photo by Bill Hackwell

President Obama: Free these prisoners!

### In consideration of human rights

The UN Children's agency reported recently that of 146 million of the world's underweight children under age five, none live in Cuba. Among Latin America and Caribbean countries, only Cuba has eliminated severe childhood malnutrition. A UNESCO report in June says that of almost 200,000 3rd and 6th grade children in 16 Latin America countries evaluated for skills they've acquired in reading, mathematics, and science, Cuba was tops, by far.

The infant mortality rate (IMR) identifies the number of babies dying during their first year for every 1000 births. It's a marker for nutritional status, mothers' educational level, and access to health care. Cuba's IMR for 2010 was 4.5. The overall U.S. IMR for 2009 was 6.5; that for African American babies, 13.24. There were 26,650 infant deaths that year in the United States, of which 8039 were of African American babies. Had Cuban standards for infant survival prevailed in the United States, there would have been 8200 fewer infant deaths there and 5308 fewer African American infant deaths.

## Cuba Caravan Challenges Blockade

By Tom Whitney

Returning from Cuba, the 22nd Pastors for Peace Friendship Caravan crossed from Mexico into Texas on August 1. Many of the more than 100 Caravan participants had spent four weeks on the road. They had defied U.S. Cuba blockade rules by taking humanitarian aid to the island and visiting there without permission. Crossing into the United States, the civil disobedience protesters refused to answer border officials' questions about their stay in Cuba.

The group Pastors for Peace, led by Rev. Lucius Walker until he died in 2010, has long protested U.S. policies many see as cruel and illegal under international law. They point to a 1959 State Department explanation for harshness. A spokesperson called "for a line of action that... would achieve major progress in denying Cuba money and supplies [and] thereby cause hunger, desperation, and the collapse of the government."



Peter Robbins photo

Rev. Walker with Cuban youth at Casa de Amistad, 2010

Every year since 1992, Caravan participants have protested treatment of the Cuban People as pawns. The U.S. government that year took advantage of the Soviet Union collapse and Cuba's loss of Soviet support to stop companies throughout the world from sending food and medical supplies to the island. The pretext then and now has been ties of foreign companies, even flimsy ones, to U.S. corporations.

On the Caravan's return into Texas, Pastors for Peace Co-director Ellen Bernstein issued a press release. "With this project," she said, "we are enacting a 'people-to-people' foreign policy that is based on mutual respect and solidarity. We will continue reaching out to our Cuban sisters and brothers, without asking permission from the US government."

Those joining the Caravan this year came from throughout the United States and a few foreign countries. They traveled mostly in buses along U.S. routes to a rendezvous in McAllen, Texas. After last minute preparations and honing up on civil disobedience, the vehicles crossed into Mexico taking donated aid material and Cuba travelers to Tampico. From there, they flew to Cuba after leaving aid material on a dock for later delivery. On the island, the delegation took part in educational and solidarity activities, including visits to organic gardens, health centers, rural communities, and schools. They met with political, educational, and religious leaders.

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## Maine people seek new U.S. approach to Cuba

Let Cuba Live has participated in all 22 Friendship Caravans. That project, organized and led by the ecumenical group Pastors for Peace, depends upon participation of U.S. solidarity groups like Let Cuba Live, and similar groups in Canada. The Caravane d' Amitie Quebec – Cuba, for example, has been part of the last 17 caravans, together with Let Cuba Live.

Again this year, the two organizations collected donated medical, education, and construction materials for the Caravan. Let Cuba Live arranged for educational and fund raising events embellished with food and music. A prime objective was support for Maria Sanchez of Portland and daughters Crystal and Heather Cron who traveled with the Caravan this year. Over the years, dozens of other Mainers have gone to Cuba this way.

On July 2, Let Cuba Live people joined 35 activists from Montreal and Quebec City outside the Hotel de Ville in Coaticook, Quebec. Canadian media interviewed members of both groups. The bi-national Cuba solidarity demonstration then moved to the nearby U.S. border station in Norton, Vermont, where Mainers and Quebecers together presented boxes of Quebec aid material to U.S. border authorities.

The officials facilitated an easy transfer into the United State of supplies they knew were destined for Cuba. On earlier crossings, activists of both countries had energetically resisted harassment and confiscations by border personnel. This year, however, Maine activists on hand heard a border official congratulating everybody on a smooth crossing. "See you next year!" he said. Ostensibly the United States government was breaking its own blockade.

A day later, Let Cuba Live boxed up aid material in downtown Brunswick, Maine. Construction materials and education devices for deaf students were added to other donated supplies. On July 6, a truck and trailer took the entire collection to Cambridge, Massachusetts. Maria, Crystal, and Heather joined the Caravan at a solidarity event there, and humanitarian supplies were put on board a Friendship bus.



Jesse Cottingham photo

Loading humanitarian aid into busses in McAllen

## EDITORIAL

### **Demand Posada's extradition to Venezuela!**

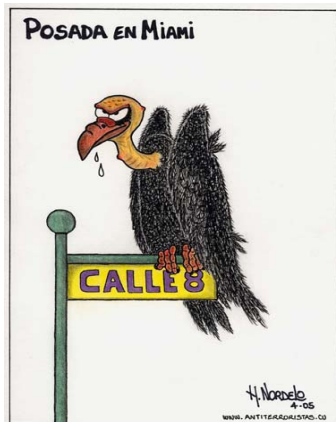
The story of Luis Posada shows why Cuba, defending itself against U.S. terror attacks, sent the Cuban Five volunteers to Florida to monitor violent plotters there. Beginning in the early 1960's, Posada organized terrorist attacks against Cuba and other targets throughout Latin America. He was affiliated with the U.S. Army, the CIA, and Florida – based paramilitary groups. From Caracas where he headed Venezuelan intelligence services, he and Orlando Bosch organized the mid air bombing of a Cuban Airliner off Barbados in 1976 that killed 73 people. Jailed in connection with that crime, he escaped from a Venezuelan jail in 1985 with CIA help. Subsequently, Posada, funded by U.S. supporters, arranged for hotel bombings in Havana in 1997. Three years later he and three others tried to assassinate Cuban President Fidel Castro in Panama. U.S. pressure secured his release from jail there in 2004.

Luis Posada arrived illegally in Florida in March, 2005. For two years thereafter, an immigration court tried to deport him. No country would take him, save one. Indeed, that country, Venezuela, had submitted an extradition request within weeks of Posada's arrival. The administrative judge handing his case, however, was spooked by testimony Posada could be tortured in Venezuela. Never mind that the witness had been Posada's Venezuelan colleague in torture.

Later Posada, born in Cuba and now applying for U.S. citizenship, ended up in an El Paso federal court, accused this time of lying about how he entered the United States. After mistrials and legal delays lasting four years, Posada was declared innocent on April 14, 2011. He returned to Miami, where he's the toast of the town.

Venezuela's extradition treaty with the United States dates from 1922. International treaties signed by the United States on terrorism and on civil aviation safety require Posada's extradition to Venezuela.

U.S. inaction stems from the sway of powerful forces in southern Florida. The U.S. and worldwide movement on behalf of freedom for the Cuban Five demands that justice be applied to Posada and that the United States abandon an obsolete, irrational dirty war against Cuba.



*Cartoon by Cuba Five prisoner Gerardo Hernandez. Calle 8 is a street in downtown Miami. (courtesy of [www.freethefive.org](http://www.freethefive.org))*

## BOOK REVIEW

### **“Revolutionary Doctors,” by Steve Brouwer, *Monthly Review Press***

By Tom Whitney

Steve Brouwer's remarkable book "Revolutionary Doctors" traces the evolution of Cuban – Venezuelan collaboration to provide health care for all and extend care throughout the world. His book recovers history, traces the politics of visionary planners, and tells what doctors and medical students of both countries actually do. Brouwer cites Dr. Ernesto Guevara who wrote, "The best way of telling is doing." Che said doctors are judged "by their practice of solidarity and equality."

The book covers momentous Cuban – Venezuelan experimentation in medical education and Venezuela's efforts to provide health care for a large underserved population. Brouwer points to U.S. harassment and directs attention to the Bolivarian Alliance of the Peoples of Our America, the solidarity alliance known as ALBA. He highlights Cuba's Latin American School of Medicine. Annually for six years that institution has prepared 1500 new doctors from dozens of countries to take up medical work where they are needed. The new physicians pay nothing for their education.

The author lived in a hillside village on the outskirts of Sanare, a small city in Venezuela's northwest. There he came to know people of modest means who were studying medicine without leaving home. He met Cuban doctors caring for patients and teaching students.

The students and teachers are part of a pioneering effort enabling 30,000 Venezuelan young people from working class families to become doctors. When they qualify, another large group of young people will enter the process. Medical education takes place in non – institutional settings in rural areas and small cities. Cuban doctors have assumed a big role in teaching medical students throughout Venezuela. With combined populations of 39 million, Venezuela and Cuba now provide free medical education in both countries for 73,000 medical students.

"Revolutionary Doctors" tells about tens of thousands of Cuban doctors who've worked in over half the world's countries. Since 1998, Cuban health workers have provided most of the medical services in Haiti, especially in rural areas. Over seven years Cuba has maintained some 15,000 physicians in Venezuela as part of that government's efforts to serve the underserved. Cuban doctors and thousands of other health workers, teachers, and "sport trainers," are working in poor urban districts and in rural areas. Newly trained Venezuelan doctors eventually will take over from Cuban physicians.

The medical revolution began in earnest in 2000, Brouwer says, when Cuban leaders proclaimed a "battle of ideas." Globalized capitalism was on a roll, and socialism in Cuba labored under compromises forced by difficulties following the fall of the Soviet Bloc. That was the time, he suggests, for Cuba to rehabilitate socialism. For him, Cuban doctors "represent a moral and ethical weapon that is striking at the hollow core of capitalist values."

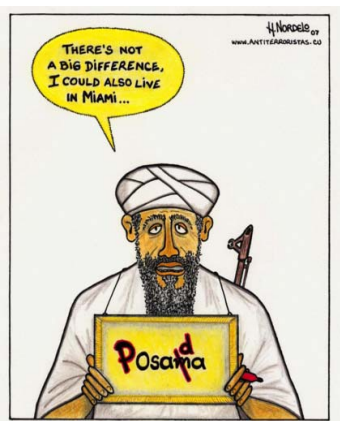
## FILM REVIEW

### “Will the Real Terrorist Please Stand Up?”

Let Cuba Live will be showing this film made by Cuba solidarity activist and filmmaker Saul Landau as part of its “Cuba Forum.” Retired Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson authored the review appearing here in excerpts. The Army veteran served former Secretary of State Colin Powell as chief of staff. The full review is available at [http://www.thehavananote.com/2011/04/will\\_real\\_terrorist\\_please\\_stand\\_indeed](http://www.thehavananote.com/2011/04/will_real_terrorist_please_stand_indeed)

Wilkerson writes: “The backdrop of the film was the U.S.-Cuba relationship from the 1959 revolution to the present. That relationship was portrayed quite accurately... That is chiefly because the one-sided nature of U.S. policy has been the same from 1823 to the present. .. Just how badly the U.S. had treated its island neighbor since the beginning of our republic [is apparent].

Cartoon by  
Gerardo Hernandez,  
Cuba Five Prisoner.  
(courtesy of  
[www.freethethefive.org](http://www.freethethefive.org))



“Clearly shown and vividly documented was the fact that the United States sponsors terrorism. In Posada Carriles and Orlando Bosch alone, there are overtones of Osama bin Laden and Aman al-Zawahiri, the nefarious leadership of *al-Qa'ida*. In the film, Carriles and Bosch as much as tell us this in their own words. These terrorists appear to take joy in what they have done, a war that continues to this day with the United States doing almost nothing to stop it and, as the film depicts in subtle ways, from time to time even aiding and abetting the terrorists who are waging it.

“But the Cold War ended almost 20 years ago. Not the case, however, with the undeclared war against Cuba. Most vividly and disconcertingly, however, the film goes on to portray this continuing illegal war through the case of the Cuban Five. These are the five Cuban intelligence agents who, in the 1990s, were dispatched to Florida to help the government in Havana defend itself better in this undeclared war.

“At the very worst, these five Cubans were ‘foreign agents operating on U.S. soil’, an offense warranting 18 months in jail under U.S. law....I don’t believe there was any doubt in anyone’s mind in that audience - Cuban or American - who the “real terrorist” in the U.S.-Cuba relationship actually is.”

Wilkerson concludes: “the litany of dangerous and illegal acts by the U.S. Government in the name of perfect security and corrupt, special interest politics, the affair of the Cuban Five, and all it represents about the U.S.-Cuba relationship, stains the very fabric of our democratic republic.”

## Cuban Communist Party Congress propels changes

By Tom Whitney

The Cuban Communist Party’s Sixth Congress, meeting in April, 2011, was the occasion for reviewing economic and political changes underway in Cuba aimed at solving problems, among them the world economic crisis, the U.S. blockade, bureaucracy, worker inefficiency, and residual effects of policies put in place after the Soviet Bloc fell.

Preparing for the Congress, the government distributed a document on new policies designated as “Guidelines.” Millions of Cubans discussed them and suggested changes. At the Congress, commissions engaged in the planning process held forums allowing delegates to criticize and make suggestions. The Congress ultimately issued a new set of guidelines leaving only 94 of the original 291 items intact while folding 16 items into other guidelines, assigning new content to 181 of them, and forming 36 entirely new ones. The National Assembly would decide upon the final version.

The changes include gradual removal of half a million people from state jobs while opening up many categories of private employment and entrepreneurial activities. Mechanisms are in place for taxing private income and private sales of homes and automobiles. Because of over dependence on food imports and a surfeit of idle land the government had previously opened up state - owned land to long term, multi-generational land use by private farmers and cooperatives. Steps have been taken to move decision making and policy implementation from the national to the local level.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Party Congress named new Central Committee members to replace 59 retirees. The new arrivals make for increased representation of women, young people, and African-descended Cubans. Closing the Congress, Party First Secretary Raul Castro indicated the new members were “selected from the immense pool of university graduates and qualified specialists, which the Revolution lost no time in educating.” They have “risen from the most humble homes” and have worked at the grassroots level, “while continuing to work in the professions which they studied.”

Castro indicated his own “principal mission and purpose for being [was] to defend, preserve and continue perfecting socialism, and to never allow the return of the capitalist system.”



A mix of transportation technology in Havana.

## HISTORICAL VIEWPOINT

### Cuban annexationism in the US Congress

by Manuel E Yepe

*Yepe's article, translated by TW, updates collaboration between power elites of both countries over two centuries. U.S. annexation of Cuba was in the air as U.S. slave owning interests and Cuban sugar barons sought to maintain slavery. Cuban emigration to the United States figures in. As recalled recently by Cuban Parliament President Ricardo Alarcon, 100,000 people in 1869 left from Havana alone for haven in the United States. They were fleeing Cuba's First War for Independence, fought by freed slaves. Alarcon noted that in 1958, prior to the Revolution, Cuba was second only to Mexico as a source of Latin American migrants to the United States. Cuba has fallen now to eighth place. He condemned the U.S. Cuban Adjustment Law of 1966 by which all Cubans leaving the island after 1959 gained U. S. welcome - and only Cubans. Manipulation of migration and of Cubans living in the United States is ongoing.*

The fact that more than a million and a half Cubans in the United States (not all have the right to vote) have two senators and four representatives in the Congress in Washington is remarkable. Cubans in the United States claim greater representation than do Mexicans and Puerto Ricans living there. Those populations, through their incomparably greater numbers and through their colonial status, respectively, need more representation.

Cubans have greater representation in Congress than do peoples living in states like Wyoming, North and South Dakota, Utah, Rhode Island, Maine, Hawaii, and New Mexico.

Just like the urge for independence, annexationism in Cuba stemmed from disenchantment with Spanish colonialism. Both currents vied with reformism that aspired to ease the colonial yoke. The rest of Spain's provinces in the America gained independence, but Cuba remained as the "always faithful," together with Puerto Rico.

In common with economic elites who moved to North America in the 1960's, Cuban annexationists who did likewise in the 19th Century were uncomfortable with Cuban revolutionaries' independence ideas.

Hundreds of Batista tyranny functionaries, dishonest to the core, arrived in Miami in 1959 with suitcases filled with dollars stolen from the public treasury. Hundreds of military oppressors, torturers, and assassins also fled, their hands bloodied. They were eluding criminal justice and people's justice. These two groups gave rise to what would become Miami's Cuban Mafia which, under the administrations of eleven White House occupants, has weighed over U.S. - Cuban relations for a half century.

These crooks combined vast criminal experience with CIA training for terrorist and military missions against Cuba to impose gangster control methods over the whole Cuban immigrant population in Florida. To their economic power derived from ill-gotten gains, they assumed power over voting

in elections. Now, the two parties handing out elective offices in the United States compete to take advantage of that political power.

U.S. hegemony, threatened by revolutionary leaders taking real power in Cuba on behalf of people's interests and their strategic and urgent demands, opted for violence to take back control of the island. Toward that end, those trained oppressors cultivated by Pentagon advisors during the Batista tyranny turned out to be more useful than the bourgeoisie who were demanding the United States return large landholdings to them, along with businesses nationalized by the revolution.

But the failures of violent plots, one after the other, persuaded extreme U.S. rightwing elements, especially during Bush presidencies, father and son, to opt for empowering right wing Cuban extremists in Southern Florida. Behind the scenes, they provided them with disproportionate political representation.

Most Cuban American politicians - descendants, many of them, of once powerful Cuban political figures or repressive Batista police agents - began their political careers while Washington was carrying out violent assaults on Cuba. The attackers were CIA-armed extremist groups engaged also in spying and subverting, most of them from Miami and New Jersey.

Cuban-American congresspersons and politically powerful leaders in the Cuban community still give priority to the line that rejects contact with Cuba. At the community level, however, one already detects big changes not reflected in the corporate media.

I believe that annexationist thought does not really characterize the whole population of Cubans who left for the United States, then or now. Relatively few have been inclined to satisfy their ambitions by taking advantage of U. S. appetites regarding Cuba and renouncing their Cuban identity. Jose Marti originally and Fidel Castro a little more than half a century ago successfully promoted a movement based on independence ideas among Cuban immigrants in the United States. The roots are still there, despite campaigns of hate and lies.

August 8, 2011 <http://www.rebellion.org/noticia.php?id=133658>



*Organic garden in Cuba*

*Continued from Page 1 To Cuba with the Friendshipment*

Our night in Tampico, Mexico was a moving experience. We had traveled that day from Reynosa over 13 hours, a trip automobiles cover in five or six hours. Vehicles broke down, and we had to stop frequently. We arrived at the docks at 10:30, tired, hot, and with sore backs. Then it was time to move every item of donated supplies, 20 tons worth, from the buses to shipping containers for delivery to Havana.

We were re-energized as we lined up from one bus after the other passing along items to fill the containers. There was loud chatter, laughter, and biceps building. The team work was inspiring, and it was for Cuba. We cheered after each bus was emptied. At 3:30 A.M., after some eating and hugging, we closed up the containers, enjoyed a song from our Mexican brother, and headed back to the hotel for a few hours of sleep.

For many of us, this would be our first time to Cuba. When we arrived and I stepped off that plane, a wave of the hot Cuban air hit me. It was moist, green smelling and beautiful. It enveloped me, and at that point, I knew that I loved this place. We walked into the airport, and we were greeted with huge smiles and *refrescos*. Our journey through Cuban had begun.

Over nine days we got to know our hosts at churches in Havana where we stayed. We attended dozens of art exhibits, dance presentations, and music performances; also panel discussions on education, healthcare, sexual health, and the economy.

For me, the most memorable discussion we attended was a candid talk on racism in Cuba. Cubans apparently recognize that racism in Cuba, while not as potent as in the United States, is internalized in their culture. The speaker called for challenging these structures. He emphasized that racism was an important issue in itself, and not merely the result of class differences. It was empowering to see people in Cuba facing racism head on, rather than claiming, as in our country, that we've defeated racism while disparities grow. He talked about the origins of racism within the family structure.

In Santa Clara, we visited one of over 100 organic urban farms in that city alone. When we arrived, the farmers greeted us each with a freshly cut sunflower. There was a beautiful display of many of the crops they grow in raised beds without pesticides. Plants grow nearby that repel harmful insects. The blockade increases shipping costs and thereby hinders food importation. Because of high fuel costs, non-organic farming fits less and less with Cuba's economy. Cubans are moving to organic, local farming to serve the community's food needs.

Farmers' pride in their work was obvious. They explained the importance of having a connection with the earth, and knowing where your food comes from. This farm offers a program for local youth and university students to do farm work in order to gain skills enabling them to begin with organic, self-sustaining farming.

Cuba is a poor nation. Its people struggle to stretch the limited resources they have, but they do it and do so collectively. Determined to survive a cruel blockade, the Cuban people came together in remarkable ways. They contribute to their society with dignity and pride, and they are participants in shaping the world around them. Cuba is not perfect, but with free education for all, nearly 100% literacy, no homelessness, free medical services for all, and the inclusion of people's thinking and ideas in creating and improving the nation, I would be proud to call it home.

*Continued from Page 1 Justice for Gerardo Hernandez*

Using the Freedom of Information Act, solidarity groups including the National Committee to Free the Five obtained and publicized material showing that Miami area reporters, and radio and television commentators, took pay totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars from the U.S. government. Hernandez' advocates say that for a government engaged in prosecution to pay for self-serving publicity made a fair trial impossible. Before and during the trial false allegations against the five men flourished in the local media from reporters on the take.

Hernandez' lawyers have been unable to pry loose satellite images from the U.S. government showing, they say, that the small planes heading for Cuba from southern Florida in 1996, piloted by Cuban American extremists, actually entered Cuban air space. They allege that under international law, Cuba may defend its airspace by military means. Consequently, Hernandez bears no responsibility for the deaths of the pilots.

We appeal to justice – minded individuals to communicate with the White House. Ask the U.S. government to honor Hernandez' legal rights and end arbitrary actions in his case. The email address is [www.whitehouse.gov/contact](http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact) and telephone number is (202) 456-1111. And write Gerardo Hernandez to express friendship, solidarity and support. His address is: Gerardo Hernandez, No. 58739-004, U.S.P. Victorville, P.O. Box 5300, Adelanto, CA92301.



*"One day my prison shirt will remain hanging there" Painting by Cuba Five Prisoner Antonio Guerrero. (courtesy of [www.freethefive.org](http://www.freethefive.org))*

## Update on possibilities for legal Cuba travel

With its mission “To encourage U.S. policies towards Latin America that promote human rights, justice, peace, and sustainable development,” the Washington – based Latin American Working Group (LAWG) advocates for the right of U.S. citizens to travel to Cuba. It recently sent out information on the current travel situation.

“As of April 21, 2011, the U.S. Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control released new travel guidelines for travel to Cuba that mirror the intentions of President Obama’s directive aimed at liberalizing the regulations, [that is to say, returning to regulations in force during the Clinton administration.] Under these guidelines, many groups that have been previously denied access to Cuba can now travel under either general or specific licenses.

Eligibility for one or the other license is essential for Cuba travel. A General License requires no permission or advance notification to U.S. officials. A Specific License is an actual document obtainable through the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) which oversees travel restrictions within the U.S. Treasury Department.

Travel under the General License requires visitors to join a group organized by one of many OFAC - approved travel agencies designated as a “licensed travel service provider.” The types of approved travel OFAC approves include educational travel, religious travel, people to people travel, and family travel. LAWG makes available on its website brochures describing each travel category. There is one link there listing licensed travel service providers and another cataloguing upcoming trips already approved. The website address is [www.lawg.org](http://www.lawg.org).

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Friendshipment participants attended Latin American School of Medicine graduation exercises at which 40 students from the United States became physicians. Since graduating its first class in 2005, the school has prepared 8,600 new doctors from 54 countries, all recipients of scholarships from Cuba. Pastors for Peace recruits U.S. students.

On their last day in Cuba, the Pastors for Peace delegation attended a ceremony at the Jose Marti Memorial in Havana. There, Rev. Raul Suarez received the ashes of Rev. Walker for custody at Havana’s Martin Luther King Center, which Suarez founded and led.



Peter Robbins photo

*Alissa from Harrison, Maine painting bus in McAllen*



***Let Cuba Live***

**P.O. Box 245  
Brunswick, ME 04011**

