MOSAIC

A publication of NYU Gallatin School of Individualized Study

ALBERT GALLATIN SCHOLARS. JANUARY 2016 SOUTH AFRICA
DEAN’S HONOR SOCIETY. JANUARY 2016 ECUADOR
AMERICAS SCHOLARS. JANUARY 2016 CUBA

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INTRODUCTION: QUESTIONING TOURISTS

Patrick McCreery

What does it mean to be a tourist? And what responsibilities, if any, do tourists have to the places they tour?

These are questions that animated the student writers who contributed to this issue of Mosaic, which represents trips undertaken by Gallatin’s three scholars groups in 2016. Whether they participated in the Albert Gallatin Scholars visit to South Africa, the Americas Scholars trip to Cuba, or the Dean’s Honor Society exploration of Ecuador and its Galápagos Islands, these student-scholars seem consumed with critiquing the purpose of travel itself. Previous issues of Mosaic have included commentary about students’ role as tourists, but never has it been so overt.

As in past years, each group explored a separate theme over the 2015–16 academic year. For the Albert Gallatin Scholars, it was “Globalization and Contemporary Art.” The Americas Scholars studied “Labor, Daily Life, and Creative Expression.” Members of the Dean’s Honor Society analyzed “Environment, Ecology, and Human Use.” Regardless of the theme or location, however, Gallatin’s student-scholars quickly perceived their own difference in relation to the local populations with whom they interacted, whether it be around racial consciousness and socioeconomic status in South Africa, attitudes about nature and conservation in the Galápagos, or the idea of “American-ness” in Cuba. This sense of distance seemingly both shaped and reflected how they perceived the places they toured.

Paradoxically, Gallatin’s student-scholars do not fit the profile of the typical tourist. Before traveling, they spend at least one semester learning about their destination’s history and culture, and receiving guidance on how to observe as well as reflect. And that preparation is necessary! Although many pieces in this issue reveal students’ guilt, shame, and frustration over being the “tourist as outsider” figure, the students do not go so far as to question the value of cross-cultural engagement. Instead, they challenge us to examine why and in what ways we travel.

When wielded as a pejorative, the term “tourist” can certainly define the leisure traveler who leaves the luxury resort only on carefully curated visits to pre-selected local sites. But perhaps the term can also include the intellectually curious person who, despite diligent prior study and genuine goodwill, experiences unease when encountering the new and the different. That unease may stem from being treated with distant politeness, or by wading into the muddy territory between observer and spectator, or by experiencing contradictory emotions that cause one to question long-held beliefs.

Without question, the essays, artwork, and creative writing included in this issue of Mosaic offer readers important reminders: to keep our eyes open when traveling, to ask questions instead of making assumptions, and to make peace with the idea that tourism—no matter how superficial or inauthentic it might seem—has the capacity to educate us in some way.
SOUTH AFRICA

ALBERT GALLATIN SCHOLARS / JANUARY 2016

Capital: Pretoria, Bloemfontein, Cape Town | Population: 55m
Area: 0.47m | Language: English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu, & more
Area Code: +27 | Currency: South African Rand
AUDIENCE TO SOUTH AFRICA: AN EXPERIENCE OF TOURISM

Sarah Flamm
As a student of theatre audiences, I have spent the past four years navigating the intersection between the live and community aspects of performances and the events themselves. When I see a show, I am most satisfied when I am in an active state of mind, never dulled into suspending my disbelief to the point where I forget that human beings in the room are telling me the story. The generosity of artists in a live setting, as well as the ritualistic nature of the theatre, are what keep me passionate about this specific form of storytelling.

The most valuable shows to me are ones that make me aware that something is being performed. Yet, during my trip to South Africa, there was always some Brechtian distance that I wanted to break; I was always in a heightened state of analysis and never felt like I belonged, even though I learned so much about the complex history of South Africa and its people and had so many eye-opening experiences.

When I embarked on our trip, I never expected to feel so much like an audience member throughout our time there. I expected to experience the country firsthand rather than looking at it from the outside. Throughout the trip, many of our discussions revolved around how we felt about being tourists and how frustrated we were to not be able to explore for ourselves elements of South Africa that seemed to be missing from our tours. The stories we experienced at museums, restaurants, and tours were clearly performative; they were carefully curated for people like us, and were told in a crafted and deliberate way.
Searching for a sense of authenticity while traveling can be a double-edged sword: one tries to be satisfied with experiencing a country while not trying to overstep one’s place as an outsider. But should there be shame in feeling like a tourist? Do I even have the right to not feel like a tourist? And how does one even go about getting a true sense of a place through a limited amount of travel?

Interestingly, the aspect of our travel that felt most authentic to me and satisfied my desire to experience South Africa on a deeper level was the art. The power of empathy and expression revealed through our museum visits and conversations with artists truly struck me. One occasion that allowed me to revel in my position as audience member to South Africa and take in the history in a truly visceral way was a tour of the Constitutional Court in Johannesburg. Our guide Daryl, who was showing us the art displayed in the court, stopped at Judith Mason’s painting, The Man Who Sang and the Woman Who Kept Silent. Daryl told us that Mason was moved by stories of the cruelty revealed during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings—of a man asked to sing “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrica” before he was shot; and of a woman kept naked for 10 days, who fashioned underwear for herself out of blue plastic before she was killed.

The painting pictured a blue dress blowing in the wind, filled by an invisible human form, and was made of plastic in commemoration of these two prisoners’ acts before death. When Daryl told us this story and read some corresponding poetry, he broke down in tears. Witnessing this South African man’s extreme act of personal expression and generosity with us tourists was powerful and gave me insight into the South African spirit in a way I couldn’t have gotten otherwise. The function of political art, after all, is to synthesize a message and experience in a way that can reach absolutely anyone.

Thinking about this experience in hindsight, I’ve come to see that tourism embodies the best parts of theatre: communication, collaboration, the live aspect, and most importantly, empathy. I realize that what initially felt like the wrong way to experience a country was exactly the way I should have experienced it. As much as I wanted to fight feeling like a tourist, each person and work of art we encountered shared the gifts of their histories, customs, dances, music, food, and stories with us because we were positioned as guests. The performative nature of South African tourism actually felt like one of the most generous acts I have ever received.
Much of the formal discussions the Albert Gallatin Scholars engaged in during our trip to South Africa revolved around some of the students’ general angst in fulfilling the role of a tourist. After all, most of us are used to being “locals” in New York City and probably some of us have looked with disdain upon the selfie-stick-wielding masses that flood the city year after year. It is this role reversal that we experienced upon arriving in South Africa that initially left many people uncomfortable. Some expressed desire to break free from the mold of tourism and see the “real” Johannesburg/Cape Town/South Africa, but it was never really clear what this meant. Did it mean living like nearly half of the population does, in some form of poverty
Or did it mean going to trendy, lesser known areas and establishments so we could feel accepted by the wealthier citizens of South Africa as more than just American tourists? I'm still not sure.

Many of us, including myself, became hung up on this preoccupation with our appearance and high visibility. But if an NYU student leaves behind the casual elitist and tourist-disparaging attitude, he or she can enjoy the experiences for what they are: some of the best sights and establishments that a place has to offer. After all, one shouldn't spend 16 hours hurtling through space in close quarters in an aluminum tube just to shy away from the most popular attractions of that region. One can attempt to dismiss many of these attractions as mere tourist traps, but to do so would be to neglect their awe-inspiring capabilities and historical value. Very few of the attractions we went to were “tourist traps” with little to offer. Nearly all of the activities we engaged in had some kind of value, whether it was aesthetic, academic, spiritual, or cultural.

Still, the constant vilification of tourists, especially the American variety who visit certain communities, makes it easy to see why a group of Gallatin students could be so very conscious of themselves and the effects of their presence on the locals around them. I think that our reluctance to be seen as typical American tourists in some ways limited our enjoyment.

Such an uncomfortable consciousness is important and preferable to being blissfully ignorant, obnoxious, and culturally unaware, but at a certain point, it can hinder one’s appreciation of a place and people, which becomes a detriment to the entire trip and the purpose behind it.

Touring a new country is in many ways like getting to know someone. When people meet for the first time, they generally want to make the best impression. If you're in a position of power (i.e., a tourist with money), the person receiving you is probably going to be polite and welcoming, but you won't get to know them entirely. Only in time will you get to know them more fully, including all their flaws and faults. As a tourist, you dip into places and see the best that they have to offer, getting a taste of what the citizens are most proud of and willing to share. This is completely understandable for short trips like ours. Although I think our trip agenda was excellently planned in terms of diversity and breadth, one can only get to know a place so well in two weeks.

So you might as well enjoy the sights. They're popular for a reason.
Appropriation I: Who Says?

There would have been lions
out beyond the city.

These are the leper graves:
segregation
a cutthroat industry.

Fall into the cracks,
the mining shafts below the city.
Walk away free.

Mandela’s dream
has not yet been realized: our holidays
have been gentrified.

Fall into
the histories,
the mining shafts below the city.
Walk away free.
ALL WHO PASS BY

REMEMBER WITH SHAME THE MANY THOUSANDS

OF PEOPLE WHO LIVED FOR GENERATIONS

IN DISTRICT SIX AND OTHER PARTS OF

THIS CITY AND WERE FORCED BY LAW TO

LEAVE THEIR HOMES BECAUSE OF THE

COLOUR OF THEIR SKINS.

FATHER, FORGIVE US...
Appropriation II: I Say

What is there to say for another skin;
for colonization locked in
under a
tongue like yours-mine;
For a man
immortalized, mythologized;
for a history
held out like an open book;
for a book
with pages half-stuck;
for a dozen tongues
where I
have only one;
for a story
sold to me but not
for me,

Growing, shaping, twisting, living while I
talk, walk away free.

What is there to say
except all the wrong words,
except “I went there.

I heard...”
I designed a research project on people’s perceptions of South Africa, wanting to discover the “true” or “authentic” character of the country. But as I started the research, I took a step back and wondered why I wanted to categorize an entire nation and experience into a neat little box. I wondered if there even was a singular “authentic” version of South Africa.

After gathering responses to the question, “how would you describe South Africa?” and reflecting on my own experiences, I discovered the truth: it isn’t possible to label any single experience as definitive of a whole country. I wondered, then, what the fuss is with finding the “true” form of a nation, and why so many travelers are obsessed with experiencing a place in the same way as its native inhabitants. I don’t have a full explanation for either, but one thing I am sure of is that the tourism industry plays a big role in the fruitless search for authenticity. And while I cannot describe to you the one true South Africa, I can share what I learned from South Africa’s visitors, residents, and complete outsiders.

As I interviewed individuals who had never been to South Africa, it became clear that most of them were unfamiliar with the intricacies of the country. I assume most of them got their information from mainstream media, since despite the extensive sources of information available, most people will not dedicate the time to extensively research a place they have not visited. These individuals associated South Africa mainly with apartheid and Nelson Mandela, remembering school history lessons on the unrest and turmoil. They envisioned the country to be more dangerous than it is, responding with warnings about diseases and other perils when I told them about my opportunity to travel there. “Don’t leave your hotel!” “Wear long sleeves and bug spray at all times or you’ll get malaria!” “Don’t eat any meat or you’ll get typhoid!” These warnings were based off random Facebook articles as opposed to actual research. They did have positive associations, but these weren’t very redeeming as they centered around tourist attractions: vibrant, jungle, safari,
Outsiders

Friendly

Visitors

Beautiful

Tourists
etc. While asking them to give a singular definition of South Africa may have been unfair, the responses did give insight into the power media and marketing have on perceptions of a place.

One might expect South Africans to more easily define the character of their nation, but that too is a major generalization, as the population of South Africa is diverse in all aspects of life and experiences the country in a multitude of ways. Nevertheless, some perspectives were common among my South African interviewees: I was touched by the pride they have for their country. Even their criticisms came from a place of love. They seem to live life embracing their past—despite its troubles—while looking towards the future with hopeful anticipation. Unlike in the United States, where discussing past human rights violation is often perceived as taboo, the South Africans I met readily and fully acknowledged the issues they had regarding segregation and apartheid. They remembered in order to learn and move forward in pursuit of perpetual betterment. This is palpably demonstrated in the public art and graffiti I saw in Cape Town and Johannesburg, which promote remembrance while attempting to beautify sites where painful things occurred.

The responses I received from people who were visiting South Africa (fellow members of the Albert Gallatin Scholars) about the country’s authentic character indicated a kind of moral conflict: feeling like they were in an intense game of tug-of-war between the tourist experience and their desire for genuine connection with South Africa. They felt that the way South Africa’s tourism industry presented the country’s tourist sites teetered between authenticity and exploitation. This feeling was prevalent at Hippo Hollow, our hotel in Krueger National Park; it is garishly designed for the wealthy traveler who wants to feel “surrounded by the magic of the African bush” while retaining all of the comforts of a five-star hotel. To make matters worse, the hotel’s beef-
based meals are named after various African wildlife so tourists believe they are eating hippo, ostrich, or crocodile meat. Everywhere our group travelled in South Africa, there was at least one instance where we felt guilty for enjoying an experience because we felt we were contributing to the exploitation of South Africans and their culture. The morality question became even more complicated when taking into account how essential the tourism industry is to South Africa’s economy. Yet, despite these concerns, we all agreed that the South Africa we experienced was a beautiful, friendly, and vibrant place that emphasizes community in spite of a troubled past.

At this point, I feel comfortable saying that I don’t believe there is one authentic experience of any country. No two people can experience an entire nation in the exact same way, and there are too many ways in which one’s perception of a place can be manipulated, for a multitude of reasons (pride, tourism, etc.). I have also seen that travelers’ desire to experience “authenticity” in a country can lead to the creation of attractions that exploit local inhabitants. I urge tourists to actively think about how their actions might affect the locals and their country, even if they are paying to experience the culture.

Author’s Note
Mzansi: (n) slang for South Africa; (adj) proudly South African
The images presented throughout are from my experiences in South Africa, juxtaposed and interconnected with words associated with South Africa, which I gathered from people who have never been there, people who have travelled there, and South Africans. The images are meant to hint at the complexities and nuances of the “Rainbow Nation” while celebrating its beauty.
Johannesburg, known colloquially as Jozi or Jo’burg, was established in the late 19th century following a great gold discovery. Today, this city is the second most populous city in South Africa and is home to Constitution Hill, the Apartheid Museum, and various art galleries, among other cultural institutions our group had the opportunity to visit. Johannesburg has been labeled the continent’s economic hub and is world-renowned for innovation, trade, and production. I met with my South African friend Sherwin Sampson, an aspiring tech entrepreneur who currently works in finance and is a youth leader. He gave me his perspective on life in Jo’burg.
Mia DiChiaro: What was it like growing up in Jo’burg and how has the city shaped you personally, professionally, and spiritually?

Sherwin Sampson: For a large part of my life, I hated living in Johannesburg, I think because I had not yet discovered Johannesburg fully. But I think mainly because I was not comfortable in who I was in my own skin. I could suggest that a lot factored into this; apartheid, being Colored, middle-class, “average.” However, I think that would be very cowardly of me. South Africa, as a people and as a country, I think, struggles from an identity crisis in one way or another. I think other parts of the world have overwhelmed our identity. Though we have benefitted largely, I think we are yet to rediscover our true identity again. This can be seen in our architecture, food, clothes, modern culture, and even language. We just need to find our own style and fully embrace it.

Professionally, I’ve only worked for three years. Though very valuable, I will admit my work has shaped me a lot. I am struggling to see the point of work operating by traditional standards. I mean, we’re operating in some parts of the continent like it’s the 1980s. Very few corporations embrace the uniqueness of South Africa and the technological bubble we’re in. It’s almost like no provision is made for us as people—humans. Companies haven’t yet understood that as Africans, we love stories, and it’s been that way since we’ve existed as a people. We love to see and hear the story of where companies and organizations want to take us. Instead, they overwhelm us [with] jargon and power because of their need to seem big and important.

Above all, there is hope. Lots of hope. South Africa has so much untapped opportunity. I think young professionals need to focus on who they are and not allow the outside world to overwhelm their inner voice. We need to focus on who we were designed to be and not just focus on trying to catch up on a missed “opportunity.” If we go back to finding our identities, we can learn how to use companies for good, as a means to build South Africa for truth and not for self-enrichment. Then we can begin to stand together to solve so many of [the] problems [we] Africans encounter. I hope and pray th[is] will change the landscape of our beautiful country, and that we will spread our voice [about] the good work God is doing here. Now, I really love being South African. I love being me.
MD: Tell me about how you became involved in entrepreneurship and what projects you are exploring.

SS: Since a very young age, I saw it as an out and a means to escape the status quo. I always wanted freedom to exercise my ideas. Moreover, I wanted a platform to showcase to the world how great Africa can be. That was then. Now, I see entrepreneurship as a God-inspired gift. It’s like God gives us this gift to change the world, because everybody can. I just choose to do it through adding value, which happens to be through the vehicle of entrepreneurship. My dream is to see faith transform the landscape of society.

Presently, I’m exploring technical user experience and design. I’m really using this as a vehicle to combat complex socioeconomic issues with faith as the base. One such example is ourobjcts.com, which was built to fight porn, but from a[n] “I-need-Jesus” perspective instead of [as] a self-help tool.

MD: What is it like to be a young person in Jo’burg today and what are the challenges facing youth?

SS: I think it’s pretty much the same as the rest of the world. I think we’re all oppressed now as young people. Our oppressor is external validation. We’re looking for people to confirm what we should be and how we should do life. We need to drop this notion of trying to live an edited life and just be ourselves. We may be facing the largest identity crisis in humanity.

MD: How would you describe Jo’burg to someone who has never been?

SS: As an opportunity to dispel myths and assumptions: I think Jo’burg is dope! People really care about you (well, depending where you are!). And I think it’s a land of many hopes and dreams, waiting to be realized.
POEMS

MMDA NE ME / EMABHACENI / CHEZ ALINA /
SEANKA SE ME ANKA / BLACK /
I AM INDEED HERE FOR THE TOUR, SIR / AMERICANIZED /
VIVA SOUTH AFRICA, VIVA / AMANDLA!

Maame Boatema

This collection of poems and thoughts is a reflection of the complexities that come with returning to one's motherland after years of absence. This is me being dramatic with good reason.
Mmoa Ne Me
And for the first time I saw a lion
The Americans always asked me about them
I'd say I didn’t come from a place with roaming animals
No one actually lives with lions
They didn't believe me
And for the first time I saw a lion
The lion saw me back
We stared at each other for three seconds
My eyes filled with fear
Hers with annoyance
She felt as I felt
We both had others telling us about us
For the first time I saw a lion
And the lion saw me back
Emabhackeni
He was sad
Or angry
He was only five, I swear
He is five
He is five with the world on his shoulders
He is five with five mouths to feed
He is five but he graces the walls of hundreds
Hundreds of strangers know of him
Remember his stern face
An old face he had, that five-year-old

He was a strong little man
He looked like a warrior
He looked like a veteran
That five year old breathed war
And breathed out situation
For situation put him there
In that hot sun
Surrounded by strangers
Strangers who will remember
Remember his stern face
An old face he had, that five-year-old

I clapped for him
I cheered for him
I feared for him
He was my blood
He was my brother
For situation put me here and put him there
Maybe he is happy
Maybe he loves every second of it
I cannot be certain
For he had a stern face
I cannot and shall not forget
I shall
Remember his stern face
An old face he had, that five-year-old
Chez Alina
I do not know where I found the audacity to criticize that child and everyone responsible for him.
I do not know why I thought I had the right to feel disgusted.
I swear, the American in me came out that day.
During our visit to South Africa, my greatest test came when the rest of the group and I were blessed with a street performance of Zulu war dances.
There were three children and an older boy all dressed up from head to toe in Zulu attire.
My first instinct was to be intrigued. This was a once in a lifetime performance; never again will I be lucky enough to see this, under the scorching sun, surrounded by friends.
And then I heard his head hit the pavement and saw his facial expressions remain unchanged by the blow.
The American in me came out and I wanted to yell out to the manager to end the show and take the children home to their beds surrounded by love, where they should be. That is where they should be, isn’t it?
Who the hell am I to assume this?
Who the hell am I to overlook the fact that when situation demands a child under ten to perform in the scorching sun for tourists from America, the child performs with no complaints?
Who the hell am I to forget my own situation?
Who the hell am I to forget that a lottery landed me in America and a lottery is keeping me here?
I have never felt so American and disconnected from Africa than I did that hot afternoon in front of Chez Alina in Soweto.
Home is where the heart is so why did my heart hurt?
Is Africa no longer my home?
Sr Anka Eye Me Anka
If I was rich and white in Cape Town
If I had a million dollar house by the beach
If I didn't have to lay my own bed
Or sweep my own floors
Would I too deny apartheid?

Black
Born to suffer
Lord to none
Accustomed to pain
Consumed by all
Kings nonetheless

I am Indeed Here for the Tour, Sir
They said I was a tourist on my own land
They said I didn't actually belong here
I guess they too have been white-washed
I mean, brainwashed
Either way, they kicked me out
I don't belong on my own land
I believed them
I have been white-washed
I mean, brainwashed.

Americanized
Tits out, belly out
I strutted into the neighborhood
Where women don't even walk outside at night
Nobody had to tell me to drape myself

Viva, South Africa, Viva
If you want to hear angels sing,
While they hold on to a burning cigarette
Right outside Mandela's home,
Go to South Africa
A person sleeping on the street in old, raggy-looking clothes.
Amandla!
They say they are your liberators
They come with a god
And their whiteness blinds you to the fact that
You are gods in yourselves
You command the greatest continent on Earth
But you let them in
You welcomed their whiteness
You welcomed it all with open arms
Because that’s what rich men do
Rich men with not a care in the world
And now where is your richness?
Your richness will be buried with the Queen
Your richness will fuel whiteness
For centuries to come you will be the joke
For centuries to come you will lose your godliness
You commanded the greatest continent on Earth
But today,
You live off scraps
You beg whiteness for sustenance
Do you not know that you are gods?
Do you not know the power you wield?
Do you not know your blackness is god?
How can you be blind to this?
Take it back
Take it back
I beg of you to take it back
THE TALE OF TWO CITIES

Austin Basallo
In visiting a country for the first time, I always find myself on a journey that dismantles my previous assumptions about that place. The intensity of these new experiences has ranged vastly from country to country, but it was particularly heightened in South Africa. My group visited only two cities, Johannesburg and Cape Town, and we had very different experiences in each. At times, they felt like two different countries.

Moments after landing in Johannesburg, we were greeted by our tour guide, an older Caucasian man from Cape Town. He would be one of few Caucasians we saw in Johannesburg, where 76% of the 4.4 million population is black.\(^1\) Even after a semester’s worth of discussion, I did not realize how predominant the black-African population is, which I believe is due to a common misconception in the United States: many Americans talk about South Africa as though it is the “white country of Africa” because, for example, a number of white celebrities are from there, but this perception is inaccurate.

During our three days in Johannesburg, we experienced the city’s politicized atmosphere; politically-themed graffiti was all around the city, reminding its occupants of its painful past. Locals we met were always willing to discuss the past and what they wanted out of the future. Everyone was politically aware. Our trip’s theme was the globalization of art, so we met with many artists. We encountered a range of opinions and artistic styles, all of which were politically influenced and complicated. Regardless of methodology, everyone had a similar goal in mind: reminding the people of South Africa where they came from and how to change the future for the better.

The days were hot and pleasant in Johannesburg. Due to its location hundreds of miles from the nearest natural water source, the city had an earth-like palette: brown, orange, and green. The soil, a reddish-orange clay called ultisol, seemed to coat everything. Johannesburg also has more than 6 million trees planted by humans and is heralded as the largest man-made forest in the world. The result is a wonderfully lush forest in and of the city, visually complemented by the red-orange tones of the ultisol. Public spaces were full, with crowded restaurants and bars, and people on every street corner conversing, trading, or simply being, making the city feel alive. But when the evening came, we were constantly reminded by hotel staff, our tour guide, and Professor Mokgosi about just how dangerous Johannesburg...
is at night. This danger derives from decades of oppression, which has forced people to feel as though their only option is to take from a system that has caused them so much pain.

By the time we left Johannesburg, I felt like I had a decent idea of how South Africa works, how to discuss it, and what to think of it. Arriving in Cape Town dismantled my assumption. During the day, Cape Town felt as alive as Johannesburg, but the environment was vastly different. Cape Town's population of 3.7 million is 42% black and 38% white, which was noticeable. The large percentage of white residents in Cape Town is likely the reason why Americans perceive South Africa as a white country. In addition, given Cape Town's wealthier population and history as a critical port, it makes sense that it would hold a prominent place in the nation's consciousness. Wedged between Tabletop Mountain and a cocktail of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, Cape Town looks truly marvelous. The ocean, mountain, and torrential winds give Cape Town a blue, yellow, and gray palette. It felt beachy yet still full of nature.

Although Johannesburg was just as busy, Cape Town felt much more consumerist, with large malls, stand-alone shops, and restaurants far outnumbering the ones I saw in Johannesburg. This delightful consumerist culture might derive from the type of crowd Cape Town naturally attracts. For instance, the nightlife scene was lively. Primarily taking place on Bree Street and two streets that run parallel to it, bars and clubs lined the streets, all filled to the brim. Going out at night for us in Cape Town was safer.

In tracing the history of Johannesburg and Cape Town, one may be able to gain some insight into why these cities are so different today. Johannesburg was founded due to a gold rush in the late 1880s and became South Africa's largest city within three decades. Soon thereafter, it became the financial capital of South Africa, due to its large gold diamond industry. Cape Town, on the other hand, began as an outpost for the Dutch East India Company; ships would stop in the cape to restock on their way to Asia. Settled by the British in the 19th century, Cape Town eventually developed a diverse population and strong economy. By the mid-20th century, however, an oppressive regime separated black and white South Africans in the country overall. What ensued were the decades of struggle and pain for the black population as they were exploited and abused under apartheid. After the walls of apartheid came down, black South Africans were finally treated as “equal.”

I believe that the differences I observed in Johannesburg and Cape Town reflect the ways in which their respective populations negotiate this “equality” in day-to-day life. Geography is a powerful factor in determining the political and economic development of a city, and this becomes evident when comparing the distinct paths of development and progress of Johannesburg and Cape Town.
THREE WOMEN

Leor Freedman
Woman in Blue and Red skirt suit
An African woman in a dress with a purse.
COASTERS, NATIONAL MEMORY, AND NELSON MANDELA

Mariah Young-Jones
One of the first images I saw in South Africa during my visit in January was Nelson Mandela’s face. It was on a coaster in a Johannesburg Airport gift shop. This certainly wouldn’t be my last encounter with that iconic image; throughout my two-week stay in the country, he would appear again and again: on more coasters, in public sites of memory, in graffiti and murals, in sculptures. As I was exposed to South Africa’s tourist industry, I would find him in more gift shops, in museums, in hotels. Not a day went by when the image of Nelson Mandela didn’t appear somewhere at least once.
Undoubtedly, Mandela served a crucial role in the fight against apartheid and in the forging of South Africa as a modern republic. However, he was never the only person fighting this fight. Nor is it fair to say that he was the most important. So what is it about Nelson Mandela that makes the South African public imaginary hold onto images of him? Anti-apartheid movements may or may not have held real attachments to Mandela’s politics, but this still does not explain the fixation with his image. I would like to suggest that through Mandela’s embodied journey from imprisonment to freedom, South Africa could visually portray its greater journey from violent apartheid to a modern, desegregated democracy.

In the 1992 film, *Sarafina!*, which I watched several months before my departure, the titular character—a student and budding anti-apartheid activist living in Soweto—has a small photo of a young Mandela hanging in her bedroom. She speaks to it in moments when she needs encouragement and strength, similar to how a religious worshiper might speak to an idol. *Sarafina!* portrays a moment in South Africa’s history when Mandela and other anti-apartheid leaders were locked away in prison and when uprisings among students were widespread. The memory of Mandela and other political leaders was strong, even as apartheid was growing more brutal. This is when the abstraction of Mandela as a political figure became increasingly important: as long as Mandela remained imprisoned, so, too, metaphorically speaking, did the rest of the country.

There appears to have been an evolution in images of Mandela that mirrors an important transition within South Africa’s politicscape. Representations of a younger Mandela evoke and incite radicalism and even communism. Representations of an older, wiser-looking Mandela reflect his role in leading South Africa into a capitalist democracy; his fierceness and anger seem to fade away, and he appears to exude an almost zen-like stillness and focus. These later images are those that have been most widely circulated on a national and global scale. Thus, the image of Nelson Mandela that has become the most known to us today is a patriarchal, moderate, and even capitalist one. And the move to circulate this version of Mandela’s image not only creates a palatable national narrative but also turns the story of apartheid itself into consumable capital—through postcards, through the tourism industry, and even through beaded coasters.
Layered Photo Composition: Background photo of building, Middle layer is black and white photo of man and top layer is a boxer.
As with any image that seems to be a natural component of the public imaginary, the work of denaturalizing Nelson Mandela's ubiquity in South African art, merchandise, and the national narrative serves to unearth who and what was forgotten along the way. Images of other anti-apartheid activists like Steve Biko, the charismatic and radical leader of the Black Consciousness Movement, continue to get left out of national narratives. Biko is mentioned as a mere aside in nearly all of the major museums. The memory of women anti-apartheid activists like Lillian Ngoyi, Rahima Moosa, and Winnie Mandela are obscured even more.

I do not intend for this analysis to diminish the very real and admirable strides that South Africa has made to overcome institutionalized racism and establish freedom for all of its citizens. But it should always be noted that freedom is a double-edged concept. As artist/activist Zanele Muholi has pointed out in her work, hate crimes against queer folk, especially black lesbians, is widespread, even though pro-LGBTQ legislation has passed. And as I witnessed during my trip, the cities of Johannesburg and Cape Town are incredibly racially segregated, even though wealth and opportunity are theoretically achievable to all; it appeared that the more affluent the neighborhood, the whiter they were.

During my very short stay in South Africa, I encountered artists and activists who are interested in challenging the simplified “freedom” narrative of South Africa and in drawing attention away from the palatable image of Nelson Mandela. A large mural of lesser-known anti-apartheid activists like Steve Biko was highly visible in Cape Town’s District Six—a great example of how a South African community is engaging with its space to reshape the national memory. The “Rhodes Must Fall” movement, devoted to decolonizing institutions through their very names and monuments, is another example. The burgeoning art movements in Cape Town, Johannesburg, and elsewhere seem at the forefront of this project of recrafting national memory. I believe they are re-engaging with South Africa’s past and with its iconographic imagery in order to honor a more inclusive past and to imagine a more inclusive future.
South Africa’s student-led Fees Must Fall (FMF) movement has rang in the new year with a reinvigorated push for economic and racial equality. At the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg, activists occupied the Solomon House during the early January registration period in order to force the university to fulfill their unmet demands from 2015. Last year, the Student Representative Council (SRC) and FMF achieved a 0% fee increase in university fees; however, FMF continues to fight for other improvements. I spoke to Thato Magano from FMF at Wits during our trip to South Africa about the movement’s demands, struggles, and future goals.
Kai Bauer: Could you give an overview of your list of demands for this campaign?

Thato Magano: The Fees Must Fall movement came out of what started as a Wits movement that catapulted into a nationwide movement. It began with the demand of a 0% fee increase. When the presidency had agreed to the 0% fee increase, the movement continued as a nonpartisan student-led movement. We had entered into an agreement with workers on university campuses that [indicated that] while we were fighting for fees not to increase, we were also fighting to end the practice of outsourcing so all workers on university campuses could be insourced and get the benefits of being registered, employed workers for the campus. After the agreement with the university for a 0% fee increase, a week later we had secured the insourcing agreement, and so we internally realized the power of collectively organizing student bodies and workers. The workers have been fighting against outsourcing for the past 15 years. The students have been fighting against fees every year since our democracy [came] into effect 21 years ago. It is only now that we understand the fact that those oppressed and marginalized by the system can work together to have some protected and meaningful systemic change.

This year, we are coming back to say that there should not be any students excluded from university because they cannot afford to pay the fees. There shouldn’t be any students who are not allowed to register because they do not have the R 9,000 [$532]. We are continuing to allow education to be accessible only to the elite.

There are secondary demands around the treatment of workers and students as well as the decolonization of the university and its curricul[um], but our main agenda for this manifestation of the movement is to call for an end to fee increments [and] financial exclusion for those who did not pay last years fees, and to allow those to register who cannot afford it.

KB: As Fees Must Fall continues to decolonize higher education, how does the movement see the future of Wits?

TM: As a movement, we are committed to the notion of the African public university. This university is built on four pillars: the understanding of intersectionality, the understanding of an African epistemological curricul[um], the understanding of black academi[c]-led institutions, and the understanding that the university space itself needs to reflect the continent that it does its business in.
Th[e] notion of intersectionality means that we come to these spaces with different identities; however, our blackness is a unifying factor, so none of us should ever be discounted in our liberation of these spaces.

The second [notion, that of an] African epistemological curricul[um], means that it’s not good enough anymore that 21 years later, we still continuously have a curricul[um] that centers [on] European and American schools of thought. There is enough postcolonial, pre-colonial, and even colonial scholarship that speaks to a different way of entering schools of thought than what is the norm. This supremacist idea of whiteness and Western modernity is something that needs to come to an end and something we need to push as a movement.

From the academic perspective, it is disheartening that in a country where 88% of the population is black, only 3% of PhD holders are black. Institutions of higher learning need to do more to develop and retain black academic talent and produce these scholars. That has not happened over the past 21 years because we have always believed that transformation would take care of itself, but I think what we realize is that the condition of blackness is so precarious that a black student cannot afford the 10 years that it takes to complete an undergraduate degree [and] a PhD degree.

If we’re talking about decolonization, we’re talking about undoing an entire school of thought. That cannot be done only at the level of access; that has to be done at the level of the physical, the operational, and the intellectual. Decolonization is a crosscutting process. If we’re talking about an African university, it embodies the ethos of Africa first—not a reproduction of Europe with African faces.

To learn more about the Wits Fees Must Fall movement, visit www.feesmustfall.joburg
INCARCERATION AND EDUCATION

Emma Hattemer
In Cape Town, we visited Robben Island, where many political activists were imprisoned before the fall of apartheid. Lionel Davis, an extraordinary artist, teacher, and writer who had been imprisoned there, acted as our tour guide. Davis is a captivating speaker, both because of his history and his spirit. He was imprisoned alongside Nelson Mandela and spent seven years on Robben Island. The fact that barely forty years later, he was there, leading us through the prison cell complex, was staggering.

Though he experienced horrors at Robben Island, he framed his time there not as terrible, but as transformative because of the opportunities for education. The South African apartheid government did not intend for its most infamous political prison to educate and empower its inmates, and the prison did not do so—the prisoners did. Davis described how the men took turns lecturing on their particular areas of expertise, from law to art history to Marxism. There was a code among the prisoners with respect to education: it was to be freely shared, even if the man asking to be taught was a warden. Although Robben Island was the weapon of an oppressive and unjust government, the educational opportunities created and pursued by the prisoners fueled hope and provided a sense of freedom. Through arrangements with several nearby universities and schools, some prisoners left Robben Island with multiple college degrees. Davis was able to complete his high school education and develop a passion for art.

In the United States, education is often depicted as the great equalizer that forms the foundation of democratic and fair capitalist societies. People are seen as being able to lift themselves up by their bootstraps, as if success is accomplished solely through hard work and talent. This belief in meritocracy justifies the existence of wealth inequality. In actuality, however, education is not only commodified and segregated but is also denied to those whom it could most benefit. Unfair and limited educational opportunities as well as discriminatory educational practices exist in impoverished and minority communities, creating the prison pipeline. The United States has the largest prison population in the world, with 2.25 million adults and over 50,000 children incarcerated at any given time. These numbers do not include those on parole or those who were formerly incarcerated but forever branded felons. Most are nonviolent offenders, and many are disenfranchised. The racial disparities factoring into rates of incarceration are stark. According to Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*, the US prison system "imprisons a larger percentage of its black population than South Africa did at the height of apartheid." Black men are incarcerated for drug charges at rates up to 50 times greater than those for white men.
The US prison system, like Robben Island, implements retributive justice, where prisoners are punished through incarceration and forced labor. Assuming that incarceration is an acceptable model, if reform is attempted, the US government and citizens must be obligated to re-examine the concept of retributive rather than restorative justice. On Robben Island, education was used to empower. Through education, prisoners could use their captive years productively to reclaim their agency. People in the US, once incarcerated, see even scarcer opportunities to be educated. Incarceration as a practice is far from ideal, but the practice of implementing retributive and racialized incarceration for nonviolent crimes without offering educational opportunities makes for cruel and unusual punishment and is unproductive and shortsighted as well.

When I asked Lionel Davis about current prison conditions in South Africa, he replied, “They are horrific.” The Constitutions of both the US and the Republic of South Africa prioritize freedom, equality, and opportunity. Locking millions away in cages and withholding education is incompatible with those ideals.
ROADTRIP <TRIPTYCH>

rogue fong

Roadtrip (Triptych) is not just a literal journey through South Africa, mirroring the Albert Gallatin Scholars’ itinerary. Nor is it an exclusively spiritual one, either. Roadtrip is a journey between the self and home: how do we deal with our identity—our origin story—when we are expunged from our homeland and forced somewhere else? Considering that Earth is the final home from which we can be expunged, how do we treat others who live in this collective homeland?

When we imprison others (as at Robben Island and in Soweto) and when we force others from their homes, who do we actually imprison? Who do we betray?

We, as humans, start off powerless in the womb and end powerless in the tomb. But somewhere in the middle, we are capable of inflicting great damage, not just upon other people but upon the world itself. I don’t intend to illustrate any rights or wrongs with my triptych; I just want give a space for people to think, and a space for people to take their own Roadtrip contemplating what home means to them.
1963... WELCOME TO SOWETO.
YOUR NEW HOME!
A LONG TIME AGO...
HUMANS, WELCOME TO EARTH,
YOUR NEW HOME.
1962... WELCOME TO ROBBEN ISLAND.
YOUR NEW HOME!
EATING ICE CREAM ON ROBBEN ISLAND

Joshua Tong

During our time on Robben Island, we stopped by a tuck shop to get some snacks. Among the fare offered was ice cream. I really wanted some, but I found it somewhat odd that ice cream would be sold on, well, Robben Island—a former prison colony emblematic of the repression and injustice of apartheid. Like few other foods, ice cream has an intrinsic joy (maybe it’s the association with childhood). It’s not a mourning food. It’s not something you can eat somberly. So on Robben Island, ice cream hardly seems appropriate…that is, if Robben Island is a place of mourning.

What’s remarkable about the Robben Island Museum is that it represents a memorial to both atrocities and—in the words of its website—“the Triumph of the Human Spirit over Adversity.” The attitude of forgiveness and celebration was embodied in the island’s signage as well as in our guide, former prisoner Lionel Davis.

I found this to be a fascinating approach to such dark subject matter, considering our visits to other sites earlier in the trip. We visited a prison on Constitution Hill, where messages etched into the doors of the solitary confinement cells are still readable. We also spent a day at the Apartheid Museum, which takes stock of the effects of apartheid and the work that has been and is still being done to dismantle it. So I arrived to Robben Island expecting a somber reminder of the depths of human depravity.

The island’s museum takes a different tone. Rather than focusing on the horrors of apartheid, it looks at hope instead. It tells about how Nelson Mandela, even after spending close to two decades imprisoned there, strove for unifying South Africa rather than retaliating against the former oppressors. It makes note of the fact that South Africa created a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to try to make amends and heal the strife. Unlike the District Six Museum, which commemorates the injustices done to people deemed lesser under apartheid, the Robben Island Museum is a testament to the country’s belief in a better future. Likewise, Lionel Davis doesn’t hold contempt for his past on the island but instead has a sense of pride for what his country is doing now.
My father, an occasional preacher, tells the following true story to his congregations to discuss the idea of forgiveness: he bought his son (me) an ice cream one day, and his son immediately dropped it. He continues with the following scenarios: if he were to make his son clean up the ice cream, that would be justice. If he were to clean it up for his son, that would be mercy. And if he were to clean it up for his son and buy him a second ice cream, that would be grace.

Grace was the attitude espoused by Robben Island and the people we met there; the ugly history of the island would not be what defined them. It would be so easy for someone like Lionel Davis to hate that place and the people who put him there, but instead he expressed grace and forgiveness. It made me think that maybe the ultimate subversion is to replace despair with hope, to transform a place designed to break people into one that celebrates those who refused to give in.

At the tuck shop, I asked Daryl, who would remain our guide throughout our time in South Africa, whether it would be appropriate to get an ice cream. He assured me that it would be. I ended up getting a ginger beer (ice cream and I tend to end messily, per my father’s illustration), but the sentiment stayed with me.
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Capital: Quito | Population: 15.7m
Area: 109k | Language: Spanish
Area Code: +593 | Currency: USD
Paradise: Teaching Environmental Pride in the Galápagos

Dominique Raboin
“Welcome to paradise!”

Our tour guides, dressed in the standard National Park Ranger khaki shorts and patched vest, offered that greeting to us at the airport in San Cristobal, the first island of our journey through the Galápagos archipelago. My New York winter skin reflected the sunlight, (nearly) blinding my travel companions. I reached for my sunscreen. If paradise feels aggressively hot, perplexingly bright, and chokingly dusty, then we had arrived.

Physical discomfort aside, I couldn’t have been more thrilled to take the first steps of my adventure on the islands, considering that the Galápagos had long been praised in my biology courses as having the “gold standard” in conservation. A combination of strict environmental legislation, UNESCO World Heritage status, and Charles Darwin’s legacy paved the way for immaculate preservation of the Galápagos’s flora and fauna. These preservation efforts are unlike those of any other place on Earth, and I soon learned that the distinction of “gold standard” is to be credited to the environmental pride of the local population.

As our island adventure commenced, it wasn’t the beautiful scenery that most intrigued me but rather our environment-enthused tour guides. Zambo, Fernando, and Javier guided us from island to island, educating us about the ecosystem, drawing our attention to the abundant wildlife, and feeding us organically grown vegetables from their gardens. Each of them was overjoyed to be guiding us, teaching us, and exploring their home with us. They had infinite wisdom and knowledge that opened doors to discovery, although none of them looked old enough to behold such sagacity.

Where did their environmental pride originate? Growing up in paradise can’t hurt, but then there is the revolutionary environment-based education system. The island school system serves around 7,500 students through an assembly of 33 private and public schools on four separate islands. Although the Galápagos’ student population is merely a fraction of New York City’s, its education plan is something to brag about.
In 1998, Ecuador created the Galápagos Special Law in an attempt to curb immigration to the islands and regain an environmental hold on the Galápagos National Park. This piece of legislation is famous for its strict regulations surrounding immigration and emigration, property rights, and agricultural restrictions. It’s a little known fact outside of the Galápagos that the legislation also included mandates for the education system. The Special Law called for a heavy integration of environmental preservation and conservation within the school curriculum for every age and grade. The simple yet groundbreaking goal of the Galápagos educational system was to inspire environmental consciousness in every student.

Our tour guides confirmed this integration of environmental education by recalling their favorite school project. In first grade, each student was assigned to care for an individual Galápagos giant tortoise. Although these tortoises lived in either a breeding center or nature preserve, the students were expected to regularly visit and track the progress of their tortoises for six years. This long-term project not only taught students about the behavioral ecology of the Galápagos’s most famed endemic animal but also instilled a sense of pride in their culture, habitat, and environment.

Despite this bold approach to education, the Galápagos has struggled with educational technology and infrastructure. My classmates and I saw firsthand the dilapidated schoolhouses in which children were expected to learn. Other complaints about the Galápagos educational system include poorly trained teachers and a curriculum that doesn’t prepare students for the local workplace or for university acceptance. Fortunately, education in the Galápagos has taken a positive turn since a curriculum overhaul in 2006, which sought to develop teacher capacity and incorporate local resources and demands—including the Galápagos' environmental capital.

After spending two weeks with our tour guides, I came to believe that the residents’ loyalty to the islands stems from environmental pride. Near the end of our adventure, I learned that almost every single Galápagueño chooses this tiny and remote home over the accessibility of the rest of the world. One of our tour guides told me that it’s common for financially stable Galápagos youths to travel around the world before beginning their independent adult lives. Growing up in a series of small islands, there is a feeling of needing to go off exploring for an extended period of time. Those who leave are satisfied to experience extraordinary places abroad, but, as our tour guide assured me, “They have to come home to the Galápagos. There isn’t any other place like it on Earth.”

Those lucky enough to be born in the Galápagos absolutely believe they live in paradise. Perhaps if the rest of the world were to learn environmental pride, the Galápagos wouldn’t be the only place with a “gold standard” in conservation.
By the time of my trip to the Galápagos, I had been living in New York City long enough to forget what it was like to hear nature instead of cars. Despite growing up in a small, touristy, suburban town in Pennsylvania, where cattle farms lay a few miles away and where you could see the stars at night, I was always mesmerized by cities. I was attracted to the idea of living in New York City for college mainly because I felt like a city dweller stuck in the country. But I found something so overwhelming and intoxicating about the pure environment of the Galápagos Islands. It was nothing like where I’d grown up, and nothing like the rural land I had expected. Spending over a week there was like setting foot on an adventure through a fairytale land where the water is pristine, animals and people coexist without fear, and the internet is so slow that people are forced to spend quality time face-to-face without the distraction of Smartphones. It truly had a magical air around it.

On San Cristóbal Island, we stayed at a family-owned bed and breakfast called Casa de Nelly, where I met Ivan, the son of Nelly. The way he spoke about his home really struck me. He said that he watched the sunset from the balcony of the hotel every night, and he raved about its beauty. Considering that I had always disliked the suburban town where I grew up, I found his affection for his home fascinating. Our reaction to seeing the sunset for the first time was the same as Ivan’s, and he never grew tired of the routine. This was the moment I realized that some people think differently about their homes than I do.

In New York City, I don’t think people put much thought into the beauty of their city on a daily basis. We New Yorkers, too absorbed in our own lives, ignore the beauty that is right in front of us. We are all in a rush to be somewhere, annoyed with the guy walking too slowly in front of us down Broadway, or restlessly standing in the long rush hour coffee line. And there isn’t much communal effort to keep our city as clean as possible, to make it beautiful for its bustling population. Small bits of trash line the streets, especially after a windy night. Recycling is possible, but when most are on the go and can’t find a recycling can, they will just throw their recyclables into the closest garbage can.
The same cannot be said for the Galápagos Islands, and it made perfect sense to me why Galápagueños would want to keep such a beautiful place free of pollution. Our tour guide Alex challenged us to use the same water bottle for the duration of the trip and to see how long it would take until we lost it, cracked it, or got it dirty. Not many of us had an intact or usable water bottle by the end of the trip. We weren't accustomed to being conservative with our waste output. We New Yorkers are used to having a place to buy a plastic water bottle within 10 feet of a place to throw it away. But in the Galápagos, sustainability is mandatory; the life and diversity of the Galápagos depends on it. Galápagueños learn these practices from a young age in school and grow up applying them in their daily lives.

I can only imagine how the US would be if everyone felt the way Ivan does about where they lived. Although not everyone dislikes where they grew up, many Americans strive to get away from their roots and branch out to new places, especially during college. Thoughts about home slowly fade as we immerse ourselves in a new environment. This gives us the chance to embrace a new place and look at it from a fresh perspective. Those who have become comfortable with life in New York still have plenty of complaints about this bustling city: crowded streets, long coffee lines, garbage bags piling up on the sidewalks. It isn't very often that New Yorkers stop to look at how beautiful the city really can be. For instance, there are few stars to be seen, but one can argue that the city skyline is just as stunning as and even brighter than any constellation. Traveling to the Galápagos opened my eyes and made me more aware of everyday natural phenomena like this and helped me realize the ways that New York City’s beauty can be appreciated and preserved.
Non-human animals’ physical diversity is viewed as, among other things, a function of sexual selection. It would be politically problematic to posit the same about humans. Furthermore, whereas human diversity is often seen as politically fraught, diversity in non-human animals is seen as a photo opportunity. Humans’ first visual impressions of a variety of species are indicative of the great divide humans place between themselves and non-human animals.

Armed with our cameras and this concept, we approached this project examining two incredibly diverse locations: the Galápagos Islands and New York City—the former having the greatest range of non-human animals on Earth, and the latter, overwhelmed by Earth’s hegemonic species.

Through this simple photography project, we observed details of non-human diversity in the Galápagos and of human diversity in New York City, attempting to highlight and question the fundamental differences between how non-human and human physical diversity is perceived. Most of all, we examined how these differences represent an aspect of humanity’s ideological separation of themselves and the kingdom Animalia.

We invite you to see if you can identify which human subjects gave us permission to photograph them. Think about your boundaries when being photographed or when photographing others. Do you make these same considerations when photographing animals? We also ask you to question why these boundaries exist, if they should exist, and ways they are expressed outside of visual representation.
GALÁPAGOS GOING: A FLASH FICTION INTERPRETATION OF FLOREANA

Ben Talarico
You stood on the sinkhole ledge. The moon was so bright that I could see the Pilsner logo on your bottle. We were bored. We were high. No one knew that we had snuck out of our cabin on a dare—my dare—for you to a) walk the two-kilometer path out of Puerto Velazco Ibarra, b) climb the 784 steps to the mountain crest, and c) stand atop the wooden fence that prevents tourists from falling to their death. Just a second on the fence-top, I had egged. No hands! But it had been more than two minutes. You ignored my pleas. You refused to come down.

Glass shattered on the forest floor a thousand feet below us. It echoed. I didn’t know that a shatter could echo. You had chucked your empty bottle into the sinkhole, extending your arm as we had been taught in Little League. Your feet slipped. I gasped. But you didn’t fall. In solidarity, and perhaps to get your attention, I threw my half-full Pilsner over the fence. Fuck, I yelled, I don’t think I threw it as far as you. My flattery wasn’t worth your attention. You just stood there, arms at your side, peering out over the Scalesia.

I thought of a poem I had read in a paperback anthology earlier that day on the beach: “With Blue - uncertain - stumbling Buzz -/Between the light - and me - /And then the Windows failed - and then/I could not see to see.” You spoke that last line. I hadn’t realized that I was reciting it out loud with you until you interrupted me. Your first words since coming here.

Hey, I said, how the fuck do you know that poem?

Everyone fucking knows that poem, you said. It’s like, the poem that everyone recites at funerals.

That sounds like a fucking lie, I said. Where the fuck did you hear that?

HuffPo, you responded. It was like, a list or some shit. “Top 10 poems to read at a funeral.”

Well, if you know so much shit, I said, then can you tell me who wrote it?

That’s obvious, you said, still facing the empty sinkhole. Edgar Allen Poe.
I have to admit that I was jealous of your memory, photographic in its precision. But just because you had a good memory did not mean that you had common sense. I failed to mention that you were on your third bottle of Pilsner. You stepped closer to the edge of the fence.

We had stood in this exact place earlier that day. We had been joking about the ghost of the Baroness, how she sauntered between the ancient Scalesia trees, canopies spread like broccoli. I couldn't be in our cabin alone, believing that she might be hiding behind the bathroom door or sleeping beneath my bed. I imagined her slinking through my open window at night, her porcelain hand reaching towards my neck, her skin as translucent as her white lace nightie. They say a man pushed her into the sinkhole.

It must’ve been like that scene in *Vertigo*—you know the one—when Kim Novak races to the top of the Mission San Juan Batista, only to fall and smash her skull on the adobe. Some nun hiding in the shadows startled her. I wondered what would be the Galapagos equivalent of that creepy nun (a redundant concept, I realize; all nuns are, to some extent, creepy.). What if an iguana slithered up your leg? A finch landed on your shoulder? Hell, how about a sea lion schlepping all 300 kilograms of blubber up to the top?

Or maybe you didn't need nature's assistance.

Standing there, scratching my legs—legs that now resembled two bloody carcasses—I thought about what would happen to your body if you fell. Not after it had hit the ground. No. I imagined what it would feel like to free fall, be the slave of gravitational force. Would it be like jumping onto a moving elevator or sitting on a crashing plane? Would your stomach float up past your chest, to your neck? Then I got it: what you would feel when barreling towards the earth must be like when those people who, protesting an injustice, are confronted by the merciless swing of a police baton: a moment when you recognize that, immortal as you always felt, your fate was always the plaything of Mother Nature.
I assume you know of Charles Darwin. Perhaps you were first introduced to him by your wizened biology teacher in elementary school. When I think of Darwin, images of a long grey beard, a boat, and finches immediately come to mind. What do you think of? Before you read any further, I will make the assumption that you have heard of the Galápagos Islands.

Darwin published a book, *Voyage of the Beagle*, in 1839, three years after his five-year voyage at sea. It catalogues his observations and theories and is in a sense a “polished” travel journal. I pulled quotes from *Voyage of the Beagle* and wrote responses inspired from my journey to the Galápagos Archipelago in January 2016, 177 years after Darwin’s.
I
Nothing could be less inviting than the first appearance. A broken field of black basaltic lava is everywhere covered by a stunted brushwood, which shows little signs of life.

There was nothing more beautiful than seeing those islands bleed into view. I left a face imprint on the airplane window.

II
The breastplate roasted […], with flesh attached to it, is very good; and the young tortoises make excellent soup but otherwise the meat to my taste is very indifferent.

It is now a heinous crime to kill a tortoise. But Zambo said when his Mom was young, she ate tortoise.

III
A few years since, the sailors belonging to a sealing-vessel murdered their captain in this quiet spot and we saw his skull lying among the bushes.

Beware the Baroness ghost on Floreana Island. She comes to bachelors’ bedrooms and tugs on their feet. One night we told spooky stories on Playa Negra while a sea turtle crawled from sea to shore.

IV
It is a hideous looking creature, of a dirty black colour, stupid and sluggish in its movements. They are not at all timorous: when attentively watching anyone, they curl their tails, and raising themselves on their front legs, nod their heads vertically, with a quick movement, and try to look very fierce.

Zach is an expert on marine and land iguanas. They nod their heads as if they have a nervous twitch or something, cursed to live on black lava.

V
Of shells, there are a considerable number of land kinds, all of which, I believe are confined to this archipelago.

No shells to bring back. Fernando shook his head at Grace when she picked up a broken sand dollar. Every piece counts.

VI
The black sand felt much hotter, so that even in thick boots it was quite disagreeable to walk over it.

Our tour guides strongly advised us to wear closed-toe shoes with laces. They went barefoot.
VII

I was always amused when overtaking one of these great monsters [a tortoise], as it was quietly pacing along, to see how suddenly, the instant I passed, it would draw in its head and legs, and uttering a deep hiss fall to the ground with a heavy sound, as if struck dead. I frequently got on their backs, and then giving a few raps on the hinder parts of their shells, they would rise up and walk away; – but I found it very difficult to keep my balance.7

You must maintain a six-foot or two-meter distance from the animals. We took selfies with the tortoises. I preferred the tortoises on Floreana Island.
Extreme tameness…is common to all the terrestrial species…A gun is here superfluous; for with the muzzle I pushed a hawk off the branch of a tree.\textsuperscript{8}

The baby sea lion liked our toes. The yellow warbler hovered above my outstretched hand. The sea turtle and I came up for air together. The terrestrial species can break the six-foot rule (we stuck our selfie-sticks and go-pros too close to the penguins once).

I several times caught this same lizard… and as often as I threw it in [the water], it returned… Perhaps this singular piece of apparent stupidity may be accounted for by the circumstance, that this reptile has no enemy whatever on shore, whereas at sea it must often fall a prey to the numerous sharks. Hence, probably, urged by a fixed and hereditary instinct that the shore is its place of safety, whatever the emergency may be, it there takes refuge.\textsuperscript{9}

I felt like that lizard when I was thrown back into Manhattan. The Galápagos are my refuge from the city. But I can't return. Too expensive, and I am dutifully responsible to numerous sharks at home.

This archipelago seems to be a little world within itself.\textsuperscript{10}

We all had different favorite islands. Mine is San Cristobal. I think Stella's is too. Zambo likes “Isabela La Bella.” We met two boys, a bit younger than us. Ivan and Rashid. The former native to San Cristobal, the latter to Floreana. They're both Galápagueños but are islands unto themselves.

When I first read Darwin's \textit{Voyage of the Beagle}, I missed many details. When I reread it upon my return home, I saw that he, too, noticed the marina iguana's head-twitching, the birds' ambivalence towards humans, and the tortoises' hiss. The 177-year gap between us dissolved.
CUBA

Capital: Havana | Population: 11.3m
Area: 42k | Language: Spanish
Area Code: +53 | Currency: Cuban Peso
“WELL, YOU’RE SAFE AND SOUND NOW, BACK IN GOOD OLD 1955”

Orli Major

Much like sex, nostalgia sells. Americans are obsessed with nostalgia: we wear the clothing of the past, play the games of our youth, and devour television shows and movies that are set in previous eras. The universe of social media—the center of our contemporary culture—highlights our nostalgia obsession: here’s a photo of me last week, us two years ago, you as a baby #tbt.

Before leaving for Cuba, nearly everyone I spoke with exclaimed that it was such a great time to visit: “You’re going while it’s still frozen in time!” “The Chevys!” “Before everything changes!”

These excited statements were starkly contrasted by the less frequent but just as strong declarations: “Cuba is not stuck in the fifties.” “They watch the same TV shows that we do.” “People in Cuba use Facebook.”

After arriving in Havana, it quickly became clear that both sides of the argument held up. The new Justin Bieber album blasted from rudimentary mp3 players perched atop decrepit Chevy dashboards. A man wore a flat-brimmed New York Yankees cap. Skinny jeans with chains rolled by. A horse pulled a wagon filled with fresh produce.

Even though I understood that people in Havana are up-to-date with State-side culture, I continued to feel the pull of nostalgia. As a tourist, I found Havana to be so wonderful because it is stuck in the past: people don’t walk around with iPhones adhered to their palms and their eyes glued to screens, and though there are modern Kias on Cuban roads, the majority of the cars are from the 1950s. So was it wrong of me to expect Don Draper to pull up at any moment in his red Chrysler convertible?
Aeropuerto Internacional José Martí, January 11, 2016
Avenida de la Independencia, January 20, 2016
Plaza de la Revolución, January 12, 2016
A road in cube. There are old fashioned cars and two people on a motorcycle.
Three people sitting in an old fashioned car. (cast of show "Mad Men")
THE AMBASSADOR FOR CUBA

Alex Hansen
One would expect a trip abroad to involve some ambassadorship for one’s home country. This is particularly true for trips involving a large group from an educational institution, like ours was. Those who make such a trip happen want the participants to represent themselves well, which thus reflects well on their school and their country. The participants think about how to talk about their home country, information they would like to share and emphasize, and commonalities they likely share with people in the host country. But what a traveler might not expect is to become an ambassador for the host country.

I did imagine that there would be a fair amount of exchange during our trip to Cuba. Popular thought in the United States suggests that Cubans have little to no access to the outside world. Even after spending a semester learning about Cuba and the realities of life there, some part of me still held on to the fiction of an uninformed Cuban populace, and I expected that I would spend a fair amount of time answering questions about the US.

What I found from conversations with Cubans in Cuba, however, is that they are extremely informed about the state of life and current politics in the US. They asked us our opinions about current politics, particularly about Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders, and about our general opinion of Cuba. I felt awkward at times, realizing that few of the people I know in the US know anything about Cuban politics. Before Obama announced the normalizing of relations between the two countries, I doubt most of the people I know had even considered Cuba beyond the mention of the Bay of Pigs in a high school social studies textbook. Thus, on my return to the United States, I found myself acting as an ambassador for Cuba. For example, here is a conversation I have begun many times since returning:

—You know, Cuba actually has an incredible education system. Their entire population is literate.

—Really? But is it worth it if they’re trapped there? What’s the point if they have no freedom to use their knowledge?
I felt unequipped to answer such questions; Cuba is a complicated place, just as any country is, and I spent just two weeks there. On the other hand, most Americans I talk to day-to-day have significantly less knowledge and fewer reasons to learn about Cuba than I did. Our educational system and our media have failed to assist the average person in the US with learning about Cuba. As someone who has had the privilege of studying and visiting it, I feel a responsibility to attempt to explain—and often, defend—it. Most people in the US are uninformed, confused, or misinformed about Cuba, which usually leads them to have an overall negative opinion about Cuba. The US government’s policies toward Cuba have also influenced this opinion, though Obama’s recent policies are certainly helping to improve Americans’ perceptions.

This often-negative opinion of Cuba and its government is the reason why I usually bring up the country’s literacy rate in my conversations. I still find it astounding that Cuba’s population is 100% literate. Despite our country’s comparative wealth, our policies and our system of governing have not been able to help us achieve this feat; in the US, 14% of the population is illiterate. Obviously, these are two very different countries with very different histories and circumstances, but Cuba has achieved a great deal while lacking significant resources.

This does not mean, of course, that Cuba is beyond criticism; every country has flaws, and these should be carefully considered and addressed when discussing policy. Yet, when the gut reaction of most Americans is to label Cuba as “wrong” or “bad” because they believe that communism or socialism is inherently wrong or bad, I think it is important to emphasize Cuba’s accomplishments. In addition to achieving 0% illiteracy, Cuba has had total health care coverage and has discovered a vaccine for lung cancer since becoming a socialist country. People can debate the longevity of socialism or its overall ethics, but they cannot deny such accomplishments.

While I am certainly not the ideal ambassador for Cuba—I am not even close to being Cuban or understanding what it means to live there—I will continue to emphasize the positive ways in which Cuba has changed due to socialism, in an attempt to bring a more balanced perspective to my friends’ and family’s understanding of the country and to broaden and complicate their beliefs and ideas. At the same time, I will not deny the aspects of life that dissatisfy many Cubans, nor will I assert that I have the final word on Cuba—I spent only two weeks there, after all, so my perspective is limited. No country is simple, so one’s understanding of a country shouldn’t be simple either.
Tourist in Cuba

Michael Frazier, Jr.

Stumbling in the sweltering dark
the flash from my phone illuminates
a shadow slipping through my shadow
a lizard
stuck-still, closed-mouth smiling
body curved, a question mark
challenging me.

I tip-toe around the intruder
inch towards the bathroom
but the flash caught two shadows
mocking me in the corner.

A black beetle
the size of a peso and
the lizard still there
preparing to salsa to a rhythm
I couldn’t hear.

In that moment
I didn’t know who I despised more:
the native bug who would crawl over my territory or
the lizard who would Congo-line up the dancehall of my legs.

I know
I’m being dramatic but
they know
they shouldn’t be here
on this resort
that’s lush with the uninhabited tangles of green dollars
rum gleaming in barrels like treasure
bundles of cacao so rich
the Atlantic
beats itself shapeless

my local tour guide even told me

the land is seasick with the cloying sweetness
of a land reliant on sugar
that’s so White
it never leaves.

Seems like everyone’s a poet here!

But don’t they know
a proper vacation needs the foreign
pushed outside in front of a pink sun-faded dilapidated building
next to a Caribbean blue 50s convertible with
cigars propped in-between their lips
so I can capture them
in a photo?

The lizard swallowed the beetle whole

and the whole of me sighed in relief

one less primitive pest
but the lizard was set
on staying where it was
I swore the thing would’ve devoured me.

Wouldn’t you be afraid of something
that makes a home out of someone’s
vacation?
Statement, Post-Poem

I wrote “Tourist in Cuba” while staying at our hotel/cabins in Baracoa, Cuba, with the Americas Scholars. I woke around 6:00 AM one day to watch the sunrise over by the cove. As I was getting ready to go out, I saw a beetle by my dresser. I ignored it until I saw the lizard next to it, which startled me. *They shouldn’t be here*, I thought. When the lizard ate the beetle, slurping down the last leg, I knew it was time for me to leave and start my morning.

After realizing I had seen this natural part of life as unnatural, I couldn’t help but apply this to the act of being in Cuba on a privileged trip where we are the strangers in this country. I had also been fascinated by the idea of beauty and how one captures beauty abroad as opposed to at home: how nature morphs into a product of consumerism, and how desolation becomes fascinating and attractive, in a way.

Though this poem focuses on tourism, it speaks to the root causes of colonization (especially in the Caribbean): a sense of entitlement, racial supremacy, and underlying misperceived fear. I have thus embedded all of these contentious themes into an entitled tourist on vacation.
Ever since Barack Obama and Raul Castro announced the normalization of relations between the US and Cuba in December 2014, there have been countless articles written about the (supposedly) isolated island nation. After visiting Cuba in January 2016, I’ve realized that most of the articles are factually incorrect, and I am disturbed by the singular image they present of Cuba. However, my intent in this piece is not to correct the description of Cuba created by other writers, nor to offer an alternative and factual image of Cuba. As the aforementioned articles prove, it is impossible to capture an entire country in one piece of writing. Instead, what follows are images, events, tastes, and feelings I experienced during my two weeks in Cuba.
1. **Color.** Though European influence is evident in the architecture, the vast majority of the buildings in Havana are painted vibrant Caribbean colors. Some buildings are painted a variety of hues, all of which have faded together with age. As pleasing as the island-y colors are to the northeastern's eye, upon closer examination, even the most vibrant of paint jobs do not cover Havana's decay.

2. **White rice.** I don't think I went more than eight hours without ingesting rice while in Cuba. The vegetarian options consisted of carb-overloads. At one meal, Liz was served a mound of white rice so large and round, it looked like an igloo.

3. **Sugar.** If there’s one flavor I couldn’t get out of my mouth in Cuba, it was sugar. At the bottom of every mojito (and there were a lot of mojitos) was a mountain-sized pile of pure granulated sugar.

4. **Colectivos.** Many stereotypes Americans have about Cuba are unfounded; therefore, I was surprised to see just how many 1950s cars there are driving around Havana. In fact, one of my favorite memories from the trip is of riding along the Malecón in an old car with broken windows and a back seat upholstered in brocade.

5. **Rolls.** Back to the subject of food: I can’t think about Cuba without being reminded of the identical, bright-white, oval-shaped, bland rolls served at every restaurant, café, and hotel in Havana.

6. **Young Fidel.** The same image of a youthful Fidel Castro sporting a long pointy beard appears on murals, government-sponsored billboards, and banners around the city, making me wonder: has Fidel had his photo taken since the Revolution?

7. **Old Raul.** Sadly, unlike his brother Fidel, the current Cuban president, Raul, is not immortalized as a young man. Next to nearly every rendering of the youthful Fidel is a picture of Raul in his later years—a strange sight, especially considering that Raul is the younger brother.
8. **José Marti.** While on the subject of illustrious (male) Cubans, it would be remiss not to mention José Marti. Undoubtedly the most adored man in Cuba, Marti’s face is equally—if not more—unavoidable than Fidel's. There are countless statues of Marti, and the airport in Havana is named after the national hero, too. After spending two weeks in the land of Marti, I was shocked to return home and find out that the poet-turned-revolutionary is not a household name in the US.

9. **The Gulf of Mexico.** The most notable feature of the sea in Cuba is one of lack. Specifically, there are so few boats allowed off the coast of Cuba that the sea often seems entirely empty. However, cruise ships have recently begun docking in Havana’s port. One day our taxi driver stopped the car to take a picture of the ships, saying it was a new sight in Cuba.

10. **John Lennon.** Why is there a John Lennon Park in Havana? Who knows! In said park sits a statue of the celebrated Beatle, and by said statue stands a woman whose job it is to be the keeper of John Lennon-the-statue's glasses: when a tourist bus arrives, she places the glasses on the statue, and she removes them once the visitors depart. Across the street from the park is the Yellow Submarine Bar, where we watched a pretty decent Beatles cover band.

11. **Pesos.** There are two currencies in Cuba. One is worth far less than the other, and it’s not for tourists. Sometimes both currencies are referred to as pesos. Too confusing to explain.

12. **Three-hour lunches.** I cannot say with certainty that Cubans partake in lengthy lunches, but as a tourist, I never ate a lunch that took less than two hours. Unfortunately, the food was rarely worth waiting for.

13. **The scar on my palm.** My biggest expense in Cuba was, without doubt, was bottled water; the tap water is entirely undrinkable, and even the most well adjusted traveler would not dare risk drinking from the sink. I don’t think it is unreasonable to say that we can learn a lot about Cuba through the water situation. There is one brand (whose slogan is “the best water in Cuba”) and even the smaller of its two sizes costs a good .50 CUC more than an alcoholic beverage. Oh, and the scar? That’s from the impossible-to-open water bottle tops that are certainly made out of the world’s sharpest plastic.
14. **The Marxist wearing an Apple watch.** Cuba is full of contradictions. For example, when we talked politics with a community-building group, one man self-identified as a Marxist but wore an ultra-expensive Apple watch.

15. **Knee-deep rainwater.** One night, after hours of torrential rain, we returned to our hotel to find that the sea had overflowed and flooded the street. We walked through water that was at least a foot deep or more in some areas.

16. **Crazy campuses.** We visited two colleges in Havana. The University of Havana, located in the city, is grand, with its large marble steps and massive banyan trees inside bench-lined courtyards. ISA, the art institute, is located on an old country club with sprawling lawns that were previously a golf course.
“In the universe there are things that are known, and things that are unknown, and in between, there are doors”
—William Blake

What are the liminal spaces that exist between what we understand as reality and what is truly happening behind these walls of perception? Walking through Havana, Cuba, I was struck by the beauty of its architecture, be it a well kept, colorful building or the remnants of a neoclassical façade. And these buildings weren’t museums or governmental buildings; they were ordinary houses—places ordinary people walk in and out of every day.

I felt incredibly welcomed in the homes and spaces of several Cubans during our trip. Yet the disparity between the warmth of the people and the visual disintegration of the buildings they lived in troubled me. Every day in Havana, approximately three houses collapse, creating a hazard not only to those living inside but also to anyone in the area. What does it mean when people die not from homelessness but from living in their own homes? Is this the government’s responsibility? How has the embargo contributed to these conditions?

I believe the only way to truly understand a place, culture, or society is through its people. This is especially important when examining Cuba; due to its history of isolation from the United States, a lack of information can easily create stereotypes about its situation. This project is thus an exploration of understanding what lies beyond the walls. It also explores bigger questions such as the government’s role in eliminating homelessness while simultaneously disengaging with restoration work.
Welcome to “Cuba”

Liz Yates
On our way back to Santiago de Cuba from Baracoa, we stopped at a rest stop in the early afternoon. We stretched our legs and used the bathroom and got something to drink, just as most people do at rest stops. Then we climbed onto a raised wooden platform and looked out at Guantanamo Bay. Some of us rented binoculars to see the prison while the rest lazily sipped sodas. When I returned to the US, the memory of this rest stop kept returning to me. It was bizarre to be in an environment so peaceful and beautiful while looking at a nearby place of known suffering, and I kept wondering who visits the rest stop. Regular Cubans might stop there to use the restroom, but do they go up on the platform? Do they rent binoculars to look out at a prison that is not theirs? What about tourists from other countries, like many of the middle-aged Europeans who stayed at our hotel? Do they have any interest in seeing a prison full of America’s “enemies”?

During my time in Cuba, it seemed like there was a whole separate infrastructure accessible only to tourists, from medical centers to hotels to private taxis. It was weird to be an American tourist in Cuba. We drew a lot of attention, perhaps because we were in a large group, or because we are Americans, or because we are young. For instance, when we went to dance at a Pena, some Cubans filmed us on their phones. I can only hope, for my own dignity, that few people will be interested in videos of American college students dancing! And Americans love to say that Cuba is a world away, even though it’s only 90 miles off the coast of Florida, but our resort on the outskirts of Santiago did not seem unfamiliar. It was so Americanized, in fact, that we joked that we were in Miami. “I don’t know if I want to go into Cuba tonight,” I said to a classmate.
Some of these separate experiences of tourists are due to the relative expense of eating in a private restaurant or staying in a hotel, but not all of it. As with all tourist groups in Cuba, our tour organizers insisted that we ride in a coach bus. When we first got onto our bus at the airport, we were told to remember its number. I didn’t even try, thinking, “Like I’ll need that!” I figured I would just remember what our bus looked like: white and blue with the word “Transtur” across the side. As it turned out, almost all of the tourist buses look the same! If the size of our group did not already mark us clearly as tourists, the bus announced our status wherever we went. It felt paradoxical to go to a country to experience it, only to travel everywhere separately from its people. While riding in Bus #4866, I would look out the window at Cubans in the city buses, which were always packed. Sometimes I made eye contact with passengers and imagined how I must look, sitting in a comfortable seat in an air-conditioned bus while they were squished between too many people.

In addition to having these separate experiences, much of what we saw in Cuba felt carefully curated, and the people we met seemed overly aware that we were Americans. At an organization called ICAP, a Cuban woman explained that ICAP’s work is to collect and maintain friends around in the world. One of my classmates, wondering if this was a metaphor for diplomacy, asked what ICAP’s mission statement is, and the woman retorted, “You don’t have a mission statement for friendship, do you?” Rather than leaving the organization with a greater understanding of and support for Cuba’s international relations, we left feeling bewildered and shut out.
We also visited a textile cooperative that made uniforms, housewares, and costumes. When we toured the factory, they showed us a couple of dreary windowless rooms where workers sat in rows at sewing machines. The decorations in the factory included a mannequin wearing a chef’s uniform, a photograph of Fidel Castro in fatigues, and a bust of José Martí. After a brief tour, the workers joined us in the entrance hall, where speakers blasted reggaeton and where we were all served shots of rum—at nine the morning! While our group hesitated to do anything, the workers began to drink and dance. Eventually, many of us joined in, drinking and laughing together for a few songs while the group consumed the rum and ham-and-cheese hors d’oeuvres. Then, the music ended and we were swept out the door and back onto our Transtur bus. As we drove away, the factory workers stood on the sidewalk and waved. We waved back, and with that, we were gone. We didn’t really get to know the cooperative or the workers at all. We didn’t learn what their daily lives were like, or whether they liked their jobs, or even what their names were. We were merely shown their workplace, and then we danced with them.

When people ask about my experience in Cuba, they most often don’t want to hear about the separate infrastructure for tourists. They want to hear about the things they expect: the rum, the antique cars, the baseball. People want to hear about what they are familiar with, and in many ways the Cuban tourism industry caters to this desire.
¿Qué puedes comprar con tres pesos?
En Argentina, una cuarta parte de una empanada.
En Uruguay, un alfajor negro o un bolsa de palomitas.
En Chile, quizás un carmelito y no mucho más.
En Cuba, cinco sándwiches en un juego de béisbol, o un viaje en taxi, dependiendo quién seas.

Qué puedes comprar en Habana con tres pesos?
Con tres pesos, puedes comprar quince rebanadas de jamón, o una piña y tres frutas bombas, o seis bolas de helado, pero no puedes comprar pintura para tu casa, o tornillos para fijar la puerta, o camas seguras para tus niños.

What can you buy with three pesos?
In Argentina, one fourth of an empanada.
In Uruguay, An alfajor made of dark chocolate or a small bag of popcorn.
In Chile, maybe a small piece of candy and not much more.
In Cuba, five sandwiches at a baseball game or one short trip in a taxi, depending on who you are and how you’re paying.

What can you buy in Havana with three pesos?
With three pesos, you can buy fifteen slices of ham or a pineapple and three papayas or six scoops of ice cream, but you can’t buy paint for your house or screws to fix your door or safe beds for your children.
En Miami, no puedes comprar nada con tres pesos. Es demasiado caro, demasiado lujo. De todos modos, tus pesos no funcionan.

¿Es mejor la vida allí? ¿Peor? Piensas en la revolución. Patria o muerte, Patria o muerte.

In Miami, you can’t buy anything with just three pesos. It’s too expensive, too luxurious, and your pesos don’t work anyway, but as long as you have someone to vouch for you, to find you a job, you’ll be alright. In one year, you’ll have a passport and life will be something different. At least that’s what you’re promised.

Is life better there? Or here? Where is there? Where is here? Piensas en la revolución Patria o muerte. Patria o muerte.
Before my trip to Cuba, 28 minutes held little significance for me. In that amount of time, I could walk from my apartment in the Lower East Side to the NYU campus. I could complete a yoga class, do a load of laundry, or catch up on the latest episode of virtually anything from the comforting glow of my personal smartphone. I didn’t think much of that time period until I boarded a plane in Miami and arrived in Cuba, 28 minutes later.

Over the course of our Americas Scholars trip, those 28 minutes came to mind often. It came to mind when we mentioned “broccoli” and it registered as a foreign concept on the faces of Cuban locals. While broccoli can easily be bought at any supermarket in Miami (28 minutes away!), Cubans are just now beginning to see that vegetable crop up at markets around Havana. It came to mind when discovering that the only commonality of Cuban pizza and the fresh, thin-crust pies dished up hot from the beaches of Miami is the decision to call them “pizza.” And upon my return to New York, when my quest to find fresh coconut—to fuel my Cuban-inspired coconut addiction—was met with disappointment, I imagined the bounty of ripe coconuts waiting to be hacked down and devoured, just 28 minutes from Miami.

We traveled to Cuba to investigate daily life and creativity, a theme that can be explored through Cuban cuisine. And we wasted no time getting to work on sampling it. Upon our arrival at the José Marti International Airport in Havana, we were transported directly to our first Cuban meal. The menu, as we would soon come to realize, comprised three variations on the traditional Cuban entrée. “Pork, chicken, or fish?” our translator would ask each of us at mealtimes. Those seeking authenticity chose pork. Those seeking a break from pork
chose chicken. And those seeking a break from chicken chose fish. Our vegetarian troopers settled for the rice and beans that accompanied each meal. Luckily for them, Cubans are religious about rice. More rice, in fact, is consumed in Cuba than anywhere else in the western hemisphere.\footnote{By day three, we had naturally exhausted all our options.}

Our disappointment over the lack of diversity in Cuban cuisine was met with creeping feelings of guilt. America has spent decades actively blockading all agricultural trade between the US and Cuba, and yet Americans give Cuban food a bad rep. One Huffington Post writer described it as such: “Imagine if the USSR were in the tropics. It’s tasty—if you like pork.”\footnote{Having spent two weeks in Cuba, I find this description accurate yet incredibly privileged. American culinary culture is enhanced due to access, and our food production is measured in terms of efficiency. For urban dwellers especially, what we eat is not a matter of what’s available but what we’re in the mood for, and we tend to take this accessibility for granted.}

Alternatively, Cuban cuisine is shaped not simply by what’s accessible but by what isn’t. Substitution, for Cuban chefs, is both a skill and an art. In Havana, we witnessed the young chef at Havana’s El Cimarron prepare a multi-course banquet from the meager ingredients we’d shopped for. We watched, amazed, as frozen fish become ceviche, as imitation lobster was whipped up into a stylish hors-d’oeuvre, and as frozen chicken was smoked into a juicy barbeque. The chef was heralded as a magician—the man who made imitation lobster look edible and taste good.

Yet it would be a mistake to label Americans as “the haves” and Cubans as “the have nots” in regards to food. After the fall of the Soviet Union in the ’90s, Cuba had no choice but to adopt a sustainable, ecologic approach toward farming.\footnote{The US at that time was rapidly shifting its agricultural model to phase out sustainability and quality}
in place of efficiency and access. As agricultural trade between the US and Cuba progresses, many fear that Cuba’s sustainable farming will be corrupted by the US’s aggressively industrialized agriculture system.

During our time in Havana, we visited an agricultural co-op—a farm that functioned with great independence from the government—and the farmers we met spoke of progress: recent harvests have brought broccoli, cauliflower, bok choy, and mushrooms. They also spoke of their commitment to sustainability, their efforts to avoid overproduction, and their focus on the quality rather than quantity of their produce. Yet, while the thawing of US–Cuban trade relations might diversify Cuban cuisine, we can only hope that US farms will begin to look more like Cuban farms, rather than the other way around.

Before traveling to Cuba, I felt a nagging curiosity to discover what a Cuban sandwich looks like in Cuba, knowing full well that sandwiches are often evidence of residual colonial culture. For instance, bánh mi would never have existed had the French not colonized Vietnam. My quest for a Cuban sandwich that could meet my expectations was largely disappointing, leading me to believe that the Cuban sandwich is just another remnant of Europe’s cultural hijacking of Cuban cuisine—just another reason to make the 28-minute journey between Miami and Cuba seem all the more astounding.

It wasn’t until our last day in Havana that I struck gold, finding a Cuban sandwich that not only met my standards but vastly exceeded them. The neighborhood burger shack we stumbled upon was nothing impressive, but it instilled in me a hunger for more, a reason to return, and a respect for a cuisine that’s turned the culture forced upon it into something delicious. I still think about this sandwich, just as I still think about all the talented chefs who fed us on our journey, from Havana to Baracoa. I find myself increasingly anxious to return, knowing that the sandwich of the century is waiting for me just 28 minutes from Miami.
In a country where iPhones don’t dominate the streetscape (yet?), eyes aren’t drawn to screens but are rather focused on what’s going on offline. Arguments are held not on the phone but in person. People have no problem looking each other in the eye, even when they don’t know each other.

During my first days in Havana, I remember being quite intimidated by the direct looks people gave me on the colorful streets. I began to think to myself: why do I find this sympathetic gesture so unsettling? But after a few days, I started seeing the beauty in eye contact, slowly forgetting the ongoing “iContact” that was such a big part of my everyday life back home. Instead of perceiving eye contact as overwhelming and daunting, it became my way of connecting to people briefly without having to speak to them.

As someone who doesn’t know a single word of Spanish, looking people in the eye became my means of interacting with Cuban locals. Since eye contact between a man and a woman is often immediately seen as sexual or romantic, I began to photograph the men with whom I made eye contact in a purely amiable, friendly way. In this photo series, I selected five men and groups of men, young and old, whose presence helped me feel welcome in Cuba without having to use any words.
CUBA AND CONTRADICTIONS

Sarah Barry
On the opening pages of the *Lonely Planet* traveler’s guide to Cuba, there is a colorful painting of a classic car whose license plate reads “CUBA” above a blurb entitled “Why I Love Cuba.” The quote, from author Brendan Sainsbury, includes this sentence: “Cuba is a forbidden fruit, a complex country of head-scratching contradictions, which, however many times you visit, will never adequately answer all your questions.”¹

This is a sentiment shared by my classmates and I, who spent (and are still spending) a significant amount of time discussing the contradictions of Cuba. We’ve spent hours analyzing systems and practices and only seem to fall further into a state of confusion. As soon as one question is answered, a hundred more spring up. The more I learn, the less I feel qualified to explain even the basics of Cuba’s politics, culture, and practices. Sainsbury’s observation is therefore believable to me. Furthermore, I’ve realized that our questions might in fact be unanswerable, no matter how much we investigate.

However, I do wonder if we have been asking the right questions. This became evident in the small town of Regla, which we visited by travelling across Havana Bay in a ferry. We sat on all the available mismatched furniture in a small rectangular room as Henry Heredia, a specialist in Afro-Cuban religion, rattled off facts about Santeria, the religion practiced by a majority of Cubans. I have a particular academic interest in religious studies, so as Heredia spoke, I scribbled notes as quickly as I could, hungry for details on this religion.

Heredia explained that in the 1600s, slaves were imported to Cuba from Africa, bringing with them their own set of religious beliefs, practices, and gods. Slave owners forced them to practice Catholicism, but the slaves began to secretly worship their own gods, using the image of Catholic saints. Over time, this gave rise to a complicated religion that is a mix of Catholicism and African religions. It involves a focus on ancestors, who serve as a source of wisdom; a focus on forces and elements of nature; and a focus on individuality. To a certain extent, each follower makes up his or her own rules. Magic can be used. Sometimes animal sacrifice takes place, but this is a last resort. Heredia stressed that problems are solved in this life. The purpose of Santeria, he said, is to provide a “revelation of your destiny.”
While Santeria does not recognize conversion or reproach it, one must be baptized by the Catholic Church to enter the religion. After a period of initiation, individuals are matched with one of seven main spiritual figures known as Orishas, who each correspond to an individual Catholic saint. Heredia made it clear they are not gods: “Santeria is not a polytheistic religion.”

As he spoke about each Orisha, describing their dominant traits, dwelling areas, and colors, I tried to make sense of all of this information. I attempted to ask how practitioners perceive the Orishas. Do they believe they have physical bodies that dwell in some physical location, as with Mount Olympus? Or are they perceived less literally? Heredia just reiterated how specific Orishas are associated with different parts of nature, like water or earth. Another student asked how the Catholic Church feels about people practicing Santeria after being baptized into Catholicism. Heredia bristled a bit at the question—or perhaps he didn't understand it. His answer was to the effect of, “It is what it is.” Finally, another question was asked about how the conflation of symbols associated with the Saints and the Orishas manifests. Heredia made a statement along the lines of, “Santeria manifests differently from the way I described it; what I described is the ideal form.” We were running out of time, and I took his answer to be along the lines of, “It’s really complicated.”

Heredia’s depictions of Santeria make me think of the religious scholar Robert Orsi’s concept of “lived religion,” which holds the belief that no individual will ever completely embody the ideal of a religion. Orsi makes a case for the following:
[...] a redirection of religious scholarship away from traditions—the great hypostatized constructs of “Protestantism,” “Catholicism,” and so on—and likewise away from the denominational focus that has so preoccupied scholars of American religions, toward a study of how particular people, in particular places and times, live in, with, through, and against the religious idioms available to them in culture—all the idioms, including (often enough) those not explicitly their “own.”

In other words, there will never be anyone—from the highest official to the most casual parishioner—who is his or her religion.

I now see that perhaps the reason why Sainsbury, my classmates, and I cannot seem to find satisfactory answers to our questions about Cuba is because we’ve been trying to reconcile people’s lived lives with concepts. But concepts like socialism and communism and Catholicism and Santeria can never be embodied in the complex and nuanced ways in which individuals live, even if those individuals constructed said concepts.

Further, I’ve come to see that contradictions are not at all unique to Cubans or followers of Santeria. In fact, I would argue that contradictions are what make us human. Whether examining communism of Cuba or capitalism of the United States, one is going to find numerous complexities and mind-boggling contradictions. I’ve come to the conclusion that to begin to understand Cuba and its people, I first must let go of the need to reconcile contradictions and instead lean into them, celebrating their existence as a shared marker of humanity.
Mzansi: Authenticity, Perceptions, and Tourism by Dylan Meehan
1. “Authentic” is being defined as an adjective describing an object of undisputed origin; something that is genuine.
2. Seasonsinafrica.com

The Tale of Two Cities by Austin Basallo

Incarceration and Education by Emma Hattemer
2. Ibid., 6.
3. Ibid., 15.

Paradise: Teaching Environmental Pride in the Galápagos by Dominique Raboin
4. “Education in Galápagos.”
In Dialogue with Darwin by Isabeaux Mitton
2. Ibid., 273.
3. Ibid., 274.
4. Ibid., 280.
5. Ibid., 286.
6. Ibid., 274.
7. Ibid., 278-279.
8. Ibid., 288.
9. Ibid., 281.
10. Ibid., 269.

The Ambassador for Cuba by Alex Hansen

In Praise of Cuban Food by Vanessa Karalis

Cuba and Contradictions by Sarah Barry
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