

# ZEKE

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LIFE & INCARCERATION OF A FAMILY  
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### ROHINGYA & STATELESS

Photographs by Sheikh Rajibul Islam,  
Marta Tucci, & David Verberckt

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# CUBA

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Text by Margaret Quackenbush



Trinidad, Cuba. 2.12.2015. A Cuban man carries a cage with birds in the streets of Trinidad. Birds are typically kept at home as domestic animals.

**Photograph by Fulvio Bugani**



# CUBA

Most ZEKE articles feature 2-3 photographers, allowing us to show at least two images from each. But there is probably no other subject on SDN that has brought in more quality exhibits than Cuba and we have felt compelled to offer breadth here rather than depth.

Why has Cuba been such a popular subject? It is certainly not because it is easy for norteamericanos to travel there—the embargo makes sure of that. It is beautiful, as these photographs attest. But so is Panama, Costa Rica, and many other places in the Caribbean and Central America that have not produced a fraction of the submissions to SDN as Cuba. I have not been there myself, but I am fascinated by the patina of an aging infrastructure that is the backdrop to everything. But perhaps more than anything, it is the Cuban people who have held on against the relentless pressure of their northern neighbor, and have done so with dignity and grace.

Yes, Cuba has its problems. I am not an apologist for the Castro regime, but somehow this tiny island nation has produced a highly literate population that is vibrant, productive, and both physically and emotionally healthy. The infant mortality rate in Cuba is lower than the United States and is among the lowest in the world. Cuba ranks #10 in world literacy (the U.S. is 45) and has

avoided the dire poverty, drug abuse, gangs, and violence that many of its Caribbean neighbors are plagued with. All this is a ripe backdrop for a documentary photographer to focus their attention on.

Walker Evans has given us some of the most memorable images of Cuba prior to the revolution in 1959. The revolution itself spurred iconic images of Castro by Raymond Burri and others. And in the intervening 75 years, many photographers have produced extraordinary work including Alex Webb and Ernesto Bazan among the most well-known.

I am thrilled to present here the work of six SDN photographers, each who have documented Cuba in their own unique vision. I only regret that we are unable to show more work of each and I encourage you to visit their full galleries on SDN to see the extent of their extraordinary work.

—Glenn Ruga

Lucia Carmela Gonzales in her home in Havana watching the 2014 World Cup soccer match in Brazil.

**Photograph by Carolina Sandretto**







"Let's start with a cliché: A vintage car against one of Cuba's most iconic landmarks: Havana's Malecón. I've always considered that a scene like the one above, so much seen and overly shared, was going to be the last thing to capture my attention when I got there. I was wrong."  
**Photograph by Rodrigue Zahr**





People at night on the streets of Santiago de Cuba. Photo by Fulvio Bugani from "Under the Surface" on SDN.

# CUBA

## A NATION DEFROSTING

Text by Margaret Quackenbush

Open a typical travel guide to Cuba, and you'll see pictures of grandiose squares, crumbling facades, street dogs sleeping in dusty doorways and alleys draped with dangling electrical wires. Cuba is a country frozen in time, or at least that's what the guidebooks say. It's a country where, according to legend, progress stopped in the 1950s, where vintage cars bump along cobblestone streets in Havana and pristine beaches stretch along the coasts.

But since the curtain began to lift between the United States and Cuba after

the countries announced a renewed relationship in 2014, that romantic imagery has begun to fade. Guidebooks once described how to sneak into Cuba through Canada and how to skirt fines associated with violating the 1963 Trading with the Enemy Act that barred Americans from spending money there, now they point out shopping malls and souvenir shops. Tourists can catch a Rolling Stones concert, stay in a Starwood hotel, fly direct from Chicago or float down on Carnival Cruises. There's no denying it: Cuba has changed.

Some say these changes are for the better. In his speech announcing that the U.S. would restore diplomatic relations with Cuba, President Obama argued that increased engagement with Americans through commerce, travel and free flow of information would improve the lives of the Cuban people.

"Today, the United States wants to be a partner in making the lives of ordinary Cubans a little bit easier, more free, more prosperous," Obama said in his December 17, 2014 speech.

But many fear that a sudden rush of American tourists has put a strain on the country and its tiny tourist industry. Christopher P. Baker, a travel writer and Cuba travel expert, believes that Cuba as America imagines it is already beginning to fade.

"The past two years has witnessed a massive surge in foreign visitors to Cuba. First, U.S. travelers traveling primarily on people-to-people group tours," Baker said. "But also Europeans—especially young adults—flocking to Cuba as never before to experience it 'before the Americans ruin it.'"

Baker and others who have

a long history of traveling to Cuba before the restrictions were lifted worry that tourist towns and historical sites won't be able to withstand the sudden influx.

"Certain core destinations, such as Trinidad and Vinales, are already beyond the tipping point of sustainability due to the throng of new visitors. In these places, the 'innocent' Cuba of fame is already fading into myth," Baker said.

### History Matters

To understand America's romanticization of "innocent" Cuba, it's important to understand the nation's long and tangled history with the U.S. Cuba became a Spanish colony after Christopher Columbus arrived in 1492, and continued as one until the end of the Spanish-American War. In 1898, a defeated Spain signed the rights to its territories, including Guam, Puerto Rico and Cuba, over to the U.S. But by 1902, Cuba gained independence, with the understanding that the U.S. could intervene when it deemed necessary and that it be granted a perpetual lease on its Guantánamo Bay naval base.

Following independence, Cuba flourished with new economic development and investment from the U.S. But the country suffered from political corruption and a succession of tyrannical leaders until January 1959, when Fidel Castro overthrew President Fulgencio Batista. The U.S. initially recognized Castro's new regime, but his communist leanings, nationalization of private land and companies, and heavy taxation of American goods led the Eisenhower Administration to levy trade restrictions on the country. From there, tensions

### In March of this year, President Obama became the first American president since 1928, when Calvin Coolidge was in office, to visit Cuba.

escalated; Cuba warmed its relationship with the Soviet Union and the U.S. cut all diplomatic ties, with President Kennedy making the embargo permanent in 1962.

Cuba suffered. While its economy stalled from the sudden removal of American-made products upon which it relied, the U.S. launched a series of poorly executed missions aimed at toppling the government, from the disastrous Bay of Pigs to several attempts on Castro's life. In 1962, tensions peaked during the Cuban Missile Crisis when U.S. spy planes discovered Soviet missiles being built on Cuban soil.

For the next 20 years, relations simmered and Cubans fled in droves to seek asylum in America. When the Soviet Union crumbled in the 1990s, the Cuban economy began to nosedive, subjecting citizens to frequent food shortages and power outages. But by the time Obama took office in 2008, America's stance on Cuba had

become rapidly outdated and unpopular both at home and abroad. The embargo had failed to change Cuba's political system and caused needless hardship for the Cuban people. In response, Obama slowly shifted the policy on Cuba: his administration made it easier for Cuban Americans to travel and send remittances, and he spent months secretly negotiating to open relations. Finally, in December 2014, Obama announced that the two countries would restore full diplomatic relations. And in March of this year, he became the first American president since 1928, when Calvin Coolidge was in office, to visit Cuba.

The benefit of this increased engagement between the two countries is clear—American travel to Cuba has increased 54 percent since 2014, American companies are widening their reach into Cuba, and the Cuban government has taken steps to expand internet access for its people. A new middle class of Cubans is emerging, with more ready cash than ever, spurring spending on private enterprise and consumer goods. But what isn't clear is the long-term effect this will have on Cuban society.

According to Baker, the

influx of money and American influence will undoubtedly chip away at the traditional Cuban way of life: "much of this money is being invested in businesses, but much is now being spent on conspicuous consumption items—a first for Cuba—such as iPhones and flashy watches. Values are shifting towards a monetized consumerist way of thinking that is inevitably weakening Cuba's exemplary community and family-focused system."

### Where is the Revolution Headed?

Others worry that the changes will undo the gains of the revolution by restoring inequality and classes of "haves" and "have-nots." But according to a report from the Pew Research Center, the Cuban government remains the source of more than 75 percent of the country's economic activity. The communist party still

**Certain core destinations, such as Trinidad and Vinales, are already beyond the tipping point of sustainability due to the throng of new visitors.**

— Christopher P. Baker, Travel writer and Cuba travel expert

rules, headed by General Raul Castro, and according to Pew, 49 percent of Americans believe that exposure to U.S. tourists and culture will do little to promote democracy in Cuba. So while Cubans now have better access to American consumer goods, pop culture and celebrity tourists, it is still a communist nation that prioritizes common effort above individual enterprise.



Havana. Photo by Rodrigue Zahr from "Cuba, a Defrosting Nation" on SDN.

Has Cuba fundamentally changed? It's far too early to tell. But we know that American attitudes towards Cuba fundamentally have: a Gallup poll from February of this year showed that for the first time, a majority of Americans have a favorable view of Cuba. Seventy-three percent of U.S. citizens approve of the thaw in relations, according to Pew. Americans are learning more about Cuba than ever before, by experiencing it first-hand as tourists or by reading about it from the flood of journalists who have entered the country since the restrictions ended.

As Obama said in his December 2014 speech, this new outlook on Cuba will benefit both countries by promoting a better understanding of the values and beliefs on both sides. "I believe that we can do more to support the Cuban people, and promote our values, through engagement. After all, these fifty years have shown that isolation has not worked. It's time for a new approach."



A neighborhood near El Capitolio, Havana. Photo by Michael McElroy from "In the Midst of Ruins" on SDN.





# VINNY & DAVID

LIFE AND INCARCERATION OF A FAMILY

Photographs by Isadora Kosofsky

For two young boys living in New Mexico, America's criminal justice system is about more than statistics and trends—it's a harrowing tale of love, loss and sorrow.

Vinny and David laugh as they decide what to order at a restaurant.



Eve places her head on David's back, while he draws a picture of a clown in his notebook. Eve confides, "I'm 43 years old. Why do we hurt the ones we love the most? I just want love."







# ROHINGYA & STATELESS

Photographs by Sheikh Rajibul Islam,  
Marta Tucci, & David Verberckt

Text by Anne Sahler

In his photo essay "The Stateless Rohingya" Belgian photographer David Verberckt, who is currently based in Hungary, captures the dire everyday life of the Muslim ethnic minority, the Rohingya, in Myanmar, Bangladesh and India. He portrays them as human beings deprived of the social, civil and human rights that are so often taken for granted, thereby giving them a face. In doing so, Verberckt increases awareness and brings to our attention the too often unnoticed humanitarian crisis of the Rohingya.

Rohingya women living under inhumane conditions inside IDP (internally displaced people) camps in Rakhine State, Western Myanmar (formerly Burma) provide the backdrop for Marta Tucci's powerfully intimate images. Approximately 140,000 Rohingya are housed in these camps, hoping for the chance of a better life. In her photographic essay "Acts of Resilience" Tucci highlights the alarming living conditions these Rohingya women endure and the strength, dignity and resilience they demonstrate in the face of overwhelming despair.

Dhaka-based videographer and photographer Sheikh Rajibul Islam showcases, in his photo essay "Waiting to be Registered," the life the Rohingya face daily in the Kutupalong camp on the border of Myanmar in Bangladesh. In a dark and brooding style, he captures the inhumane living conditions and the risks of seeking employment as undocumented migrants without work permits.

Modina Khatun is waiting for her husband because he went to work five days before and hasn't returned. She doesn't know if he is dead or alive.

Photograph by Sheikh Rajibul Islam