



## Purpose

The purpose of this project was to explore the relationship between understanding the cultural background of a nation and foreign relations with that nation.

## Case Study

My case study for this was Cuba: a nation long isolated from outside influence. I traveled to Cuba in November, 2015 to conduct a field study about the effects of the Embargo on Cuba. I ended up finding out much more! I learned why the Cuban government favored communist and socialist style government. I also delved into the history of the nation and the need for more economic and social equality for its citizens.

This trip strengthened my personal philosophy that while it is important to hold on to one's own values and beliefs, it is even more so to understand the other side's rationale behind their thinking.

## Effects if the Embargo

In Cuba, everyday commodities that we take for granted are considered rarities, including new cars, Wi-Fi access, and even toilet paper. The cars we saw in Cuba, were almost exclusively manufactured before the Cuban Missile Crisis, and have been maintained for all of this time through the use of spare parts from other outdated vehicles. Many describe this as a time portal into the sixties; the Embargo has literally placed Cuba more than half a century backwards in technological advancement.

## Current Legislation

The last piece of legislation that most thoroughly addressed the embargo was the Helms-Burton Act, which mandates that no action can be taken to lift the embargo unless the Cuban government transitions to a democratic government that excludes the Castro family. However, this still leaves the door open to build diplomatic relations and begin a dialogue. Traveling to Cuba is one of the most eye-opening experience for any sceptic, as demonstrated by the students who came on the field study. Over ninety percent of them had a more positive experience of Cuba after they embarked on the field study than before the trip, and I believe that this could be the case for Americans who travel to Cuba in the coming years.

# A Door Long Unopened

## *Cuba: A neighbor estranged by the Economic Embargo*

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Skyline Panorama  
Havana, Cuba  
(Photo by Anisha Patwardhan)

*"My perception [of Cuba] has changed... The way Cuba is portrayed in popular media and culture in the United States is what I expected, and it was much different than the sentiment towards the US that I felt in Cuba."*

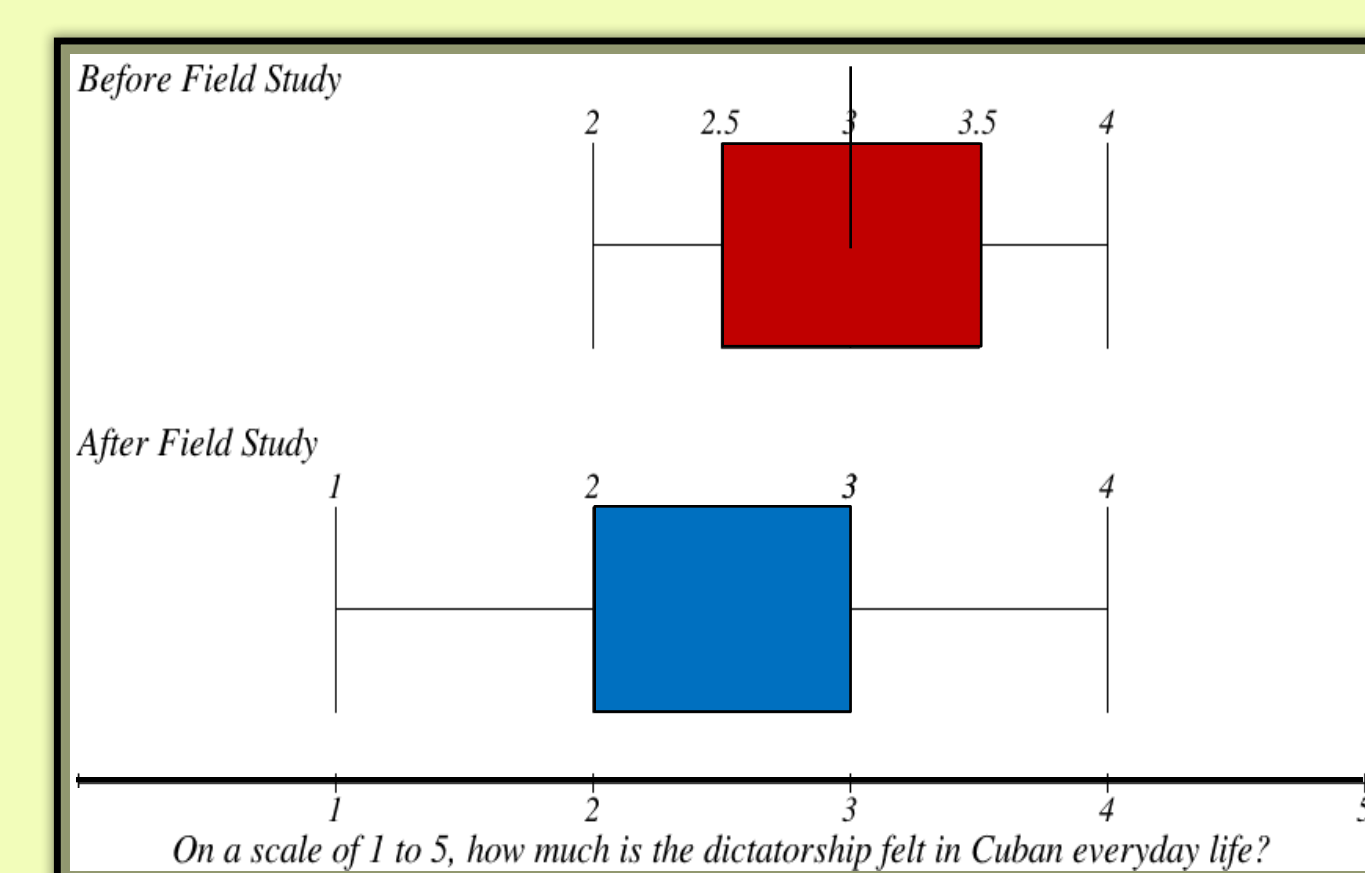
-Ryan Kearns, Lick-Wilmerding High School ('17)



Meeting with Dr. Carlos  
Alguzaray  
Havana, Cuba  
(Photo by Alex Felker)

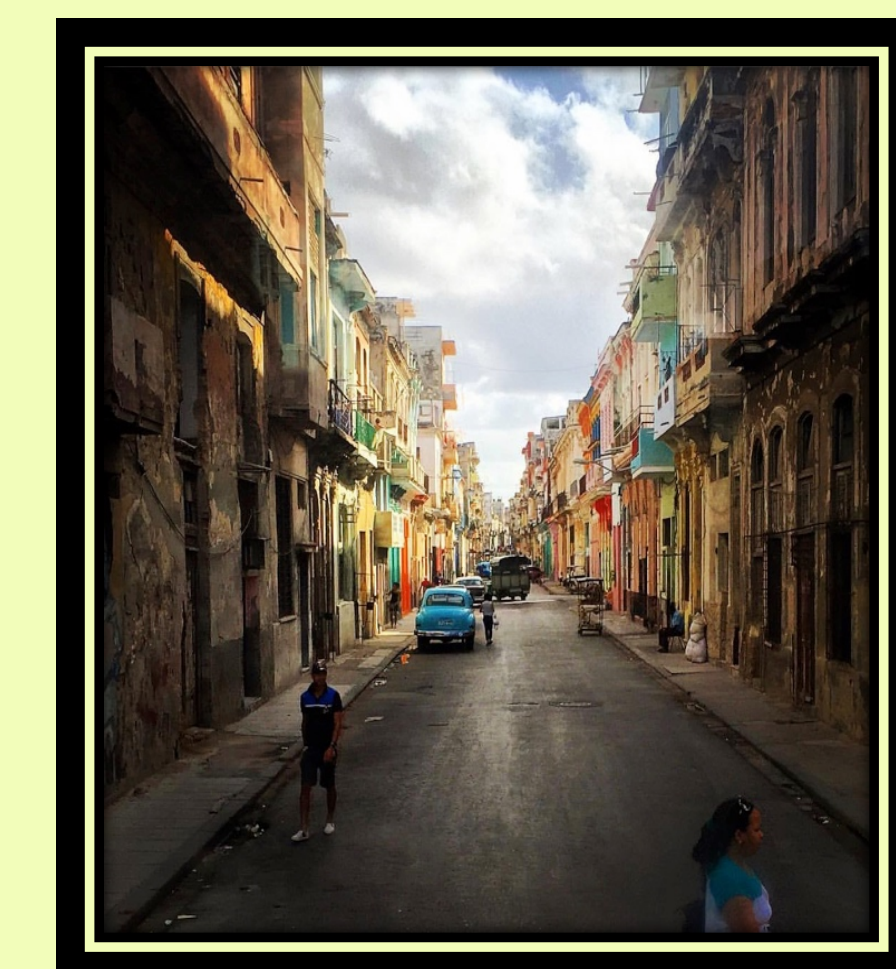
*"I realized that [Cuba] is much different from what we hear about or see online... the people of Cuba don't always have access to Wi-Fi, so they can't publish their own views of what it's actually like to live there."*

-Amisha Wadhwa, Westmont High School ('19)

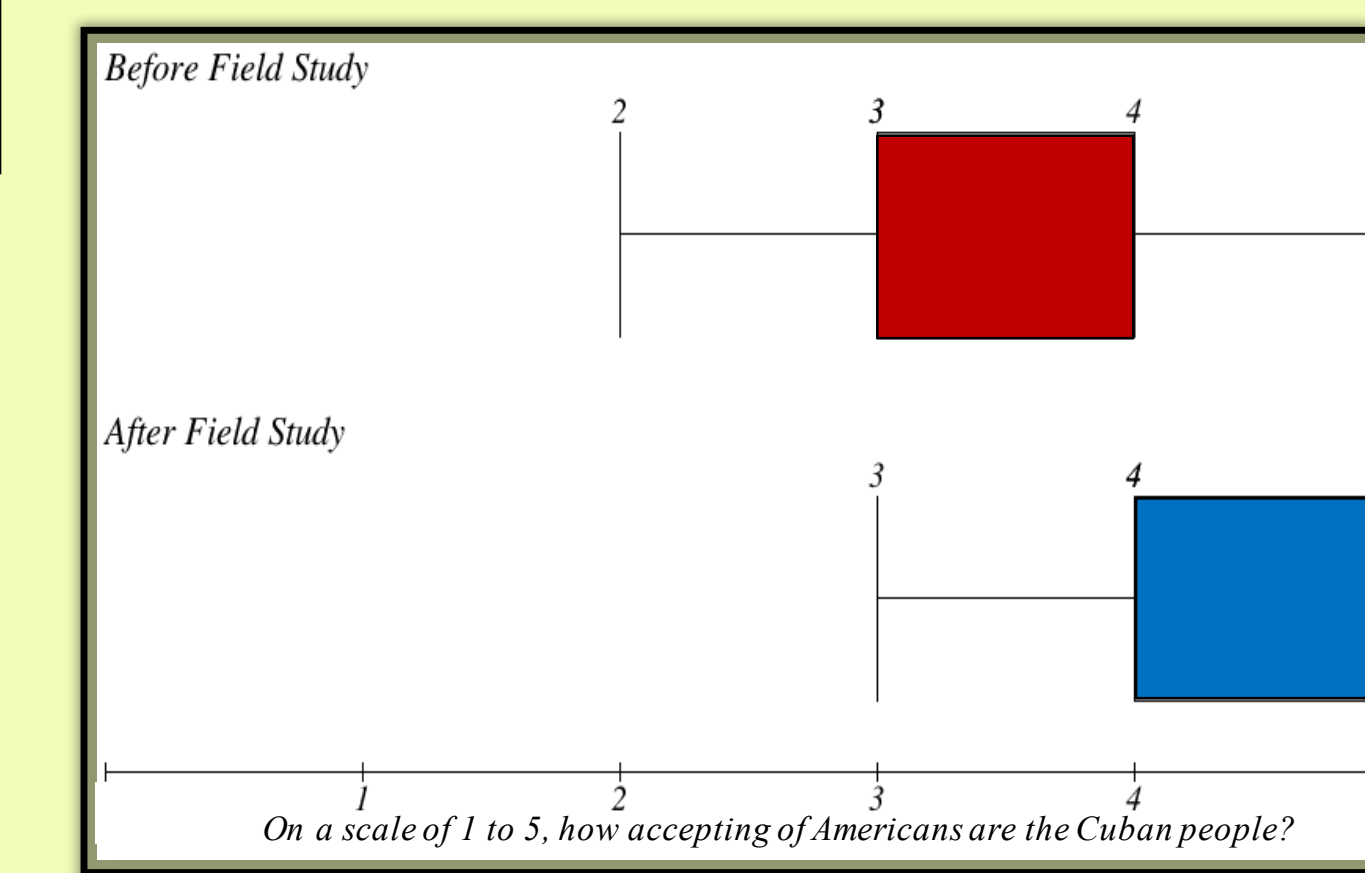


*"I felt that the Cuban society and way of life was something that made sense for Cuba, even if it wasn't something I personally agreed with."*

-Maya Levin, Lick-Wilmerding High School ('16)



Street View  
Havana, Cuba  
(Photo by Alex Felker)



*"My perception of Cuban culture and everyday life was much more positive than I had originally anticipated."*

-Sam Wolf, Kehilla Jewish High School ('16)



Tobacco Farm  
Viñales, Cuba  
(Photo by Alex Felker)



Vintage Car  
Havana, Cuba  
(Photo by Alex Felker)



Ceviche  
Havana, Cuba  
(Photo by Anisha Patwardhan)



Che Guevara Propaganda  
En Route to Havana, Cuba  
(Photo by Alex Felker)

## Call to Action

When I traveled to Cuba, I met a new generation of Cubans already exposed to American media and sports. They were eager to connect with the outside world and reestablish relations with the United States. I see more collaboration in the future between our two nations with an opportunity like this. It is up to the people of the United States to match the willingness of the Cuban people to negotiate and come to a mutual agreement. Congress is in a gridlock on this issue. If enough people realize that the Cold War era is far behind and that the people of Cuba are more like us than we thought before, even a Republican majority Congress can be persuaded to strike a deal with the Cuban government.

## Next Steps

Cuba was one case study for this topic. It was the best-suited pick because it was virtually untouched by American political influence for over half a century. The next step for this research would be to do more case studies on nations of different socio-political-economic standing and compare those to the results in Cuba.

## Acknowledgments

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## Contact

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