

The National Black Chamber of Commerce® has been studying the evolution of Cuba for fourteen years. The evolution has been slow as we entered the 21st century but recently there have been some major economic developments. Last November Cuban residents were given the right to personal property. They can now buy and sell homes. Just last week they can now freely travel abroad with an authentic visa from the nation they wish to visit.

During our first trip to Cuba in August, 2000, we were stunned by all the promising features of this island nation and its people. My mentor, the late Dr. Arthur A. Fletcher, marveled at this and said to me, "This nation will one day become the 'Hong Kong' of the Caribbean." Art, it is about to start happening. Let's look at the possibilities.

Cuba has a great education system which is far superior to ours. These citizens are ready to take on the global market as they are adept at the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects. For example, they are some of the best engineers and architects in the world. Much of this talent is used around the globe and helps generate revenue for the nation. The last time I was in Paris I took a stroll past a new five star hotel that was being built. I was surprised to see so many Blacks doing the construction. The next day I came by again and heard one of Fidel Castro's speeches blasting out through some speakers. It became clear to me that the construction company and probably the architectural team were indeed Cuban. I first witnessed this inspirational exercise while we were in Havana. Their prowess at infrastructure is becoming legend around the world. Africa, Europe, Asia and other places they are making a great reputation.

This island nation is also known for its healthcare delivery system. Cuban doctors are so efficient that they travel around the globe helping to address health issues wherever it is needed. A Black Cuban has a lifespan at least a decade longer than an African American. Every Cuban is required to have a full medical exam twice a year. Did you know that they have eradicated sickle cell anemia in Cuba? Now that they can freely travel we should be sending for some of their health services here since it is superior to ours. Just think of the possibilities in all third world nations.

The biggest provider of wealth for the average American is real estate equity (right now it is in a funk but it will return). Now that Cubans can buy and sell homes it is going to generate cash for prospective entrepreneurs. With these proceeds they can invest in start-up businesses and begin the venture of wealth building and job creation. Banks in Cuba are as busy as ever. There is now a housing demand for over 600,000 new homes. Think of the construction

companies popping up to meet that demand - JOBS, JOBS AND JOBS. The government is estimating that over 1 million new jobs can be created through this capitalistic activity. This nation has a population of about 11 million people and already 338,000 are now self-employed.

Cuba is one of the hottest tourist destinations for Europeans and South Americans. Its white sand beaches, modern hotels (mostly European owned), best rum in the world, best lobsters in the world and slick Afro – Cuban music (actually straight from the Congo via the slavery years) makes it a festive nation. Did I mention the world's best cigars? We saw some of the most beautiful Black women in the world living there.

The “gates” of Cuba are unlocked. It is time for our nation to catch up to these changes and let us travel and do business with our brothers and sisters in Cuba like the rest of the world. Cuba has survived all the sanctions, dirty games, spying and trickery we have thrown at it since 1959. It is now ready, willing and quite able to participate in the global economy. In fact, we should be going there right now and invest in this newborn economy. The best educated people with a natural work ethic should be value added human capital for our corporations. They would be excellent joint venture partners for our small businesses. God has blessed Cuba. Maybe it is that giant statue of Jesus in downtown Havana that is helping things out. Also, maybe it is that statue of Abraham Lincoln in the town square that compels us to go there and join this renaissance.

Next year we need to organize a gigantic trade mission to spend a good two weeks in Havana, Santiago and the countryside. Hopefully, our nation will catch up to this modernization and extension of liberty in Cuba.

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