

## Summary

Growing up I always had a fascination with Cuba. Listening to stories my father told me, I dreamt of one day explore my family roots by visiting the island. That however, was only a dream for me as I had no way of returning. Last January, this impossible dream came true and I was able to visit Cuba through study abroad. While in Cuba, I had an opportunity to interact with several Cuban college students. One student remarked that I was not Cuban because of the clothing I was wearing. My Cuban national baseball hat was something that defined me as an outsider to her. I had no idea what to say at that moment. As I thought more about what she had said to me, I asked myself what defines a person as Cuban.

I decided to try to answer this question with a creative writing response. I focused on three major topics that I noticed inside as well as outside of Cuba. The first topic was the divide between Cuba and the United States. In order to help answer the question of Cuban identity, I compared the life of Cuba's national hero, José Martí, to my own. Martí, like me, lived much of his life outside of Cuba in exile. Unable to return he experienced the divide between Cuba and the United States. I too experienced this divide. Using some of Martí's works such as *Abdala* and *Nuestra America*; I compared the divide in colonial Cuba with present day Cuba. Because of this divide, the student I met had only a one-sided perception of Cubans. After visiting Cuba I have an idea of Cubans both inside and outside of Cuba.

In my second topic I focused on representations of Cuba. While in Cuba I was able to see various ways of how Cubans represent their own country. Using some of the examples presented by José Quiroga in *Cuban Palimpsests*, the idea of representing Cuba is further explained. One way in particular is the funeral of the salsa star Celia Cruz. During her funeral, Quiroga describes, her casket as having both an American and Cuban Flag draped over it. The representation of Cuba at

Celia Cruz's funeral was evident with the Cuban flag. The American flag represented something different, however.

In my third topic I focused on the Americanization of Cuba. While in Cuba I noticed that some things in the culture had been Americanized. Many of the songs that I liked, the Cuban students also liked. Another example of Americanization in Cuba was in sports. Cuba's national past time is baseball. I concluded my essay by stating that being Cuban is not something that can be proven, but rather it is a profound love for Cuba.

The creative essay was written to answer the question of what defines a person as Cuban. It was also written as a search for identity. When the Cuban student told me that I was not Cuban, I felt she had robbed me of who I was. This was my response to her statement and how I answered the question of not only what a Cuban is but who I am.

### Biographical Sketch

Jared Montano comes from a family of Cuban immigrants. During high school, Jared helped program a device for several students with speech problems. Jared also helped volunteer in several competitions for students with disorders. As part of his undergraduate senior seminar, Jared had the opportunity to travel to Cuba completing his aspiration of visiting the island. This trip allowed him to interact and broaden his mind about Cuban culture.

Currently Jared Montano is a sophomore undergraduate student studying at West Chester University of Pennsylvania. Majoring in Spanish and Communications with minors in French and Italian, Jared has a strong command of romance languages. Vice president of the Spanish

Club he is also an executive board member for the West Chester Hillel. Aside from clubs Jared has also tutored students in Italian, helping improve their language skills. He currently holds an internship at the West Chester University Digital media center.

Jared aspires to travel to many exotic places, broadening his perspective of world culture. After graduating from West Chester, Jared has hopes of working in digital media as a translator. Using the insight he gained during his time in Cuba, he hopes break down cultural barriers that hinder communication.