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The Cubans (English and Spanish Edition)

Jack Beckham Combs

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Asked to conjure an image of Cuba, most Americans see a country of elegant, crumbling buildings and old American cars. While it takes less than twenty-five minutes to fly from Miami to Havana, the United States and its island neighbor have been mired in hostility and distrust since the Castro Revolution ousted the American-backed puppet Batista fifty years ago. Shared family connections have allowed both Americans and Cubans to separate the governments of each country from its people, but there is still misunderstanding on both sides.

Photographs that purport to represent Cuba and its people often reproduce the narrow American imagination of the place, starting and ending in Old Habana. While it is true that the buildings in this small section of the city, many of which are 300 years old, have been crumbling for 150 years, and many of the cars are from the pre-Revolution era, this quaint image bears little reality to the country and its people.

The documentary photographer Jack Combs has been making photographs of the Cuban people over the course of six years and fifteen visits to the island. His images range from the urban to the rural, from saturated colors and polished night skies to vibrant street scenes full of movement and sere agricultural landscapes. Much of Combs's time was spent outside Havana, traveling to cities, smaller towns, villages, and farms in every Cuban province. His pictures of agricultural life are beautiful pastoral compositions. Rarer still is the emphasis his eye places on ordinary people living their everyday lives. Their faces and settings demonstrate that Cubans may have less than they need, but they are nonetheless a people of strength, good humor, and great national pride. The breakup of the Soviet Union and the end of its massive economic subsidies may have shattered the Cuban leaders' dream of economic independence, but not the people's spirit.

Distributed for Documentary Photography, Santa Fe, New Mexico

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