

Crossing Havana: Encountres with the Other City



Crossing Havana: Encounters with the Other City, a photo exhibit at the Young Men and Women's African Heritage Association (YMWAA) headquarters, is the opening event for a one-week series of activities titled *AfricAméricas* taking place at different locations in the City of Pittsburgh between May

6th and May 11th, 2013. The principal conveners of the exhibit, are the *Citizens' Committee for Racial Integration* (Cuba), the *Afro-Cuban Alliance* (U.S.), and the journal *ISLAS* (U.S./Cuba).

The exhibit "Crossing Havana" is a collection of social documentary photographs

about real, current living conditions for many black Cubans in Cuba's capital, Havana. The photographs, while not professional, were taken by Juan Antonio Madrazo Luna, a black, Cuban, civil rights activist who is also the National Coordinator of the island's premier, independent, civic organization devoted to fighting racism, discrimination and civic disengagement—the *Comité Ciudadanos por la Integración Racial* [Citizens' Committee for Racial Integration] (CIR), founded in 2008. The value of this exhibit is that it carefully initiates an important dialogue among those who view it with and about people in Cuba who are marginalized (and those who are not) by exposing and saturating us with their dirty hyper-reality—a reality little known to us outside the island.

From Their Living Room to Ours

YMWAHA's headquarters at 1205 Boyle Street in Pittsburgh, a former, Victorian style, duplex townhome, will serve as home to the *Crossing Havana* exhibit. Its warm and welcoming living room will serve as the first stop for all visitors. There is a wonderfully organic, human connection between the photographs being displayed in a living room and the photographer's home in Havana. Why? Because his living room, to be precise, doubles not only as CIR headquarters in Havana, but also

houses a modest collection of photographs of historically and currently prominent Afro-Cuban men and women whose images and stories appear nowhere else in Cuba. He calls it the *Hall of Fame of Black Cuban Men and Women*. So, YMWAHA, upon committing to house the *Crossing Havana* exhibit, actually established not only a direct connection between two living rooms, one in Havana and the other in Pittsburgh: and two organizations committed to social service and education, but also, and most importantly, between the CIR and its activists (some of whom are coming to Pittsburgh to participate in *Crossing Havana* and *AfricAméricas*), and local Pittsburghers interested in Cuba, the African Diaspora, civil rights, justice and culture.

AfricAméricas

In addition to the *Crossing Havana* exhibit, the entire week will include informal chats, formal presentations, roundtables, receptions, film viewings, radio interviews, and finally, a choral concert and dance performance titled *AfricAméricas: A Fusion of African music, rhythms and culture in the Americas*, all designed to draw in and engage a broad cross-section of Pittsburgh community members—blacks, whites and Latinos—with Afro-Cuban life in contemporary Havana and Afro-Latin American culture.