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OPINION

The Challenges of US and Cuba Relations

A new time and moment for peacemakers

BY ANGEL L. RIVERA-AGOSTO

In Cuban Spanish jargon, there is a phrase they use to make bad things or happenings go away. For example, if in the middle of the night people listen to the song of the owl, considered an ominous bird by farmers, they would say without hesitation, "Solavaya!" Also, when passing a funeral, they would say "Solavaya" to chase away the death.

I suspect that something

bad stayed behind on Dec. 17, 2014, when President Obama said the U.S. foreign policy to Cuba had been "a failure." I want to think that a new time has started for the relations between the two countries.

I recently attended a meeting in Cuba. I sat with Cubans



and we shared our best wishes for the future. They also raised some real questions. The first one is: If there is an ending to our historic policies regarding Cuba, what

is it that we would be starting? It is almost impossible to think that the United States would give up its policy concerning Cuba entirely. Cuba has always ranked high on the list of foreign policy concerns for the United States.

Another question raised was: Are we talking about a change of tactics, but same strategy as always? The truth is that Cuba resisted an aggressive U.S. policy for more than 40 years with no concessions. That was an extraordinary show of external strength.

Nonetheless, it is said that the strength of any country to deal with international relations is measured by internal forces. The internal reality of Cuba is one where it has demonstrated its ability to sustain a survivalist economy, but it takes more than that to develop a country.

A third challenge arises from the geopolitical field of Latin America. The recent "Bolivarian conscience," developed by Hugo Chavez and some other Latin American leaders, was demonstrated in their firm desire to include Cuba in any

hemispheric summit. That, combined with U.N. votes against Cuban blockade, has pushed the United States to reevaluate its positions in the face of a more united continent.

There is still a fourth challenge: The majority of the people in the United States do not want to maintain the blockade. Churches have played a fundamental role on changing the way the American people see Cuba.

Even unlikely supporters in U.S. politics are saying that the blockade has impacted the United States more than Cuba.

Numbers talk — estimates of the sanctions' annual cost to the U.S. economy range from \$1.2 to \$3.6 billion, according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

The idea of lifting the blockade is complicated from a Cu-

ban perspective, too. It can seem threatening, as the globalized, capitalist economy would rush into the island the way a "Bay of Pigs" group of invading soldiers couldn't. What will it mean for the values and achievements of Cuban revolution?

This is an excellent moment for all peacemakers to say "Solavaya" to all bad influences from the past and to work on friendly and just relations with our brothers and sisters in Cuba. It is time that U.S. policymakers remember Jesus' teachings to "love God with all your heart ... and your neighbor as yourselves." (Mark 12:29-31)

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A Movement One Year after #MikeBrown

For some police and politicians, response has not matured

BY NICOLE LEE

Anticipation for the commemoration of the one-year anniversary of the killing of Mike Brown Jr. by then-Ferguson Police Officer Darren Wilson was high. Clergy community and civil leaders, gathered to remember "Mike-Mike"'s life, death and aftermath that sparked a movement.

While Mike Brown's death unfortunately was not wholly unique, the response from the community was. Community members stayed in the street publicly protesting and never went home. Open defiance lasted hundreds of days. Even after the police brought out dogs and tear gas, the community refused to back down.

These acts of civil disobedience inspired people around the country to defy the initial storyline of "looters" and "rioters" and to look to the deeper issues at play in Ferguson.

This anniversary was met with pro-



tests and renewed calls for justice but it was also greeted by music, concerts, prayer vigils and strategy sessions. While the goals remained steadfast among demonstrators and concerned folks, there was diversity in approach and tactics.

Activists, artists and religious leaders were retrospective with a keen eye toward all that still must be won. The future of a movement was in the hands of not just Ferguson but the nation and as a movement, it must be prepared to act locally and nationally.

Yet the response of the police and some politicians in St. Louis County has not matured. Once again, vehicles and armament reminiscent of war scenes, rolled onto West Florissant in Ferguson.

On the anniversary of Mike Brown's death while a concert headlined by Talib Kweli and Common rocked the night in Ferguson, the police ordered a group of protesters to disperse. Moments later, they teargassed the very path the police ordered protesters to take. A 12-year-old girl was put in handcuffs. A handicapped veteran was maced and tackled to the ground. Armed white vigilantes roamed the streets of Ferguson while once again black protesters found themselves public enemy #1.

The next day, protesters took to

Highway 70 shutting it down for 15 minutes. Those demonstrators who were nearly run over by an angry driver were charged with assault. Demonstrators and onlookers were arrested, many kept in handcuffs for up to 12 hours.

These actions are merely a manifestation of the deeper structural issues that remain in St. Louis County. The entrenched system, never improved by the civil rights movement, continues to fight reform and punish those calling for it.

St. Louis County's municipalities had a banner year in terms of arrests and fines collected from its residents. Ferguson has rejected the first draft of the consent decree presented by the Department of Justice in order to ameliorate its racist policing practices.

In an equally brazen move, the county executive for St. Louis County has decided to pursue criminal charges against protesters. These charges go as far back as last August and our cases that the state prosecutor and the municipalities chose not to pursue.

I think of the ways in which St. Louis County continues to defy conventional wisdom treating its own citizens as enemy combatants every time I hear criticism of the tactics of Black Lives Matter activists. From colleagues to comment sections,

there is a constant refrain citing tactics over substance. Critiques of political targets over the terror black communities are facing calls to question our priorities as a nation.

One year out, I think the tactics of disruption coupled with strong policy recommendations that quickly evolved into reform is the only way to manifest that black lives matter. The Butcher's Bill is growing with so many dead black men and women at the hands of law enforcement it is difficult to keep track of the hashtags. If a 12-year-old in handcuffs or in a body bag is not enough to shake the entire country from its complacent slumber, perhaps it is not so extreme that people continue to utilize tactics that bring them face-to-face with military vehicles and disapproval from political parties.

One year out, something must give. Not just in Ferguson, but in the hearts, minds, and actions of Americans everywhere. The truth: many of us simply can't go home hoping that the protests will abate and things will go back to normal. Many of us are fighting this system like our lives depend on it. Because for some of us, they do.

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