

The Mentoring Corner (March, 2024)

Hello, Brethren:

In the past, this MENTOR has written columns about Freemasonry in Cuba and P.R., during the XIX Century (e.g. May 2021). We will now quickly overview the XX Century.

During the first 40 years after Cuba became independent (in 1902), Freemasonry developed firmly throughout the island. Most every town had its own one-story Lodge building and the big cities had more than one. Havana, whose metropolitan area had 25% of the country's population, included about 1/3 of all Cuban Lodges, plus the Appended Bodies and the Grand Lodge. Many social, political and economic public figures: government ministers, university deans, newspaper editors, business executives etc., joined and several became Grand Masters. It was its golden age.

Leading town figures, such as doctors, judges, pharmacists, schoolteachers, chief of police, mayor, political boss, even the priest, usually became members. Many local and national issues were informally considered. My father joined one of these Lodges in a provincial city, in 1926.

After 1940 the economic situation of the country improved, and Freemasonry spread much faster, doubling in members and Lodges. The new Lodge buildings had now two-stories: the first floor was rented out for income, and the Lodge used the second one. A Grand Lodge skyscraper was built in Havana, using three floors for Lodges and the Masonic university, and renting the rest. More social, political and economic public figures joined, enhancing its public standing.

But the government's political corruption and mismanagement was creating an unhealthy environment. Freemasonry and other civil society groups failed to help improve this situation. It led to a broad loss of faith in the Cuban governmental system. Such loss in turn brought the 1959 revolution, as many thought a new generation would help fix our national problems (at the time, Marxism was not part of said fix). However, the remedy resulted even worse than the disease!

The revolutionary government took over all private enterprise, education system, and media, and banned all political parties. Citizens were required to fill long forms known as "cuentame tu vida" (tell me the story of your life) where religious and fraternal activities, past work history, all family abroad or jailed, etc. was requested. Individual future work and study opportunities were offered, depending on such information. Those classified as "non supporters", were ignored.

Freemasonry was never banned, as occurred in Russia, Germany or Spain, for our Craft had a long and distinguished history forging the Cuban nation; but it was severely affected. Masonic Lodges were required to submit to the Ministry of Interior, within 72 hours after each session, a report detailing who was present, what matters were discussed, etc. Hence, between the tens of thousands who left the country and those who ended or decreased their Lodge attendance due to political measures penalizing participation, the participation of younger and economically active members substantially decreased. These measures were effective enough to choke Lodges. It was during this time that I joined The Craft, after two years of military service in the *labor units*.

Such situation lasted until mid-1980s, when Cuban government allowed religious believers and Masons to join official institutions, and pressure on membership and attendance eased up. It is possible that our past Cuban experience predisposes this Mentor to advocate on behalf of a more activist stance of our Craft that contributes toward a healthier political environment.

Thus, Mentor will offer a Zoom talk on *Surveys* and their implementation and interpretation, on Tuesday April 2nd, at 7 pm, using link <https://syracuseuniversity.zoom.us/j/94545765754>

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