

# Miami Herald

Posted on Fri, May. 17, 2013

## Oedipus in Havana

BY JOSE AZEL  
[jazel@miami.edu](mailto:jazel@miami.edu)



AZEL

When Oedipus, the tragic hero of Greek mythology, realized in agony and shame the calamity he had brought his city, he could not bear to see the results of his hubris. Overwhelmed with the knowledge of his wrongdoings, Oedipus stabbed his own eyes out, and went into exile.

In Cuba, the Castros, blinded by their egos and unwilling to change course, simply rewrite the history of their failure and seek to reinvent themselves in designer clothing.

By any objective socio-economic measure, pre-Castro Cuba was a relatively advanced country. In the 1950's Cuba's infant mortality rate was the best in Latin America and the 13th lowest in the world. In the region Cuba ranked third in per capita food consumption,

fourth in literacy, and first in television sets per capita. Pre-Castro's Cuba had 58 daily newspapers of different political hues and ranked eighth in the world in number of radio stations.

After 53 years of the reverse alchemy of central planning, Cuba has been transformed from one of the most prosperous countries in the hemisphere to one of the most miserably poor.

Moreover, according to the latest (2013) "Freedom in the World" report by Freedom House, Cuba remains the only country in the Americas deemed "Not Free" with scores in the worst-of-the-worst categories for political rights and civil liberties. Of the 47 countries in the world designated as "Not Free", only 9 have scores slightly worse than Cuba (North Korea, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Sudan, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Somalia).

Yet, the architects of this tragedy are not disgraced, but honored as Raúl Castro was recently in Chile where he was delusively sworn in as president of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).

Given the abject failure of Cuba's socioeconomic model, the sycophancy of Latin American leaders toward the Cuban leadership is perhaps best explained as a petulant form of anti-Americanism. It is not that the Cuban revolution has accomplished much for the Cuban people; it has not. It is that the Castros have successfully confronted the Goliath of the North. That seems to be what Latin American leaders value from the disastrous Cuban experiment.

Ironically, we may soon witness the United States underpinning the Cuban regime following in the footsteps of the Soviet Union and Venezuela. Should Hugo Chávez's death result in a substantial decrease in Venezuela's aid to Cuba, the Castros may choose to play their Alan Gross card and release the imprisoned American. The U.S. administration may then feel compelled to reciprocate somehow.

For Cuba, the big prize would be a relaxation of the travel ban allowing more American tourists to visit Cuba. The island's tourist industry is owned by the military, and thus money from American tourists would flow primarily to the regime with only a trickle down benefit to the Cuban people. With American tourists visiting the island, Cuban Americans may discover that the Castro government will move to limit their travel. For the Castros, Cuban-Americans — able to communicate with friends and relatives and travel outside the secluded tourist areas — are far more subversive and challenging. Why bother with Cuban-American visitors if you can get Varadero Beach-headed, folklore-seeking, mojito-drinking American tourists?

In Oedipus at Colonus, the second play of Sophocles' trilogy, the exiled king dies cursing his sons to kill each other in battle, and his grave is said to have become sacred to the gods. The Castros have condemned Cuban brothers and sisters on each side of the Florida Straits to battle each other, but when the true history of the Cuban tragedy is known, the Castros' graves will not be sacred to anyone. History will not absolve them.

José Azel is a senior scholar at the Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies, University of Miami and the author of the book, *Mañana in Cuba*.