

"I don't care who dancing with whom as long as they dance for the revolution"

(Fidel Castro, when he was told that black & whites were dancing together at celebrations on the day of the ouster of the US supported Regime under Batista)

Hola Fidel,

I want to come to Cuba. I want to go to Guantanamo, to Camp X-Ray, with others who oppose US Imperialism in all its forms. We will come as a Delegation, which will include many different forces. We want to serenade the Camp X-Ray with a drum ensemble to begin with. A reminder to them as to where they are, prisoner and Captor alike. We want to pay respect and homage to the Indios who are no longer there, exterminated by European Colonialism. We want to pay our respects to the millions of Africans brought to the New World who experienced untold horror and suffering. We want to show the entire world where we stand.

I never dreamed I would have the occasion to write you a letter under these circumstances. I've given a lot of thought to what I should say and I've done some research and seen photos and learned things about which I was not aware. I think the best way for you to understand what I/we want is to give you a little background.

My name is Darnell Stephen Summers. I was born in Detroit on July 9, 1947. I have one brother, Bill Summers born on June 27, 1948 also in Detroit. My parents were born in Louisiana, my Father in 1915 and my Mother in 1922; both have since passed away. My mother unfortunately was murdered in her own home by a black man who was addicted to cocaine in 1993. My parents, in the early 1940's, were refugees fleeing the terror of the US government and its agents, the Ku Klux Klan and other lesser terrorist groups, who were entrenched in all the positions of political power concentrated mainly in the south but represented to one degree or another in every state in the union. If there was ever a time for a "War on Terrorism", then that was it.

They, like so many other blacks went north trying to escape oppression and seeking work, which at that time was plentiful because of World War 2. What they were confronted with when they reached the "Promised Land" rivaled the most violent forms of Apartheid. Detroit was the "Arsenal of Democracy" but by 1943 there had already been two major uprisings of black people against almost daily racist attacks tolerated if not sanctioned by the government.



There are many things which impact on an individual and that help to shape their viewpoint and ultimately their world outlook. The events leading up to the Cuban Revolution had a profound effect on me. What I knew about Cuba up until around 1957 could be summed up as follows, "I Love Lucy" starring Lucille Ball & Desi Arnaz (alias Ricky Ricardo), "Xavier Cougat and his Orchestra" and Dizzy Gillespie playing music that had an "Afro-Cuban" ambience with Chano Pozo's influence and flavor there to be heard. There were certainly other entertainers and personalities but these names stick out in my mind. Desi Arnaz's frequent performances on his TV Show with his orchestra playing music hinting at something different but somehow familiar. He would shout "Babalu" which at that time meant nothing to us but seemed to have an effect on the members of band because it appeared, to me in retrospect, to animate them. I have since learned that it was an incantation, calling on one of the African deities of the Yoruba religion.

Doris and William "Jack" Summers, my parents, wanted the best for their two little boys so they decided that we would attend a private school in Detroit. We attended a Catholic elementary and high School. So in the 1950's we attended "Blessed Sacrament" Elementary which was located behind Blessed Sacrament Cathedral located on Belmont and Woodward Ave.

Sure, in school we learned "Remember the Maine" (the battle-cry of the 1898 Spanish-American War), but that didn't, in anyway, shed light on Cuba's history, culture or its people. It was just an island full of happy black and brown faces, cigars, sugar cane, rum, loose women and wild nights in Havana.

I vaguely remember a TV broadcast in 1957 or so which showed a diving-competition extravaganza at a hotel in Havana. Poolside people lined the perimeter either sitting in chaise-lounges or standing holding their Caribbean cocktails and laughing it up, having a good time. There seemed to be something wrong with this scene, something out of place but I could only see it through the eyes of a ten year old and I had to rely on what I had heard from the conversations of parents, relatives and their friends and also what little I knew.

I was too young to have witnessed the nightlife and life-style of the Beatnik Era but I knew of its music and Literature and was drawn to it, it had a certain rebellious quality to it. It was cool "Daddy" and appealed to me. In 1959, I believe, I saw a TV report on the guerillas that were leading the fight to overthrow Batista. Those faces and forms, which I saw, gave me the impression that these people were the equivalent of revolutionary beatniks. They were bearded, rough-looking and wearing these fatigue caps. They could talk with machine-gun precision and they were saying things I wanted to hear and in all likelihood they would have felt at home in a coffeehouse in the "Village" or in a pup tent in the Sierra Madres. They seemed somehow wild but at the same time very dignified and in command of their wits. They also created furor, excitement and tumult wherever they were or went. Some people were afraid of them and hated them. We loved them and their energy and their boldness. The nerve they had fighting against American interests on America's doorstep.

That was the mood, the atmosphere. They were in a large sense waging a battle in which we, the oppressed, here in America could share in the fruits of victory. Suddenly we could beat the Yankee. It wouldn't be long before we all would be free.

Man, these brothers and sisters could have come out of my neighborhood and in the larger sense I guess they had. Straight from the block, all up in your face. No compromise. No sell-out. The entire white establishment in America was up in arms. "Look at these uppity half-breeds and niggers", It was written all over their racist faces, "let's put out this fire before it goes out of control."

If you were black living in America at that time you tended to look at world events in a different light. There was a light emanating from Cuba that was hard to ignore and everyone knew its significance and either tried to draw strength from it, destroy it or exploit it.

The theme was so pervasive, in 1960, that even the Mother Superior at our grade school, Mother Mary Caelan, suggested that we have a debate over the issues of the Cuban Revolution to be attended by the 7th and 8th grade classes. In retrospect I can't imagine that her idea was solely her own and it seems to me that it must have been, in fact, a directive from somewhere high up in the Catholic Church hierarchy. It was to be a big event held in the auditorium/lunchroom in the evening with our parents present. I would have a chance to show my stuff and was confident that I would make the debating team.



June 5, 1961

Wm. James J. Flynn
Pastor



One side would argue for the US government, the other side would present the revolution's position. A pupil would be selected to play the role of the respective government's leader. My heart raced, I wanted to carry the flag for the revolution, no Devil's Advocate role for me. But in the end I was looked over and didn't play a role on either side of the debate. I sat there on the night of the debate sadly disinterested, listening to pupils who were handpicked to speak because they were the teacher's favorites. Ironically, Fidel Castro's role was played by a young Arab pupil who concentrated more on getting laughs and making everything look ridiculous than on substance and another white pupil who gladly portrayed Eisenhower or Nixon, I don't remember, and in the end the Cuban side lost the debate, the revolution was defeated because it went too far and asked too much and we all just went home. Everything changed after that, forever. I never forgot that day.

1960 was a turbulent year. I remember it well because Moms Mabley, a black comedian, made a comedy record and joked about the fact the Cubans who had been invited to stay at the Theresa Hotel in Harlem, while speaking before the United Nations and were said to have been preparing their meals themselves and one could smell the chicken cooking in their suites. We all laughed long and hard. We all loved to eat chicken.



It was no coincidence that you were invited to Harlem. People were excited about it all the way across the country and around the world. It was interesting to read about your visit to Harlem in 1960. It must have been a wonderful experience. The pictures of you talking to the press and just relaxing, taking it easy. The photo of you and Malcolm X casually talking. I was overwhelmed with emotion, pride and respect. I became even more determined to write this letter. The people of Harlem received you and the Delegation with open arms and rightfully so.

Because right offshore was a country that went up against all that America represented and who weren't afraid to voice that opposition and in the clearest and loudest fashion. That was a good thing and worthy of respect and support. Cuba has inspired many who thought that change was necessary in the face of almost impossible odds. The Sixties exploded. The National Liberation Struggles, The Civil Rights and Black Liberation Struggles, The international Anti-War Movement, The Freedom Riders, The Birmingham Bombings, The Bay of Pigs. The assassination of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, all clear indications of what and who we are dealing with. Who can forget these events?

And it's in that spirit that I ask to be allowed to advance to within shouting distance of the concentration camp and voice my opposition and indignation, I have never been to Cuba but many of friends and some of my family have visited the Island.

In fact several of my comrades were members of the Venceremos Brigade. My trip will not be a vacation or holiday but rather a festival of the oppressed. We have no weapons, planes, tanks or ships. What we do have is determination to expose the crimes of the US and their plans for global domination and slavery. We want to speak for people who cannot speak for themselves. We want to see that people are treated with a respect that is deserving of human beings.

No, I'm no longer that young schoolboy searching and fighting for an opinion, a frame of mind, but those years throughout the 50's shaped and steeled me and many others for the upheaval of the 60's and beyond. Many years have passed. I've been to war and prison. I've married and have had the good fortune of raising children. It is inevitable that things change, while one star falls another is born right in its wake. That is the nature of things, and yes there are issues that we may disagree on but that can't and won't, in my estimation, change the necessity of having to deal with this Outrage. In the end, history will judge us all according to how we stood up to Tyranny and Oppression. In closing allow me to once again point out the powerful message that will be sent if this delegation is allowed to proceed and function.



The presence of Viet Nam Veterans as an integral part of the delegation is a necessity. It is certainly one of the things that the US government fears most; exposure by its own soldiers and former soldiers. Cuba needs us as much as we need Cuba. It's time to tell the true story of Cuba and its peoples, a history that has been distorted and plagued with lies by those who want to suck the blood of the entire planet and live off the misery of others as they have done for hundreds of years. A history that most people in the world are not aware of. The US says openly that the Viet Nam War was justified. What does that have to do with the present situation? Simply put, many people who are involved in this new "War on the World" were, in fact, participants if not planners of the Genocide perpetrated against the Vietnamese during that war. They stand smugly in front of cameras today and proclaim that the world will be a better place under their domination. I categorically dismiss that assertion. They intend to use Guantanamo as a sort of "Devil's Island" free from the prospect of serious international scrutiny. Free from righteous protest. They are employing hideous weapons of mass destruction at this very hour, incinerating, Auschwitz-style, hundreds of Human Beings at a time, under the guise of fighting terrorism. They are brazen and bold enough to talk about employing "small" Nuclear Weapons against all their enemies and, of course, taking into account the "Collateral Damage". Anyone who opposes their terrorist acts is himself branded a terrorist. When George Bush says we'll do as we did in the Wild West in the 19th Century, "Wanted: Dead or Alive", he's only legitimizing the brutal lynching of thousands of Blacks in America since there's been an America. They operate under the Credo, "the only good Indian is a dead Indian" and they take the right to exact Justice through reprisals and at the same time proclaiming loudly that a single one of their lives is worth more than one hundred lives of their captives. It's a history full of genocide with no end in sight. They are a law unto themselves violating all codes of Common Decency and Human Rights. It is there, in plain daylight, for everyone to see, to witness. So, in the interest of Humanity we all must step forward, raise our voices to help in the process of putting this madness to an end. That's why we want to come to Cuba.

Hasta luego,
Vamos a Guantanamo !!

Darnell Stephen Summers

Photo above: Viet Nam, Fall 1968(l to r, SP4 D. S. Summers, SP4 Jones, SP4 G. Holiday)